

**Building Local Economies in Southwest Virginia  
September 28, 2010  
University of Virginia College at Wise**

**Executive Summary of Building Local Economies Discussion and Next Steps**

Approximately sixty people gathered at the University of Virginia College at Wise for the workshop on Building Local Economies in Southwest Virginia. The meeting was convened and facilitated by Frank Dukes and Christine Gyovai of the Institute for Environmental Negotiation at the University of Virginia. Participants' thoughts and input were solicited throughout the meeting to help determine interest in the projects and help inform possible next steps.

The meeting began with three presentations by organizations that are working at the regional scale in the area. These collective presentations were a means both to inform attendees of on-going efforts in the region and also to help participants envision and consider networks of support within their own efforts. After these presentations, the group discussed needs and opportunities around local food systems, green building and low-income housing, and downtown revitalization and artisan networks.

The second part of the meeting focused on the Spearhead Trail of the Southwest Regional Recreation Authority. This discussion provided opportunities for people to connect who are working on different efforts. Meeting participants were able to discuss possible topics of concern and potential funding opportunities. The meeting concluded with dinner with a presentation and discussion with guests from the Policy Consensus Initiative of Oregon around communities collaborating to revitalize their economies through local means.

The following morning, a small planning meeting was held to discuss possible next steps from the Sept. 28 Building Local Economies meeting. Below are four areas the group discussed tentatively moving forward with.

- Facilitating discussions for downtown planning and ATV access
- Planning for building local food systems
- Engaging in targeted community capacity building, particularly around facilitation
- Continuing the regional, cross-sector convening on Building Local Economies, similar to the Sept. 28 meeting (mid-year 2011)

These project areas will continue to be discussed with project partners, and ideas, input and interest in participation are welcome from the larger group. Finally, funding and sources of support will be sought, as well as planning for future meetings and next steps in fall of 2010 and beyond.

## Notes from September 28, 2010 meeting

### Current Projects that are Building Local Economies

#### **1. Denise Barrett, Appalachian Sustainable Development (ASD): Growing Local and Regional Food Systems**

Denise Barrett spoke about Appalachian Sustainable Development's commitment to local food systems. She noted that the region currently engages with 19 local farmers markets, including 45 growers and 600 farmers using these markets. In addition, market forces that are able to create sustainable market options to preserve the culture, economy, and environment of the Appalachian region are a necessity. Denise noted infrastructure in Duffield to supply buyers and manage trucks is in place. The problem with local food systems, as Appalachian Sustainable Development observes, is that the demand for this far outweighs the supply.

Denise identified several needs that, if realized, would greatly benefit the food system community. These include:

- The establishment and increase of community canneries, readily accessible kitchens, and community gardens;
- The localized ability to flash-freeze produce;
- An increase in marketing efforts to link producers to consumers, including a widely distributed directory of local businesses; and
- Youth education aimed at informing students about the sources of their food, and food and farming choices.

Some items to consider within this frame of discussion include the following questions:

- What resources, energy, and knowledge are involved in starting a community greenhouse?
- What is the potential for local foods to contribute to the local economies?
- How can the concept of local foods be framed as a quality of life issue?
- How can we encourage farmers to add value to vacant land that could be farmed and encourage more use of taxed land?
- What are some creative ways to use residential mini-farms?
- What are some of the tensions that exist between farmers and people who add value to farm products, such as artisans in the farmer's market context, and how can these pressures be alleviated?

*Denise is the primary contact for people wanting to expand their involvement with ASD's involvement in local and regional food systems.*

#### **2. Brian Phipps, People Inc.: Green Building and Low-income Housing**

Brian Phipps with People Inc. presented concepts of green building and low-income housing. Since 2005, \$35M has been used to construct 853 affordable housing units with a focus on green building practices in the greater Appalachian region. In addition, low-income housing units were integrated into the Green Building Training Center. In order to expand the sustainable goals of

the local region, questions for consideration were posed on how this local community may want to align itself with sustainable technologies and efforts in the future. These considerations include:

- What are the cost differences between green and conventional building practices?
- What are the current endeavors utilizing geothermal heating and cooling systems, and can the manufacturing of geothermal devices be brought to the region?
- Are there any existing educational outreach programs in the region that are focused on green design?
- What are the local water conservation efforts?
- Is there any interest in establishing green cemeteries- i.e. no crypt, coffin, embalming, etc?
- What are the emergent solar firms in the Washington Green Building Council?
- Is there a local green building directory?

