

Summary of the



Planning Retreat held on September 28, 2013

By

**DecideSmart, LLC**

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## Background

At the request of the NVRC DecideSmart LLC facilitated a planning retreat on September 28, 2013. The event, hosted by NVRC Chair Mayor Bob Lazaro, was well attended. (See attached attendance sheet). The purpose of the retreat was to review the context of NVRC's duties and capabilities and conduct an internal assessment of how well the Commissioners felt the organization is meeting the mission. The retreat was facilitated by Bill Leighty (former chief of staff the Governors Warner and Kaine) and Lane Ramsey (former County Administrator of Chesterfield County) of DecideSmart, LLC. Prior to the retreat a brief survey was conducted to ascertain what the Commissioners thought were:

- 1) What major issues faced the organization
- 2) What the strengths of the organization were
- 3) What the weaknesses were
- 4) What the proper relationship with the region should be, and
- 5) Whether or not the Commissioners felt the organization was carrying out its chartered mission.

During the retreat the above survey was discussed as a context setter for the facilitated retreat. This summary of the retreat follows the agenda of the retreat.

## Context Setting: Why are we here?

After introductions, Mr. Leighty provided the NVRC with some historical background on the history of regional cooperation in Northern Virginia. In addition, Mr. Leighty reminded the group of the overarching law that govern the creation and use of the Commonwealth's regional planning organization — the Regional Cooperation Act and the Joint Powers Act — which provides that local governments may cooperatively do anything that they have the individual power to do (except tax and issue debt). This broad reaching capability provides the NVRC with the capability of doing virtually anything the member jurisdictions wish to do. Mr. Leighty also discussed the unique nature of the NVRC in that unlike its sister PDCs, NVRC does not have within its sphere the transportation planning role of other PDCs because the MPO authority in Northern Virginia rests with the MWCOG.

Mr. Leighty also reminded the Commissioners that unlike their counterparts, the NVRC Commission is entirely made up of elected officials; a unique aspect of its operations. Mr. Leighty pointed out because of this the NVRC Commissioners have an elevated stature within the leadership of state government policy circles.

## **Survey Results: What are your expectations as Commissioners?**

While a survey was conducted prior to the planning retreat, participants were urged to use the survey as a guide to the planning retreat discussions and not as the basis of the discussions. Also, since the survey was only completed by 11 of the 25 Commissioners it was felt to be too inconclusive to draw specific direction from it. It did however provide a great basis for opening the discussions during the planning retreat. "Top lines" from the summary were:

- 1) What are the top four issues that the Commission should be addressing to benefit the region (number of times cited): Environment, Transportation and Economic Development (there was no clear fourth issue)
- 2) What are NVRC's Greatest Strengths (number of times cited): Bringing officials together, Collaboration between communities and Staff/Mark Gibb
- 3) What are NVRC's Greatest Weaknesses (times cited- included some issues cited toward the bottom under taking clearer positions and lack of vision): Need to take clearer positions, relations with the public and lack of vision
- 4) What is the proper relationship of NVRC within the community: Arbitrator of tough issues/catalyst for collaboration
- 5) Do you believe that NVRC has a clear mission: Tie of Agree but are we achieving it and Agree and it is clear

After reviewing the results of the survey, DecideSmart then turned to facilitation of a discussion of the above results. This facilitation began with the use of an all participant exercise.

### **Looking Back: Highs, Lows and Themes Exercise**

Participants were asked to look back over the last ten years and make individual lists of what they felt were "Highs" and "Lows" for NVRC. These individual results were compiled on a time line and then the facilitation looked for "Themes" from the results.

There were two distinct themes that the facilitators felt emerged from the exercise. First, with a few exceptions proudly touted by individual Commissioners, there were decidedly few individual "projects" that could be recounted by the participants. Second, the participants strongly felt that the "ideas" generated by the NVRC were a very positive attribute of the role of the NVRC.

What was concluded during the discussion is that, while NVRC properly provides some services that should be provided on a multi-jurisdictional basis, its greatest value is as an "idea" oriented rather than "project" driven organization. Further, as the discussions yielded, the greatest contribution that NVRC provide the region is creating a "safe" collegial and collaborative forum for sharing ideas, creating new ideas and education members on emerging trends facing governmental organizations in the region. NVRC is the leader in idea generation for the region.

Given the complexity and diversity of the makeup of the Northern Virginia region, this “safe” forum is highly valued.

### **Looking Forward: The future direction of NVRC**

Extensive discussion followed the exercise. Given the sense of the value contributed by NVRC on being the leader in generating ideas, the question is, moving forward, what would NVRC’s ideas center upon?

The discussion centered on three issue oriented items and one overarching theme. The issue items were: Workforce, Transportation and Energy. The overarching theme was making NVRC more of the “voice of the region.”

#### **Issue Items**

- There was a sense of the participants of the need to focus, along with ongoing work, on:
  - Workforce
    - Coordination with higher educational institutions and key employers to enhance the regions workforce capabilities and supply
  - Energy Planning
    - Planning for energy usage and energy security for the region
    - Enhancing efforts of the efficient use of energy
  - Transportation
    - Facilitation of a broader coordination of issues beyond the individual focal points of existing organizations, without duplicating the work of those organizations
    - Focus on transportation moving people and the need for regional linkages of the many entities into one broader vision

#### **Overarching Theme**

- The Commissioners and Director should work to further define ways for NVRC to be the “voice” of the Northern Virginia region:
  - Communicate to clearly identified stakeholders in the region and outside of the region
  - Establish a mechanism for further discussions of regional branding and where appropriate including that NVRC position as a shared vision coming from all of the localities jointly thereby maximizing power of the message
  - Educate RoVa on the role NoVa plays in the Commonwealth’s future including conditions, needs and opportunities

## September 28, 2013, Retreat Attendees

### NVRC Commissioners Present:

- Chairman Bob Lazaro
- Vice Chairman Penny Gross
- Treasurer Del Pepper
- Commissioner Nader Baroukh
- Commissioner Sharon Bulova
- Commissioner Janet Clarke
- Commissioner John Cooke
- Commissioner Jay Fiset
- Commissioner Gerald Foreman
- Commissioner Libby Garvey
- Commissioner Marty Martinez
- Commissioner Lisa Merkel
- Commissioner Marty Nohe
- Commissioner Frank Principi
- Commissioner Scott Silverthorne
- Commissioner Scott York

### Staff Present:

- Mark Gibb
- Ken Billingsley
- Dale Medearis
- David Schwengel
- Michele Simmons
- Peggy Tadej
- Linda Tenney
- Steve Walz
- Aimee Vosper

