



HEALTHY COMMUNITY CHOICES

FOR THE GREATER RICHMOND REGION





Southern Environmental Law Center

The Southern Environmental Law Center is a nonprofit organization dedicated to protecting the natural areas and resources of the South. SELC works with more than 100 local, state, and national groups, providing legal and policy expertise on issues relating to transportation and land use, air and water quality, forests, coasts and wetlands.

SELC's Land and Community Program promotes smarter growth, sensible transportation choices, community revitalization, and open space conservation.

This report was developed and released in collaboration with the Partnership for Smarter Growth, a nonprofit organization whose mission is to educate and engage communities in the Richmond region to work together to improve quality of life by guiding where and how we grow. Founded in 2004 by citizens from across the region, PSG partners with an ever-growing network of individuals, organizations, businesses, planners, developers, and elected officials to achieve their goal of community-based, sustainable planning.

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OVERVIEW

A healthy community is essential to our quality of life and well-being. Choices about how and where we grow have an enormous impact on whether we have healthy communities—in two senses of that term. How and where we grow impacts the overall health of a community itself, reflected in its vitality and the quality of life of its residents. In addition, healthy communities are those in which development and design of the built environment encourage healthy activities such as walking and bicycling, promote safety, provide access to medical care and to nutritious food, and reduce threats to our health such as air and water pollution.

Although growth has brought tremendous benefits to the Greater Richmond Region, poorly-planned transportation and land development can take a heavy toll on public health as well as on the health of communities. For example, the region has had the highest rate of sprawl, driving, and vehicle pollution per capita of any major metro area in Virginia, a dubious distinction that has brought significant personal, social, economic, fiscal, and environmental costs.

Smarter growth alternatives to scattered, automobile-centered development are needed to promote healthier communities. These alternatives include walkable, mixed use development that integrates where we live, work, and shop; renovation and compatible infill in existing communities; new development in targeted areas; and more housing options, more transportation options, and better protection of farmland and natural and historic resources.

Smarter growth offers multiple health benefits. The important potential benefits of healthy community choices include:

- Reduced air pollution from motor vehicle exhaust and power plants since less driving and more efficient buildings consume less energy and thus require the burning of fewer fossil fuels.
- Greater physical activity for residents of all ages, both by encouraging walking and bicycling and by providing additional open space for recreation.
- Cleaner water as a result of less pavement, rooftops, and other impervious surfaces that allow polluted stormwater runoff to enter streams and rivers.

- Increased conservation of prime farmland and more urban farms, increasing the availability of locally grown food and reducing the burning of fossil fuels required to transport food to consumers.
- Better indoor air quality as a result of green building measures that curb harmful pollutants from sources such as building materials and furnaces.
- Improved accessibility to health care and other needed services for senior citizens and low income households.
- Enhanced social connections and interaction, as well as increased interaction with nature, both of which offer physical as well as psychological benefits.



Awareness of these benefits is increasing, as is recognition of the links between transportation, land development, community design, and health. Policies and projects that promote healthier communities are better for our economy and our environment as well, offering enormous benefits to individuals, families, neighborhoods, and the entire region. And demographic changes and market changes resulting from shifting business and individual needs and preferences are providing additional impetus for better approaches to where and how we grow.

These and other factors have helped spur an increase in projects and policies that advance healthier community choices in our region.

This report examines the connections between transportation, land use, community design, and health, and some of the trends driving a new approach to develop-

ment. It also provides an overview of policies that can help build healthier communities—such as measures to encourage renovation and infill development, affordable housing, green building, more transportation options, more green space, and protection of working farms.

The report then profiles four efforts that highlight some of the abundant opportunities for healthier community choices in rural, suburban, and urban areas: the renovation of Lincoln Mews in the North Side of the City to provide affordable, green housing; the protection of Bandana Farm in Hanover County through a conservation easement; the redesign of Bon Secours' Memorial Regional Medical Center in Mechanicsville to better connect to the community; and the revitalization of historic Jackson Ward in downtown Richmond. The Partnership for Smarter Growth and the Southern Environmental Law Center co-sponsored a series of presentations and walking tours in recent months that focused on these efforts. A range of other organizations partnered with us on one or more of these events, including the Better Housing Coalition, Bon Secours Virginia, Capital Region Land Conservancy, James River Green Building Council, Richmond Association of REALTORS®, Tricycle Gardens, and the Virginia Downtown Development Association. Public officials, community leaders, planners, developers, architects, and citizens took part in these events.

The profiles in this report showcase some of the smarter development activities and opportunities in our region, highlight some of the critical issues about where and how we grow, and illustrate the importance of policies that can promote the health benefits of smarter growth.

Projects and policies have only begun to capture some of the enormous potential to provide healthier community choices in the Richmond region. Our region has a legacy of leadership in such efforts, including having had the nation's first electric streetcar system and one of the oldest public markets in the country, as well as a history of a thriving downtown, town centers, and walkable communities. We need to recapture that leadership and to develop healthier ways to grow.

BUILDING HEALTHY COMMUNITIES

Transportation and land use policies, patterns, and projects have enormous impacts on public health and on the health of our communities. The Greater Richmond Region¹ is fortunate to have a number of vibrant communities and elements that promote healthier activities, including pedestrian-scale

neighborhoods that facilitate bicycling, walking, and socializing; walkable, mixed use areas where people can live, work, shop, and play; and parks, farms, and natural areas that provide recreational opportunities, fresh food, and scenic landscapes.

The dominant land development pattern in recent decades, however, has been sprawling growth, with residential and commercial uses separated and increasingly located beyond existing communities. As a result, the region has had the highest rate of land conversion of any major metro area in Virginia. The U.S. Department of Agriculture estimates that an area over 1.5 times the size of the City was developed in just five years between 1992 and 1997—more land than was developed in either Northern Virginia or Hampton Roads.² Although land development slowed with the recent economic downturn, in Chesterfield County alone approximately 21,500 acres were developed between 2000 and 2008.³ The consequences of this rapid, scattered development include the loss of farmland and open space, as well as a redirection of investment that has contributed to the decline of some commercial and residential areas in the city.

