Introduction

The Clinch River Valley Initiative (CRVI) held the second quarterly meeting of 2015 at the American Legion Building in Tazewell, VA. An exciting tour was held at Cavitt’s Creek park in Tazewell County first, and then the CRVI meeting was held from 4:00 – 5:45 PM, with dinner and music following. The meeting had participants, including the IEN facilitation team. Thank you to Tazewell County and David Woodard for providing the meeting space and food with Eva Catron for providing the dinner, and to the Tower Street String Band for providing the music.

Executive Summary

- For the first half of the meeting, participants split among the 5 Action Groups to discuss in small gatherings recent accomplishments and on-going efforts of each Action Group.
- Following the break-out session, all meeting participants convened for brief updates from each Action Group.
- A panel of community members discussed the successes and challenges of revitalization in their communities and how they brought people together to reach these accomplishments. The panel included Amy Sampson from Tazewell, Rod Cury from Richlands, and Cathy Johnson from Cleveland.
- The Hometowns of the Clinch Program was launched in Tazewell County. The program will bring towns together to improve communities, encourage entrepreneurship, and create a unified public image for tourism. See the appendix for the thresholds and toolkit to become a Hometown.
- Resource Documents – Hometowns of the Clinch Thresholds and Toolkit

Action Group Updates and Upcoming Events

At the beginning of the meeting, all participants split among the Action Groups to learn of recent accomplishments and to discuss upcoming events and ongoing efforts by each group. The Environmental Education and Water Quality action groups met together, and the State Park and Access Point action groups met together. The Downtown Revitalization action group met by itself.

Environmental Education

- The action group has been approached by the Smithsonian Institution to assist on a project involving hellbenders (a species of salamander) in areas of the Clinch River Valley. The Smithsonian is looking for information on where hellbenders live and where local residents have either seen or found evidence of them.
The 3rd Annual Environmental Education Symposium will be held on Saturday, May 9th, at St. Paul Elementary School. Unlike past years, the event will be held outside. Although slightly lower attendance is expected than previous years because of the change in dates from March to May, the new spring-time date is expected to work better because of the more pleasant weather and the ability to hold the event outside.

Water Quality
- The Upper Tennessee River Roundtable has gotten a grant from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to create character costumes based on animals found in the Clinch Valley, such as the hellbender, mussels, and darters. Educational skits are being produced, such as one that occurred on Earth Day in Abingdon, VA.
- The UTRR is putting together a report card of all the events and efforts that are being completed in order to attract more funding.
- A household hazardous waste event was held on April 11th at the Tazewell County Fairgrounds and more than 4 tons of waste was collected.
- A successful Youth Summit was held in March courtesy of VA Department of Forestry funding. At the summit, students applied for mini-grants, have been working on a project, and will present the results of the project at the upcoming Environmental Education Symposium on May 9th.
- A youth coalition is in the process of being formed thanks to a recent grant to VISTA service member Willie Dodson.
- Water quality trainings are being conducted.
- A major project of restoring stream banks and planting a riparian buffer on Indian Creek (a tributary of the Clinch) is ongoing, after a damaging chemical spill in the 1990s.

State Park/Access Points
- Virginia Secretary of Natural Resources Molly Ward visited the Clinch Valley on April 13-14, 2015. She toured Cavitts Creek Park, as well as other access points and potential anchor properties farther downstream, to potentially be included in the proposed multi-unit Clinch River State Park, which received money for planning during the 2015 legislative session. The tour went well. No money has been appropriated for acquisition yet, however.
- The action group is helping the Department of Conservation and Recreation in planning for the park by providing maps of the area and information on potential properties that could be included in the park.
- The action group is always looking for more information on potential access points and anchor properties along the Clinch.

Downtown Revitalization
- The Downtown Revitalization action group did not give specific updates, but instead included the panel of local community members who discussed ongoing efforts in their towns as part of the Hometowns launch later in the meeting.

Panel Discussion
A panel of local community members discussing downtown revitalization efforts was moderated by Shannon Blevins and Robyn Lee. The panel consisted of Cathy Johnson, who works for the Town of Cleveland, which sits right on the banks of the Clinch River; Amy
Sampson, of the Tazewell Today initiative working to revitalize the Town of Tazewell; and Rod Cury, a teacher in Tazewell County and resident of the Town of Richlands.

Shannon Blevins first asked the three panelists to introduce themselves. The panelists were then asked a series of questions regarding revitalization efforts in their towns, and each panelist had a couple minutes to respond to every question.

