

and towers

From fields...

The Region is...



# My Backyard

The newsletter of the Richmond Regional Planning District Commission, including the Town of Ashland, the Counties of Charles City, Chesterfield, Goochland, Hanover, Henrico, New Kent, Powhatan and the City of Richmond.

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## Planning Commissioner's Forum

Summer 2006

The 5<sup>th</sup> Annual Planning Commissioner's Forum, held June 9, 2006 at the Capital One West Creek Campus Town Center in Goochland County was attended by 54 planning commissioners, directors and staff—an event showing an increase in attendance year after year.

The keynote speakers this year were Drs. William H. Lucy and David L. Phillips, Urban and Environmental Planning professors at UVA. Their recent book, *Tomorrow's Cities, Tomorrow's Suburbs*, explores census data and trends that affect aging suburbs.

They found that neighborhoods constructed before 1940 were growing in per capita and family income, while suburbs constructed in the 1960s and 1970s were comparatively losing income. They predict that the recent growth in the 1990s and 2000s will experience a comparable decline in income as aging baby boomers, young professionals and even families move out of these recently constructed suburbs, often into neighborhoods with older (pre-1940) homes.

Michael Chandler, Professor Emeritus at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and Director of Education for the Citizens Planning

Education Association of Virginia (CPEAV) provided the history of planning in the United States and spoke on the importance of comprehensive planning and long-range planning, stating, "Many citizen planners fail to realize tasks such as annual reports that they are required to perform."

T.K. Somanath, CEO of the Better Housing Coalition, gave a presentation on the importance of affordable housing and offered a toolbox with which to help planning commissioners implement affordable housing in their communities. Waiving proffers and hookup fees, property tax abatements and affordable dwelling unit ordinances are just some of the tools that can be used to increase the availability of affordable housing. Especially important to our region is housing for working families. "Teachers, police and firefighters often do not make enough in salaries to afford an average priced home in the community in which they serve."

(See *Affordable Housing in the Richmond Region* fact sheet at [www.richmondregional.org](http://www.richmondregional.org).) Furthermore, as baby boomers age, providing affordable housing for seniors will become even more important.



T.K. Somanath of the Better Housing Coalition highlighting how planning commissioners can implement affordable housing in their communities.

Richmond Regional Planning District Commission  
 2104 West Laburnum Avenue, Suite 101  
 Richmond, Virginia 23227  
 tel: (804) 367-6001 — fax: (804) 367-4375  
[www.richmondregional.org](http://www.richmondregional.org)

# What's Happening in Our Capital Region?

## American Planning Association Confers in San Antonio

*The City of Richmond's Neighborhoods in Bloom program was recognized during this year's APA National Planning Awards luncheon. The program received the Opportunity and Empowerment Award which is given annually by the APA and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to a project that improves the quality of life for low- and moderate-income community residents.*



*David Sacks, Richmond Department of Community Development, accepting the APA/HUD Opportunity and Empowerment Award for the city. (Photo: APA Planning Magazine)*



*Banner announcing APA conference flies over street near San Antonio Convention Center.*



*Inset showing banner announcing APA conference. These banners were displayed prominently throughout the convention area.*

In late April, five thousand planners descended on San Antonio for the annual American Planning Association (APA) national conference. San Antonio's annual Fiesta celebration provided a festive backdrop, including a floating river parade, beaded necklaces, confetti and noisy police escorts for the festival's organizers. Of special interest to conferees at the conference, was syndicated columnist, Molly Ivins, jump-starting this event as the opening session's keynote speaker. She reflected on Texas politics and on the audience's need to stay positive in working with governments.

The conference went on to feature 11 "hot topics" in planning. This year's regional tracks included Transportation Shaping Regions, Planning for the Food

System and Planning for Water. With an eleven month-long drought in the San Antonio region, host city residents talked about the prospect of new water rationing. Some planners toured areas north of the city where residential development is increasing in the recharge zone of the aquifer that provides San Antonio with its water. Other mobile workshops led by local planners visited various projects around San Antonio and central Texas.

The new APA "supertopic," Housing Choice and Affordability, was launched at this year's conference. Sessions were devoted to revitalizing housing in first ring suburbs, integrating historic preservation and affordable housing and creating mixed-income communities around

*(Continued on Page 8.)*

**The 2007 APA national conference will be held in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania after public hearings, which are required as part of the process.**

*From fields and towers....The Region is My Backyard*

# What's Happening in Our Capital Region?

## VIRGINIA LEGISLATURE



### Legislatively Speaking—2006

As the 2006 General Assembly session came to a close, a great deal of legislation passed the Senate and House which impacted local governments. Below are just a few of those bills.