As we have spread farther apart, and as transportation tax dollars have been invested primarily in road projects, people in the region often have little choice but to drive—and to drive farther—to get to work, to



shop, or to engage in other activities. The region has the highest driving rate in Virginia, with people in the urbanized area driving an average of 28.2 miles per person per day in 2008, while people in Northern Virginia drove an average of 23.7 miles per day, and in Hampton Roads 24 miles.⁴

There are abundant opportunities for healthy community design and development in the Greater Richmond Region. Alternatives to sprawling development and driving are needed to promote healthier communities. Smarter growth not only offers health benefits, but also aids our economy, our environment, and our communities.⁵

The Benefits of Healthy Communities

Some of the most important health benefits of smarter growth include the following:

Reduced Air Pollution. Our vehicles and power plants generating electricity to serve our buildings produce a significant amount of pollution. In fact, the region has the highest rate of air pollution from vehicles per capita of any major metro area in Virginia. Emissions from vehicles and power plants are largely responsible for causing an average of over 26 violations of health standards for ozone in our region each year between 2005 and 2010.⁶ Ozone and other air pollutants damage our health, including harming lung tissue, possibly causing asthma attacks and premature death, and disproportionately harming children, senior citizens, and individuals with chronic lung disease. The American Lung Association has given Chesterfield, Hanover, and Henrico a failing grade for their air quality due to the number of high ozone days.

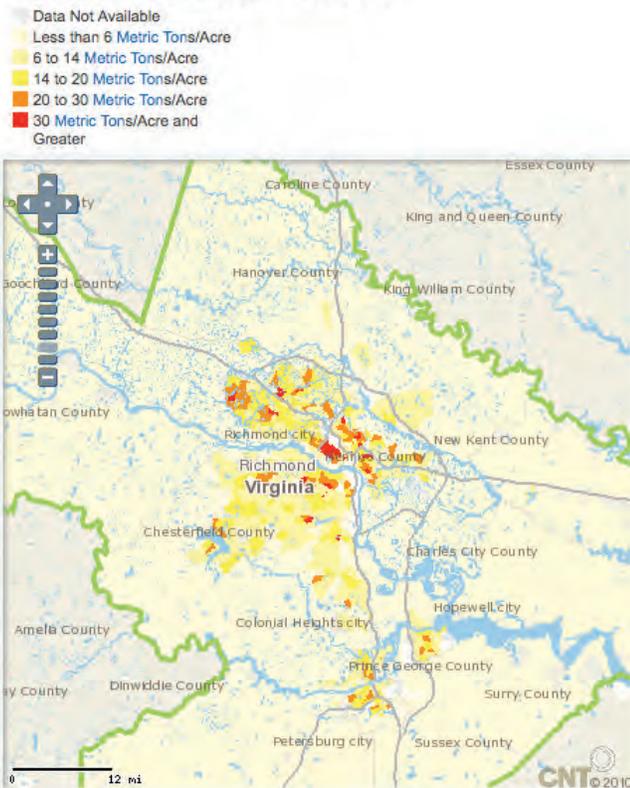


Greater Physical Activity. Scattered development and a lack of adequate, safe facilities make walking and bicycling impractical or impossible in many parts of the region. This contributes to physical inactivity that can lead to problems such as obesity, diabetes, and cardiovascular disease. If the obesity epidemic is not addressed, the current generation of young people could be the first in American history to be less healthy and die earlier than their parents' generation.⁸ As the Surgeon General's landmark 1996 report, *Physical Activity and Health*, concluded, "Americans can substantially improve their health and quality of life by including moderate amounts of physical activity in their daily life."⁹ Walking and bicycling are among the most beneficial and realistic ways for people of all ages to engage in regular physical activity.

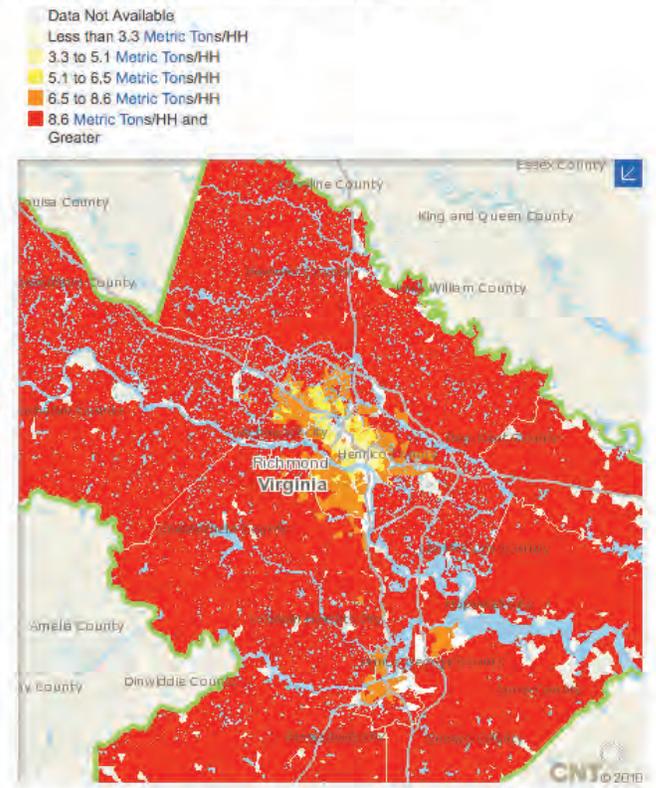
By promoting walking, bicycling, and transit use through a combination of complementary transportation, land use, and community design policies and practices, we can drive less and reduce motor vehicle pollution. And encouraging more compact, mixed use development can further reduce emissions by reducing the length of the vehicle trips we do take. In addition, more energy efficient buildings can reduce energy consumption and thus lower power plant pollution. Further, greater conservation of open space preserves tree cover that can remove harmful pollutants in the air, and planting street trees can help remove harmful pollutants while also providing a more attractive pedestrian environment.

The same combination of complementary transportation, land use, and community design steps that can reduce air pollution by promoting walking and bicycling can also encourage greater physical activity. Walkable, mixed use development with a connected street network and other elements such as adequate and well-maintained sidewalks, crosswalks, and lighting help facilitate walking and bicycling and thus produce multiple health benefits. In addition, parks,

CO2 per Acre From Household Auto Use



CO2 per Household From Household Auto Use



Perceptions of vehicle emissions change dramatically when viewed on a per household rather than a per acre basis, illustrating the impact of development patterns on vehicle pollution.



playgrounds, greenways, trails, and other recreation facilities encourage physical activity and enhance the quality of life in existing communities and help people integrate physical activity into their daily lives.