Next spring, a homeowner's energy audit summit will be held.

### **3. Todd Christensen, Southwest Virginia Cultural Heritage Commission: Artisan Networks and Downtown Revitalization**

Todd Christensen with the Southwest Virginia Cultural Heritage Commission (SVCHC) spoke on the topic of artisan networks and downtown revitalization. He explained that although old scenic downtowns are a good amenity, an increase in pedestrian gathering areas is needed to increase the vitality of these centers. One participant asked how can communities transform their downtowns into a destination as Bristol, Virginia has accomplished? Some strategies include blocking off streets into pedestrian-only areas to feature vendors, directly linking downtowns into regional trail systems, and providing accessible amenities and essential services, like restrooms, to visitors. Another consideration is to envision how to make heritage and cultural systems responsive to a younger generation of people that may be more focused on the future than the past. A new, robust website will be unveiled in the near future that will have significant information on many topics things related to southwest Virginia, especially travel. The SVCHC will have information available on the new website, as well as the new Heartwood artisan center, which will be open in 2011.

The group discussed several significant issues facing the region:

- What are the strategic investment opportunities from public funding, and how are these efforts different from traditional funding scopes looking at long-term job creation?
- What are the counties' visions for local food economic development?
- How can health-based tourism and healthy places be created that engage both visitors and local residents?
- How can the discussions of this meeting move from a group of like-minded people to the larger populous?
- How can the ties between city officials and local food producers be cemented, acknowledging farmer's markets as a vital economic tool?
- How can vendors be encouraged to participate in the use of EBT swipe card machines during farmer's markets?

- How can senior farmer's markets be institutionalized?
  - What are methods to support counties that are trying to “grow growers,” while creating unity between competing interests?
  - How can future sessions be circulated to a larger population?
- 

**Jack McClanahan, Southwest Regional Recreation Authority (SRRA), Spearhead Trail  
Frank Dukes, Institute for Environmental Negotiation, University of Virginia (graduate  
student class report)**

The next presentation was from Jack McClanahan from the Southwest Regional Recreation Authority's Spearhead Trail Initiative. This project represents a recreation trail initiative that is already in progress and can help draw tourists to the towns it connects. The SRRA website has significant information about the Spearhead Trail, as well as the organization. UVA's Frank Dukes also presented key elements of a graduate student project that looked at how other communities have used recreational trail development as economic development.

The Spearhead Trail is currently engaged with planning for Trail implementation. There was considerable discussion around how to consider downtown revitalization planning and how ATV users and hikers can be integrated with more pedestrian-friendly downtown areas. An example is Gilbert, West Virginia where there are designated streets for ATVs, or having motorized and non-motorized areas within a town. Some people noted that trailheads for ATVs should not be sited adjacent to downtowns or backstreet connections. Southwest Virginia has no noise ordinances, but this should also be a consideration when integrating ATVs into downtown areas. Another issue with ATV use is how to encourage riders to remain on the trails. Some participants noted that while National Forests have designated ATV trails, a negative result may occur when the users do not respect these trail boundaries.

ATV users are only one of the Spearhead Trail's projected user groups—hikers, bikers, and horseback riders will also be able to use the Spearhead Trail.

The Department of Conservation and Recreation provides trail grants of \$1.4M with 30% to motorized uses, 30% to single uses, and 40% to diversified uses. Motorized uses are the least competitive. One participant noted that planners need to think about the protection of natural resources and the intended design speeds of the trail amongst different uses in applying for funding.

A larger discussion is needed to open a dialogue of how to integrate various users and downtowns in a balanced and creative manner. The education of users across various scales and sectors is important in this effort. Haysi, Virginia is another study area to refer to when considering how heavily used recreation areas compete with downtowns.

The Spearhead Trail is concerned with creating more exercise opportunities and encouraging safety when recreating. Challenges arise when locating trails and gaining permission from property owners. When thinking about trails and their design, a major consideration is how they connect with the town centers and how they can facilitate getting people off the trail and into the town centers. Charles Bath in the Czech Republic is an example of a central attraction

surrounded by trails leading to other attractions. One participant noted that thinking about this in advance is much easier than retroactively, and it helps to engage the community.

