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Proposal for a Comprehensive Visioning Process for the Richmond Highway/Route 1 Corridor

History and Potential: The Richmond Highway Corridor passes through some of the most historic land in our Nation including the home and lands once owned by our first President. It has streams and wetlands connecting to the Potomac, and parks including Huntley Meadow and the Mount Vernon bike trail. It is marked by the diversity of peoples that are modern Fairfax, with a variety of neighborhoods and housing. From Beacon Hill one can see the landmarks of our nation's capital including the Washington Monument and the National Cathedral.

Challenges: Yet, the corridor also faces significant challenges. It has not attracted public and private investment like other parts of Fairfax and hasn't seen the revitalization one might have expected from the most recent economic boom. The 1999 Brookings Institution "Region Divided" report noted the challenges facing the Route 1 corridor which Brookings chose as the boundary line for the east-west divide. Even the expansion of Fort Belvoir threatens to bring more traffic without sufficient private investment according to some studies. Lack of jobs means longer commutes for area residents, while the economic downturn has been particularly hard on lower income residents of the corridor. Streams have been severely damaged by runoff from acres of parking lots and buildings, and the corridor may not be fully capitalizing on the wealth of nearby historic sites.

Voter Survey 2009: A survey by the Coalition for Smarter growth of over 300 voters in the corridor found that top priorities for the Richmond Highway corridor are:

1. Pedestrian safety (sidewalks, etc)
2. Transit (Metro, bus, light rail)
3. Safety
4. Economic Development
5. Parks and Open Space

What voters like MOST about living along Richmond Highway: Accessibility and Convenience (to DC, Old Town, jobs, and shopping)

What voters like LEAST about living along the Richmond Highway: Traffic.

Their vision for a new, revitalized Richmond Highway includes:

- Walkable Main Street community designs with good pedestrian safety
- Higher end (and local) retail options
- Improved safety, less crime
- Aesthetics (more attractive appearance of the highway)
- Reducing traffic through transit
- More green spaces, protected streams, and new parks

Visioning: Past studies have addressed separate pieces including the environment, transportation, housing, revitalization, and development, but rarely have the various issues been integrated. One of the best ways to break out of the box and to win revitalization of a community along with a range of land use, housing, transportation and environmental solutions is through a comprehensive public visioning process. Good examples can be found in:

- Arlington's Columbia Pike vision planning (<http://www.arlingtonva.us/Departments/CPHD/Forums/columbia/CPHDForumsColumbiaColumbiaPikeInitiativeMain.aspx>);
- Alexandria's Braddock Road Neighborhood Plan (<http://alexandriava.gov/Braddock>); and, Richmond Virginia Downtown Master Plan (<http://www.richmondgov.com/forms/downtownplan.aspx>)

The Mount Vernon Council of Citizens' Associations (MVCCA) recently conducted its own visioning in order to develop Annual Plan Review nominations (<http://mvcca.org/compPlan.html>) for a number of the commercial nodes along the corridor. This volunteer led effort is impressive. In addition, Supervisor Hyland has launched a Mount Vernon District visioning task force. Separately, the MVCCA is conducting outreach to its member groups. The data collection and outreach for this effort is similar to what is often done as a lead up to a public visioning effort.

A joint Mount Vernon and Lee District visioning process, fully funded, engaging all sectors of the community, and integrating a full range of issues could provide the spark, the momentum, and the comprehensive vision the corridor needs.

There are a number of excellent architecture/town planning/transportation/economic-market analysis consulting teams that can guide a community through a visioning process. The National Charette Institute, <http://www.charretteinstitute.org/>, explains how a community visioning process is undertaken and the advantages of such a process. Public planning charettes with the nation's best firms will gather disparate studies and issues, conduct market and analysis and other studies, and engage in integrated land use, urban design, transportation, housing, economic and environmental planning. A well done public visioning process inspires and creates momentum like no other process.

Funding: Fairfax may have spent as much as \$1.5 million on the Tysons Corner replanning (<http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/dpz/tysonscorner/>). The Route 1 Corridor deserves commensurate attention, although the process need not cost that much or take as long as it has for Tysons Corner. The best funding sources in the near term are the BRAC community planning funds, the proposed \$150 million appropriation for BRAC transportation, and the community's application for a "TIGER II" transit planning grant.

The soon to be launched sustainability initiative from the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) could also offer a source of funding. The Obama Administration's Partnership for Sustainable Communities between HUD, the Department of Transportation, and the EPA (<http://www.epa.gov/dced/partnership/index.html>) supports integrated planning and will include a new \$150 million HUD program within the Community Development Block

Grant program. The Route 1 corridor could be a candidate for new sources of federal funding, so it will be important to lay the groundwork now.