Question 1. **Paint a picture for us, what’s a summer day look like in your town in the year 2020?**

Cleveland – Cathy Johnson described a community with lots of great little shops, with hiking and biking trails around the town, to the Cleveland Barrens, and to the Clinch River; and a new swinging bridge across the river from the campground to the town. There will be a new pavilion area after several dilapidated buildings are razed.

Tazewell – Amu Sampson told of a day when she could take her son to Cavitts Creek Park to play, followed by dinner at a restaurant on Main Street and some shopping afterwards.

Richlands – Rod Cury envisions Richlands as an active and inviting town. There will be a river-walk along the Clinch River, with people strolling, biking, and fishing. People will be shopping along the town’s streets. Residents will be passionate about the town’s history, as the historic railroad foreman’s section house will be restored and opened to the public after a $450,000 renovation grant is used. A muralist will come to paint a mural on a wall near the newly-restored building.

Question 2. **How are you organizing your local revitalization efforts?**

Cleveland – Cleveland has a management team that meets regularly and works a lot to supervise the use of a $1.8 million grant that the town received for revitalization efforts. The town also has a volunteer tourism committee that meets on a regular basis.

Tazewell – Tazewell has just started out with a new non-profit, Tazewell Today, and is hopeful for its first grant soon. Many volunteers from both the private and business sectors have been recruited. A design meeting for downtown is coming up. The effort is patterned after the national Main Street project.

Richlands – The town has received a Community Development Block Grant of $700,000 to help revitalize part of the town. The renovation of the historic railroad section house is coming up soon and is one of the last parts of that revitalization project. Richlands is now thinking about a project for revitalizing the western area of the town. Rod Cury also mentioned that “twigs in a group are stronger than one alone” to describe the need for communities in the area to work together to create a stronger region.

Question 3. **What has your town learned from another community along the Clinch River?**

Cleveland – Cathy Johnson mentioned that it is important to take advantage of the local Planning Districts and their resources.
**Tazewell** — Tazewell brought in Lou Wallace from St. Paul to speak about revitalization efforts in her town. Tazewell found this talk to be motivational and learned they needed to “just start somewhere.” Trips to other surrounding towns are also inspirational because community members can see revitalization efforts in action.

**Richlands** — It is important to engage both citizen groups and local governments to work in collaboration on revitalization efforts because support from both is needed to be successful.

**Question 4. What are the immediate next steps for your town’s revitalization efforts?**

**Cleveland** — The next step is to hire an appraiser.

**Tazewell** — Tazewell is looking for a grant writer to get grant applications flowing and is planning a celebration to recognize the many volunteers whose efforts have been so vital to helping the town so far.

**Richlands** — The next step for Richlands is to finish the restoration of the railroad section house.

**Hometowns of the Clinch**

After the completion of the panel discussion, the Hometowns of the Clinch program was launched. First, Jim Baldwin gave a brief overview of the program and the motivations behind its developments. Then, Shannon Blevins, Robyn Lee, and Nick Proctor discussed the program, how it works, its goals, and how towns in Tazewell County can get involved.

**Overview:** Jim Baldwin of the Cumberland Plateau Planning District Commission began the kick off by explaining the importance of the program to the overall vision for the region. The program will draw attention to the river to enhance economic development through the celebration of biodiversity. The communities have rich histories that are tightly connected to the river. This program will build on that history. This is a community and economy development project. It is based around developing consensus and bringing people together. When we all cooperate together and learn from each other, we share in success.

The economy of Tazewell County, and Southwest Virginia in general, used to be based on natural resources. However, that industry is now on the decline and it is time to start thinking differently to maintain a robust economy and strengthen communities. For example, Cleveland has lost its coal business, but it still sits on the banks of the most biodiverse river in North America. How can that town think creatively to revitalize itself?

Patience is key in this effort. Downtown revitalization and rebounding from the decline in the natural resources economy will not occur overnight, but will take years of hard work. Towns along the Clinch are already connecting in ways that no one thought possible 20, or even 10, years ago. Economic opportunities are arising in towns where a lot of people had once give up. Hometowns of the Clinch is a program to continue this revitalization and build on past successes to continue creating more new opportunities for residents who live along the Clinch.
Presentation on Hometowns of the Clinch: Shannon Blevins, Robyn Lee, and Nick Proctor presented a detailed description of the Hometowns of the Clinch program, what it means to be a Hometown, and how towns can get involved in the program. Doug Jackson of the Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development is also a part of the Hometowns of the Clinch committee, but was unable to make this meeting.

