



Metropolitan Washington Regional Fellows Program for Public Leadership

The Documentation of a
Unique Regional Program

February - September 2017



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Executive Summary

The Metropolitan Washington Region is comprised of 24 independent municipal jurisdictions spread across Maryland, Virginia, and the District of Columbia. The region spans over 6,000 square miles, and is home to over 5 million people and over 3 million jobs. A strong region depends on the collaboration of local public and private sector leaders to make the regional economy competitive with other metropolitan areas.

ULI Washington is dedicated to playing a key role in maintaining and sustaining the strength of the region. As a convener of thought leadership that is uniquely positioned to bring together regional decision-makers from the government, public, and private sectors, ULI Washington hosted in 2017 its first Regional Fellows Program for Public Leadership. The mission of the Regional Fellows Program is to empower public sector leaders in the Metropolitan Washington Region to build and sustain successful 21st Century communities by providing access to information, best practices, peer networks, and other resources to foster creative, efficient, and sustainable land use practices.

The inaugural cohort of the nine-month Regional Fellows Program consisted of 15 senior public-sector decision-makers who, together, represented three jurisdictions within the Metropolitan Washington Region: The City of Alexandria, VA; Montgomery County, MD; and Fairfax County, VA. Between February and September 2017, each Fellowship team selected an intractable challenge and hosted a Panel of experts to study and make recommendations on that challenge through a two-day Technical Assistance Panel, or TAP.

The City of Alexandria sought recommendations on strategies to improve the competitiveness of the West End office buildings in both the near term and the longer term, and expressed a willingness to consider new and creative approaches for this area including new land uses, infill development, infrastructure improvements, incentives, marketing and positioning.

Montgomery County sought recommendations to maximize the opportunities for the White Oak Science Gateway, an area of the County that has been identified for major development initiatives after nearly 20 years of development moratorium. The focus of the TAP was to examine potential ways to market the

area that would both encourage already planned redevelopment projects and promote revitalization in areas not currently slated for redevelopment.

Fairfax County sought recommendations to advise the County on the development of a community engagement process, including a communications plan, for a specific site which can be used as a template for other future community engagement exercises. This TAP touched on several issues, including: broadening outreach and engagement, particularly to those who don't currently participate; increasing public understanding of process; promoting creative engagement; better utilizing technology; and identifying implications for resources and culture.

A major underlying tenet of this program was to work intensively in three different area jurisdictions on three separate intractable challenges, and in doing so, observe and address shared trends that emerged. Although each jurisdiction is unique, there are similar challenges faced by all the participating jurisdictions. Over the course of the inaugural Regional Fellows Program, two major trends emerged: The Changing Nature of Public Engagement and Equity in Revitalization and New Development.

The shared themes indicate that, as a region, there are opportunities to collaborate on these challenges – to share best practices and to learn from the successes and failures of neighboring municipalities. Only by collaborating will the region boost its overall economic competitiveness.

****Cover image shows Panelists posing for a photo in front of City Hall during a tour of the City of Alexandria. Image source: ULI Washington.****

About ULI Washington

A District Council of the Urban Land Institute

ULI Washington is a district council of the Urban Land Institute (ULI), a nonprofit education and research organization supported by its members. Founded in 1936, the Institute today has over 32,000 members worldwide representing the entire spectrum of land use planning and real estate development disciplines working in private enterprise and public service. As the pre-eminent, multidisciplinary real estate forum, ULI facilitates the open exchange of ideas, information, and experience among local, national, and international industry leaders and policy makers dedicated to creating better communities.

ULI's mission is to provide leadership in the responsible use of land and in creating and sustaining thriving communities worldwide. ULI Washington carries out the ULI mission locally by sharing best practices, building consensus, and advancing solutions through educational programs and community outreach initiatives.

About ULI Washington's Regional Fellows Program

The Metropolitan Washington Region is comprised of 24 independent municipal jurisdictions spread across Maryland, Virginia, and the District of Columbia. The region spans over 6,000 square miles, and is home to over 5 million people and over 3 million jobs.

A strong region depends on the collaboration of local public and private sector leaders to make the regional economy competitive with other metropolitan areas. Increasing the capacity of public leaders and creating greater public-private connections across the region are critical to the region's health. ULI Washington is dedicated to playing a key role in maintaining and sustaining the strength of the region. As a convener of thought leadership that is uniquely positioned to bring together regional decision-makers from the government, public, and private sectors, ULI Washington hosted in 2017 its first Regional Fellows Program for Public Leadership.

The mission of the Regional Fellows Program is to empower public sector leaders in the Metropolitan Washington Region to build and sustain successful 21st Century communities by providing access to information, best practices, peer networks, and other resources to foster creative, efficient, and sustainable land use practices.

The inaugural cohort of the nine-month Regional Fellows Program consisted of 15 senior public-sector decision-makers who, together, represented three jurisdictions within the Metropolitan Washington Region: The City of Alexandria, VA; Montgomery County, MD; and Fairfax County, VA. Each jurisdiction selected a fellows group of five individuals that included an Honorary Fellow (either a County Executive or Council Member, or City Manager), three senior-level decisions makers, and a program manager.

Between February and September 2017, each Fellowship team selected an intractable challenge and hosted a Panel of experts to study and make recommendations on that challenge through a two-day Technical Assistance Panel, or TAP. TAPs, which are signature ULI programs, provide expert,

market-driven, and objective advice by bringing together a multi-disciplinary panel of experienced real estate experts from around the Metropolitan Washington Region who tour the study area, meet with stakeholders and experts, and formulate recommendations.

Each Fellowship Team was aided by two faculty members – prestigious real estate experts and active ULI Washington members – who volunteered their time over nine months to scope the challenge, assemble the panel, guide the panel’s work over the two-day TAP by serving as co-Chairs of the group, and provide follow-up to the Fellowship team after the Panel’s conclusion.

In addition to hosting a TAP, each Regional Fellow served as a Panelist for a TAP in a different Fellowship jurisdiction. This cross-fertilization of talent allowed Fellowship teams to receive targeted, practical technical assistance, and to engage in multiple opportunities for knowledge-sharing among peers in neighboring fellowship jurisdictions.

The Regional Fellows program was built and modeled after The Daniel Rose Fellowship, a program of ULI and the National League of Cities, that focuses on leadership, integrated problem solving, public/private collaboration and peer-to-peer learning. In 2017, Washington, DC, served as a participating city in the Daniel Rose Fellowship. ULI Washington’s launch of the Regional Fellows Program in that same year was strategic and timely: it provided Regional Fellows from Alexandria, Montgomery, and Fairfax with an opportunity to interact with the Washington, DC Fellows and with the panelists from around the Country who travelled to Washington, DC in March for the Daniel Rose Fellowship land-use challenge. All program participants had the opportunity to participate in a luncheon program hosted by ULI Washington, during which open and honest conversation about land use, economic development, racial tensions, public involvement, and the roles and responsibilities of decision-makers ensued.

In addition to hosting and serving on TAPs, all ULI Washington Regional Fellows convened at three separate points during the Fellowship – at the program’s launch, during a mid-year retreat, and at the program’s graduation. Each of these day-long programs provided opportunities for leadership training, capacity-building, and to form relationships across jurisdictional boundaries.

This report serves as the culminating documentation for the inaugural year of the Regional Fellows Program. This report contains one chapter dedicated to each Fellowship Jurisdiction’s Technical Assistance Panel experience, and a final concluding chapter that reflects on several regional trends that emerged throughout the program.

ULI Washington Regional Fellows Class Of 2017



City of Alexandria, VA Fellows, pictured above, Top Row, L-R:

Mark Jinks, City Manager, Honorary Fellow

Yon Lambert, Director, Department of Transportation and Environmental Services, Fellow

Stephanie Landrum, President and CEO, Alexandria Economic Development Partnership, Fellow

Karl Moritz, Planning Director, Department of Planning and Zoning, Fellow

Hilary Orr, Special Assistant to the City Manager, Coordinator (not pictured)

Fairfax County, VA Fellows, pictured above, Middle Row, L-R:

Sharon Bulova, Chair, Board of Supervisors, Honorary Fellow

Barbara Byron, Director, Office of Community Revitalization, Fellow

Kirk Kincannon, Executive Director, Fairfax County Park Authority and Interim County Executive, Fellow

Fred Selden, Director, Department of Planning and Zoning, Fellow

Lauren Murphy, Revitalization Program Manager, Office of Community Revitalization, Coordinator (not pictured)

Montgomery County, MD Fellows, pictured above, Bottom Row, L-R:

Isiah Leggett, County Executive, Honorary Fellow

Jewru Bandeh, Regional Director, Montgomery County Eastern Region, Fellow

Peter Fosselman, Implementation Coordinator, White Oak Science Gateway Master Plan, Fellow

Greg Ossont, Deputy Director, Department of General Services, Fellow

Amy Donin, Planning Specialist, Department of General Services, Coordinator (not pictured)

Reinventing Alexandria's West End

City of Alexandria, VA
June 13-14, 2017

Background

The Beauregard Area lies west of Interstate 395, within the West End of the City of Alexandria. The area is characterized by land uses that include campus-style office, residential, and institutional development of varying heights that are interspersed with green space and surface parking lots. More specifically, the area is home to 1.8 million square feet of office space occupied by Federal and private tenants, 154,000 square feet of retail space, 6,114 apartments in 268 buildings, 530 senior units in Goodwin House and Hermitage, plus institutional facilities and open space.