Process:

- MVCCA and Lee District citizens associations consider and potentially endorse joint, comprehensive and public visioning process and send endorsement to Supervisors.
- Mount Vernon and Lee District Supervisors endorse visioning process and submit and win passage of a Board of Supervisors Resolution.
- Joint Committee formed to help guide the process -- comprised of Mt Vernon and Lee District Planning Commissioners, citizen association representatives, county staff and economic development officials, business representatives, government and non-profit housing groups, and conservation groups. The diversity of the community is represented.
- Supervisors and staff seek funding and submit grant proposals crafted with the help of the Joint Committee.
- Funding is secured with the help of the Congressional Delegation and state lawmakers.
- Joint committee crafts Request for Proposal to solicit top-notch consulting support. Areas of expertise needed may include market analysis and economic development, transportation modeling and street design, transit systems, affordable housing, urban design and landscape design, town planning and transit-oriented development.
- Joint Committee, county staff and Supervisors review submitted proposals and interview and select consulting team.
- Consulting team meets with Joint Committee, county staff and all relevant agencies as part of pre-charette process where reports and studies are gathered and analyzed, the full range of stakeholders are identified and interviewed, the public charette/visioning process is scoped-out, and the outreach and communications plan is developed.
- Charette begins with educational presentations and is followed by at least one all day public discussion and design process (more if necessary).
- Development of the draft plan takes place in an open public studio format over the course of a week or two.
- Draft plan is completed and released for public comment.
- After a period of public and staff review and input, the final plan and implementation measures are drafted and issued.
- Following a Planning Commission and a Board of Supervisors hearing, the new plan and implementing measures are adopted.

Potential Outcomes:

- A new, comprehensive vision for the corridor with a clear implementation plan. Having this clear consensus vision developed through widespread public participation will give confidence to both elected officials and private investors necessary to fund improvements. Branding and creating an identity for the corridor that could capitalize on its history, environment, diverse workforce, proximity to the Nation's Capital and a new transit system will help attract investment. Specific outcomes also include:
 - Consensus on advanced transit system for the corridor and next steps for the design and funding of the system.

- Consensus on the road design for Route 1.
- Plans for preservation and integration of affordable housing with the new vision, along with a comprehensive approach to social services.
- Vision for local street networks, urban design, and transit-oriented development -- linking the preferred type of transit technology with the matching development pattern (for example light rail with nodes of development, or bus and linear development).
- Network of bicycle routes.
- Integrated parks, stream corridor and habitat protection plan, including stormwater management, stream restoration, etc.
- Identification and mapping of historic sites.
- An integrated system of signage and wayfinding.
- Plans for civic and artistic institutions, schools/libraries and enhanced public safety.
- Identification of the public policy, geographic and private market obstacles to past redevelopment efforts and a strategic approach to addressing these.

Partial List of Existing Plans and Studies to be Reviewed in the Course of New Plan Development:

Land Use:

Fairfax Comprehensive Plan, <http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/dpz/comprehensiveplan/>
 2009 APR Nominations – MVCCA, <http://mvcca.org/compPlan.html>; Mount Vernon District, <http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/dpz/apr/nominations/mtvernon/>; and Lee District, <http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/dpz/apr/nominations/lee/>,

Transportation:

1997 VDOT Route 1 Study: <http://www.fcrevit.org/richmondhwy/download/CorridorStudy.pdf>
 2006 County Pedestrian Plan, <http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/fcdot/pedestrian/>
 2007 Fairfax County [presentation](#) summarizes transportation studies at that time
 2009 Fairfax County Transit Development Plan, <http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/fcdot/tdp.htm>

Economic Revitalization:

1997 Revitalization Analysis by the Robert Charles Lesser Company, <http://www.fcrevit.org/richmondhwy/download/RevitalizationAnalysis.pdf>
 2005 Urban Land Institute Technical Assistance Panel, <http://www.fcrevit.org/richmondhwy/download/TAPReport.pdf>

BRAC:

2008 BRAC APR Review, <http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/dpz/apr/brac/>

Housing:

Fairfax County 5-Year Affordable Housing Plan, <http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/rha/5-yrplan/>

Environment:

Watershed Plans: The three important watersheds on Route 1 are Dogue Creek, Belle Haven and Little Hunting Creek. Fairfax County's general website on its watershed plans:
<http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/dpwes/watersheds/>

Little Hunting Creek has a watershed plan that was adopted by the Board of Supervisors in February of 2005.

<http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/dpwes/watersheds/littlehuntingcreek.htm>

http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/dpwes/watersheds/littlehuntingcreek_docs.htm

Dogue Creek, Belle Haven and Four Mile Run are all in the middle of watershed plan development.

<http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/dpwes/watersheds/doguecreek.htm>

http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/dpwes/watersheds/doguecreek_docs.htm