Cleaner Water. Development in the region has significantly extended the spread of impervious surfaces such as roads and rooftops. In Chesterfield County, for example, impervious surfaces increased by over 90% between 1992 and 2001, and increased by 67% in Henrico during that time.¹⁰ These hard surfaces cover forests, farms, and wetlands that previously filtered water, increasing erosion, flooding, and polluted stormwater runoff and impairing water quality. In addition, land cleared for development and roads can increase sediment deposited in rivers and streams. In contrast, smarter growth patterns can reduce the overall amount of impervious surfaces, through steps such as more compact, mixed use development that reduces the total amount of pavement and other infrastructure needed to serve the same amount of growth, lower parking requirements, and conservation of farmland and open space.

Local, Nutritious Food. Another consequence of rapid development in the Greater Richmond Region has been the dramatic loss of farmland. The amount of land in farms in the region declined by 12% in just five years between 2002 and 2007.¹¹ Some localities have lost farmland even more rapidly, with the number of acres in farming dropping by 45% in Powhatan County and almost 30% in Henrico dur-

ing that brief time. In addition to the impact of sprawling development on water quality noted above, these developments impact our health by changing where and how our food is grown. Paving productive farmland reduces our ability to produce fresh food for healthy diets, and increases air pollution as more fossil fuels are burned to transport food longer distances. In addition, there is growing recognition of the health problems in low income neighborhoods that are “food deserts,” areas that lack grocery stores and whose residents have limited access to stores outside their neighborhood. Smarter growth takes us in a different direction, and helps to conserve farmland, promote agricultural vitality and markets,

and encourage community gardens—all of which can increase the availability of nutritious, locally grown food.



Better Indoor Air Quality. Many people spend up to 90% of their time indoors, yet the air we breathe inside can have higher pollution levels than the air outside due to emissions from sources such as building materials and furnaces. Poor indoor air quality has been estimated “to cause thousands of cancer deaths and hundreds of thousands of respiratory health problems each year” in the United States.¹² Children are particularly at risk. Numerous steps in new and renovated buildings can create green,

healthy buildings by substantially improving indoor air quality. These steps include eliminating the use of materials that contain or emit harmful chemicals, installing much more efficient heating and cooling equipment, and using improved ventilation systems.

Improved Accessibility to Health Care.

Much of the recent development in the region and lack of investment in alternatives to driving appears to be built on the unstated assumption that people can and will drive to reach desired or necessary destinations. However, many people are unable to drive or do not own a car. The lack of transportation alternatives for older adults and for low income individuals in particular can sharply curtail their access to needed medical assistance and other services. Walkable developments that include critical destinations closer to residences and additional meaningful alternatives to driving such as attractive, frequent transit service are required to ensure adequate access to health care and other important services.

Enhanced Socialization and Interaction with Nature. Increasing evidence links higher levels of social interaction and experience with nature with a range of physical and psychological benefits. For example, some studies have found that adults with less contact with friends and relatives may have a shorter life. Other studies show that in auto-dependent communities, the inability to drive can lead to isolation and depression. Further, a host of studies have examined the positive health impacts of interaction with nature, including reducing stress and depression, enhancing the body's immune system, and improving concentration in school children. Smarter growth can promote these health benefits since it has the potential to increase socializing, both by having more people in closer proximity and by encouraging more walking, creating opportunities for social engagement. In addition, steps such as land conservation, creating easily accessible parks and playgrounds, and planting street trees can provide greater opportunities to connect with nature.



Demographic and Market Changes

The demand and need for healthier communities is expected to increase as a result of various trends. For one thing, major demographic changes are underway in the region, such as the changing age distribution of the population. One of the fastest growing age groups over the next two decades will be young adults age 20-34 of the Generation Y or “echo boomer” generation—an age group that often seeks a more urban, active lifestyle.¹³ The other fastest growing age group is seniors age 55 and older, and as the baby boomers age, many more people are choosing to live in walkable, mixed use communities as they seek to remain physically fit and to live independently with access to medical care and other needs.

In addition to the impacts of these demographic changes, factors such as energy prices and traffic congestion are creating a much stronger market for communities that offer the opportunity to live, work, and shop. Similar shifts are taking place in the commercial market. For example, both the private and public sector are looking into opportunities to transform Innsbrook—a quintessential suburban corporate office park development in Henrico County—into a mixed use town center. Sidney Gunst, the founder of Innsbrook says that, “Companies want the choice for their employees to live close to their jobs, or they will go somewhere else.”¹⁴

As Laura Lafayette, Chief Executive Officer of the Richmond Association of REALTORS®, notes “Healthy, sustainable neighborhoods that feature excellent design, a mix of uses, and great walkability contribute significantly to our region’s enviable quality of life. But we can and should do more. Given the realities of the housing market and given the desire of more and more people to live in greater proximity to their jobs, now is the time to focus on infill development, focus on transforming some of our aging communities into revitalized mixed use developments that reduce energy consumption and promote healthy lifestyles. “

Policy Options for Healthier Communities

There are many hurdles to healthier communities, despite the significant benefits and increasing demand for such development.¹⁵ Among other things, regulatory provisions can make it more expensive to renovate existing buildings or prohibit mixed use or more compact development. And federal, state, and local investments and policies have poured the bulk of taxpayer funds for transportation into road projects that serve motor vehicles, slighting other modes of transportation and often subsidizing sprawl.

Public policies and investment decisions need to be reoriented to promote healthier communities. Among the key policy changes needed are:

- Eliminate regulatory barriers to healthier communities. For example, local zoning provisions often make it difficult if not impossible to build walkable, mixed use development through requirements such as large lot sizes or setback requirements, or mandating the geographic separation of commercial and residential uses. These provisions

effectively require people to drive to conduct almost any activity. In addition, minimum parking provisions that require abundant free parking make driving cheaper and more convenient, subsidizing vehicle use while discouraging bicycling and walking.¹⁶ These provisions need to be overhauled.

