West Piedmont Summit Held to Promote Regional Collaboration

On October 19th, the West Piedmont Planning District Commission hosted the WPPDC Regional Summit: Engaging Collaborative Communities which was held at the New College Institute (NCI) in Martinsville. The event was attended by more than ninety (90) regional stakeholders representing local government, economic development, K-12 education, workforce development, chambers of commerce, human services, health care, public health, non-profit organizations and private sector employers.

The event served as the focal point of a regional strategic planning process initiated earlier this year by the West Piedmont Planning District Commission to encourage collaborative approaches to issues of regional impact and interest. The intent of the Regional Summit and the overall process is three fold including a capacity building exercise to better position the West Piedmont Planning District Commission to serve as a regional convener and facilitator of regional thought and dialogue. Secondly, the process has a goal to identify a short list of regional projects and opportunities the West Piedmont Planning District Commission can engage in with regional stakeholders. Lastly, the regional summit and the planning process identified an objective to educate the region’s localities and stakeholders on the Go Virginia program and position them to effectively take advantage of state incentives intended to promote job creation and economic growth.

To assist the PDC in organizing and facilitating the regional summit, WPPDC utilized the services of the Richmond based consulting firm DecideSmart. DecideSmart principal Bill Leighty along with partners Lane Ramsey and Will Davis worked closely with the WPPDC staff in developing and fashioning the event including reviewing the event stakeholder list, program format, and the recruitment of high profile presenters to both inform and facilitate future regional opportunities. Based on a pre-event survey designed by DecideSmart team partner Bob Holsworth, four subject areas were identified for the focus of the summit including economic development, technology, sustainable health initiatives, and workforce development.

Activities at the regional summit centered around informational programs from key presenters including Jane Kusiak, Council on Virginia’s Future; Charley Majors, Go Virginia Regional Council; Karl Stauber, Dan River Regional Foundation; and West Piedmont Executive Director, David Hoback. Additionally facilitated group discussion on the Summit’s major topic areas were led on Economic Development by Jay Langston, Virginia Economic Development Partnership; Workforce Development by Elizabeth Kramer, Governor’s Office (Commerce & Trade); Technology by Karen Jackson, Secretary of Technology; and Sustainable Health Care Initiatives by Dr. Jody Hershey, West Piedmont Health District. All of these presentations are posted on the WPPDC website.

Following the Summit, DecideSmart performed an additional post-event survey of Summit participants. This information along with the pre-event informational gathering and the facilitated discussion which occurred at the October 19th event will inform the final project report which is presently being prepared by DecideSmart and the WPPDC Staff. It is anticipated this final report will be published and available for review by approximately February 1, 2017.

The Regional Summit was made possible by a $25,000 Building Collaborative Communities (BCC) grant received from the Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development earlier this year. The WPPDC staff is most appreciative of DHCD Capacity Development Specialist Ramona Chapman for her assistance and support in the development of the Regional Summit.
Virginia Performs Community Snapshot for the West Piedmont Planning District, Southside Region, Virginia, and the United States