The City of Alexandria adopted an update to the Beauregard Small Area Plan in 2012. The Plan focuses on redevelopment of several large garden apartment complexes, single-family homes, a shopping center and aging office buildings. The Plan provides a vision and framework for the area that includes integrated land use, transportation and urban design; new urban neighborhoods; diverse



Map source: ULI
Washington.

uses and housing that intended to be compatible with existing neighborhoods; an interconnected open space network; 800 affordable housing units; a dedicated transitway; and a new fire station and athletic field.

As part of the City's efforts to reposition the West End, the City is planning the West End Transitway, a 5.3-mile corridor which will bring bus rapid transit (BRT) to the Beauregard Corridor around 2021 and link the Mark Center, Southern Towers and other destinations to the Van Dorn Metro Station to the south. Sidewalk improvements, new bikeways, and pedestrian safety and traffic operations improvements at 18 intersections also are planned for implementation.

The demographics of the Beauregard Area tell an interesting story. Residents have lower median household incomes than the City as whole, and higher rates of poverty. The population is younger on average, and household sizes



This flyer, from The City of Alexandria's website, shows the alignment of the West End Transitway. Image source: <https://bit.ly/2GIFC6t>

are somewhat larger. The largest parks and open space in the City are in the West End, including the Winkler Botanical Preserve, as well as the Alexandria Campus of the Northern Virginia Community College (NOVA) and an Inova Hospital adjacent to the Study Area.

The City sought guidance on strategies to improve the competitiveness of the West End office buildings in both the near term and longer term, and expressed a willingness to consider new and creative approaches for this area including new land uses, infill development, infrastructure improvements, incentives, marketing and positioning.

Panelists were asked to address the following questions:

1. Prior to completion of the West End Transitway, are there interim design or tenant solutions the City could seek to reduce vacancies?
2. Is there a way to "brand" the area in order to attract a certain type of tenant and is there a role transportation can play in "branding" the area / corridor?



Garden apartments characteristic of the West End. Photo credit: ULI Washington.



BRAC 133 is the new location for the Washington Headquarters Service and a number of other DoD agencies. The project added 6,400 new employees to the Mark Center area. Photo credit: ULI Washington.



The Shops at Mark Center, located on Beauregard Street, provide retail, service and food options to nearby apartment communities. Photo Credit: ULI Washington.

3. How can the City best work with stakeholders to determine the best outcome for the vacant office buildings, and are there incentives the City could provide to spur a type of use.
4. Based on the site visit and Panel knowledge of comparable locations, what options for change have the greatest likelihood of success?
5. How does the Panel view the market for planned growth in the area adjacent to the office parks? Is there the potential that planned residential development will spur non-residential investment (retail, office, other) or should retail and other amenities be encouraged to act as a stimulus for residential and non-residential growth?
6. Are there cities or communities nationally struggling with this same issue that have adopted innovative programs and incentives that Alexandria can mimic?
7. What type of catalyst anchors might the City consider incentivizing that could utilize a campus-like setting?

Panel Observations

The Panel toured the Beauregard Area, reviewed briefing materials, and heard from stakeholders who expressed concerns about long-standing differences between the East and West End of the City. The East End of Alexandria is largely characterized by historic Old Town, with its urban street grid, activated streets, small scale retail, and historic homes. The West End of Alexandria, on the other hand, feels more suburban in nature, with wider roads, larger parcels, and auto-oriented development. Though the West End contains half the City's land area and half of its population, it lacks the regional identity that characterizes the East End. Over the course of the TAP, Panelists observed several key opportunities and challenges for Alexandria's West End.

Opportunities

The neighborhoods of the West End are an overlooked asset. These stable communities are both diverse and relatively affordable, especially compared with the high house costs of the rest of the region. The Panel's tour of the West End confirmed that there are many assets in or near the area that could support the City's effort to reposition this submarket and promote private sector investment. Some of these assets include:

- INOVA Hospital
- Alexandria Campus of the Northern Virginia Community College (NOVA)
- I-395 access
- BRT Line
- Beatley Central Library

- Federal presence
- Landmark Mall (Howard Hughes Investment)
- Substantial Open Space:
 - » Fort Ward Park (137 acres)
 - » Ben Brenman Park (59 acres)
 - » All Veterans Park: (38 acres)
 - » Dora Kelly Nature Park (47 acres)
 - » Winkler Botanical Preserve (45 acres)
 - » Holmes Run Trail System
- Cameron Station

Office Vacancy

In addition to these assets, the Panel observed a significant office vacancy rate (31.9 percent) throughout the West End. These vacancy rates are not unique in the region; office vacancy is symptomatic of a fundamental shift in the nature and locational preferences of office tenants – both regionally and nationally. Changes in how people work—reduced space per employee, desire for flexible spaces, floor plate requirements, telework and other alternate work options—are changing the nature of office leasing region- and nation-wide. Panelists observed that the vacant office buildings in the West End are symptomatic of a broader issue that is specific to the West End Alexandria submarket, including:

- Lack of identity
- Lack of a full complement of amenities found in competing Northern Virginia neighborhoods:
 - » Retail options including diverse restaurant offerings (e.g. coffee shops, fast casual, healthy food to table, white table cloth)
 - » Childcare options
 - » Recreational facilities
 - » Civic Services (art, recreation, performing arts, education)



Alexandria enjoys many assets – including nature preserves, INOVA Hospital, Northern Virginia Community College, and more. Image source: ULI Washington.

Connectivity and Access to Retail

Connectivity within the area and between open space, retail, and housing remains a challenge for Alexandria's West End. West End retail centers such as Bradlee and Landmark are neither connected to nor integrated with nearby housing. Considerable open space is distributed throughout the West End, but it is not well connected through trails or sidewalks, and consequently has not been leveraged as an attractor. Panelists also heard stakeholders cite the need to travel to Shirlington in Arlington County to meet their restaurant and retail needs, rather than meeting these needs locally, within the City of Alexandria.



Connectivity among Alexandria's West End neighborhoods is a challenge – particularly with regard to parks, recreation, open space, and trails. Image sources: ULI Washington.

Panel Recommendations

The Panel identified the West End as crucial to Alexandria's vibrant future. Alexandria's West End is a "best kept secret" that could provide live, work, and recreational options for both current and future residents, and for employees. Strategically influencing the future of Alexandria's West End represents a unique opportunity for the City, because this area provides a livable, more suburban character with established, relatively affordable neighborhoods compared to surrounding areas. Additionally, existing single-family housing provides an oasis in this part of the City, which is an asset to attract families who may also be employees in the area.

Recognizing the potential of the West End, the Panel recommended that the City initiate a *OneAlexandria* effort to change perceptions and reposition and strengthen the area. The *OneAlexandria* effort serves as a way to reframe some of the challenges associated with the West End, by:

- Acknowledging the different geographies of the East and West parts of the City
- Examining funding to ensure an equitable share to the area
- Celebrating successes
- Communicating the status of projects and programs, and opportunities in the area
- Creating incentives for near-term change
- Considering the area's long-term needs

Attaining a *OneAlexandria* approach involves several specific recommendations from the Panel. These recommendations are outlined below.

Capitalize on Existing Assets

The area has an obvious locational advantage due to access to transportation infrastructure including the future BRT, I-395, and other major routes. The extensive open space system and recreational facilities within the West End represent an important asset for both residents and employees; such a significant resource should be celebrated and leveraged, as these resources would be impossible to acquire today.

Additionally, though the Winkler Botanical Preserve affords the opportunity to connect with nature without leaving the City, this unparalleled resource is neither widely known, nor readily accessible. To maximize its potential benefit, the City needs to understand the original agreements and zoning approval to be sure the Preserve is being operated in conformance with those agreements, create a relationship/partnership with the Winkler Trust to better utilize this community asset and explore the possibility of acquisition or collaboration with the Trust.



Stephanie Landrum leads Panelists on tour of Alexandria's West End. Photo credit: ULI Washington.



Panelists hear from Honorary Fellow Mark Jinks about Alexandria's West End. Photo credit: ULI Washington.

Proximity to Inova Hospital and the NOVA Campus create the potential for synergies with those who live and work in the West End as well as the rest of the City. Finally, the redevelopment of the Landmark Mall and the BRT implementation in the West End position the area to provide diversified opportunities for economic development, public enjoyment and civic identity.

Strengthen Connectivity and Mobility Options

Auto-oriented travel is only one of many mobility options that should be easily available to Alexandria's residents. The West End BRT line will be implemented in a few years, but because it will be a new and different part of an existing regional system, it will be critical to educate residents on how to use it.

To strengthen opportunities to walk or bike to transit, a review of speed limits – and the actual speeds travelled – must be undertaken. Panelists anticipated that this data may yield the need for “road diets” – or reducing auto-oriented lanes on existing roads – or other speed-related adjustments. Improved walking and biking facilities will also create incentives for these activities. Panelists also recommended that more robust transportation demand management plans be considered to provide incentives for use of alternative modes of transportation. A review of capital expenditures for these types of efforts will ensure equity across the City and demonstrate commitment to a multi-modal community. Connecting the West End to major institutions such as the Inova Hospital, medical buildings, the Virginia Theological Seminary, the NOVA Campus and the BRAC Office Building will begin to create identity for the area.