- Offer incentives for renovating historic buildings, redeveloping empty commercial buildings or declining retail corridors, and building compatible infill development. Financial incentives such as rehabilitation tax credits or abatements, as well as rehabilitation loans and grants are a proven set of effective tools.
- Provide information and technical assistance programs and give incentives such as grants, loans, and streamlined permitting for green buildings and affordable housing.¹⁷
- Fund upgrading, connecting, and adding parks, as well as protecting farms, forest, and open space. Direct funding is needed to fix up existing parks, build new recreational facilities, and acquire open space, or purchase development rights. Tools such as conservation easements and tax credits can encourage private land conservation steps.
- Promote local agriculture through steps such as comprehensive plan and zoning provisions that recognize the importance of farming and do not treat farms as land waiting to be developed, providing farmers markets and marketing assistance, making suitable, unused public land available for community gardens, and farmland protection measures noted above.



Before and after: renovation and infill development along Hull Street in Manchester



- Allocate a greater share of transportation funds to transit, pedestrian, and bicycle projects to help develop a more balanced and diverse transportation system that gives people alternatives to driving. Among other things, money could be spent to install and improve sidewalks, well-designed crosswalks, bike lanes, shade trees, and street lighting. In addition, devote a larger share of transportation funds to existing communities and a larger portion of those funds to maintenance to encourage healthier communities.

There has been an increase in policies and projects in the Greater Richmond Region that promote healthier communities. Plentiful opportunities remain, however, for further improvement, including opportunities to build walkable, mixed use communities that provide attractive and healthy places to live, work, and play. Declining and run-down areas in both the city and the suburbs provide some of the most significant opportunities to revitalize and redesign existing communities and to accommodate new growth.

Transforming policies, practices, and our approach to growth is an enormous challenge, but the need for change is clear and urgent. We must make healthier community choices.

PROJECT PROFILE

LINCOLN MEWS

BUILDING A HEALTHY, GREEN, AFFORDABLE COMMUNITY

The Context

The Richmond region has a shortage of healthy, safe, and affordable housing.¹⁸ The dimensions of this challenge are increasing, with over 35% of households in the Richmond region spending over 30% of their income on housing.¹⁹ Over half of all renters in the region are cost burdened. Although housing prices have declined in the recent economic downturn, higher unemployment, stagnating wages, and other factors have led to an increase in the percentage of cost burdened households in the region in each of the past five years.

The lower cost housing that is available in the region is often poorly designed, constructed, and maintained. As a result, energy costs are high, and indoor air quality often can harm the health of residents, leading to severe respiratory problems and other issues due to emissions from sources such as building materials and furnaces. Moreover, public spaces and other elements in such neighborhoods that impact residents' overall quality of life are often ignored, creating unhealthy and unsafe conditions both for residents and for surrounding neighborhoods.

There are better alternatives, including abundant opportunities to provide healthy, environmentally-friendly, affordable housing.



Before and after: the transformation of Lincoln Mews

The Project

Lincoln Mews is a property located on ten acres in north Richmond.²⁰ It was previously a rundown apartment complex called Lincoln Manor that had experienced neglect, high vacancy rates, and high crime rates. The nonprofit Better Housing Coalition acquired the property in 2008. BHC renovated the property in two phases during the past three years, transforming both the interior and the exterior of the apartments while continuing to provide affordable housing. This effort has been extensive and is ongoing, and BHC has received awards and accolades for its work at Lincoln Mews.

According to BHC Vice President and Chief Operating Officer Bob Newman, “We pretty much had to change everything in those apartments—the

exterior walls had no insulation and the heat didn't work well, the appliances were old and inefficient, the rooms were not in good shape. We reconfigured the apartments and renovated each one. It's a completely different place. Now residents live in greater comfort for a small fraction of their former utility costs.”

Key Policies and Design

One of the most significant elements of the renovation of this community is the use of numerous green building measures. Each apartment was renovated to reach

EarthCraft standards, including installing energy efficient windows, insulation, tankless gas water heaters, Energy Star appliances, high efficiency heat pumps, efficient light and plumbing fixtures, and refinished wood floors using a low VOC sealant. These measures have substantially reduced energy and water usage, cutting bills and reducing air pollution from generating energy. These measures offer additional health benefits by providing better indoor air quality.

In addition to the changes to each apartment, low impact landscaping and rain gardens were installed to reduce overall maintenance, to handle stormwater runoff, and to decrease water pollution. Further, BHC remade the public spaces and common areas. A new community center was built that establishes a hub for the neighborhood, providing a meeting place for residents as well as space for a range of activities such as after-school programs for children and youth. The community center includes solar panels that heat the water for the laundry facility. In addition, a playground was built to provide a safe and inviting place for children to play. A community garden is planned next to the community center where residents can plant and harvest vegetables.

Lynn McAteer, Vice President for Planning and Special Projects with the Better Housing Coalition, says that there were no major policy hurdles to the redevelopment of Lincoln Mews, and that the City's Plan of Development review process helped facilitate the effort. This process allows developers to bring their plans in early on and meet with all city departments involved—such as public works, utilities, planning, and fire—to get feedback and anticipate any problems. In addition, the city gave BHC a small piece of unused land adjacent to Lincoln Mews to accommodate some parking, aiding



Lincoln Mews new community center



the reconfiguration of the property. “The City was very supportive of this project throughout,” notes McAteer. “This really made a difference in taking on this effort, and we are continuing to work cooperatively with the City.”

City officials have praised the project. Councilman Chris Hilbert has said that “the sustainable design enhanced the overall appearance and curb appeal of the complex while saving the residents money in energy bills. None of these improvements would have been possible without the vision and hard work of BHC.” In addition, Alicia Zatcoff, the City’s Sustainability Manager, concludes that “Lincoln Mews is a very important project to have in the City of Richmond. It is a great example of urban revitalization that provides green, affordable housing to residents and creates a model for other developers to follow.”

THE BOTTOM LINE

The extensive renovation of Lincoln Mews provides multiple benefits and transformed an entire community, creating a healthier, more vibrant community; more comfortable and healthier living spaces; and new ways for residents to participate in healthy activities. Green, affordable housing not only helps individuals and families, but also the community and the entire region.

PROJECT PROFILE

BANDANA FARM

RURAL CONSERVATION AND LOCAL, ORGANIC AGRICULTURE

The Context

The Greater Richmond Region has had the highest rate of land being converted to development of any major metro area in Virginia. As noted earlier, one consequence of this rapid development is the dramatic loss of farmland, with the amount of land in farms in the region declining by 12% in just five years between 2002 and 2007,²¹ and shrinking even more rapidly in certain localities.