Meeting participants noted that blueways (water trails) along the Clinch River need to look at a variety of issues in order to emphasize blueway development. These issues include access, stream health and quality, and obtaining funding. Efforts may include interpreting the heritage and history of the blueways by creating interpretive sites along the water to tell the story of the region and forming a coalition to look at areas of overlap and identify opportunities for increasing the chances of attaining funding.

Meeting attendees noted resources for connecting other initiatives, including public health, and trails include the following:

- The Community Design Center at Virginia Tech is a valuable resource.
- Design overlays are an important tool, especially creating design overlays for blueways, for integrating and codifying overlays to see region as a whole rather than a collection of parts.
- Establishing a focus for the trails, such as “walking school bus” trail.
- Virginia Outdoors Survey, which is part of a state recreation plan.
- In some places in the West, physicians can write prescriptions for outdoor play.
- Need for resources for people who are not ambulatory or handicapped and unable to walk.

#### **Key Themes that emerged from the Spearhead Trail discussion**

- There is a need for increased cooperation and communication amongst user groups and stakeholders.
- The development of an integrated plan is needed among towns and localities to guide recreational development and town planning.
- Continue to engage a wide variety of stakeholders and participants in meetings.
- Conflict prevention planning is a tool to develop as meetings move forward.
- Various groups may work together on waterway cleanup efforts with great success. Several groups noted working together toward this effort, and several participants noted enthusiasm for waterway cleanup efforts, as well as the development of blueways.
- Work to obtaining funding sources and organizations to manage grants.
- Identify ways regarding how entrepreneurs can take the initiative to start businesses and be successful.
- Feature the significant natural resources of the region in economic development efforts.
- It is important to find ways to encourage youth retention throughout southwest Virginia.
- Identify strategies to build on the economic “ripple effect” as economic benefits increase?

---

#### **Wendy Willis, Policy Consensus Initiative and Faye Stewart, Oregon County Commissioner: Building Consensus in Changing Communities**

Wendy Willis of the national Policy Consensus Initiative and Faye Stewart, County Commissioner in Oregon, presented their experience working with a changing resource-based economy. They highlighted the need to pay attention to the transition that individuals and groups are undergoing, and especially recognizing the loss that change brings. They also emphasized the

value of an intentional collaborative process as they described an “Oregon Solutions” project that engaged several jurisdictions in response to a significant economic threat.

Participants noted several similarities between communities in Southwest Virginia and the Oregon, and discussed ways that the Oregon communities have moved toward building a stronger economic base.

The following morning a small working group session was held to discuss possible next steps, as noted above. Participants noted the hope that this effort will continue to expand to be a forum to connect people and resources who are building local economies and community resilience in Southwest Virginia and the region. Future efforts may involve additional meetings, community visioning, and communication with project coordinators and potential funding resources, depending on next steps determined by project partners. Please don’t hesitate to contact Christine Gyovai at [christineg@virginia.edu](mailto:christineg@virginia.edu) or 434-982-6464 with any questions or ideas for next steps.

**Meeting attendees**

Adam Cupston	Jorge Hersel
Amy Gail Fannon	K. D. Cook
Andy T. Miles	Kathy Selvage
Anthony Flaccavento	Margie Douglass
Becky Nare	Mark Caruso
Bill Smith	Marley Green
Bryan Phipps	Matthew Harris
Carl Mitchell	Michael Wampler
Charlotte Mullins	Mike and Judianna Clark
Chris Clark	Randy Rose
Christine Gyovai	Robert Chambers
David Vires	Robert Jones
Debbi Hale	Russell Lockhart
Deborah Wagner	Sandy Ratcliff
Diane Withen	Sarah Love McReynolds
Duane Miller	Scott Hamilton
Ed Rogers	Shannon Blevins
Esther Bolling	Sim Ewing
Eugene McClellan	Steve Brooks
Faye Stewart	Sue Cantrell
Frank Dukes	Tommy Dotson
Gary Crum	Tina Rowe
Gary McElyea	Todd Christensen
Jack McLanahan	Tom Cormons
Jackie Davis	Wendy Willis
Jennifer Wampler	Zafar Dad Khan
Jim Baldwin	
John Dreyzehner	
John Kilgore	