

# OUR REGION, OUR VISION, OUR DECISION



A REGIONAL VISION  
FOR THE  
COUNTIES AND TOWNS OF

**CULPEPER, FAUQUIER, MADISON,  
RAPPAHANNOCK AND ORANGE**

## Preamble to the Vision

Over a period of four months, from February through May 2001, more than 200 citizens from the five counties served by the Rappahannock-Rapidan Regional Commission (RRRC) came together to create this Vision. The first five meetings were held in each county where citizens were asked to identify the strengths, challenges and opportunities that they perceived in their counties. Summaries of these meetings were prepared and common issues and concerns were identified. These themes then served as the basis for two region-wide meetings, where participants were asked to discuss their shared concerns as well as to identify and recommend actions that could be taken to address them. The results of these discussions are distilled into the Vision Statement and the Implementation Recommendations below.

Participants recommend that this Vision serve as a starting point for the Rappahannock - Rapidan Regional Commission and the region's local governments. Participants expect that as dialogue about implementation proceeds, more citizens will be drawn into the process. Participants noted that all counties were represented during the process, and all meetings were extensively publicized through mailed invitations, newspaper notices and radio public service announcements. The mailed invitations were sent to over 1500 residents representing a broad diversity of perspectives including business, environmental, education, religious, agricultural, historical, and local government interests. Participants expressed hope, however, that ways will be found, as deliberations go forward about implementing this Vision, to foster greater participation by a broad range of the region's population, so that more citizens will have a role in the shaping the future of the region.

Additional copies of this Vision, as well as meeting summaries and copies of all the documents that were a part of the visioning process are available from the RRRC. The web address for the RRRC is <http://www.state.va.us/rrpdc/>

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Sponsored by the RAPPAHANNOCK-RAPIDAN REGIONAL COMMISSION (RRRC)

## **VISION STATEMENT**

### **Shared Values**

In our region, we value our scenic natural setting, abundant open space and farms, numerous historic resources, the Main Streets and neighborhoods of our communities, a warm and friendly atmosphere, good jobs and a balanced economy, a quality educational system, and a modest amount of growth. We value the benefits of planning and of citizens working together through their governments to guide local and regional change.

### **A Summary of Our Vision**

We desire that our region and communities in the future will ....

- Succeed, where others have failed, in managing growth and change to preserve those characteristics that we value and seek to sustain.

*We seek “places of character.”*

- Retain their rural and small town feel and preserve their timeless scenic resources.

*We seek “places of beauty.”*

- Offer education and employment for all career levels and preparation for all career tracks.

*We seek “places of learning.”*

- Provide infrastructure for the scale and types of communities we desire.

*We seek “places of service.”*

- Balance jobs and housing, tax effort and tax base.

*We seek “places of opportunity”*

- Find each town and county better off than today and find localities working together on those issues that can be best leveraged in common.

*We seek “places of empowerment.”*

## **What We See in Our Region Today**

We see many strengths in our region and communities that make them highly desirable places to live, work and recreate. We have the best of several worlds – we are close enough to major urban centers that they are accessible yet far enough away that our communities retain their own identity. At the local level, our region offers a beautiful setting of farms, mountains and rivers, as well as traditional towns that provide services and markets. We enjoy the smaller scale of our communities where people are warm and friendly. Taxes have been low compared to neighboring localities and we have a high quality of life.

Many citizens and officials agree that our communities are now at important turning points. The single most important shared concern is the "growing pains" experienced throughout the region, and the challenges that will be brought by the next decades. Signs of sprawl are increasingly evident and this puts pressure on rural owners who want to continue farming. Traffic is beginning to be an issue but VDOT proposals frequently raise concerns. Public service expectations are increasing as our communities grow, especially expectations for schools, recreation and water supply. As we try to address our needs through planning and zoning, we find that the state has not always granted local governments sufficient authority to achieve the kinds of controls or funds we seek.

We are beginning to find that the concerns and experiences of the counties and towns making up our region have many elements in common and we see significant potential for addressing our concerns in a coordinated way.

