

DISTRICT HIGHLIGHTS COMPILED BY Leona Chan, Ellen Janes, Courtney Mailey and Carl Neely

Virginia Kicks Off Poverty Reduction Initiative

Virginia Governor Tim Kaine opened his May 2009 summit, "Re-Thinking Poverty," with a challenge to policy leaders throughout the state—support the efforts of an ongoing poverty reduction task force by contributing ideas and setting out ambitious goals to fight poverty in Virginia. Virginia Secretary of Health and Human Resources Marilyn Tavenner said that the Re-Thinking Poverty summit "really helped frame – and reframe – ideas about the causes of poverty in Virginia and how to solve them." Tavenner co-chairs the task force with Robert Grey, managing partner of the Hunton and Williams law firm, to help shape new strategies to reduce poverty and to enhance economic opportunity for all Virginians.

The task force is divided into three primary areas of focus: asset development, enhancing individual and community resilience, and workforce training and education. Committees for each area must develop strategic recommendations for reducing poverty that can be implemented at the state and local levels. These recommendations are based on current poverty research, best practices in other states, and input from several citizen engagement events that took place on July 18 called Act on Poverty. Working with Virginia's Community College System, the Act on Poverty forums simultaneously connected citizens and task force members in 26 different locations across Virginia in an open discussion about poverty and economic opportunity. "Governor Kaine asked the task force for specific recommendations, so it's been really important for us to hear from community leaders and the general public about the



programs and services that are working, and which need more attention," Grey said.

Questions that the task force will consider when developing recommendations include: Does national research mirror what's happening in Virginia? Do our solutions for ameliorating poverty capitalize not only on national best practices but also on Virginia-specific solutions? The task force's draft recommendations and priorities are being presented to the Governor's Office in fall 2009.

Virginia first lady Anne Holton also has worked on a number of issues related to reducing poverty in Virginia. Mike Evans, of Holton's office, indicated that, "We see the recommendations from the task force being implemented in two ways. First, the governor will include some of them in his 2010 budget proposal to the General Assembly. Second, we hope that legislators will use some of these ideas to respond to the struggles they are hearing their constituents facing during the recession."

According to Tavenner, "What's also interesting is that people from very divergent backgrounds and regions of the state agree that education, affordable health care and child care are critically important."

"We've heard opinions about the commonwealth's tax credits and structure, too. All of this feedback is an important barometer for the task force," she said.

More information about the ongoing work of the Virginia Poverty Reduction Task Force, is available at www.poverty.virginia.gov.

D.C. Begins Streetcar Project

Transportation officials began the first phase of the D.C. Streetcar Project in September 2009. The project serves as an internal circulator within the city and provides city riders with another public transportation option.

According to the Urban Land Institute's report, *Beltway Burden*, of the proportion of District residents who commute to work, 38.5 percent of the residents take public transportation and 14.6 percent walk or bike to work. The option of a streetcar system, which will be available for the cost of a bus fare, will serve as an environmentally friendly alternative to driving.

Officials also believe the streetcars will be particularly beneficial to local neighborhoods and communities in the District. The ease of access has been proven to revive historic neighborhoods with new investment and activities. The District Department of Transportation (DDOT) looked to Portland, Oregon, as an example. In Portland, the development-to-transit ratio is 18:1, which means every \$1 spent on the streetcar has resulted in \$18 of development in the immediate area (DDOT, 2009). District officials hope the economic development will benefit historic neighborhoods, such as the waterfront corridors of Anacostia and the Northeast. Coupled with the District's job and housing opportunities, as well as cultural and historic amenities, the streetcar system is positioned to serve as a catalyst for new community and economic development.

The D.C. Streetcar Project intends to circulate only within the District and will operate in mixed traffic at moderate speeds. For the first phase of the project,

WASHINGTON, D.C.



tracks will be installed from the South Capitol on Fifth Sterling Drive to the Anacostia Metro station (DDOT, 2009). In later phases, the District Department of Transportation plans to incorporate H Street, NE/Benning Road, and the Northeast D.C. streetscape into the streetcar system. The projected cost for building the D.C. Streetcar Project is \$55 million, which is relatively inexpensive compared to the \$8.8 billion Metrorail system as reported by the Federal Transit Administration. The project is estimated to be completed within three to five years, with the Anacostia line in full service by 2012.

Re-establishing a Districtwide streetcar system will require a committed and collaborative effort from transit officials, government officials and city residents. If executed successfully, this project has the potential to create a stronger and more sustainable communities for the District of Columbia. More information on the D.C. Streetcar Project is available at www.ddot.dc.gov.