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Franklin County</th>
<th>Henry County</th>
<th>Patrick County</th>
<th>Pittsylvania County</th>
<th>Danville City</th>
<th>Martinsville City</th>
<th>WPPO</th>
<th>Southside Region</th>
<th>Virginia</th>
<th>United States</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2015 Employment Growth</td>
<td>0.1%</td>
<td>1.5%</td>
<td>1.9%</td>
<td>4.1%</td>
<td>-0.2%</td>
<td>-2.0%</td>
<td>0.7%</td>
<td>1.6%</td>
<td>2.0%</td>
<td>2.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013 Business Startups as a Percentage of Total Establishments</td>
<td>7.0%</td>
<td>6.3%</td>
<td>7.6%</td>
<td>7.4%</td>
<td>5.8%</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
<td>6.3%</td>
<td>6.8%</td>
<td>9.6%</td>
<td>9.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014 Per Capita Personal income</td>
<td>$24,789</td>
<td>$19,538</td>
<td>$18,916</td>
<td>$21,615</td>
<td>$20,569</td>
<td>$19,663</td>
<td>$21,404</td>
<td>$19,090</td>
<td>$33,950</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015 Unemployment Rate</td>
<td>4.6%</td>
<td>6.5%</td>
<td>5.5%</td>
<td>5.4%</td>
<td>7.3%</td>
<td>8.8%</td>
<td>5.9%</td>
<td>6.1%</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
<td>5.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Virginians Age 25-64 with a High School Diploma or Above, 2014</td>
<td>87.3%</td>
<td>82.6%</td>
<td>85.4%</td>
<td>85.7%</td>
<td>84.6%</td>
<td>83.7%</td>
<td>85.1%</td>
<td>82.8%</td>
<td>90.1%</td>
<td>88.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Virginians Age 25-64 with a Bachelor's Degree or Above, 2014</td>
<td>20.6%</td>
<td>12.8%</td>
<td>11.7%</td>
<td>15.1%</td>
<td>19.3%</td>
<td>17.8%</td>
<td>16.5%</td>
<td>15.4%</td>
<td>37.9%</td>
<td>31.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016 On-Time High School Graduation Rate</td>
<td>91.4%</td>
<td>91.3%</td>
<td>91.4%</td>
<td>93.0%</td>
<td>81.0%</td>
<td>86.0%</td>
<td>89.5%</td>
<td>88.7%</td>
<td>91.4%</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015 Associate's Degrees per 100,000 Residents</td>
<td>216.8</td>
<td>410.2</td>
<td>354.7</td>
<td>246.0</td>
<td>316.1</td>
<td>477.1</td>
<td>307.7</td>
<td>340.5</td>
<td>217.1</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015 Bachelor's Degrees per 100,000 Residents</td>
<td>307.5</td>
<td>279.5</td>
<td>288.2</td>
<td>266.9</td>
<td>451.5</td>
<td>652.3</td>
<td>393.9</td>
<td>303.0</td>
<td>422.7</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012 % of Adults Reporting Physical Inactivity</td>
<td>23.3%</td>
<td>35.7%</td>
<td>27.4%</td>
<td>29.9%</td>
<td>29.5%</td>
<td>28.4%</td>
<td>29.3%</td>
<td>30.0%</td>
<td>22.2%</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012 % of Adult Population Classified as Obese</td>
<td>27.3%</td>
<td>31.7%</td>
<td>30.8%</td>
<td>33.1%</td>
<td>35.0%</td>
<td>33.4%</td>
<td>31.6%</td>
<td>33.0%</td>
<td>27.3%</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012 % of Adult Population Diagnosed with Diabetes</td>
<td>12.3%</td>
<td>14.9%</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
<td>14.0%</td>
<td>14.1%</td>
<td>13.5%</td>
<td>13.7%</td>
<td>13.8%</td>
<td>9.8%</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014 % of Population Without Health Insurance</td>
<td>15.6%</td>
<td>16.3%</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
<td>14.3%</td>
<td>14.3%</td>
<td>14.3%</td>
<td>15.2%</td>
<td>15.4%</td>
<td>12.4%</td>
<td>13.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: U.S. Census Bureau (Population, Per Capita Personal Income, Educational Attainment of Population Age 25-64, Without Health Insurance), Bureau of Labor Statistics (Employment Growth, Unemployment Rate), U.S. Census Bureau, Statistics of U.S. Businesses (Business Startups Rate), Virginia Department of Education (On-Time High School Graduation Rate), State Council on Higher Education in Virginia (Associate’s Degree, Bachelor’s Degree), Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (Physical Inactivity, Obesity, Diabetes).

The table above, titled Virginia Performs Community Snapshot for the West Piedmont Planning District, Southside Region, and the United States, a product of Virginia Performs, shows a variety of socioeconomic data for these geographic areas.

The table shows that the region faces some challenges with regard to areas such as educational attainment and health, yet proactive measures are underway throughout the District to address these concerns. For example, while educational attainment of individuals holding bachelor’s degrees or higher lags the state, many school divisions within the region offer dual enrollment programs with local community colleges to enable high school students to get a head start on education and earn college credits at no cost. While the region lags the state in health metrics including lack of engagement in physical activity, occurrences of diabetes, and obesity, localities within the region are making strides with regard to encouraging people to live healthier, more active lifestyles. For example, numerous localities are either planning for or actively enlarging multi-use trail networks; multiple Complete Streets coalitions now exist throughout much of the region to encourage localities to create multimodal transportation systems, thereby encouraging walking and bicycling as means of transportation; and Go Healthy West Piedmont, a program associated with the West Piedmont Health District and funded by a U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention grant, promotes lifestyle changes including healthy eating habits and physical activity to reduce obesity and the occurrences of chronic diseases such as diabetes.
Danville MPO Hosts Community Stakeholder Meetings For Bike/Pedestrian Improvements

On Thursday November 10th, the Danville Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO), staffed by the West Piedmont Planning District Commission, hosted a series of community stakeholder meetings throughout the day to solicit community input in furtherance of a bicycle/pedestrian study currently being conducted in Danville’s River District. The study, which will recommend safety and functionality improvements to the bicycle and pedestrian network in the River District, is being conducted by EPR Planning Consultants of Charlottesville, and EPR team members Bill Wuensch and Matt Rehnborg were present at the meeting. In addition, VDOT Project Manager David Cook and other VDOT staff participated in the meeting. The series of meetings was held at the former Pepsi Bottling Company building located at Crossing at the Dan.

The first stakeholder session began at 9 a.m. and included staff from the City of Danville. The 10 a.m. meeting included the merchant community of the River District. At 11 a.m., a representative of Danville Regional Foundation and YMCA staff shared their ideas with the group. At 1 p.m., staff from the Danville Department of Parks & Recreation provided input, and at 2 p.m., a representative from the Institute of Public Health Innovation as well as a representative of another local organization attended and provided input. A final input session took place from 4 to 6 p.m. which solicited feedback from members of the general public.