The Hometowns of the Clinch is a program to sustain the Clinch River as a source of community and economic development in the Clinch Valley. This presentation in Tazewell is just one of many that will be given to towns along the Clinch that could receive the benefits from this program. There are many different aspects of this program:

- **Community capacity building workshops** will be put on throughout the region. Marc Wilson visited the region in March for Hometowns of the Clinch week, gave a talk, and did a visual assessment of the Town of St. Paul.

- **Branding for the whole Clinch River Valley** will be a major part of Hometowns of the Clinch. There will be shared graphic elements for the four-county region surround the Clinch Valley that can create a network of conformity and cohesion, while allowing for individual differences among the various towns. For example, Dungannon has its own logo personalized to the town, but it also uses the Clinch branding to connect itself to the wider region and to the other towns along the Clinch.

- **Marketing potential.** The Hometowns of the Clinch program and the branding will allow Clinch River communities to market themselves as part of a larger network in southwestern Virginia that have a similar context, but offer different opportunities and experiences to visitors and residents alike. There is also professional photography that Clinch communities can utilize. “When you enter the Clinch River Valley” and see signs for Hometowns of the Clinch, “you know you’re doing something and that you’re somewhere.”

- **Annual requirements for maintaining status as a Hometown of the Clinch.** There are certain thresholds for entrepreneurial participation and friendliness that towns must meet in order to maintain their designation as a Hometown of the Clinch.
  - **Merchandising.** There must be some outlet in the community where Clinch merchandise (i.e., Clinch t-shirts, Clinch bumper stickers, etc.) is sold, whether the town office, a visitor center, a local shop, etc.
  - **Community involvement in CRVI.** Local residents must be active in community events and clean-ups and in the preservation of the Clinch River.
  - **Get involved with other communities.** Help other communities along the Clinch in their revitalization and Clinch preservation efforts. This requirement is aiming to exchange ideas and experiences among the various towns and to build greater cohesion throughout the region. Communities can provide each other with inspiration, such as Amy Sampson’s description of Lou Wallace from St. Paul giving a talk in Tazewell. For example, if the Clinch does not flow directly through your town, then partner with a town where it does for a joint river clean-up.

- **Visual assessments.** Towns are expected to complete visual assessments of their communities covering a range of areas in order to be designated a Hometown of the Clinch. Potential questions to ask when performing the assessment:
- What areas of the community need improvement?
- Is there trash that needs to be cleaned up?
- Where are the places in the community that need assistance?
- What are the assets that are special to this community?

At the end of the presentation on Hometowns of the Clinch, it was asked that any community members who want to get involved in the program or want their town to get involved exchange contact information with Shannon, Nick, or Robyn in order to follow up. The effort is not pinpointing specific communities but is looking to spread the word to towns throughout the Clinch Valley.

After the meeting, all participants were invited to stay for a community dinner catered by Eva Catron and for music provided by the Tower Street String Band.

**Meeting Participants**

1. Brad Kreps  
2. David Woodard  
3. Carol Doss  
4. Nick Proctor  
5. Jim Baldwin  
6. Skip Skinner  
7. Michelle Workman  
8. Monica Appleby  
9. Shannon Blevins  
10. Steve Lindeman  
11. Wally Smith  
12. Rod Cury  
13. Robyn Lee  
14. Stephanie Otis  
15. Debra Horne  
16. Erin Reidhammer  
17. Cathy Johnson  
18. Darrell Horne  
19. Ishmael Richardson  
20. Nicole Vachon  
21. Rose Agbalog  
22. Lara Johnson  
23. Sam Parker  
24. Cynthia Parker  
25. Jim Talbert  
26. Warren Hinkle  
27. Tina Altizer  
28. Curt Breeding  
29. Nancy Brooks  
30. Amy Sampson  
31. Lynna Mitchell  
32. Tower Street String Band  
33. Frank Dukes  
34. Christine Gvoyai  
35. Emily Heymann  
36. Andy Reitelbach
DRAFT THRESHOLDS

Hometowns of the Clinch Designation

We’re working to align more resources and opportunities for local revitalization teams. We’re thinking of it almost like a “mini-Main Street program. To be eligible, communities will have to meet thresholds.

1. Active local revitalization or tourism Committee in place
   a. Lead efforts in community
   b. Participate in collaborative efforts around shared river resources, such as clean ups and cross-community projects.