## **The Six Elements of our Regional Vision**

### **Land Use and Growth Management**

We visualize our region and our communities as consisting of “**places of character**” — rural areas that retain their character as predominantly green and open, and towns and villages that are centers for living and non-farm employment. Growth is effectively managed while a hard edge between urban and rural places is maintained. All major arteries, such as Routes 29, 15, 28, 17, and 3, will have a more urban character near towns and cities but will protect the area's natural resources and will remain rural for most of their length. To successfully manage growth and land use to achieve this vision, our region and communities will employ a range of regulatory, incentive, and financial tools to protect farmland, historical buildings and sites, and open space, while also preserving the village and town centers in each county. We visualize local governments working together with each other, with the RRRC, and with their citizens to actively accomplish these goals.

## **Natural Resource Protection**

We visualize our region and communities as consisting of "**places of beauty**" —vistas of rural farms, orchards, historic places and unspoiled scenic beauty, as well as protected habitats and areas of natural resources for retreat, discovery and recreation. The Blue Ridge and mountain vistas will be protected as important resources and attractions for visitors, along with the region's rivers, forests, open space and working farmland. Our piedmont soils will be cultivated with practices that sustain their rich productivity and our mineral resources are sensitively managed. Our region's rivers and streams will be kept clean and managed in a comprehensive way that both protects recreational uses and provides ample clean water for our communities and those downstream. Our groundwater resources will be managed to ensure clean water, sustainable yields and protection of human health. Our air quality is excellent and will not be compromised by industry. The night sky will continue to offer excellent opportunities for stargazing, and scenic roadways will be unblemished by billboards. To successfully achieve this vision, we will use a variety of tools ranging from education, and monitoring, to regional collaboration and agreements. We visualize this being led by a combination of regional citizen groups and localities working together.

## **Schools and Recreation**

We desire our region and communities to be "**places of learning**" with excellent education for the region's youth, and a skilled workforce that attracts clean high-technology industries to locate in the region. We desire our region to be a place that respects its diversity of race, culture, and income, and deals with its differences in an open and healthy manner - a place where communication across socio-economic levels is fostered.

We desire schools to offer academic education for all students, including high expectations for attending college, college preparatory classes, as well as career oriented job shadowing, and school-to-work programs. Continuing education programs will be coordinated through the region, and will support the region's agricultural and rural lifestyles as well as various industries.

Outdoor recreation opportunities are diverse and abundant throughout the region and will be linked our area's educational program. Sports and other active pursuits for diverse age groups will become increasingly available within the region.

To successfully achieve this level of services, we envision a combination of tools such as regional educational planning, incentives for private sector support, and capital expenditures for new facilities. We visualize these efforts being citizen-led and implemented by a combination of regional working groups, community nonprofit organizations, and the RRRC and localities working together.

## **Utilities and Transportation**

We visualize our region and communities as "**places of service**" – places where transportation and utilities supports the needs, goals, and values of the region's communities without compromising their natural resources or aesthetic character. Multiple modes of

transportation will be available to residents, including pedestrians, community busses, trains and bike routes. These systems will be simple and compatible with the scale and character of the region's communities. Telecommunications will be readily available throughout the region, enabling entrepreneurial businesses and clean industry to develop in the communities. Water and power needs will be developed in a balanced and coordinated way for our communities in ways that do not compromise our air and water quality. To successfully manage these needs, our region will initiate collaborative and proactive long-range planning among the localities for the purpose of rationalizing the region's infrastructure and obtaining regional funding.