In addition to general discussions about issues affecting pedestrians and bicyclists in the River District, various other forms of information-gathering took place. One exercise involved participants drawing routes on a map and illustrating where in the River District they walk or bike to and where they would take part in these activities if improvements were made. Another exercise involved participants placing color-coded dots on a map of the River District to show destinations they often walk or bike to, as well as where they believed bicycling and walking were difficult or unsafe. The project team also provided large table maps and comment sheets to solicit written comments.

A significant amount of input was obtained, and several aspects of safety in the River District were underscored by the participants. The large intersection of Memorial Drive, Craghead Street, and the Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial Bridge was identified as one area of concern for bicycle and pedestrian safety. Another identified area was the intersection of Riverside Drive and the Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Bridge, particularly with regard to pedestrian movements along Riverside Drive, crossing the lanes of the bridge and proceeding in the direction of the YMCA. A third issue raised was the absence of lighting, particularly on the Dan Riverwalk Trail between the YMCA and the pedestrian bridge which provides access to Crossing at the Dan.

In the coming months, a draft plan containing recommendations for bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure improvements will be developed and presented to the Danville City Council as well as the public, after which a final plan will be adopted. EPR is also in the process of conducting a study for the MPO which analyzes Mount Cross Road with a focus on the intersection of Mount Cross Road and Dimon Drive to determine future improvements on that road which may be necessary to accommodate travel demand associated with improvements at Averett University’s North Campus. A series of stakeholder meetings will take place in the near future to obtain feedback for that study.
West Piedmont PDC Adopts Updated Hazard Mitigation Plan

Culminating a one-year planning process involving the West Piedmont staff, regional public safety personnel and the consulting firm Dewberry, the West Piedmont Planning District Commission adopted a five-year update of its Regional Hazard Mitigation Plan at a meeting held December 1, 2016.

The Regional Hazard Mitigation Plan was first adopted in 2006, and was later updated in 2011. The latest update to the Plan began in October 2015 and was funded by a $75,000 Federal Emergency Management Administration (FEMA) grant, along with $2,000 from each of the region’s localities, based on prorated contributions. A Mitigation Advisory Committee, comprised of representatives of each of the region’s localities, was formed to select a consulting firm to update this Plan, and Dewberry, of Fairfax, Virginia, was selected.

Staff from Dewberry conducted field visits in each locality to develop the main part of the Plan, known as the Hazard Identification and Risk Assessment (HIRA). The HIRA is comprised of three components which include identification of hazards that could affect the planning area, profiling hazard occurrences and determining vulnerable areas and community assets, and estimating losses and prioritizing potential community risks. The Mitigation Advisory Committee, along with Dewberry, was responsible for identifying mitigation strategies to be employed by each locality. Other stakeholders involved in the Plan update included local non-profit groups, members of the business community, representatives of academia, and the public were invited to provide input. A public meeting was held on March 31, 2016 to solicit public input for the Plan, and public input was also solicited via the WPPDC’s website.

A second important component of the Regional Hazard Mitigation Plan is Capability Assessment, which identifies the ability of the region’s communities to mitigate the hazards identified in the Plan, and thus forms the basis of the hazard mitigation strategy. The identified hazards which threaten the region and its localities are divided between natural and human-caused. The table below identifies the list of natural and human-caused hazards which the region is most vulnerable to, and their associated threat levels:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Natural and Human-Caused Hazards Identified for the West Piedmont Planning District</th>
<th>Natural Hazards</th>
<th>Human-Caused Hazards</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Winter Storms</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Organic/Inorganic Spills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flooding (with Shoreline Erosion)</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>High Voltage Transmission Line Failure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wind (including Hurricanes, Thunderstorms)</td>
<td>Medium-High</td>
<td>Pipeline Failure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drought</td>
<td>Medium-High</td>
<td>Dam Failure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wildfire</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>Agterrorism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tornado</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Earthquake</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Landslide</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: West Piedmont Multi-Jurisdictional Hazard Mitigation Plan

The Mitigation Advisory Committee developed a variety of goals utilizing the HIRA and the Capability Assessment, which were validated from the 2011 Plan update. In general, the major goal highlights include protection of persons and property and reducing future damage to the community; maximize the resistance of homes, businesses, critical facilities, and infrastructure to natural hazards; ensuring that critical services remain functional during and after emergency events; render local governments more capable of reducing the impacts of future disasters; increase public awareness of disaster risks via public outreach and education programs; exploit new and existing technology to aid in disaster mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery activities; and promote regional approaches to emergency management.

The Plan must be maintained regularly, and this requires the West Piedmont PDC, along with a regional working group, to monitor and evaluate the Plan on an annual basis. The Plan update schedule must also be maintained, requiring another update in five years.