New Green Housing Supports Inner City School Teachers

Miller's Court, a redevelopment effort in Baltimore, opened its new mixed-use warehouse conversion project this summer. The project transformed an 80,000-square-foot warehouse into 54 one- and two-bedroom apartments and 36,000 square feet of office space. The residential spaces were designed and marketed to recent college graduates arriving in Baltimore to teach in the city's public schools. Teachers were offered a discount of between \$300 and \$600 per unit.

To complement the project's focus on public education, commercial space was marketed to nonprofit organizations that support inner-city schools. Less than two months after opening, the building was already fully leased by young teachers and nonprofits who serve the city's youth, and it has a waiting list for the apartments.

Developers have a second, similar project under way. The Seawall Development Company, which was founded by the father-son team of Donald and Thibault Manekin, undertook a \$20 million project, transforming a long-vacant building into a vibrant asset both to its immediate neighbors and to the city at large. Miller's Court sits on the boundary between the popular Charles Village neighborhood, home of Johns Hopkins University, and the Remington neighborhood, which has struggled to attract homeowners and other new investors. The scale and location of this project, located on a major thoroughfare near Johns Hopkins and the Baltimore Museum of Art, will help make it a catalyst for other improvements in the city.

The reason Miller's Court is so unique is that many of the building's innovative concepts came directly from

prospective tenants. The developers and architects asked young teachers to imagine their ideal living space, and they responded with ideas such as a copy center, fitness room, café, and indoor and outdoor gathering spaces.

Miller's Court has been awarded a gold LEED certification. The development team recycled many of the building's materials and fixtures into new elements, including furniture and artwork that adorn the building in unexpected and artistic ways. For example, a 10-foot dragon fabricated from the building's scrap metal hangs above the front entrance, and recycled wood and steel have become the beams and furniture of an outdoor courtyard.

The developers tapped an array of public and private financial resources, including millions in federal Historic and New Markets tax credits. SunTrust Bank provided the primary financing and invested in New Market Tax Credits (NMTC) with the help of U.S. Bank. Enterprise Community Investment, Inc. received the NMTC allocation, while Baltimore City provided support through its new Inclusionary Housing initiative. The Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development also provided subordinate debt through its Neighborhood Business Program.

According to Donald Manekin, the project was meant to "roll out a red carpet to new teachers arriving in Baltimore" and to create a strong community that will contribute as much to the building's sustainability as its green construction.

For more information, visit www.millerscourt.com.

MARYLAND



North Carolina Launches Initiative to Provide Services to Unbanked

The North Carolina State Treasury, the North Carolina Commission of Banks and United Way have launched Bank On North Carolina, a program that connects qualified individuals who have no relationship with financial institutions to basic banking services. The program, which was started in the fall of 2009, helps to connect financial institutions to underserved markets.

With the help of savings incentives and financial literacy campaigns, Bank On North Carolina hopes to reach its goal of encouraging 2,400 Durham residents to open checking accounts within the first six months of the program. "This effort will decrease the number of unbanked households in targeted areas by 10 percent and save nearly \$4 million in fees for moderate- and lower-income consumers within the first two years of the program," said Derwin Debose, Bank On North Carolina's program director.

North Carolina ranks fourth in the United States for the number of unregulated check-cashing operations per capita. On average, North Carolina residents pay approximately 5 percent of their income toward fees and interest associated with these alternative financial services. To support the use of checking and savings accounts, the program brings together both public and private partners to facilitate financial education sessions in Durham and throughout the state. Fifty training sessions are planned for 2009-2010.

To set the groundwork for the program, various community partners convened to create an advisory committee. The committee developed a strategic plan to help achieve its goals. First, Bank On North Carolina partners worked with

the Pew Charitable trust to assess the unbanked situation and to create a feasibility study. Researchers from Matt Fellowes and Mia Mabanta of the Pew Safe Banking Opportunities Project (2008) and the North Carolina General Statutes found that in North Carolina, there are approximately 472,100 unbanked households, with approximately 24,100 in the Durham metropolitan area alone.

The committee then began discussions with banks and credit unions to establish low-to-no-cost accounts. To bring awareness of the program and to educate families about how banking institutions work, the advisory committee has developed an extensive marketing strategy aimed at residents. Plans to create a policy agenda are also in development.

A statewide launch of Bank On North Carolina is expected in early 2010. Durham will be one of the first Southern cities to offer the program. In various locations across the country, additional "Bank On" initiatives have been implemented.

To access the Bank On North Carolina Advisory Committee presentation, visit www.authorstream.com/Presentation/derwindubose-230100-bank-north-carolina-advisory-committee-committee-business-finance-ppt-powerpoint/.