Paving productive farmland diminishes our ability to produce fresh food for healthy diets, and as more fossil fuels are burned to transport food longer distances, increased air pollution causes or exacerbates numerous health problems. Paving open space also creates more stormwater runoff and pollutes our water, and sprawling development can contribute to physical inactivity, leading to problems such as obesity, diabetes, and cardiovascular disease.

How food is grown also has important health consequences. Organic farming can improve our health by reducing the use of pesticides and herbicides that pollute our water and that can leave residues that harm consumers. In addition, organic farming can reduce energy consumption and therefore the health impacts that result from air pollution and other byproducts of energy production.

Awareness of these trends and impacts has increased in the region in recent years. Efforts are gaining momentum to conserve farmland, forests, and open space; to grow more food locally; and to produce and purchase more organic food.



The Project

Bandana Farm is a 95 acre farm in western Hanover County. Located near Beaverdam, it is in an area historically known as Bandana, which is where the farm takes its name. Sam Moody is a fourth generation farmer on this land. He and his wife Marian decided to put a conservation easement on their property, which allows them to own, live, and work the farm while ensuring that the land will be protected in the future. The easement is held by the Virginia Outdoors Foundation. Jason McGarvey, VOF's Communications and Outreach Manager, says that the farm "has outstanding conservation values that led to its protection, including scenic vistas, rolling fields, forests, a historic farmhouse, wetlands, and streams. In addition, the Moodys have taken steps such as putting in fencing to keep cattle out of streams and adding stream buffers that help ensure good water quality."

The Moodys raise beef cattle and are working toward organic certification of the farm, which they hope to receive by 2013.



Marian Moody says that “Farming is such an important part of our identity, and of the history of Hanover County. We decided we wanted to keep this beautiful land from being built up so that future generations can farm it, enjoy it, and benefit from it.”

Key Policies and Design

Many policy tools are available to address the loss of farmland and open space, including local comprehensive plan and zoning provisions, purchase of development rights programs, and agricultural vitality programs.

One of the most critical land conservation tools is the conservation easement. Easements are voluntary legal agreements between a landowner and a government agency or land trust that permanently prohibit specified uses of the land in order to protect its conservation value while often specifically permitting other uses—such as farming—to continue. In exchange for limiting certain development options, the owner can receive state and federal tax incentives associated with the charitable donation of an easement. The landowner continues to own and retain the right to sell the property.

Tara Quinn, Program Manager for the Capital Region Land Conservancy, notes, “Conservation easements such as the one placed on Bandana Farm are an innovative solution to the need to preserve natural areas and our working farms and forests with limited public funding.

Easements are among the most effective tools for permanent, voluntary land protection.”

The Virginia Outdoors Foundation, which was created by the General Assembly in 1986, holds the largest number of conservation easements in the state, including 62 easements in the Greater Richmond Region totaling over 9,500 acres.²² The Capital Region Land Conservancy works with VOF and is the local land trust serving the Richmond region.²³

In addition, Hanover County’s rural conservation efforts include efforts to combine zoning with the use of easements. David Maloney, Hanover’s acting Director of Planning, says that “through our rural conservation zoning district, or RC, we require approximately 70 percent of acreage to be included in a conservation area in certain areas, and to be protected by a conservation easement. To date, the County has preserved over 5,000 acres in such easements.”

It has been estimated that a total of about 16,000 acres have been protected in the region through various methods.

Although the number of easements and protected acres has increased in recent years, the Richmond region lags behind other parts of the state, and area localities have also adopted fewer innovative policies such as purchase of development rights (PDR) programs.

Pattie Bland, chairperson of the Coalition for Hanover’s Future, concludes that there is a critical need for greater rural conservation since it “is integral to the economic and environmental health of a society. Conserving our rural resources means that citizens can pursue a livelihood tied to the land, and enjoy green spaces for active and passive recreation. Conserving rural space also means we value a vibrant and diverse ecosystem—the very support of our lives. “

THE BOTTOM LINE

The donation of a conservation easement, stream protection efforts, and pursuit of organic certification at Bandana Farm highlight the multiple health benefits of farmland preservation and organic farming, as well as the need to pay close attention to how and where we develop, and to how and where we grow our food.

PROJECT PROFILE

BON SECOURS

CONNECTING A SUBURBAN CENTER TO THE COMMUNITY

The Context

Bon Secours Health System operates a multi-state network of health centers, including four hospitals in the Richmond region. Bon Secours has launched an initiative to improve the health and quality of life

in nearby communities by transforming its hospitals into health care centers set in environments that aid the healing process and promote healthier lifestyles.²⁴ Key elements of these efforts in the Richmond region include a collaborative assessment of needs and assets in areas around medical facilities, community dialogue, and improving the design of facilities and their connection to neighboring communities.

Bon Secours' Healthy Community efforts are based upon a recognition of the relationship between health and the built environment. As Dougal Hewitt, Senior Vice President for Mission of Bon Secours Virginia has noted, "studies have shown that better design can promote healthier communities by encouraging more walking, less driving, and more socializing. Our goal is to use better design to help build healthier communities and to promote healing."

The Project

Bon Secours has initiated collaborative, community-based planning efforts at a number of its facilities in the Richmond region. For example, it partnered with the City, the Richmond Redevelopment and Housing Authority, and the community to hold public meetings and develop a vision to revitalize and transform the 25th Street corridor in the East End District from Broad Street through to Nine Mile Road, includ-



ing the Richmond Community Hospital area.²⁵ In another project in a very different, suburban context, a process planning the development of the St. Francis Medical Center campus in western Chesterfield County produced

a vision to blend additional medical buildings with shops, restaurants, housing, and green spaces to alter a sprawling area by creating a walkable neighborhood with the hospital at its core.²⁶

Memorial Regional Medical Center, a 70-acre medical campus in Mechanicsville, will be the focus of the next collaborative community planning and design process, called a charrette, which is planned to launch in the spring of 2012. The Center currently contains a large amount of surface parking and the campus is buffered and somewhat disconnected from the surrounding area. These design challenges are fairly typical of much of the suburban development in the region, and they greatly limit walking and social interaction.



These areas present some of the most important opportunities to redesign the built environment to promote healthier lifestyles.

Some steps have been taken recently to improve the environment of the facility itself. For example, a garden was installed in partnership with Tricycle Gardens to enhance healing by providing both a place for patients, visitors, and staff to relax and a place to grow fruits, vegetables, and herbs that will be used in preparing nutritious meals for patients.