**HB 568 Telecommunications tax restructuring** replaces/applies a statewide communications sales and use tax to retail communication and video services on a competitively neutral basis. The tax rate will be 5 percent on such services as local exchange, inter-exchange, cable, VOIP, satellite, paging and wireless.

**HB 1513, SB 394** require that prior to adoption of any comprehensive plan or amendment, the locality must submit the plan or amendment to the Department of Transportation for review and comment. VDOT will set up requirement standards and submit them to the 2007 General Assembly for approval.

**HB 93, SB 224 Environmental site assessments** clarify the authority of local governing bodies to adopt ordinances requiring site assessments as a part of a rezoning or subdivision approval process.

**SB 374 Single-family dwellings** mandates that localities provide for clustering if they have not done so in the past, provided they have had a 10 percent growth within a 10-year period, and they must include 40 percent of unimproved land. There are exemptions to this bill.

**HB 78 Reconstruction** allows property owners to reconstruct damaged nonconforming property to its original nonconforming state within two years. If the damage/destruction is due to a natural disaster, the time limit increases to four years.

The full version of the *Yeas and Nays Report* with voting records is posted to the RRPDC web site at [www.richmondregional.org](http://www.richmondregional.org).

For additional information, please contact Patricia Villa at the RRPDC at [pvilla@richmondregional.org](mailto:pvilla@richmondregional.org) or at (804) 367-6001.

### Public Radio Partnership for Emergencies

After Hurricane Katrina struck the region last year, localities were left with no efficient way to disseminate information to citizens, such as notifying them where to get water and other supplies.

Since then, members of the Richmond Regional PDC have created a committee to look into a partnership with WVCE-FM, the public broadcasting system which services central Virginia, including the Richmond region. This collaboration will ensure that citizens throughout the entire region are able to receive locality-specific information through radio transmission.

Although in its very early stages, the partnership seems to be gaining momentum quickly. WVCE-FM has proposed several alternatives and is willing to work with individual localities to develop a schedule for transmitting public service announcements during and after a disaster until the emergency is official terminated.



*Crank-powered radio which can be used during power outages. This will be an important part of improved emergency communications.*

A Memorandum of Understanding is being created for this regional project with the staffs from each locality. Stay tuned! The Richmond Regional PDC will provide an update in future newsletters as progress continues on this multi-jurisdictional effort.

For additional information on this emergency broadcasting coordination, contact Jacqueline Stewart at 367-6001 or at [jstewart@richmondregional.org](mailto:jstewart@richmondregional.org).

Want to receive the RRPDC newsletter by e-mail? Just let us know at (804) 367-6001 or e-mail us at [RRPDC@richmondregional.org](mailto:RRPDC@richmondregional.org)

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# What's Happening in Our Capital Region?

## Commissioners Visit Nashville



*Tim Ernst, Hanover Board of Supervisors and Bobby Ukrop, Co-Chairman of the Nashville InterCity Visit pause for a photo.*



*John Mathiason, Capitol Region Airport Commission; Annemarie McHugh, Junior Achievement; and Jack Berry, Richmond Metro Convention & Visitor's Bureau, discuss issues before take-off.*

On April 27 through 29, Richmond Regional Planning District Commission and Metropolitan Planning Organization Chairman, Malvern R. "Rudy" Butler, Commission members Bill Pantele (Richmond) and Jim Donati (Henrico), and Executive Director, Paul E. Fisher, participated in the InterCity Visit to Nashville, Tennessee. Approximately 100 people went on this trip, including six other local government officials



*Paul Fisher introduces the featured speaker on Nashville's commuter rail project.*

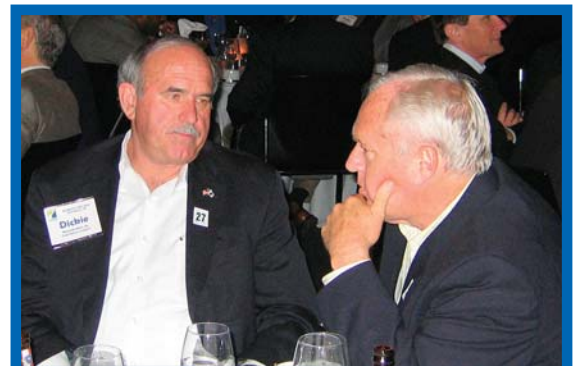
from the Richmond Regional PDC member jurisdictions.