Incorporate Flexibility to Respond to Market Demands

Panelists acknowledged that the 2012 Beauregard Small Area Plan contains many elements that should be implemented including the multiple village concept. Panelists further stipulated that the Plan needs to incorporate more flexibility to respond to market realities and conditions. Examples of where flexibility is desirable include:

- Relaxing underground parking requirement; permitting at- and above-grade parking if wrapped by active uses
- Relaxing architectural guidelines such as for building materials or infill townhouse development
- Allowing co-mingling of use to achieve mixed-use development
- Adding walkable retail to the Plan
- Providing for flexibility to move density within the Plan area to facilitate provision of public amenities

Hire Dedicated Staff

Supporting the effort to reposition the West End and to achieve OneAlexandria requires the City to recognize that land use in the West End is fundamentally different from City's East End. The East, with its historic neighborhoods and street grid is more urban than the West End. So, too, the West End possesses different challenges and different opportunities from the East End. Accordingly, what works in the East End submarket may not work in the West End. A West End Coordinator should therefore be created to promote the area and foster strategic partnerships. A dedicated multi-departmental planning and zoning staff team should be created to facilitate development, making the City's focus on this area clear.

Streamline the Site Planning Process

Fundamentally, the suburban office park is an outdated product type. Panelists stated that the existing office buildings in the West End will not survive as office space in their existing form. As a result, there is an opportunity to market the area for other uses. Due to proximity to Inova, Panelists recommended marketing these buildings as medical office space. Panelists also recommended that the parking requirements for medical office uses may need to be reduced from where they are currently. Broadening permitted commercial uses to attract a wider range of office tenants for the existing office space, including shared economy uses such as maker spaces or infill development on surface parking lots, could also be beneficial.

Additionally, according to the Panel, by-right conversion of office to residential use may not create the best outcome for the community. Panelists recommended that the City create a process and tool kit that would entice developers to forgo by-right development options in favor of a streamlined site plan process. This would create an incentive for amenities such as walkable retail, street facing townhouses and streetscape. Panelists pointed to Montgomery County's benefit points program as an example of such a process.¹

Consider Creative Economic Development Opportunities

Panelists recommended that the City and the Alexandria Economic Development Partnership (AEDP) increase focus and efforts on behalf of the West End. This must include coordination with current and future landowners to achieve the goals of the Beauregard Small Area Plan, create opportunities for interactions among Inova, NOVA, and other employers, gain a better

¹ The report, Commercial/Residential and Employment Zones: Incentive Density Implementation Guide, provides information on the benefits points program. For further information, see <http://www.montgomeryplanning.org/development/documents/CRZoneGuidelinesforweb11.5.pdf>.

understanding of employers' needs, and work with NOVA and T. C. Williams High School to provide targeted workforce development.

In reviewing the priorities of the Beauregard Small Area Plan, the Panel stressed the need to address unconnected, single use buildings, and to “blur the line” of I-395 in terms of its impact on the community. The City should promote and protect the valuable and varied existing residential stock. In the short-term, new development opportunities could include adaptive reuse of some existing space and foster connections between areas.

The City can also raise the profile of the West End by relocating community-centric government functions to the West End. One option would be to explore purchase of the building next to the recently purchased school building to house relocated City functions such as a regional service center or to include community space.

Incentives would help make the West End more attractive to current and prospective property owners and tenants. Possibilities include flexibility to broaden the range of uses and their locations in buildings, tax abatement for incremental assessed value that results from retaining commercial uses in existing commercial buildings (e.g. Montgomery County enterprise zone models), density averaging or density transfer within a designated area of the West End and an expedited review process in return for provision of public amenities and commercial uses.²

Transparent Community Outreach

The Panel further recommended that the City take the TAP recommendations to the community to inform, educate on market conditions and solicit feedback, and commit to community engagement to foster ongoing dialogue about the future of the West End.

Finally, the Panel strongly recommended that a Council Policy Statement is needed to set the tone for this effort and suggested that they adopt a West End Investment Strategy to demonstrate Council commitment to the West End and One Alexandria.

Follow-up

In addition to these primary recommendations, the Panel urged the City to capitalize on the asset of the Winkler Preserve as a resource for the entire City. Finally, the Panelists stressed the importance of staff affirmatively reaching out to development firms purchasing properties in the West End and to consider the costs and benefits of various expected community benefits.

² For information on the Montgomery County, enterprise zone tax credit, see https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/finance/taxes/tax_credit_exempt.html#p6.

Panelists

Panel Co-Chairs and Faculty

Christopher Kurz, Linden Associates, Inc.

Rebecca Snyder, Insight Property Group

ULI Washington Regional Fellows

Barbara Byron, Fairfax County Office of Community Revitalization

Peter Fosselman, Office of the Montgomery County Executive

Greg Ossont, Montgomery County Department of General Service

Panelists

Ilana Branda, Montgomery Housing Partnership

Bob Eisenberg, Clark Enterprises, Inc.

Dan Hardy, Renaissance Planning Group

David Kitchens, Cooper Carry

Ken Wire, McGuireWoods

Doug Wrenn, Rodgers Consulting

Bob Young, The Young Group



Panelists and sponsors pause for a photo before departing on a Tour of Alexandria's West End. Image source: ULI Washington.

Fulfilling the Vision for White Oak

Montgomery County, MD
May 16-17, 2017

Background

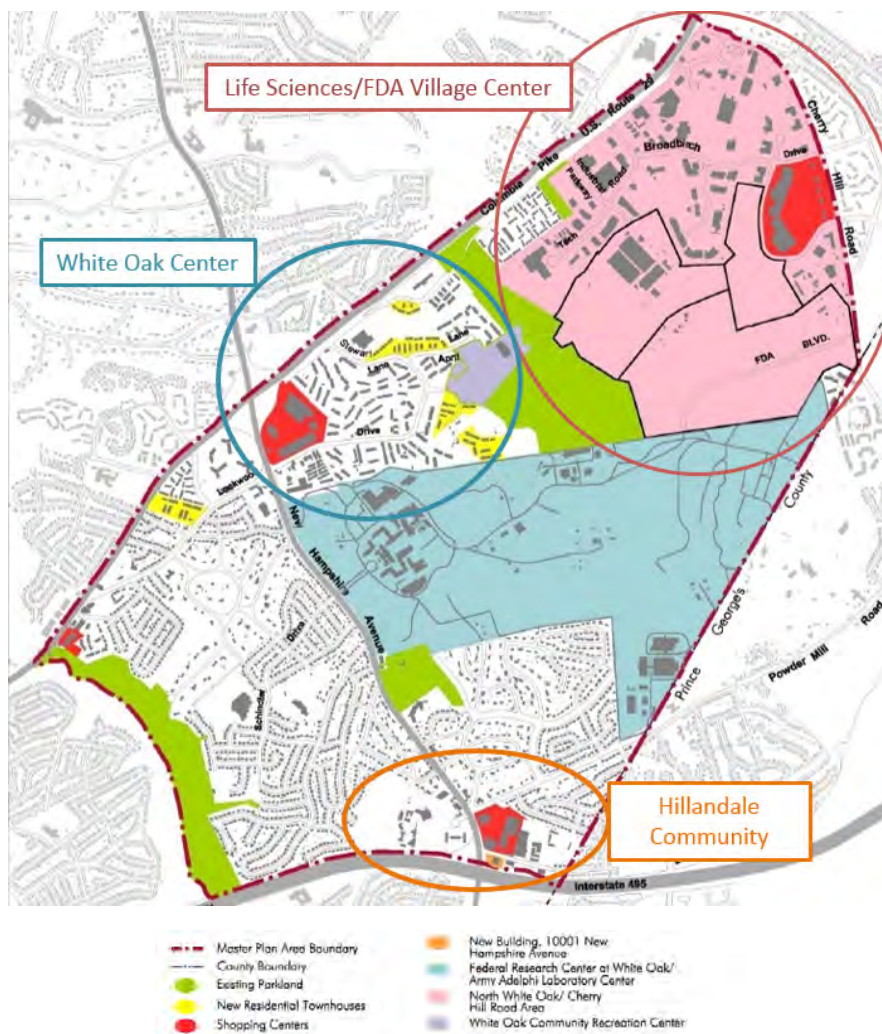
The White Oak Science Gateway (WOSG) area has been identified for major development initiatives after nearly 20 years of development moratorium. Encouraging economic prosperity in the eastern portion of Montgomery County has been a key component of County Executive Isiah Leggett's administration. In 2009, the County purchased a 115-acre former composting facility known as Site 2 from the Washington Suburban Sanitary Commission (WSSC) for the express purpose of creating a "World Class Bio/Life Sciences, Education and Research Community." A Request for Proposals was issued for a public-private partnership, and in 2011 the County chose Percontee, Inc., owner of the adjacent 175-acre gravel operation, as its development partner. This partnership to redevelop nearly 300 acres of industrial uses into a mixed-use center with a focus on bio/life sciences will take place over the next 20-30 years; regulatory applications are expected to be submitted in 2017 with approvals by the end of 2018. Permitting and construction of the first phase will follow.

While the 300-acre project known as Viva White Oak is poised to transform the WOSG, new development and redevelopment in the area is not limited only to this project. A new master plan was approved in 2014 covering nearly 3,000 acres, allowing mixed uses on other properties historically dominated by a single use. Construction has begun on Washington Adventist Hospital on a 50-acre site off of Cherry Hill Road; the hospital is estimated to open in early 2019. Smaller infill projects, both commercial and residential, have been taking place since the moratorium ended in 2002. Additionally, the Federal Research Center, which includes the campus of the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, is slated to consolidate thousands of employees to the WOSG in both new and consolidated jobs.

