

Building the Framework

The
CAPITAL REGION
COLLABORATIVE

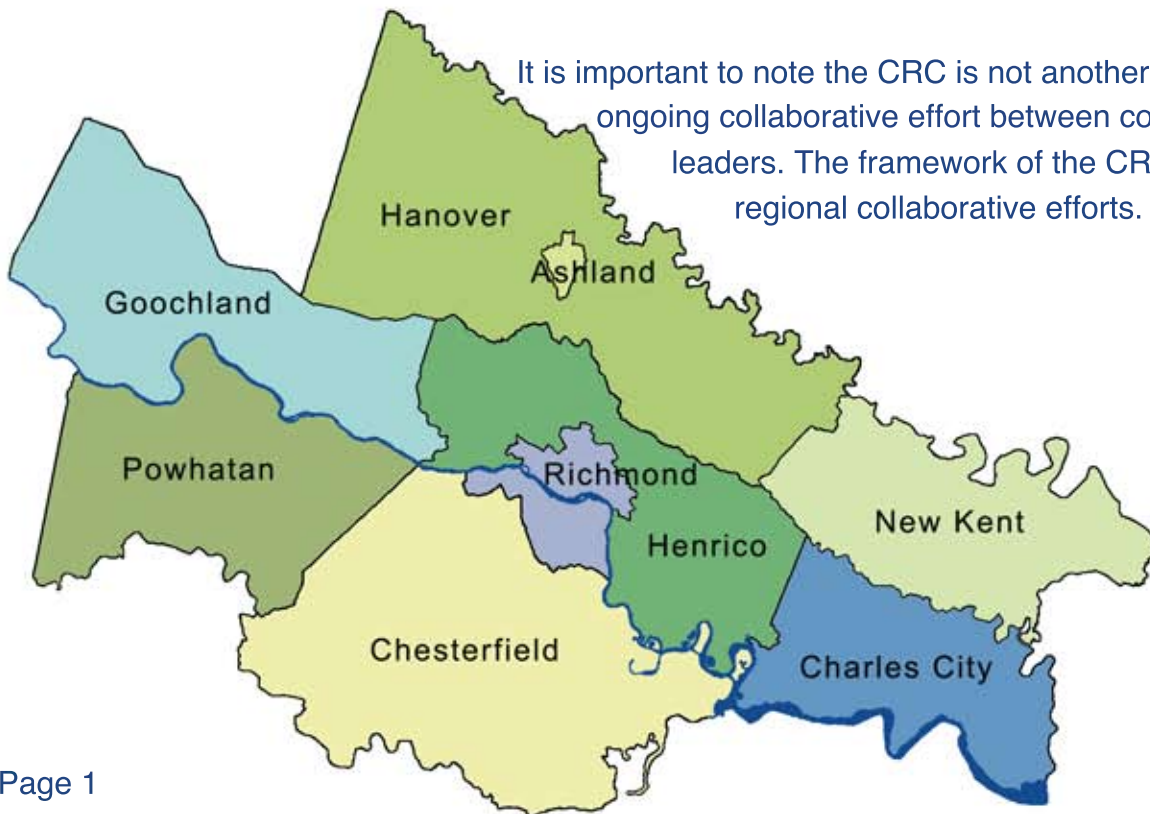


for
**Regional
Collaboration**

The CAPITAL REGION COLLABORATIVE

The Capital Region Collaborative was formed to address issues that are not confined by city or county limits. It seeks to improve the quality of life in the Capital Region of Virginia by supporting collaboration. The CRC started its work by asking residents of the Region to share their thoughts and opinions on aspirations and priorities for our community. Through a series of 10 focus groups, 85 public community conversations, a telephone survey and an online survey, more than 8,000 voices came together to identify seven priorities for the Region. This document reports “What We Heard” from the community.

During our next phase, we will convene “work groups” for each priority area. These groups will set goals for improvement and will identify ways to answer the question “How Are We Doing?”. Through continued community engagement, the CRC will produce a framework to prioritize issues, projects and programs across the region.



It is important to note the CRC is not another top-down visioning process, but a sustained, ongoing collaborative effort between community residents, local government and business leaders. The framework of the CRC will identify, connect, support and celebrate regional collaborative efforts.



What We Heard

The region spoke. We listened.

We asked the Capital Region:

“ *What are our most pressing regional issues?*
What aspirations do you have for the region’s future? ”

Over 8,000 people spoke up through focus groups, telephone interviews and community meetings.

What We Heard:

Folks agree that the Richmond Region is a great place to live. They enjoy the relatively low cost of living, the almost nonexistent traffic congestion, fantastic cultural and entertainment opportunities and a location on the East Coast convenient to the beach, the mountains and large urban areas. They are proud of the Region’s history and cultural diversity.