Over the two and a half days of the trip, participants learned about Nashville's successes in economic development, health care industry, regional promotion, minor league baseball, connecting local university graduates with jobs, downtown revitalization and other issue areas. In addition, Paul Fisher moderated a session on transportation, featuring

*(Continued on Page 8.)*



*Jim Donati, Henrico Board of Supervisors and Virgil Hazelett, County Manager, listen at break-out session.*



*Dickie King, Chesterfield Board of Supervisors and Lane Ramsey, Chesterfield County Manager, reflect on the day's sessions.*

**Don't forget: The RRPDC's large conference room is available to our member jurisdictions and affiliates for meetings. It's as simple as picking up the phone and calling us!**

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# What's Happening in Our Capital Region?

## Washington-Rochambeau Revolutionary Route

One historic route through the Richmond region will be sprouting new directional signs this year. A Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) project will replace "Washington Rochambeau Route" signs, originally erected in 1981. The new signs will begin at Mount Vernon in Fairfax County and follow the route, designated by the Virginia General Assembly, which includes roads through Hanover and New Kent counties and continues to Yorktown. The goal of VDOT is to replace the worn and missing signs by the beginning of September which will be in time for the 225<sup>th</sup> anniversary in October of the siege at Yorktown during the Revolutionary War.



*One of the route directional signs to be replaced this year in New Kent County.*

In September of 1781, Revolutionary War generals Washington and Rochambeau passed along the route through Hanover Courthouse and New Kent Courthouse on their way to Yorktown. The Washington-Rochambeau Revolutionary Route (W3R for short) was the 600-mile route taken by French and American soldiers and supply wagons from Newport, Rhode Island to Yorktown, Virginia. The National Park Service is currently studying whether or not the route should be included in its National Historic Trails system because of its historic significance. The siege of British forces there resulted in the surrender of General Cornwallis to American forces, a deciding moment in the war and in American history.

Contact Sarah Weisiger at 367-6001 or [sweisiger@richmondregional.org](mailto:sweisiger@richmondregional.org) for further information.

## Regional Data Resource Center Underway

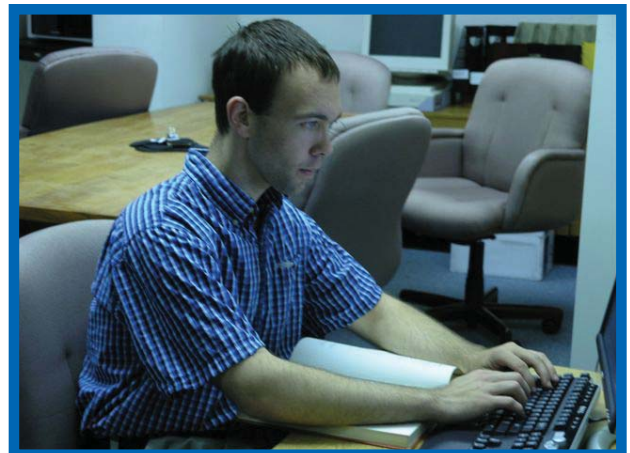
Ever wonder how you could obtain a document or report from the past that you think is no longer in circulation? The Richmond Regional PDC is developing a regional data resource center which will include financial, legislative, planning and transportation related documents, as well as a computer available for research.

Included in this consortium of information will be records consisting of a broad range of various reports as well as electronic copies of past and present documents.

The resource center is currently being organized and a database is being created to catalogue books, reports, journals and statistics.

Phase two of the project will include scanning the documents into a digital form for easy access. Staff will be contacting the region's localities for additional documents to add to the resource center.

The RRPDC is welcoming contributions: If any local government has materials or documents they would like to donate to the research center, please contact Runda Bailey, who is organizing the records and managing the center; she can be reached at 367-6001 or at [rbailey@richmondregional.org](mailto:rbailey@richmondregional.org).