Major infrastructure investments will accompany redevelopment including new roads, interchanges/intersection improvements, and Bus Rapid Transit. In March 2017, Montgomery County approved \$40 million in forward funding to facilitate roadway construction within the Viva White Oak project.

Current land uses within the WOSG are extremely diverse and include industrial, retail, office parks, large federal facilities, and an array of residential units from single family houses with large lots to multifamily high-rise rental apartments. There are many established residential neighborhoods within the plan area, and certain multifamily buildings retained existing zoning in the master plan in an effort to continue to have a source of market-rate affordable housing in the area. The WOSG area is extremely diverse; over 30% of residents are foreign-born.

The development planned for WOSG will bring great opportunities to an area still affected by a long development moratorium. There are established neighborhoods with residents who should be heard and respected as redevelopment continues into the future. Additionally, it is important to maximize the opportunities that specific redevelopment projects bring to the area. The Land Use Challenge examined potential ways to market the area that will both encourage





Panelists hear about Montgomery County's White Oak Science Gateway. Photo credit: ULI Washington.

already planned redevelopment projects and promote revitalization in areas not currently slated for redevelopment.

Panelists were asked to address the following questions:

1. How can we maximize stakeholder participation as projects, both in real estate and infrastructure, move forward? What are some effective strategies for engaging the diverse communities within and around the WOSG area?
2. How can the WOSG area leverage proximity to the Federal Research Center and the Viva White Oak project to bolster the local economy? How can the Viva White Oak project be a catalyst for other areas within the WOSG? What are complementary uses to the 300-acre Viva White Oak project that other areas of the WOSG plan could benefit from?
3. How can the WOSG area position itself to attract new businesses, residents, and visitors as redevelopment continues in the near term and over the next few decades?
 - a. What marketing and/or promotional and/or educational strategies (events, campaigns, branding programs, etc.) could help assist with the revitalization of this area?
 - b. Are there any opportunities for area-wide marketing?
4. What unmet demands in the WOSG area are there to satisfy?
5. Are there any temporary/seasonal enhancements or pop-up uses that the area could benefit from? If so, what uses and where?
6. The US 29 corridor is planned to be one of the first areas in Montgomery County to have Bus Rapid Transit. How can the WOSG area maximize this opportunity to attract new businesses, residents, and visitors?
 - a. Are there any additional incentives that should be implemented to increase the use of BRT once operational? If so, what?
7. How will the County, and any potential partners, implement the Panel's recommended strategies? Please provide:
 - a. General definition and timing of each strategy (i.e. immediate, short-term, long-term);
 - b. Primary and secondary responsible parties for strategy implementation;
 - c. Broad estimated cost;
 - d. Potential funding sources for the strategy (public, private, grants, new funding mechanism, etc.); and
 - e. Priority ranking.

Panel Observations

Over the course of the two-day TAP, Panelists toured the large study area, met with area stakeholders, and heard from Montgomery County staff members on a wide variety of issues. Panelists observed that White Oak has many assets, which include but are not limited to: a unique combination of available land; large employment anchors; a diverse population; attainable housing; parks space; cultural options; planned transportation investment; and community support for change. All of these assets contribute a unique opportunity for great community development and place making in Viva White Oak.

In addition to these assets, Panelists found that the perception of the White Oak area has long been shaped by a lack of public and private investment in the community, particularly in comparison with the investment in the rest of Montgomery County. Historically, while there has been some investment in the White Oak area, much of the investment in Montgomery County has occurred in the western portion of the county, where both housing prices and household incomes are significantly higher. Several specific challenges face the study area, including those listed below.

Confusing Identity

White Oak is a large, decentralized, and diverse study area – both in regard to the people who inhabit the study area, as well as the kinds of land uses that comprise it. During the TAP, Panelists noted there is not one single issue area or icon that defines White Oak. This, combined with the historic trend of underinvestment, contributes to the area’s amorphous identity. This confusing of identity is further complicated by the fact that White Oak’s three commercial nodes—Hillandale, White Oak and the FDA/Life Sciences—are disconnected from each other both visually and physically.

Furthermore, Panelists observed that the term “Viva White Oak” as a descriptor of the anticipated development project is confusing because several other terms are used interchangeably by stakeholders and government officials alike to convey the same project. Panelists found themselves wondering aloud about the definitions and differences between the terms “Viva,” “Viva White Oak,” “White Oak,” and “The White Oak Science Gateway.” All of these factors contribute to a generalized confusion around the identity of the study area.

Disconnect between Housing and Employment Opportunities

Garden apartment complexes throughout the study area provide market rate affordable housing for the area’s lower income residents, but these complexes lack connections to each other and to retail, community facilities, and transportation options. Although many services are provided by the County to these residents, there has not been a substantial investment to help preserve this



White Oak’s three commercial nodes contribute to a confusing singular identity. Pictured here is an iconic “White Oak” sign, located at what is commonly referred to as the “White Oak Shopping Center,” located at Columbia Pike and New Hampshire Avenue. Photo credit: ULI Washington.



Panelists were able to visit the perimeter of the US Food and Drug Administration campus during their tour, as seen in the images above. Photo credit: ULI Washington.

affordable housing and provide necessary social services for the population living in the housing. Housing options include single-family neighborhoods, garden apartments, and high-rises, but the housing types and price points are not aligned with the full range of job opportunities in the area.

Furthermore, though there are several large employers in the study area – such as the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and Adventist Hospital – there is a lack of job training to prepare residents for job opportunities with these employers. As a result, area residents are forced to seek employment opportunities outside the immediate area, which both contributes to congestion, and raises the overall transportation costs for area residents – many of whom earn a smaller household income compared with other Montgomery County residents.

Transportation Challenges

Traffic also shapes the perception of the White Oak area. Eighty percent of traffic on Route 29 is through traffic. Transportation options are limited for transit-dependent residents, although planned road and intersection improvements will reduce congestion. Although the US 29 Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) line between Burtonsville and downtown Silver Spring will be the first BRT line in the County, BRT is still several years away, and challenges with internal connectivity could contribute to the “last mile problem” between fixed BRT stations and the community.

Scattered and Disconnected Land Uses

The area is characterized by disconnected land uses. For instance, The US FDA is a major employer and landowner in White Oak and is slated to grow through new jobs and consolidation of related facilities. However, the campus is physically walled off from the community by a fence that was mandated to meet national security concerns; this fence creates a barrier through White Oak, and forces residents to go around the campus to access adjacent communities and neighborhoods within the study area. Community access to the campus currently is restricted except for special events a few times a year.

On the other hand, FDA’s anticipated growth also represents a unique opportunity for the area: this employment growth could support additional retail, housing, and office opportunities that would benefit the entire White Oak community.

Panel Recommendations

The Panel acknowledged the Viva White Oak development project can be a great catalyst for local change, in large part because it has the funding, political commitment, and plans in place. Panelists also underscored that Montgomery County has a key role to play in the success of Viva White Oak, especially in the areas of economic development, employer recruitment, and marketing of this unique opportunity. Implemented correctly, Viva White Oak could propel the study area as a leading location for the bio health industry, as well as a leading location in the region that is affordable to work, live, and play.

“Viva [White Oak] has the potential to catalyze significant new investment on a site that is unique in the Washington Region.”

— Brian Cullen, Panel Co-Chair



Viva White Oak. Image source <https://bit.ly/2GDTF11>

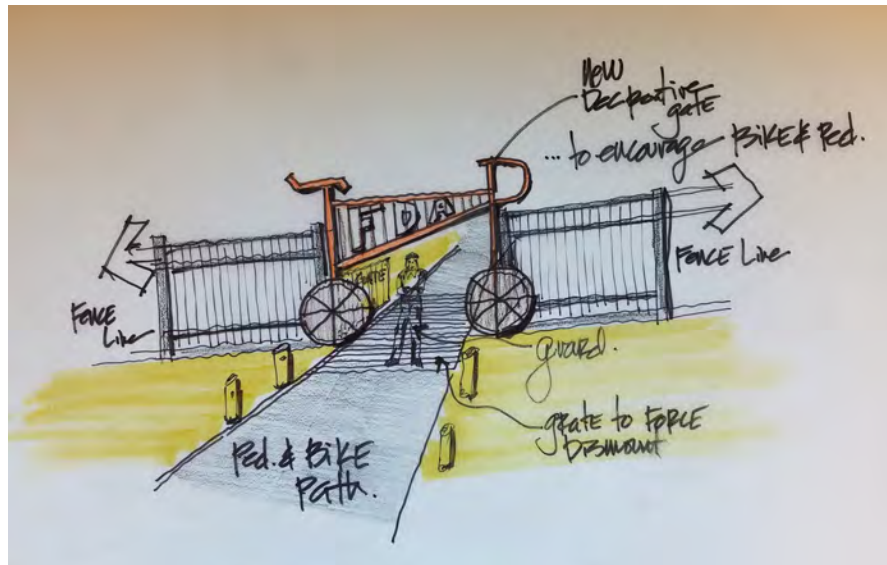
Panelists offered several specific recommendations, which are detailed below.