There is a belief that the Richmond Region can become one of the premier metropolitan regions on the East Coast. However, to reach the Region’s full potential, increased regional collaboration between government, business and the nonprofit sectors is needed.

The public recognizes that a strong region is vital to economic and social stability and wants greater collaboration across the sectors and municipal boundaries.

When asked about specific issues, strong concerns were voiced about **workforce preparation** and **job creation**. If we are not preparing our children for the jobs that are available, we are not supporting a thriving regional economy and cannot compete nationally, let alone internationally. And if we are not recruiting and doing our most to support businesses (small and large), then we won’t have the right jobs in the right places across the Region.

The other five priority areas were healthy community, leveraging the James River, arts and entertainment, social stability and regional transportation. These issues are seen as both supportive and reliant upon workforce preparation and job creation and contribute greatly to our region’s attractiveness and quality of life.

PRIORITIES



Job Creation

Aspiration:

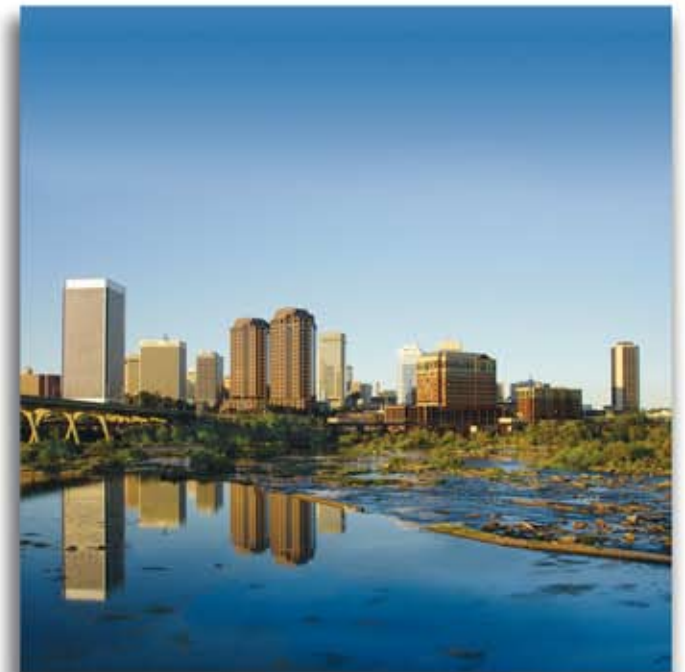
The Region will enjoy a diverse regional economy that is competitive in the national/global marketplace and provides job opportunities for all.

What We Heard:

The participants were clear that job creation is at the top of the list of pressing regional issues. Residents told us that we need to attract all job types, including entry level positions. There are not enough jobs, not jobs in the right places and the Region is not supporting existing or new businesses as well as it could. Others indicated that we need to create a more supportive environment for start-up businesses. It was noted that the Region has the potential to attract corporate headquarters.

As a Region, we need to:

- Develop strategies for job creation that provide a balance for the Region
- Grow existing businesses, support small and large employers
- Create an environment that nurtures innovation and entrepreneurship
- Leverage regional assets as engines of job creation
- Transform distressed areas by creating job opportunities in those areas
- Create entry level jobs, particularly in distressed areas



PRIORITIES



Workforce Preparation

*Aspirations: 1.) Align workforce skills to employer needs
2.) Every child graduates from high school and is job-ready or college-ready*

What We Heard:

The participants are concerned that our children are not graduating from high school ready for the next step—whether it is college, trade school or the workforce. Business leaders say many high school graduates do not have the basic skills needed for even entry-level jobs and adult workers often need retraining. There are many organizations that provide some sort of **workforce development/training**, but they are not “on the same page”. Participants are concerned about weak pockets of educational opportunities in our Region.

As a Region, we need to:

- Bring together workforce development providers to coordinate offerings
- Match employer needs to training and educational opportunities
- Prepare our high school graduates for the workforce, not just for college, by creating clear pathways to careers
- Give the education community a better understanding of business needs and the business community a better understanding of the education system
- Develop high-quality technical and magnet schools
- Level the playing field for educational opportunities across the Region



PRIORITIES



Quality Place

Aspiration:

The Region will be the most appealing/attractive destination for arts, culture and entertainment on the East Coast.

What We Heard:

The Region has a lot to offer: art, history, entertainment and sports. However, the participants do not believe this is evident to the outside world. More regional collaboration is needed to leverage these assets for economic benefit. Our cultural diversity is a strength that is attractive to the younger generation. We should brand the region as **culturally rich, diverse and creative**. A community perceived as rich in diverse culture, arts, sports and entertainment can drive economic development by attracting business and tourism to the Region.