*The new RRPDC resource center will allow citizens and local governments to search for documents and records, including past and present comprehensive plans which will be archived in the center.*

Hours at the Richmond Regional PDC are Monday through Friday from 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

# Getting There...

## Anniversaries at the PDC



**Paul E. Fisher**  
Executive Director  
5 Years



**Jo A. Evans**  
Assistant Executive  
Director  
15 Years



**Sharon E. Robeson**  
Administrative Secretary  
5 Years

**CONGRATULATIONS** to Paul, Jo and Sharon on their worthy service to the Richmond Regional PDC!

## Future Bike Route Realignment

Cycling, not only for recreation but also for transportation, is continuing to grow in popularity in the Richmond community. In fact, due to its growing recognition, the Richmond Area MPO added the Capital Trails project, a pedestrian and bicycle route linking the colonial capital of Williamsburg with the modern day capital of Richmond.



*The need for increased cycling as a mode of transportation has prompted the Richmond Area MPO to seek alignment changes along two major routes to increase safety.*

Two national bicycle routes, Interstate Bicycle Route 76, beginning in Yorktown, Virginia heading to the Pacific coast and Interstate Bicycle Route 1, carrying travelers from Florida to Maine travel through the Richmond region and cross each other in the Town of Ashland.

Conditions along these popular tour routes for local, national and international cyclists have changed over

the past 30 years when the routes were first designated. Working in partnership with our Citizens Transportation Advisory Committee member and also a Richmond Area Bicycling Association member, Mr. Bud Vye, the RRPDC received resolutions of support from Chesterfield and Henrico counties to initiate alignment changes to make these routes safer for cyclists and the motoring public. More to come in the next newsletter about the route alignment changes!

For additional information on this project, contact Barbara Nelson at 367-6001 or at [bnelson@richmondregional.org](mailto:bnelson@richmondregional.org)

## Welcome to...

### Amy E. George, Associate Planner



Amy George first joined the Richmond Regional Planning District Commission team as an intern, recruited from the Virginia Commonwealth University's Urban and Regional Planning program in July 2005 where she was a full-time student.

Although our newest employee is still taking classroom courses, she reduced her workload at the university to fill the full-time associate planner position at the RRPDC, providing community development assistance, census data, emergency services data development and historic resources assistance. Amy can be reached by e-mail address at [ageorge@richmondregional.org](mailto:ageorge@richmondregional.org).

## Regional Mass Transit Study Underway

At the May RRPDC meeting, authority was granted to execute an agreement with VDOT for the use of funds for this comprehensive study. The study will cover the entire PDC area as well as linkages to adjacent rural and metropolitan areas, addressing all surface public transportation modes. In addition, the study will provide recommendations for dedicated, on-going funding to meet capital and operating needs.

**Look for the Capital-to-Capital trail improvements article (\$500 million in construction projects) in the next My Backyard newsletter!**

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# Getting There...

## Gas Prices Affecting Ridership?

At a Richmond Area MPO meeting earlier this summer, John Lewis, GRTC Transit System CEO, addressed how rising gas prices, compared to the \$1.25-\$1.75 GRTC fare, affected ridership. Figures show that ridership was up 17-106 percent, depending on the area served.

## FY 06 Reports on CD

FY 06 reports and documents authored by the Richmond Regional PDC will be available on CD shortly.

Please contact Patricia Villa at 367-6001 or at [pvilla@richmondregional.org](mailto:pvilla@richmondregional.org) if interested in obtaining a copy.

## Huguenot Bridge Reconstruction

Design plans are underway and should be ready for public review this fall for this project, which has been on the MPO's regional priority list for the past six years.

VDOT plans to build an entirely new structure with two 12-foot lanes, two 10-foot breakdown lanes to also double as bike lanes and with sidewalks on both sides. The current cost estimate for this long-anticipated project is \$38 million.

VDOT estimates it will take three construction seasons to complete this much needed bridge.