Breaking Down Physical Barriers

FDA has already invested \$1 billion in their campus, with more investment to follow as jobs are added and other facilities consolidated. As the major job creator in the area, FDA already makes a significant contribution, yet the campus feels and looks like an island within White Oak study area. This isolated use is due to floodplains, steep slopes, fences, and security considerations. Panelists recommended that the campus be connected to the larger study area by pedestrian and bike access. A “bike gate” could be developed to connect and create shared use paths while preserving limited access to the FDA

campus. This simple connection would provide a visual and experiential cue to residents in the surrounding communities that knits the study area together, as well as enhanced mobility access for FDA workforce.

This rendering, as designed by one of the Panelists, is meant to exhibit a secure way to create a break in the fence to allow cyclists to enter the FDA site. Image source: ULI Washington.



The stream valley that runs through White Oak is underutilized for both recreation and transit. Panelists recommended that the County construct pedestrian and bike paths through the stream valley to connect housing, parks, employment, and the new White Oak Community Recreation Center. In addition, streetscape improvements will strengthen pedestrian connections and build community identity.

Broaden Educational, Job Training, and Housing Options

The Panel emphasized the need for improved educational opportunities to train workers in White Oak, not only for jobs at FDA and Adventist Hospital, but also for other existing local businesses such as Coca Cola.

Building the workforce for current and future employers will require a multi-pronged effort. Analyzing area workforce skills, matching skills training to future job opportunities – including entrepreneurial opportunities – are important first steps. The Panel recommended that the County convene Montgomery County Community College, Johns Hopkins University, FDA, Adventist Hospital, and other interested parties to engage with the public schools on vocational studies, internships, and other programs that will promote workforce development. Job training programs like WorkSource in Wheaton and at Montgomery College could be important resources for residents. It would also be beneficial for FDA and Adventist Hospital to conduct “road shows” about their work, and to collect and share job opening information, particularly from major employers.

Similarly, it is necessary to create a broader array of housing choices (e.g. single family attached, townhouses, multi-family, condos, age targeted/restricted,

assisted living, temporary corporate housing) for the employees who commute into White Oak every day to allow for work/life balance, reduce in-commuting and traffic, and add dollars to the local economy. To help protect the community from gentrification, the Panel recommended that the County explore new tools such as allowing increased density to preserve existing affordable housing, permitting entertainment uses as short-term uses, and considering means to encourage integration of new facilities for the large regional churches in new development.

Marketing, Branding and Community Engagement

The success of the Viva White Oak development, and by extension, of the entire study area, will require extensive marketing, branding and community engagement efforts to attract businesses, residents and visitors to the area. The Panel identified strategies for each group as well as the entire area.

First and foremost, it will be necessary to market the White Oak Science Gateway outwardly as a function of Price, Product, Promotion and Place. Reframing marketing efforts in this way creates a recognizable and positive brand for the area. The Panel concluded that naming the area “White Oak” rather than “White Oak Science Gateway” was preferable. Reframing the area as “White Oak” signals an appetite and a capacity for growth: that after years of a development moratorium, things are changing in the area. Panelists strongly recommended that “White Oak” should be used on signage and communications by County government and any group whose efforts touch this part of the County.

“Our big takeaway...whether you’re looking to move someplace to live or you’re a business looking to locate...you’re looking to move to a neighborhood...while the White Oak Science Gateway is a technical name...it doesn’t sound like a place...we recommend you call it White Oak.”

– Stephanie Landrum, Panelist and Fellow
from The City of Alexandria

With FDA serving as such a strong and growing area employer, the County should aggressively market White Oak to the Bio Health Sciences industry worldwide. By building on the globally-recognized life sciences hub already established in White Oak, the area can be promoted as a hub for innovation and a convenient and affordable place to live in the Washington-Baltimore Corridor, with proximity to FDA and the new Adventist Hospital.

The County should also develop fact sheets or profiles of existing employers (e.g. nature of business, workforce data, benefits to local economy) for distribution in order to raise awareness about these employers locally.

Similarly, resident demographics (i.e. skills, job categories) can be compiled to share with potential employers assessing the area for workforce availability. Business attraction efforts can be strengthened by creating a business/property owner partnership to advocate for the Viva White Oak project and to serve as “ambassadors” for the White Oak area. The Tysons Partnership is a recent example of a group working outside of government to achieve the goals for the area.³ Such a partnership can eventually take on additional responsibilities, such as becoming a Business Improvement District.

Other ways to market the area include festivals, concerts and special events in existing parks and on the Viva White Oak site, making the larger White Oak neighborhood more prominent on the Montgomery County Economic Development Corporation website, creating a fact sheet on FDA employees, using the water tower to promote “White Oak,” and positioning a camera on the area to track the progress of key development projects.



This quick rendering by Panelists exhibits how the Water Tower could be used as a placemaking and marketing opportunity. Image source: ULI Washington.

Education is an important means to market the area to residents. The University of Maryland, Montgomery County Community College, Johns Hopkins University, Adventist Hospital, and others are potential partners for internships, vocational studies, and other educational opportunities. Panelists suggested that major employers can “adopt” local schools and mentor older students, and create a preferential internship program for White Oak residents. Additionally, newer residents will be attracted to the area if job information is readily available. The County or a community organization can partner with major employers such as FDA, Adventist Hospital and other employers to collect and share information about job openings.

³ Information on the Tysons Partnership can be found at <https://www.tysonspartnership.org/>.

Activities and events are great attractors to a community and the White Oak area has numerous assets and opportunities to attract visitors. Panelists suggested capitalizing on the FDA presence by partnering with FDA to promote its museum, which currently is part of the FDA History Office. The County could also encourage FDA to hold a Community Day, and to cohost industry events at their campus.

Harness Regulatory Opportunities

Using its regulatory powers, Montgomery County could promote entertainment uses, such as short-term uses in vacant buildings. For example, breweries and other food makers, and temporary active uses like indoor play spaces and boutique fitness classes, could attract visitors to the area while it is undergoing development. The County could also amend policies and plans to encourage retention of large regional churches into redevelopment projects, using public-private partnerships to encourage affordable housing. In addition, Panelists suggested that Montgomery County relocate Park and Planning special events and activities to the area from other more established areas of the County. This move would showcase White Oak to the rest of the County, and bring new foot traffic to the community.

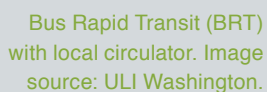
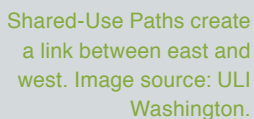
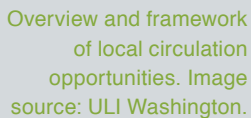
Transportation, Traffic, and Connectivity

Transportation infrastructure poses challenges to future development in White Oak. Improving connections can reinforce the identity of a place, and encourage and support local businesses and activities. Fulfilling the potential of White Oak will require improvements to connectivity both within the White Oak area and to regional destinations in Montgomery County and beyond.

The Panel concluded that improving regional connectivity must maximize the use and potential of the BRT line to reduce traffic congestion along Route 29. Key to the success of this implementation is “last mile” connectivity to the neighborhoods in White Oak. Connections to the existing regional trail system could further extend the reach of this line.

Local circulation and access can be improved with transportation services that will leverage the investment in BRT. For example, a circulator bus/shuttle connecting White Oak Center and the surrounding neighborhood to Westech/ Plum Orchard and Viva could improve connections between home and work while eliminating in-area road trips. Sidewalk and streetscape improvements along the streets connecting to the BRT line would improve walkability and help establish the identity of White Oak. Internal trail connections, including bridges and paths in the stream valley parks, would facilitate walking and biking both within the area and in the region, while connecting housing, parks, employment and the White Oak Community Recreation Center.

In recognition of ongoing traffic issues and the high volume (80 percent) of through traffic, Montgomery County has planned interchange improvements



Furthermore, Panelists noted that the planned grade-separated interchanges might adversely affect access to properties and both existing and new development, and suggested that the estimated \$15 million project costs could be reallocated to local improvements that would enhance internal connectivity.

Creating an identity for White Oak will require a concerted effort to embrace a new reality. Panelists encouraged the development of a strategy or guidance document, such as a “kit of parts,” that includes elements of lighting, signage, landscaping, hardscape, building materials, for streetscape, bike lanes, intersections and elsewhere that, if followed uniformly throughout the area, would reinforce a sense of place and build identity. Panelists suggested reallocating funds from planned Route 29 interchanges to fund relatively minor area improvements. Engaging the US General Services Administration (GSA) to plan pedestrian and bike access to the FDA campus from the surrounding communities could also be a good first step to address the physical barriers to internal connectivity.

Business and community engagement is a key strategy for achieving White Oak's vision. The Panel recommended creation of an inter-agency working group to raise the profile of the White Oak effort and promote coordination. The Panel emphasized the importance of engagement with major employers such as FDA, GSA, and Adventist Hospital to understand their employees' needs for housing, amenities, retail and other uses, as well as to understand the types and skills of employees needed for their workforce.

Leveraging resident interest in community progress, the Panel also recommended creation of a “Friends of White Oak” organization to bring together existing civic organizations and could focus on quality of life issues, recreation, creation of trails, green space and the like.