2. Attendance at Main Street training when held in Southwest Virginia.

3. Have a targeted entrepreneur incentive package and or information path in place.

4. Have a tourism resource available--kiosk, flyer, app, map or other tool.

5. Community Participation in one mySWVAopportunity entrepreneurship activity annually.
   a. Attend pitch night
      1. April 30 Richlands
      2. May 26, UVA Wise
      3. June 25, Duffield
   b. Give emerging entrepreneurs a tour of your community.
   c. Attend an opportunity summit.

6. Have Local / Business representative active in CRVI:
   a. Attend at least one CRVI meeting each year.
   b. Willing and active participation in downtown revitalization committee strategies.

7. Completion of local visual assessment annually
   1. Identify at least three action items undertaken each year.
   2. Include access points and river frontage in this assessment—even if it’s close to, but not in, your community.

8. Have Clinch merchandise available somewhere in the town.

9. Host or participate in hospitality training when it’s available.
USING THE CLINCH BRAND IN YOUR COMMUNITY

The Clinch River Valley Initiative (CRVI) has developed a collaborative brand in partnership with the region’s communities and stakeholders. You’re invited to use it widely in promoting the river and our downtowns, our stewardship efforts and festivals, our heritage sites and scenic vistas. We encourage you to use the logo and brand in any aspect of your communication, signage, and marketing that fits your community’s specific strategy.

a. CRVI volunteers will be happy to present the full promotional package to your civic group, tourism committee, or town council.

b. The design guidelines and all of the files you need are located at [www.clinchriverva.com](http://www.clinchriverva.com).

c. We’d be happy to help you put together a flyer if you’d like to present this to the community in a small mailer with your utility bills.

d. For assistance in incorporating the logo into your materials, or organizing outreach strategies in your community, please contact:
   
   Nick Proctor
   276-492-2412
   nproctor@myswva.org

For starters: here are some quick ways you can use them:

1. On stationery
Consider using the simple Clinch logo as you renew community stationery. The logo is available in one-color, four-color, and black and white versions. The simple logo can be printed very small because it doesn’t include a descriptor. At the page’s footer, try complementing it with the *Southwest Virginia* logo and help spread the word about this region’s world-class outdoor recreation.

![Simple Clinch logo variations](image1)

   (1 Color)  (4 Color, mottled)  (Black and white)

2. Where you can make it a little larger.
This version includes the tagline, Virginia’s Hidden River. If the logo is too small, the tagline will frustrate viewers, so if you can go a little bigger, try this one.

![Larger Clinch logo variations](image2)
3. On tourism brochures and websites
Where you have more room and can send a specific message, you can use the larger logo complete with the tourism market pitch.

4. When you want to stretch it out
This version allows you to get both messages out there and are available the color variations as well.

5. To tout your specific assets
We’ve got some fun icons that you can use on maps, signs, and advertising. There are about 30 of them so far, but see if you can guess these ten.
6. On signs
Through CRVI, communities are just beginning to discuss how they use the logos in signage. If your community is putting up new signs or developing a signage strategy, check in with the CRVI steering committee and let’s see how we can support your effort. It may be that it’s just a matter of getting the right files to your sign design team, or there may be ways we can help create a consistent system across the region.

7. For use by related businesses
These logos are not just for community use. Any hospitality business such as an outfitter, a restaurant or a hotel can use the logo on their advertisements, menus, flyers, etc... Especially when the business promotes the qualities your community and the river that you are trying to communicate, encourage businesses to cross-promote the region.

8. Getting word out locally
If you’re interested in helping to tell your residents about the Clinch River Initiative Strategy, we’d be happy to help put together a small flyer that can be included with utility bills or posted in the town hall.

9. Getting to know the Branding Toolkit
The Community Image Style Guide (a PDF document available on the Clinch River Valley Initiative website) is a good resource for ideas on how to use the brand. Flip through it and consider how the logo can complement your community brand. Then contact Doug or Brandi if you need assistance.

10. Working collaboratively with CRVI partners
We’re just getting started on these strategies to collectively market our downtowns and natural assets via the Clinch River. We’re doing it together, so make sure to stay on the CRVI meeting invitation and update list. Then join the Downtown Revitalization Action Team. Let’s do this. There may be other assets that we can create some strategies around...like a coordinated list and map of our restaurants serving home-style cooking.

If you're interested in helping to tell your residents about the Clinch River Valley Initiative, please contact Doug or Brandi for assistance.