### **Economic and Housing Opportunity**

We desire our region and communities to be "**places of opportunity.**" We desire our region to boast a healthy economy that offers balanced employment opportunities ranging from high-paying jobs to reduce the need for commuting, farm and forestry-related jobs, to clean industries such as tourism and high-technology, as well as jobs that can retain skilled young people. First and foremost, our region will recognize and value what is already present in the region, and nurture, sustain and promote these existing opportunities before initiating new programs for new industry. The region will seek to retain a balance between farming, tourism, small businesses, entrepreneurs, and clean industry. Care and judgement will need to be exercised to ensure that new industries are complementary and not counter-productive to existing community assets. We desire that more citizens are involved in economic development plans. We desire living wages to be offered throughout the region, and integrated housing for all socio-economic levels to be linked with areas of economic development. We desire families to be supported by sufficient daycare services and provided community support in multiple ways, such as financial counseling and transitional housing which is considered a "stepping stone" for people moving from emergency to permanent housing. We desire low and moderate-income housing to be available and integrated throughout the region and its various communities.

### **Local Powers and Authority**

We visualize our region and our communities as "**places of empowerment.**" We envision local governments that are responsive to citizen needs and interests, that are skilled at balancing differences and which can provide leadership in planning for the future. We place great faith in planning and zoning as a means to improve our communities. We seek additional authority from the General Assembly to create and use tools that are necessary to plan and to finance local government services. We recognize that as a region we share many challenges and that if we speak with one voice we are more likely to succeed than if each county and town goes it alone.

## **IMPLEMENTATION RECOMMENDATIONS**

Participants in the Rappahannock – Rapidan Regional Visioning Process were asked to identify measures that they judged would best lead to the realization of the above Vision Statement. Ideas were generated in both the county and the regional meetings. The ideas drawing the most support in each discussion group, or ideas which discussion group participants felt should be addressed first, are listed below. Those with an \* are the measures nominated at the second regional meeting for being addressed first. A full list of the proposed measures is available from the RRRC.

Building on this list of measures, the Rappahannock – Rapidan Regional Commission is urged to develop and adopt a Regional Vision Implementation Plan.

Citizens participating in the RRRC Visioning Process urge the following actions:

### **Land Use and Growth Management**

- Localities will participate in regional strategy meetings to share information, to establish common definitions, to coordinate comprehensive planning, to coordinate zoning, to undertake other mutual actions to educate themselves and to become politically active. \*
- Localities will work together to develop a regional future land use plan, including a regional greenway plan connecting historic places and sites. Local governments will embrace the regional land use plan. Localities will create guidelines for development, develop viewshed protection tools, and encourage infill. \*
- A regional planning academy will be established to educate the public and create citizen leaders. The academy will encourage citizens to become actively engaged and to provide input to public decision-making. \*
- Regional historic districts, as well as historic town districts will be established, while providing towns or other designated growth areas room to grow.
- Adherence to comprehensive plans will be the norm, and ordinances and local guidelines to enforce these plans will be enacted.
- Agriculture will be supported as a key feature of the region through
  - zoning that supports agriculture.
  - a regional program for the purchase of development rights (PDRs) and open space easements.
  - support for future farmers in school curricula.
  - funding for Best Management Practices.
  - assistance to farmers with identifying, developing and marketing their niche products.
  - a regional farmers market that provides active local support for local farmers.
  - Ag/forestal districts in every county in the region.
  - methods of raising revenue that are alternative to the real estate tax, which is seen as harmful to agriculture.

- The RRRC will ensure regular media coverage and education about upcoming regional developments.

### **Natural Resources Protection**

- The RRRC will take the initiative to address this vision and engage appropriate local and state officials in the process so that they might effectively represent the region in resource protection and management issues. \*
- An inventory will be made of existing natural areas including forests, open spaces, unique habitats and riparian corridors as a first step in developing a green infrastructure plan. \*
- A green infrastructure plan will be developed to address watershed protection, provide continuity for wildlife habitat, link significant natural resource nodes, preserve open space, and facilitate storm water management. \*
- Localities will reach regional agreements about natural resource protection issues.
- A dedicated state and local funding for natural resource protection will be secured.
- Much of Rappahannock and Madison Counties and portions of other counties will be recognized as important "green spaces."
- The region's rivers will be monitored for development activity and recreational uses.
- Educational efforts will address the public of all ages about natural resource protection issues and the value of scenic property.