Key Policies and Design

A multi-step process will be used to develop a new vision for Memorial Regional Medical Center and its connection to the surrounding area. This process will include an assessment of current facilities, stakeholder involvement, research and gathering data, developing alternative concepts, refining strategies, and implementing the plan. As Jason Smith, Healthy Communities Liaison for Memorial Regional Medical Center, notes, “The collaborative process will uniquely address the suburban context of this hospital and the needs of the community we serve. While focusing on a campus plan, the charrette process will also provide an opportunity for the community to dialogue about related issues, including access to public spaces, bicycle and pedestrian safety, public transportation, affordable housing, land use, and other environmental and sustainability concerns that impact community health.”

Community reaction to the collaborative nature of the project has been positive. Pattie Bland, chairperson of the Coalition for Hanover’s Future, says that her group is looking forward to the planning process. As she stresses, “citizen participation is a vital part of the equation when a community makes its land use decisions. A partnership of informed citizens working with their elected and appointed officials helps ensure that the values and goals of a community receive thoughtful consideration and implementation.”

Debbie Winans, Chairwoman of the Hanover County Board of Supervisors, stated that the County “is committed to providing our citizens with healthy neighborhoods to raise our families and grow our businesses. Community planning is also part of economic development, and we are

pleased that Bon Secours is looking at ways to improve this facility and create a healthier community.”

Although elements of the plan will become clearer as the process gets underway and public input is received, it is likely to consider key potential steps to retrofit and revitalize this suburban area by creating more of a town or village center. Elements likely to be considered include improving internal and external connectivity (such as adding sidewalks and bicycle paths, and improving public transit to provide better access to medical care), building additional medical facilities and a mixture of residential and commercial uses, reducing the dominance of surface parking, improving the natural environment, and adding community-enhancing amenities.

David Maloney, acting Director of Planning for Hanover County, notes that the County has had informal discussions with Bon Secours about possible expansion of the hospital and steps to better connect it to the neighborhood, and that the County has in place a number of policies that allow a mixture of land uses and that require sidewalks and other measures that improve connectivity. One of the most important challenges will be implementing any resulting vision. “The benefits of connecting a facility like Memorial Regional Medical Center to the community are obvious but challenging to realize,” Maloney said. “Community involvement is a great way to take on the challenge of harnessing those benefits.”

THE BOTTOM LINE

Bon Secours’ efforts to transform its medical centers into more walkable, mixed use areas and to connect them to the surrounding community illustrate the tremendous opportunities to design the built environment in ways that promote health and increase connectivity and accessibility. The planned Memorial Regional Medical Center project also indicates the enormous potential to retrofit some types of existing suburban development to create healthier, more vibrant communities.



Before and after: potential improvements to the Medical District, Richmond Community Hospital area

PROJECT PROFILE

JACKSON WARD

REVITALIZING A HISTORIC COMMUNITY

The Context

Jackson Ward is a mixed use neighborhood in downtown Richmond with a rich history, a recent surge in development, and a need for additional revitalization.²⁷ It emerged as one of the nation's leading African American commercial, entertainment, and residential districts in the late 19th and early 20th century, and became known as the "Black Wall Street" and the "Harlem of the South." Like many African American neighborhoods, it experienced massive demolition and institutional bulldozing later in the century, including the construction of Interstates 95 and 64, the Coliseum, and facilities for VCU-MCV.²⁸ As Tyler Potterfield, a planner with the City's Department of Planning and Development Review, concludes: "even as late as the 1990's, the thinking was that to revitalize Jackson Ward it was necessary to clear much of it and redevelop it from scratch. We seem to have finally gotten past that and are getting back to the basics with successful rehabilitation and infill construction—especially in places where the historic context survived."

Key elements of the community remain, including many 19th century row houses and more cast iron work than any neighborhood outside of New Orleans. The Maggie Walker House is a National Historic



Site, and most of the neighborhood has been designated as a National Historic District and as a City Old and Historic District. The community has a blend of residential and commercial uses, a number of vacant or underutilized buildings and parcels, and a walkable, pedestrian-friendly urban fabric. These factors have contributed to a rise in renovation projects in Jackson Ward, and position

it to become a more vibrant, mixed use community.

Jim Hill, another planner with the City's Department of Planning and Development Review, notes that Jackson Ward is the largest residential enclave left downtown, and that "few cities have such an area—it is within walking distance or an easy bike ride to a variety of entertainment and dining choices and is adjacent to the central business district."

Major Projects

Renovation projects have begun to transform Jackson Ward, improving the health of the community and encouraging healthier activities such as walking and bicycling. Most of this work has focused on one and two family historic residences, although some larger projects have been undertaken as well. The Richmond Dairy Building, for example, was redeveloped as 113 apartments in 2000, and a number of projects have been completed in the last few years, including Jackson Commons (energy efficient, green infill project with 41 units thus



far), Ram Cat Alley Apartments (historic rehabilitation creating 59 units), Booker T. Washington Plaza (historic rehabilitation of 28 residential units), The 212 (historic rehabilitation adding both office and residential space), and VCU Medical Center buildings on East Marshall Street.²⁹

Another recent project is Bliley's Garage. This adaptive re-use project created 15 apartments and an enclosed garage from two buildings, including a two-story garage and warehouse built for Bliley's

Funeral Home. This was both a historic rehabilitation and a green building project, and added insulation, high efficiency internal storm windows and heating and cooling equipment, high efficiency appliances, a photovoltaic system to meet part of the electric demand, and a solar thermal hot water system.³⁰



Before and after: Bliley's Garage renovation

In addition, Ronald Stallings, President of Walker Row Partnership, has created about 110 residential units and 15 commercial spaces in the 56 projects he has developed in Jackson Ward. Most of these projects have involved the renovation or the adaptive reuse of vacant buildings.³¹ His flagship project—and perhaps the most tangible symbol of Jackson Ward's renaissance—is the renovation of the historic Hippodrome Theater, where Ella Fitzgerald, Duke Ellington, James Brown, and many others played in what was once a thriving 2nd Street entertainment district. The Hipp and the adjacent W. L. Taylor Mansion were reopened in 2011 and include entertainment venues, a restaurant,

two retail spaces, and 28 apartments. This project is a major part of an effort to bring back 2nd Street as an entertainment district.³²

Stallings stresses that the revitalization of Jackson Ward means “you can once again live, work, shop, and play here. It's an exciting time, and this is a very accessible community with options that fit a range of needs. You can have an apartment, a home with a back yard or a larger home if you have a family, and there are housing choices as you get older as well.”