Note: Estimates from the Pew Charitable Trust's Safe Banking Opportunities Project is based on data from the U.S. Census Bureau, the Federal Reserve's 2004 Survey of Consumer Finances, and the North Carolina Commissioner of Banks.



WV Welfare Reform Coalition Changes Its Mission

Recently, the West Virginia Welfare Reform Coalition became the WV Alliance for Sustainable Families, or WVASF. The name change reflects a change in the organization's direction. "We found that we made significant progress in making families aware of the services available to support them in the short-term, but there was still a great deal to be done about changing their circumstances in the long-term," says Calah Young, executive director of WVASF. Founded in 1996, the original purpose of the organization was to initiate action in the areas of research, education, advocacy, and coalition building to ensure that West Virginia successfully implemented welfare reform. In addition to voicing issues impacting low-income families receiving public benefits, WVASF has now expanded its focus to cover asset development, financial literacy and long-term economic sustainability for working families.

Providing financial education and asset accumulation incentives, like individual development accounts, is one way to increase long-term financial planning among low-income families. "We made significant strides with Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) outreach, creating volunteer income tax assistance (VITA) sites all over the state," says Young, "But for us, the conversation always came back to 'how do we influence the recipients' use of their refund?' Most families have already decided how they will spend that money before they even got to the VITA site. We just couldn't seem to get their attention at that moment." After reflecting on this finding, the WVASF decided that the best way to influence long-term financial planning among low-income families was to take a more comprehensive, long-term approach to providing education about financial planning alternatives.



WVASF just completed a research study and a series of forums to help understand the landscape for asset development services and partners in West Virginia. Starting with more than 100 existing partner organizations, WVASF conducted a survey to identify and assess which organizations were providing asset-building services. Initial analysis of the results shows that partner organizations had could well-articulate the needs of their customers and providing services to immediately meet those needs. However, few organizations offer supportive programming, such as financial education, to help customers make informed decisions about their long-term financial future. During the follow-up forum series, WVASF sought to delve more deeply into why so few organizations offer this linkage between immediate services and long-term support. According to Young, "What I heard more often than not is that everyone acknowledges that financial education is beneficial. But trying to get people to save in the face of urgent and basic needs, like food, heat, or gasoline – it just doesn't work."

While some partner organizations stated that having a tangible goal, like a house, has been somewhat more effective, it remains unclear whether homeownership is the best path for WVASF's target market. "We recognize that we can't solve everything," says Young. "People that fit the Earned Income Tax Credit demographic are our main customer. We still haven't decided what kinds of incentives will be most effective and meaningful to these families." WVASF continues to seek viable policy and advocacy positions that will stabilize low-income families and prevent them from losing what they do have over the long-term. For more information about WVASF visit, www.wvasf.org.

South Carolina University Launches Data Clearinghouse

Economic and community development professionals in South Carolina will have a new comprehensive research and data resource in the fall of 2009 when the University of South Carolina launches a prototype for the South Carolina Data Clearinghouse. Partners include the South Carolina Department of Commerce, the South Carolina Office of Research and Statistics, and the South Carolina Employment Security Commission. The Clearinghouse will keep records of metadata or metainformation, which will assist users in developing more extensive research.

The purpose of the Clearinghouse is to make information more accessible to community development practitioners and government and business leaders as they shape public programs and policy. Community development practitioners can use the Clearinghouse to complete their grant applications as well as to determine changes or progress in their local service areas and communities. This is the only tool that allows users to search for data by congressional districts. "This effort will leverage existing data with related providers and users," says Dr. Hildy Teegen, dean of the Darla Moore School of Business at the University of South Carolina.

The data will be categorized by metropolitan statistical areas (MSAs), as well as by substantive search categories, such as housing vacancy rates, housing sales, transportation, infrastructure, energy, taxes, labor and health. The data will also be available in a common and informative format so that users can better understand the data collection and analysis process.

The Clearinghouse is unique from other traditional data sources because

users will be able to receive more expansive services. While other data sources are mostly repackaged data from the census, the Clearinghouse allows users to conduct more efficient keyword searches.

The data clearinghouse also helps identify gaps in data availability. "Currently, there is no one-stop-shop for data relating to economic development in South Carolina," Teegen says. Feedback from constituents and practitioners in South Carolina points to data-search inefficiencies that often cause policy decisions to be delayed for a lack of information.

Establishing an efficient data clearinghouse requires a collaborative effort. Industry leaders convened in September to work on the project design. Leaders in South Carolina are excited about this opportunity to leverage existing data and to connect with originators of proprietary data. Collaborators expect to have the complete database released in spring 2010.

For more information on the Clearinghouse, contact the Darla Moore School of Business at the University of South Carolina at scdataclearinghouse@moore.sc.edu.