Follow-up and Next Steps

The Panel ended the presentation with a “homework” assignment for the County:

- Create an interagency working group to coordinate implementation of the White Oak Plan, private development and capital projects
- Develop a “kit of parts” for streetscape and integrate into development and capital projects
- Convene the “Friends of White Oak” group
- Engage business and property owners on clean-up and appearance issues
- Create a fact sheet on the Food and Drug Administration

The Montgomery County team reported on their progress at the September 2017 graduation. An interagency group consisting of staff from the County Executive’s Office, Transportation, Permitting, General Services, Budget, Planning, Fire and Environment Departments had been created and was awaiting the first major development schedule.

The 2014 Design Guidelines address streetscape. A 2017 budget and strategy were being mapped out to brand and market White Oak with various stakeholders. Montgomery County Economic Development Corporation pledged to continue to refine this.

The first meeting of the Friends of White Oak was held in October 2017. Discussion of clean-up and appearance issues was initiated in September 2017 and will be addressed by this group with the Maryland State Highway Department and Montgomery County Transportation and General Services Departments.

The FDA fact sheet is being revised and expanded by FDA.

Panelists

Panel Co-Chairs and Faculty

Charlie Hewlett, RCLCO

Brian Cullen, Keane Enterprises

ULI Washington Regional Fellows

Kirk Kincannon, Fairfax County Park Authority

Stephanie Landrum, Alexandria Economic Development Partnership

Fred Selden, Fairfax County Department of Planning and Zoning

Panelists

Jon Eisen, The Eisen Group

Judith Meany, Catholic University School of Architecture and Planning

Alex Rixey, Fehr and Peers DC

Chris Rzomp, Gensler



Panelists pose just before delivering their recommendations. Image source: ULI Washington.

Enhancing Community Engagement and Outreach

Fairfax County, VA
April 26-27, 2017

Background

Fairfax County is the largest jurisdiction in Virginia with over 1.14 million residents and containing over 406 square miles. The County is divided into nine magisterial districts, each represented by an elected member of the Board of Supervisors, and by the Chairman of the Board who serves at-large. Like many communities, Fairfax County is experiencing changes in the demographic make-up of its population. At over a million residents, 32% are foreign born and nearly 40% speak a language other than English at home.

As with many jurisdictions in the Commonwealth of Virginia, Fairfax County is experiencing an increasing need to engage with a broader array of citizens on land use topics. While the County is shifting towards a more paperless means of communicating with its citizenry, it has continued to rely on traditional outreach methods to engage the various segments of the population on land use issues. These traditional methods of engagement, which are not uniform across the County's nine magisterial districts, may not provide the necessary opportunities for the changing population of Fairfax County to actively and continuously engage with County staff and decision makers on matters related to planning and development. The result is a limited number of participants, not necessarily reflective of the community at large. Furthermore, the County does not measure community engagement in a way that easily determines if County residents, despite being effectively reached via traditional engagement tools, are opting out of participating in community planning sessions thereby opening the door for a select few from the community to steer the direction of an outreach effort.

The intent of this Panel was to advise the County on the development of a community engagement process, including a communications plan, which can be used as a template for future community engagement exercises. This challenge touched on several issues, including:

- Broadening outreach and engagement, particularly to those who don't currently participate
- Increasing public understanding of the process
- Promoting creative engagement
- Better utilizing technology
- Identifying implications for resources and culture

The Panel was asked to address the following questions:

1. How can Fairfax County broaden its outreach and education goals to reach a more representative sampling of the County's population?
2. How do we give people the knowledge and skills they need in order to fully understand the issues and participate in the discussion?
3. Given the influences of technology and other means of public participation, what is the best way to establish credibility for different forms of input? How does the County balance the value of the different means of providing input including but not limited to: social media interactions, digital communications, written correspondence, and attendance at public meetings?
4. How can technology (ex: social media, communication platforms such as mySidewalk, consulting groups, etc.) be best utilized in the County's outreach?
5. How does Fairfax County engage organizations that are not already participating but could serve as a conduit for community participation?
6. What are the implications for cost and time frames on the public process? How to prepare/train staff? How to go about implementing?

Panelist Observations

The current civic engagement model used in Fairfax County is largely a consensus-based model that is understood by a small number of informed participants. Furthermore, County engagement processes rely heavily on established community organizations, such as Home Owners' Associations and Civic Associations, to inform the public about government activities and processes. Because these two constituent groups – informed participants and established community organizations – only represent a small portion of all the residents of Fairfax County, the current civic engagement model falls short of holistic engagement. In particular, demographic groups that are less informed



Fairfax County Honorary Fellow Sharon Bulova shares her vision of the importance of transparent and holistic civic engagement. Image source: ULI Washington.

about public processes, or are not represented by established civic organizations, can wind up being inadvertently left out. In addition, frequent leadership changes within established civic groups can disrupt the continuity in the way information is provided. This is further complicated by the different approaches employed by the citizen Land Use Committees that review planning and zoning proposals in their individual districts.

“Your goal in the process is not so much equality as equity... look at the work collaborative as part of the process which means that there is access to the process, input is considered and there is a clear feedback loop...it doesn’t mean that everybody leaves the table having all agreed on things.”

— Julia Koster, Panel Co-Chair

According to the Panel, the County’s emphasis on reaching consensus in land use processes may not serve broader public interests. Consensus is defined as “a general agreement” and connotes reaching unanimity.⁴ Panelists noted that although achieving consensus can be desirable, the time requirements needed to achieve consensus can work against broad citizen participation. Focusing on collaboration, rather than consensus, offers an approach that may better achieve County goals for participation. Collaboration is defined as “to work jointly with others or together” and connotes a process involving cooperation.⁵ A collaborative process offers more equitable access to the process because the underlying focus is to enable all parties to cooperate towards reaching a common goal, rather than focus solely on the goal itself. A collaborative process also ensures that input is considered from a multitude of angles, and requires a clear feedback loop. Participants in any public process need to know what they can expect from a process in terms of schedule and outcomes, according to Panelists.

Fairfax County Fellow
Fred Selden, along with
Montgomery County
Fellow Jewru Bandeh
deliberate with Co-Chairs
A.J. Jackson and Julia
Koster. Image source: ULI
Washington.



⁴ <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/consensus>

⁵ <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/collaborate>

Panelists also discussed the differences between outreach and engagement; outreach and engagement are not the same. Panelists defined outreach as unidirectional. This “one-way process” serves a primarily informational purpose. Engagement, on the other hand, is a “two-way process,” and provides an opportunity for voices to be heard and for information to be shared. While both outreach and engagement are important, Panelists emphasized the need to identify a specific goal for engagement at the outset of any public process.

Panelist Recommendations

The Panel approached the challenges in this TAP in four dimensions, and suggested recommendations for each. These dimensions were:

- Outreach and engagement
- Countywide initiatives
- Project-specific initiatives
- Technology and engagement

Outreach and Engagement

Community engagement requires an ongoing commitment of time and resources to achieve two-way communication. Current land use processes in Fairfax County work well for those who are already familiar with them. Yet for those residents who are less familiar, such as newer residents, those new to civic participation, or those with limited time, the process can be extremely difficult to navigate. Technical language, time demands, and multiple sources of information can all serve as barriers to participation.

Despite County efforts to date, different demographic groups – immigrants, renters, millennials, and business owners – find it difficult to participate in traditional, meeting-focused planning processes. Panelists recommended that engagement and outreach efforts need to be tailored to changes in the County population. Regardless of the group, the expectation that everyone “come to City Hall” no longer works for all. Equity of opportunity to participate is key to an inclusive process.

Changes in Fairfax County demographics are well-documented. According to the Panel’s research, nearly 38% of Fairfax residents were foreign-born, nearly 64,000 foreign-born individuals became residents since 2010 and 40% speak a language other than English at home. Barriers to immigrant participation include language, literacy, relationship with and trust of government and a lack of understanding of government structures and processes.

To engage immigrants, it will be important to develop specific strategies that reach different immigrant groups. This requires an investment in developing cultural competency among staff, as well as physically going into immigrant communities to attend community events. Identifying and discovering informal networks and community-based organizations that serve specific groups creates opportunities to break down barriers to participation. Often, a business

owner or religious leader can be a point of contact for a community and can lead processes and community engagement efforts. Additionally, identifying and visiting the formal and informal locations where immigrant communities gather is also a great strategy for effectively distributing information.

To ensure that efforts are sustained over time, Panelists recommended building an inventory or database of resources and programs for various groups. Panelists also recommended that the County offer “cultural sensitivity” training for staff, as well as develop a catalogue of business and service organizations, geographically-based business organizations, professional associations, and ethnic business organizations, which can be contacted for outreach and engagement initiatives.

Millennials have been found to participate in meeting-based efforts on an extremely limited basis, and demonstrate a preference to participate using technology. As with immigrants, outreach to this group can be more effective by going to places this group frequents. In addition, framing issues by personalizing their relevance is more likely to generate interest and participation.

To facilitate participation by renters, it is important to recognize that the County is home to significant populations of renters of choice (i.e., lifestyle renters) and of traditional renters (i.e., individuals or families who are unable to enter into home ownership). Because civic associations typically do not include rental properties, relying on civic associations to represent the voices of these residents falls short of harnessing the voices and opinions of the renter community. Immigrant renters can be further isolated from the established structure for engagement due to language and cultural barriers. Successful engagement of this group requires reaching out to property managers, social service agencies, and cultural and social networks to make the appropriate connections to these communities.