Charles Finley, President of the Historic Jackson Ward Association, adds that “Jackson Ward has it all—beautiful, historic buildings, a diverse community, a notable history, and a neighborhood that is an easy and pleasant place to walk around—all right downtown.”



Key Policies and Design

Public officials and developers cite a number of policies that have helped spur the revitalization of Jackson Ward, including federal and state preservation tax credits, the City's tax abatement and enterprise zone programs, and the Neighborhoods in Bloom program that included the community as an area for focused public and nonprofit resources.³³ In addition, the City made a direct investment of funds in the renovation of the Hippodrome Theater and Taylor Mansion.

Challenges certainly remain. The City's Downtown Plan and several plans for smaller areas provide excellent recommendations for additional steps to improve the community. Funding, political and community support, and careful project review are needed to continue restoring the health of Jackson Ward while ensuring that projects are compatible with its character and make it even more pedestrian-friendly.

Further steps to encourage the recent wave of historic rehabilitation projects and infill have been suggested, since many buildings and parcels remain vacant or underutilized. The Downtown Plan recommends additional incentives such as micro loans and grants, reduced permit fees, tax relief, and reduced parking requirements.³⁴ These steps also provide incentives to address the high number of blighted buildings that remain. And the City has developed a spot blight abatement process for some of the most derelict structures where it can use eminent domain after all enforcement options have been exhausted. Jim Hill cautions that this is "a long and laborious process," but concludes that "in difficult situations it may be the best tool to get a building fixed up or sold to someone who will repair it."

There also are challenges at particular locations, such as the area around the Convention Center. The Downtown Plan recognizes that this project "which

was intended to bring new life to the Ward, has instead overwhelmed its small scale and created a barrier between the Ward and City Center."³⁵ The City hired 3North Architect to develop a mini-plan for the area, and their recommendations include improved sidewalks, on-street parking, outdoor cafés, dedicated bike lanes, and bike rentals. David Rau with 3North says that these steps can "improve the appearance of the area, better orient visitors and help them get around, and provide needed amenities that will increase activities in the area."

Streetscape improvements are needed in other parts of Jackson Ward as well. Although the community's block and street layout are pedestrian-friendly, additional investments, such as increasing sidewalk maintenance and installing trees along streets, would enhance these assets. Street trees not only help create a more attractive and comfortable environment that encourages walking and bicycling, but they also help improve air quality. The City's Urban Forestry Division recently planted trees along 3rd Street, a major gateway into Jackson Ward from I-64 that previously lacked a single tree.



Improved and additional green space is another step to make Jackson Ward a healthier community. Abner Clay Park, for example, is a neighborhood park that offers important recreational opportunities and a location for community events. As the Downtown Plan and a conceptual master plan for the park prepared in 2010

recognize, however, the park is underutilized and some areas are uninviting. Specific recommendations to upgrade the park include enhancing pedestrian connectivity, improving entrances, and adding shade trees and plantings to make the park more inviting and more comfortable.³⁶

Further, although Jackson Ward has a connected street network and other elements that are attractive for pedestrians and bicyclists, as well as drivers, the range of meaningful transportation options needs to be expanded. The City has announced plans to return at least some downtown streets such as Marshall Street to two-way traffic. This will help reduce vehicle speeds and thus will encourage walking and bicycling; in addition, eliminating one way streets can improve access and reduce confusion for drivers trying to reach businesses and residences.³⁷

Potential transit improvements also have been discussed and studied for the adjacent Broad Street Corridor, including a streetcar, light rail, and a bus rapid transit system.³⁸ These proposals typically include a stop at 2nd Street, a primary gateway to Jackson Ward. They could reduce traffic, provide greater transit choices, promote economic development, and reduce harmful air pollution.

Finally, Jakob Helmboldt, the City's Pedestrian, Bicycle and Trails Coordinator, says that specific bicycle and pedestrian projects are in the works such as a new east/west primary bicycle route across the city that will pass through Jackson Ward along Marshall and Leigh between 2nd Street and 11th Street. Helmboldt notes that "Jackson Ward's traditional neighborhood scale and connected street grid provides an environment that is conducive to creating a walkable, bikeable community."