As a Region, we need to:

- Build our Region's reputation as a history destination
- Enhance visitors' experiences by connecting the Region's resources with a system and signage, and leveraging conventions to bring folks back as tourists or residents
- Improve downtown's attractiveness and safety
- Enhance the gateways to our Region to make them more visually appealing
- Leverage our amenities as economic drivers
- Develop an effective system to direct visitors to our Region's amenities



PRIORITIES



Coordinated Transportation

Aspiration:

Maintain status as one of the most uncongested transportation networks in the country while supporting all modes of transportation.

What We Heard:

“Transportation” covers many areas: cars, public transportation, rail, air, bikes, walking. Overall, the participants are very pleased with the area’s traffic—and they would like it to stay that way. They would like to see a system that connects bike trails and public transportation across regional boundaries. There were suggestions for inner-region transportation such as a museum and cultural loop, a Short Pump loop and public transportation from the city to the airport.

As a Region, we need to:

- Expand the use of public transportation and bicycling as viable transportation options. Review current bike trail system to better connect and provide avenues for transportation, not just recreation
- Develop funding sources to advance regional transportation projects
- Better connect our region to other metropolitan areas such as Washington DC and Raleigh, with enhanced passenger rail service
- Consider freight movement—design our transportation network to support logistics and freight movement for more regional opportunities and competitive advantage
- Capitalize on the potential that the Port of Richmond offers our Region as a transportation hub and economic driver



PRIORITIES



Healthy Community

Aspiration:

Transform the Region into a metro area known for a active lifestyle.

What We Heard:

The majority of participants in the community engagement process believe that promoting a healthy and active lifestyle in the Region is very important. Many indicated that this is an important part of our community's brand. They also stressed the importance of outreach to our schools, with the message of the value of an active, healthy lifestyle and good nutrition. Concern was expressed over access to preventive health services, healthy food and mental health services (including substance abuse services).

As a region, we need to:

- Benchmark and monitor healthy community indicators such as rates of heart disease and diabetes
- Benchmark “active lifestyle” indicators
- Research access to health services across the Region
- Expand and better connect walking paths, bike trails and parks
- Catalog and coordinate current programs aimed at educating children about healthy lifestyles



PRIORITIES



James River

Aspiration:

Through regional collaboration, make the James River a centerpiece for entertainment, recreation and commerce.

What We Heard:

The James River is a centerpiece of the Region, a unique asset that is under-leveraged, according to the participants. It could be a powerful magnet drawing people to the Region. Residents questioned why there are so few restaurants or outdoor businesses located near the river. Others indicated that public access and safety along the river are concerns. There are many diverse groups with missions of conservation or improvement of the James River, but they are not always well-coordinated in their efforts or funding. There needs to be a regional plan that balances recreation, conservation and economic development.

As a Region, we need to:

- Market the river as a regional asset
- Make recommendations to improve public access to the river
- Create a regional plan for the river which creates a coordinated vision
- Discuss education opportunities around the river including ecology, history, health and recreation
- Coordinate celebrations and activities that focus on the river
- Encourage appropriate business development along the James River



PRIORITIES



Social Stability

Aspiration:

The Region embraces our social diversity as a strong community asset and supports a community where all residents have the opportunity to succeed.

What We Heard:

Residents of the Region believe there is a lack of collaboration and coordination between social service agencies and competition for funding. Folks in need must visit many different agencies before they find answers. The process for obtaining services can be confusing and cumbersome. The Region has a quality of housing issue for low income residents. We need to make sure that the inventory of housing matches the need.

As a region, we need to:

- Catalog available social services
- Streamline system for acquiring services
- Increase awareness of existing programs and services, both within social services agencies and externally to the general public
- Reward agencies that collaborate and leverage resources for social services to make the experience easier for those in need
- Map housing inventory to answer the following:
 - Does the inventory of housing match the need?
 - Do we have the right mix of housing?
 - Does zoning put up unnecessary barriers?



What's Next?

The Capital Region Collaborative is pulling together teams of local citizens, community leaders and subject matter experts to dive deeper into the issues, set tangible goals and quantify measures of success. Together, these groups and the organizing council will build a regional framework that will promote a shared sense of region and a common agenda for action. We will continue to monitor the indicators of success and make adjustments as needed over time.

Get Involved

Does this speak to you?



Would you like to be part of a regional movement to improve your quality of life?

Contact Wendy Burtner-Owens at wendy.burtner-owens@grcc.com or (804) 783-9313 for more information to get involved

Capital Region Collaborative Organizing Council

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