The Vita Apartments in Tysons exemplify luxury apartments developed to meet the needs of lifestyle renters. Photo credit: <https://www.sbaranes.com/portfolio/residential/grid/project/vita-tysons>



Participation by businesses can be hampered by time and the demands of running a business. To engage business owners, Panelists recommended looking to area-based or ethnic-based business groups, rather than large business organizations with County-wide constituencies. Participation in business events to share information and targeting efforts to issues that affect businesses such as sign regulations, changes in business requirements and the like would be beneficial. Allowing comments via electronic means rather than requiring meeting attendance to participate would also benefit this group.

Countywide Initiatives

The Panel reviewed the Zoning Ordinance update process as an example of a countywide effort with substantial public engagement requirements. Strategic principles for a successful process include the fact that identified stakeholders were engaged, that a range of perspectives were captured, and that participants agree that the process was fair.

To be successful, Panelists recommended that countywide land use processes require clear, well-defined steps to ensure that the public understands the process. As an example, steps for a process could include:

- Outreach
- Strategic information gathering
- Identify options
- Select preferred alternative or recommendation
- Public hearings/decision

Initial outreach helps establish understanding and trust among participants. When providing information to the public, Panelists stressed the importance of being clear about the vision, goals and context; how the process will impact people and businesses; the timeframe; what information is needed; the feedback loop; and the expected product of the effort.

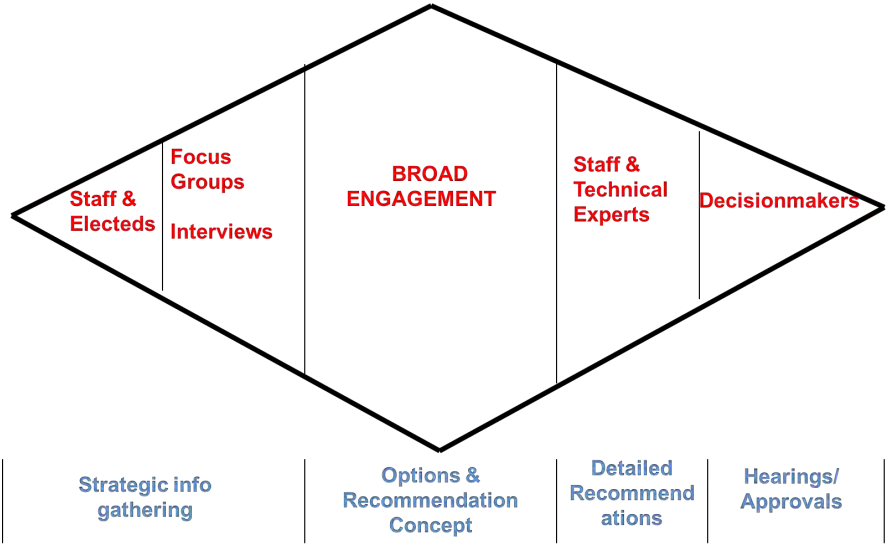
When gathering information, clarity about which specific issues are open for discussion defines the objectives at the outset, and can avoid generating trust issues later in the process. Input can be gathered from different groups in different ways; but key to this is ensuring equitable opportunities to participate and comment. Defining issues from participants' perspective enhances interest in a topic, and will aid participation. For example, when discussing changes to zoning regulations, one suggested approach would be to discuss the topic in terms of desired experiences (i.e. improved retail options) and possible impacts (i.e. visual, noise, traffic), rather than through a zoning-specific lens. Overall, making issues relatable will yield more interest.

Before moving to the options stage of a process, it is crucial to provide clarity as to how options will be identified. While many tools can be used to solicit and share information, input should be provided in a common format and all input should be treated equally – regardless of whether it is received in-person

through an oral testimony, via a mailed and written letter, or through an electronic submission. A visual preference survey is one way to evaluate options among a diverse group of participants. Explaining how input was translated into options or recommendations reinforces the transparency of the process. Ways to evaluate options include consistency with County goals, plans, and policies and consistency with input. The goal is to achieve broad agreement and minimize unintended consequences.

Engagement Process Concept

This infographic, developed by a Panelist, demonstrates levels of engagement (in red) and compares them to corresponding engagement outcomes (in blue). Image source: ULI Washington.



Project-Specific Initiatives

Many citizens become engaged in the planning process when a development proposal goes under review in their part of Fairfax. All nine Magisterial Districts have their own Land Use Committees (LUC), and while these LUCs provide some information about proposals, this information is shared and distributed in different ways, at different levels of detail, and at different times in each District. In other words, public engagement and outreach is not uniform across the nine Magisterial Districts. For those not already familiar with the development review process, this can lead to confusion.

To broaden participation while still remaining sensitive to the differing approaches of the Magisterial Districts, the Panel recommended that the County establish a baseline of information that would be provided to create a more transparent and predictable review process. This baseline should include:

- Requiring applicants to conduct a pre-filing outreach meeting and provide the meeting minutes with their application;
- Posting Land Use Committee agendas online

- Providing consistent project information online in plain English
- Giving citizens the option to opt-in for notifications on meetings, revised submissions, etc.
- Creating a process to regularly update Home Owner and Civic Association contact information
- Providing plain language flyers with Land Use Committee (LUC) meeting dates/times in local gathering spots
- Enabling electronic filing
- Including all comments as an appendix in staff reports
- Allowing public comments to be received electronically

Apart from this baseline, the Panel acknowledged that the traditions of Magisterial Districts conducting different practices could still occur; the different approaches do not diminish the overall engagement process as long as there is a baseline of uniformity.



In Arlington, a Community Facility Study Engagement Toolkit was made widely available and provides basic and transparent information on the kinds of data that is being collected, and how it will be used. Source: commissions.arlingtonva.us

Technology and Engagement

Effective citizen engagement should be both high tech and high touch. The Panel recommended a guiding principle that using technology to spread information should stick to four guiding principles: simple, digestible, actionable, and graphic. Together, these guiding principles address the “fire hose” effect of too much information.

– Yon Lambert, Panelist and Regional Fellow
from the City of Alexandria.

Information about The City of Alexandria's Development Review Process is available in accessible, easy-to-follow language, as illustrated in the flier below. Source: City of Alexandria.

[illegible]

- a modification of the parking ratios;
- a modification to the yard, landscape or open space requirements;
- increased building height;
- increased Floor Area Ratio;
- a flexible housing bonus density;
- other special requirements listed in the applicable zone in the Zoning Ordinance.

CONTACTING THE DEPARTMENT

- For information about proposed development projects, visit www.lelandrivera.gov/Development
- For questions about which development planner is handling your case of interest, call the Department at 703.746.4666.
- For general questions about zoning, call the Front Counter at 703.746.2588 or 703.746.2589.
- To become involved in the planning process for Small Area Plans, contact the Neighborhood Planning Division at 703.746.3809.

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Panelists acknowledged that a challenge of public engagement is managing the input that is received. The Panel stressed the need that while a public process should reflect all input, it is not necessary to respond to every individual comment. Focusing on “macro-level” projects for public feedback focus will help streamline the public engagement process. While there is an ongoing dilemma about how to deal with digital comments vs. in-person public testimony, the Panel recommended that improved public engagement practices should result in treating both means of input equally – particularly because technological platforms engage larger audiences – many of whom are traditionally disenfranchised from the typical “meeting-centered” process.

Digital marketing is another tool that can drive the public to a specific website for more information. Geofencing and ads that direct users to publicly sponsored activities and events can provide traditionally disenfranchised constituents with greater information. Geocoding information also results in getting the public the information they want quickly.

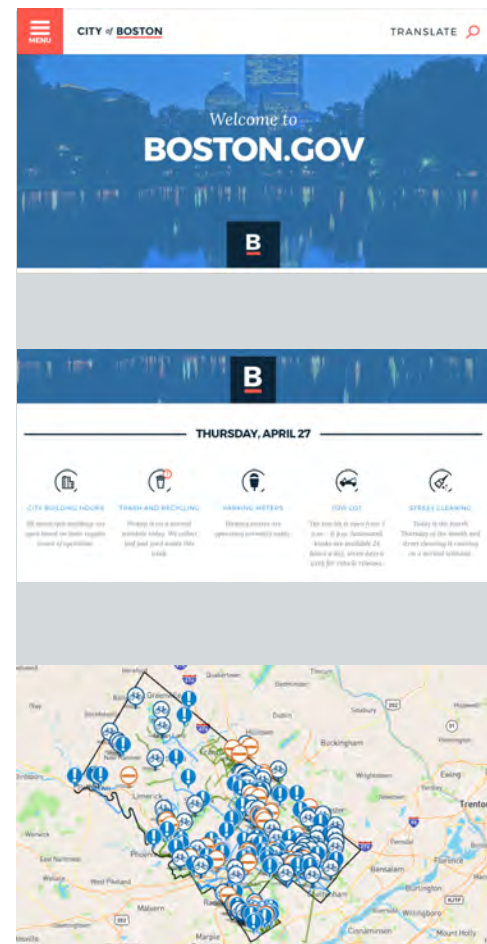
Panelists recommended additional ways to capitalize on a web presence, including:

- A visually simple “Splash” page that directs users around the site
- Information that is organized by “highest asks” on the website instead of the organizational structure
- Geolocated development tracker using the existing Land Development database
- FAQs and Planning 101 information to explain processes and terms for new participants
- Plain language content, which makes information more accessible
- Updated content is crucial to keeping the site fresh and informative

The Panel recommended that the County accelerate its plans to revamp its website. As part of this effort, rather than updating all content, existing content should be streamlined and updated based on priority initiatives. Panelists suggested using analytics to streamline and simplify content. Future process improvements that utilize technology could also include:

- Electronic application filing
- Requiring a pre-filing outreach meeting by developers
- Placing plain language flyers in local gathering spots
- Posting all public comments as an appendix

⁴ Information on Arlington County’s Neighborhood College Program can be found at <https://projects.arlingtonva.us/neighborhood-conservation/college/>.