Before and after: potential transformation of Marshall Street

THE BOTTOM LINE

The revival of Jackson Ward and the potential for further revitalization of this historic area illustrate the enormous opportunities to create healthier communities in both senses of that term—the overall health, quality of life, and vibrancy of this particular community are getting stronger, and improvements to the built environment are encouraging healthy activities while reducing threats to our health such as air pollution.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ For purposes of this report, the Greater Richmond Region is considered to be the City of Richmond and the Counties of Chesterfield, Henrico, Hanover, Goochland, New Kent, and Powhatan.
- ² Rex Springston, "Area Now Champion of Sprawl: Land Development is Fastest in State," *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, Feb. 12, 2001 (analysis performed by U.S. Department of Agriculture, Natural Resource Conservation Service).
- ³ Chesterfield County Planning Department, *2009 Magisterial District Development Report* (May 2009).
- ⁴ FHWA, Office of Highway Policy Information, *Highway Statistics 2008*, Table HM-72 (these figures are for what FHWA considers the "urbanized area." For Richmond, that is a slightly larger area than the focus of this report). See Trip Pollard, *Sustainable Communities: Building for the Future of the Greater Richmond Region* (2010)(www.southernenvironment.org/uploads/publications/Sustainable_Richmond_042010_Final.pdf), for more on driving trends and transportation alternatives in the region.
- ⁵ See *Sustainable Communities*, note 4, on the various benefits of smart growth, and Trip Pollard, *Smart Growth is Smart Economics: Sustainable Development in the Greater Richmond Region* (2010)(http://www.southernenvironment.org/uploads/publications/Smart_Growth_Richmond_Report_LR_F.pdf), for further details on the economic benefits of smart growth.
- ⁶ Calculated from Virginia Department of Environmental Quality data (<http://www.deq.state.va.us/airquality>).
- ⁷ American Lung Association, *State of the Air 2011* (<http://www.stateoftheair.org/2011/states/virginia>).
- ⁸ Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, "Childhood Obesity" (www.rwjf.org).
- ⁹ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, *Physical Activity and Health: A Report of the Surgeon General* (1996).
- ¹⁰ U.S. Geological Survey data compiled for Goetz, Jantz, et al., "Integrated Analysis of Ecosystem Interactions with Land Use Change: the Chesapeake Bay Watershed," pp. 263-275 in DeFries, Asner and Houghton, eds, *Ecosystems and Land Use Change* (2004).
- ¹¹ U.S. Department of Agriculture, *2007 Census of Agriculture*, Vol. 1, Ch. 2: County Level Data, Virginia (<http://www.agcensus.usda.gov/Publications/2007/index.asp>).
- ¹² U.S. EPA, Office of Air & Radiation, *Healthy Buildings, Healthy People: A Vision for the 21st Century* (Oct. 2001)(<http://www.epa.gov/iaq/hbhp/index.html>).
- ¹³ See, for example, John McIlwain, *Housing in America: The Next Decade* (Jan. 26, 2010); Virginia Housing Development Authority, "Accommodating the Housing Needs of Generation Y" (Oct. 2008).
- ¹⁴ See *Smart Growth is Smart Economics*, note 5, p. 9.
- ¹⁵ A number of sources explore the hurdles to healthier communities and policy reforms to overcome these hurdles. See McCann and Ewing, *Measuring the Health Effects of Sprawl* (Sept. 2003); Trip Pollard, "Policy Prescriptions for Healthier Communities," *American Journal of Health Promotion* 109 (Sept./Oct. 2003).
- ¹⁶ Donald Shoup, *The High Cost of Free Parking* (2005); Willson, "Suburban parking requirements: a tacit policy for automobile use and sprawl," *J. Am. Planning Assoc.* 29 (Winter 1995).
- ¹⁷ See Trip Pollard, "Building Greener Communities: Smart Growth and Green Building," 27 *Virginia Environmental Law Journal* 125 (2009).
- ¹⁸ More detailed information on housing affordability in the region can be found in Trip Pollard and Frances Stanley, *Connections and Choices: Affordable Housing and Smarter Growth in the Greater Richmond Area* (2007).
- ¹⁹ Housing Virginia, *Housing Affordability Index (HAI) Sourcebook* (citing data from the U.S. Census, American Community Survey, and Virginia Tech Center for Housing Research)(<http://www.housingvirginia.org/tc.aspx?PID=344>).
- ²⁰ See Better Housing Coalition, "EarthCraft Virginia names Lincoln Mews Multifamily Renovation Project of the Year," *BetterNews*, Summer 2011; Community Design Studio, Lincoln Mews (http://www.communityhousingpartners.org/development/architectural_design/documents/LincolnMewslores.pdf); Carol Hazard, "Run-down complex transformed into eco-friendly housing," *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, April 22, 2011.
- ²¹ U.S. Department of Agriculture, note 11.
- ²² http://www.virginiaoutdoorsfoundation.org/VOF_pub-statsbycounty.php.
- ²³ See <http://www.capitalregionland.org>.
- ²⁴ See Bon Secours Health System, *Creating Communities of Health and Hope* (http://hso.bonsecours.com/assets/healthy_communities/pdfs/Strategic_Framework.pdf).
- ²⁵ For background and documents on the East End Transformation Initiative, see <http://www.eastendvision.org> and <http://www.richmondgov.com/EconomicCommunityDevelopment/CommunityInitiatives.aspx>.
- ²⁶ Sarah Dabney Tisdale, "The Doctor Is In," *Style Weekly*, April 7, 2010.
- ²⁷ Many sources explore Jackson Ward's history and architecture. See, for example, Robert P. Winthrop, *The Jackson Ward Historic District* (1978) (<http://dig.library.vcu.edu/cdm4/document.php?CISOROOT=/jwh&CISOPTR=210&CISOSHOW=0>); National Register of Historic Places Inventory-Nomination Form (<http://pdfhost.focus.nps.gov/docs/NHLS/Text/76002187.pdf>); Historic Jackson Ward Association (<http://www.hjwa.org>); Michael Paul Williams and Emily C. Dooley, "Jackson Ward hopes for revival," *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, March 21, 2010.
- ²⁸ See, Nomination Form, note 27. One consequence of these and other steps was to isolate North Jackson Ward, including the Gilpin Court public housing project. See, for example, Edwin Slipek, Jr., "The Lost Neighborhood: Within sight of downtown but invisible to most," *Style Weekly*, November 8, 2006. The Richmond Redevelopment and Housing Authority has undertaken some planning efforts to revitalize North Jackson Ward that are intended to transform it into a mixed income, mixed use neighborhood. See, <http://www.rrhoa.org/revitalization/njw.html>.
- ²⁹ See Venture Richmond, *The Art of Urban Innovation: RVA Downtown Development Snapshot 2011* (<http://www.venturerichmond.com/pdfs/GRID10.pdf>); Venture Richmond, *Downtown Development Update 2010* (http://www.richmondgrid.com/grid/downtown_UPDATE2010_FINAL2post.pdf).
- ³⁰ Venture Richmond (2011), note 29; Ted Randler, "Challenges of Creative Spaces," *Greater Richmond Grid*, May 9, 2011.
- ³¹ See www.jacksonward.com.
- ³² See Edwin Slipek, Jr., "Turnaround Artist," *Style Weekly*, Jan. 12, 2011; Will Jones, "Hippodrome Theater to reopen as music venue," *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, Sept. 4, 2010.
- ³³ See John Accordino, George Galster, and Peter Tatian, *The Impacts of Targeted Public and Nonprofit Investment on Neighborhood Development*, Community Affairs Office of the Federal Reserve Bank of Richmond (July 2005); Local Initiatives Support Corporation, *The Ripple Effect: Economic Impacts of Targeted Community Investments* (2005).
- ³⁴ Richmond Downtown Plan, adopted in October 2008 and additional amendments in July 2009 (<http://www.ci.richmond.va.us/planninganddevelopmentreview/PlansOther.aspx#Downtown>), p. 4.10.
- ³⁵ Downtown Plan, note 34, pp. 4.5, 4.9.
- ³⁶ Community Design Assistance Center, Abner Clay Park Conceptual Master Plan (May 2010) (http://www.hjwa.org/hjwa/Abner_Clay_Final_Report.pdf).
- ³⁷ See Michael Martz and Carol Hazard, "Richmond plans conversion of one-way streets downtown," *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, August 22, 2010.
- ³⁸ See *Smart Growth is Smart Economics*, note 5.



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