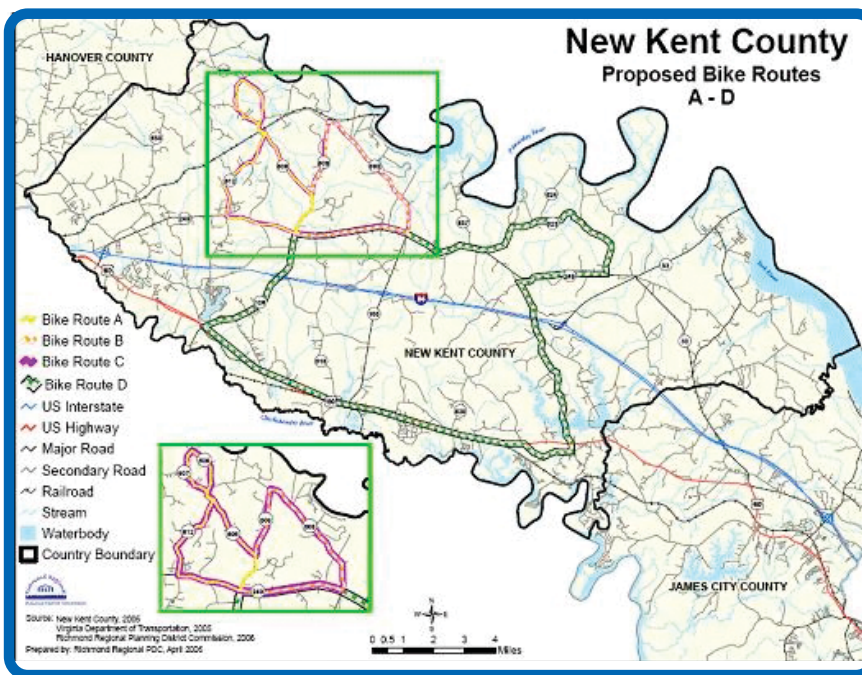
## Bike Routes are Mapped for New Kent County

In June 2005, the Richmond Regional Planning District Commission prepared a *Rural Bicycle Signage Study* for New Kent County.

The report detailed the existing and proposed signage locations and options for the county. Based on this, the RRPDC applied for a TEA-21 grant on behalf of the county for signage along four routes.

The routes were developed by New Kent County planning staff. In fall 2005, planning staff worked with area cyclists and county planning staff to develop

additional routes and to provide mapping for these routes.



*Proposed bike routes for New Kent County.*

This report is intended to document the application process and provide maps and cue sheets for cyclists wishing to travel the rural roads of New Kent County. The routes range from a few miles to an English Century (100 miles).

Cyclists get a chance to try out these routes every fall at the Farms of New Kent Festival in Talleyville. Hundreds of cyclists of all ages and skill

levels come out to experience the rural beauty and roads of this scenic county.

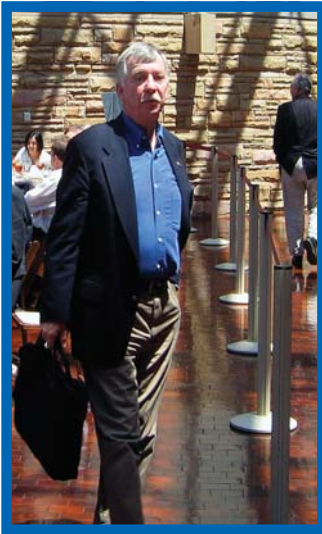
*(Continued on Page 8.)*

**Check out the RRPDC web site for additional bike maps showing bike routes with mileage.**

# What's Happening...

(Continued from Page 4.)

## Commissioners Visit Nashville



*Richmond Regional PDC and Metropolitan Planning Organization Chairman, Rudy Butler (Goochland Board of Supervisors), leaves lunch at the Country Music Hall of Fame where a session on Nashville's healthcare industry sector was held.*

a presentation on Nashville's commuter rail line by Bill Farquhar, with Nashville's Regional Transportation Authority.

While very impressed with Nashville's successes, the Richmond delegation came away feeling very good about the successes of the Richmond region compared to the Nashville region.

## Richmond Regional Planning District Commission

2104 West Laburnum Avenue, Suite 101  
Richmond, VA 23227

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(Continued from Page 7.)

## Bike Routes-New Kent

This summer is the perfect time to try one or several of the routes; maps and cue sheets can be found at [www.richmondregional.org](http://www.richmondregional.org).

It is the goal of the RRPDC and the New Kent County planning staff that these routes will form a core of cycling options for transportation and recreation/tourism in the county.

For additional information on this project, contact Amy George at 367-6001 or [ageorge@richmondregional.org](mailto:ageorge@richmondregional.org).

(Continued from Page 2.)

## APA in San Antonio

transit. Over the next year, the Housing Choice and Affordability supertopic will be the focus of the APA's publications, research initiatives and training.

For additional information on the conference, contact Sarah Weisiger at 367-6001 or at [sweisiger@richmondregional.org](mailto:sweisiger@richmondregional.org)

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