### **Schools and Recreation**

- Schools will provide education that meets the needs of the region, including excellent academic and college preparatory courses, job shadowing, school-to-work programs, training for high-tech jobs, and vocational training programs.\*
- Regional education forums and summits will be developed to explore mutual interests, to plan, and to initiate possible actions.
- Diverse recreational opportunities for the region will be provided, and will be explored using Community Foundations for funding new recreational facilities.

### **Utilities and Transportation**

- The region will work assertively with VDOT to develop corridors for through-traffic that avoid significant historic and rural areas and that protect important vistas. Planning will respect local decision-making authority and incorporate all interests into the discussion.\*
- Regular pro-active regional planning will be initiated for the long-term, looking at employing trains and busses for commuters, expanding options for pedestrians and cyclists. \*

- Community trains, with one or two cars, and community busses will be employed to expand the transportation options available to commuters. Such a transportation system will be designed to be simple, not complex.
- Localities will work together on utility and transportation issues, to understand the federal agencies and their requirements, and to show that localities are behind regional projects.
- Localities will develop a 20-year plan for various aspects of the region's infrastructure, including regional plans for telecommunications, water supply and funding, water and sewer, health systems, power companies, and transportation and airport development.

### **Economic and Housing Opportunity**

- We will maximize the use of existing community assets and resources and evaluate the impact of new economic pursuits on the entire region. \*
- A regional committee, linked to local committees, will be established to propose a plan and execute a program for agriculture/ forestry, heritage, tourism, and low impact industries. The plan will link the preservation of rural character and open space to economic development, historical preservation, technology, and tourism. Strong points and resources of each will be identified, promoted and marketed, including niche markets and specialty farming. \*
- Various kinds of tourism will be developed including agri-tourism and heritage tourism.
- Other regions will be identified that have profited from preservation and derive lessons from their experience; we will monitor neighboring regions to determine their impacts on our region.
- Regional grants for innovative and low impact economic development projects will be sought.
- We will identify and offer incentives to encourage local entrepreneurs in the four focus areas (agriculture/forestry, heritage, tourism, and low-impact industries).
- We will identify and attract clean low-impact industries to the region to address the employment needs of residents, using a variety of incentives when necessary, providing incubators for start-up industry, and establishing telecommuting centers.
- The technology infrastructure of the region will be developed to facilitate low-impact technology companies locating in the region as a way of improving job prospects for local residents.
- Low and moderate-income housing will become integral in new developments, infill, rehabilitation projects, and will be linked to transportation and employment. \*
- Housing in the region will be affordable to all socio-economic levels, and educate the public so there will no longer be a stigma associated with lower-income housing.
- Incentives, such as tax credits, for lower-income housing will be made available.
- Families will be provided with support through multiple avenues, including transitional housing and support services such as credit counseling and financial mentoring.
- Daycare will be available and daycare providers will have a minimum knowledge base.

## **Local Powers and Authority**

- Local governments will use this Vision Statement as an on-going basis for cooperative regional actions that benefit the member jurisdictions of the RRRC. \*
- The RRRC will provide publicity about regional developments and raise awareness among both the public and elected officials of significant regional issues. \*
- The RRRC will continue to sponsor public meetings about regional planning with continued effort to involve a larger and more diverse audience.
- A grass-roots effort will be mobilized to make the Dillon Rule an election issue.
- Local governments will utilize the full range of planning and zoning tools currently authorized under Virginia enabling legislation
- The region will seek additional authorizations for programs such as impact fees, transfer of development rights, tax credit programs, cell tower controls, and tools for protecting agriculture and open space.
- The region will seek authorization of additional sources of local revenue and increasing the amount and predictability of state payments to local governments under various state programs for education, land conservation and transportation
- The RRRC will work with local governments to improve the ways that VDOT works with local governments and citizens in addressing transportation needs.
- The RRRC and local governments will work closely with federal and state agencies whose operations and land/facility holdings are located in the region.
- The RRRC will work with the news and other media/publications to represent the region and its vision to major audiences.