Information on the City of Boston's website is simple, digestible, actionable, and graphic. Source: www.boston.gov



Panel Co-Chairs and Faculty members Julia Koster and A.J. Jackson smile upon completion of the panel. Image source: ULI Washington.

- Creating a project page for each accepted application (e.g. Arlington County's summary, justification, links to detailed information)
- Exploring new apps for information sharing and geofencing in conjunction with the website revamp

In the longer term, the Panel recommended that the County would be well-served by creating a stronger social/visual media approach, improving the business case for engagement, identifying a technology tool that meets technology principles, and deploying a digital marketing approach around a key area plan. Public education programs like Arlington's Neighborhood College are another way to provide information to the general public as well as specific groups outside of consideration of a project or development proposal.⁴

Follow-up and Next Steps

Following the Regional Fellows Mid-Year Retreat, the Fairfax Fellows met with their Faculty and Panelists to have a more focused discussion about technology and website priorities. The discussion reinforced that the website should be the first priority for the County. The need to acquire the skillset for outreach and public communication also was recommended to address the staff capacity consideration. Finally, the Panelists recommended that the County investigate apps that could support public engagement, and providing geofenced data and other key information.

Panelists

Panel Co-Chairs and Faculty

A. J. Jackson, EYA

Julia Koster, National Capital Planning Commission

ULI Washington Regional Fellows

Jewru Bandeh, Eastern Montgomery Region Services Center

Yon Lambert, City of Alexandria Department of Transportation and Environmental Services

Karl Moritz, City of Alexandria Department of Planning and Zoning

Panelists

Agnes Artemel, Artemel & Associates, Inc.

Samia Byrd, Arlington County Department of Community Planning, Housing and Development

Bob Harris, Lerch, Early & Brewer

Drew Morrison, VHB

Mark Silverwood, Silverwood Companies

John Swanson, Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments

Conclusion:

The Emergence of Regional Themes

A major underlying tenet of this program was to work intensively in three different area jurisdictions on three separate intractable challenges, and in doing so, observe and address shared trends that emerged. Although each jurisdiction is unique, similar challenges are faced by all the participating jurisdictions. The shared themes indicate that, as a region, there are opportunities to collaborate on these challenges – to share best practices and to learn from the successes and failures of neighboring municipalities. Only by collaborating will the region boost its overall economic competitiveness.

Over the course of the inaugural Regional Fellows Program, two major trends emerged: The Changing Nature of Public Engagement and Equity in Revitalization and New Development.

The Changing Nature of Public Engagement

In each jurisdiction, the role of public engagement emerged as a central issue. Fairfax County's challenge was defined by the request to develop a more inclusive and representative public engagement process. In both Montgomery County and the City of Alexandria, Panelists repeatedly heard from stakeholders about the desire for effective engagement processes that yield positive results for their community. In all cases, community stakeholders would like to more readily obtain information that is relevant to their interests, and easily and transparently engage in public processes that allows for effective representation and decisions.

In today's fast-paced world, the traditional meeting-centered public process can no longer serve as the only source of engagement. This approach fails to engage enough people, and can alienate key constituent voices. In Fairfax County in particular, the Panel noted that four key constituent groups – immigrants, millennials, renters, and businesses – are underrepresented through this traditional approach to engagement. Missing the opportunity to engage these voices leads to land use and regulatory decisions that may not meet the needs of the very people these decisions are aiming to serve.

If public engagement processes and techniques are to authentically engage a representative sample of the public – one that is increasingly characterized by changing demographics and lifestyle habits – local governments must embrace creative new approaches to engagement in order to cast a wider net. Strategies like maximizing the potential of technology and innovative communication tools are important, as is the need to visit constituent groups where they are.

But engagement extends beyond the ability to reach increased numbers of voices. Establishing trust and credibility with community stakeholders is critically important for public engagement to be effective. Public engagement must also feel authentic for participants. If stakeholders do not feel as though their voices count, they will be less likely to engage in the future or at all. Information sharing via a website or specialized apps is more likely to engage if it is provided in plain language, current, graphic rather than text heavy, and geocoded to ease finding relevant information. Working to build trust through local contacts and regularly sharing information in simple, digestible ways is equally critical to unlocking the potential of engaging more people and hearing more voices.

Equity in Revitalization, New Development, and Representation

In each Jurisdiction, issues surrounding equity in revitalization, new development, and representation emerged. The western part of Montgomery County is home to significant development around Metro Stations and along key highway corridors. By comparison, development in White Oak in the eastern part of the County has lagged behind. Hampered by a development moratorium, the area is characterized by its diffuse land ownership and poor connectivity, despite substantial assets in the area. The County's commitment to catalyze the market and stimulate private investment through the Viva White Oak development project signals a change to this investment cycle, and stakeholders in White Oak are looking forward to change and improved perceptions that may follow for White Oak.

Uneven investment in development was a theme that surfaced in Alexandria as well. Stakeholders stressed the longstanding differences between the East and West End and their desire for a change in that narrative. The West End has seen limited new development or redevelopment in recent years, and the Panel found that the City has an opportunity to reset the balance between East and West by reframing the office uses (e.g. by introducing new permitted uses, modifying requirements and streamlining processes) and by capitalizing on existing assets. Stable and relatively affordable single-family housing also offers an opportunity to attract families into the community. BRT and other planned transportation and walkability improvements will support investment to the area. With better access and connectivity, the many parks and open spaces will offer great opportunities for residents and workers alike.

Revitalization and new development are most likely to occur in locations where market forces, public investment, and government priorities align, as well as in places where assets present easy opportunities for capitalization. As a result of this dynamic, development can occur unevenly from one community

to the next. This uneven development can lead to areas with significant new investment, and to areas that lag behind by comparison. The lack of equity can cause a “have” and “have not” perception to form when investment is targeted to more obvious development opportunities. Once the more ideal sites are developed, attention typically turns to areas that need more coordinated efforts, longer timelines, and increased flexibility in process and requirements.

These development dynamics are not new, and remain a reality for local and regional governments alike. Such dynamics were illustrated tangibly in the TAPs for both Montgomery County and in Alexandria. In both of these places, Panelists were pleasantly surprised by stakeholders’ overwhelming “Yes in My Backyard” or “YIMBY” response to development and investment. In both jurisdictions, stakeholders shared that, after years of feeling ignored compared to other more affluent areas in their same jurisdiction, time had finally come for the opportunity to improve their communities. On the whole, development and investment were welcomed, and the desire of stakeholders to have an active voice in the pending development came across loud and clear.

Both Montgomery County and Alexandria will be faced with a unique opportunity to harness these positive opinions as development opportunities continue to arise. But the process of soliciting, hearing, and incorporating many points of view in a development process can be tricky – particularly if a public engagement process is relegated to a traditional “meeting centered” approach. In Fairfax County, probing issues related to representation in a public engagement process underscored the kinds of equity challenges that can arise when a public process inadvertently limits participation. It is imperative to design public engagement processes that invites representation not only from the regular and often vocal attendees at traditional public meetings (sometimes referred to as “frequent fliers”), but also from the greater populace – including members of society for whom attending traditional public meetings is either undesirable or impossible. Equity in engagement by providing different options for input, and by establishing equal priority in the way feedback is received, is key to inviting and incorporating as many voices into the process as possible.

From a regional perspective, sharing these stories about equity is important – it exposes the reality that many jurisdictions are struggling with similar challenges, which can, in turn, open the door to authentically addressing how equity in development can become more mainstream and accessible. Once common challenges are discovered, then local, neighboring governments have an opportunity to collaborate to solve these challenges, rather than shouldering the challenges on their own.

The Regional Fellows Program endeavored to unearth the universality of such challenges among neighboring jurisdictions through integrated problem solving, public/private collaboration and peer-to-peer learning. ULI Washington will continue to build on these efforts in service to and in support of the Metropolitan Washington Region.

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Program Leadership

Yolanda Cole

Chair, ULI Washington
Sr. Principal and Owner
Hickok Cole Architects

Anthony Chang

Co-Chair, Regional Fellows Program
Vice President, Asset Management
Washington REIT

Evan Goldman

Co-Chair, Regional Fellows Program
Vice President, Land Acquisition and Development
EYA, LLC

John Coe

Co-Chair, Regional Fellows Program
Principal
Coe Enterprises

Program Partners and Collaborators

Jess Zimbabwe

Executive Director
Daniel Rose Center

Gideon Berger

Director
Daniel Rose Fellowship Program

ULI Washington Staff

Lisa Rother

Executive Director
ULI Washington

Deborah Kerson Bilek

Senior Director, Community Outreach
ULI Washington

Program Manager

Susan Ingraham Bell

Planning & Zoning Consultant



**Urban Land
Institute**

Washington

ULI Washington
2001 L Street, NW, Suite 200
Washington, DC 20036
Phone: (240) 497-0550
www.washington.uli.org