



## MEMORANDUM

**TO:** George Washington Regional Commission

**FROM:** Kimball Payne & Jack Tuttle, Berkley Group Executive Managers

**DATE:** November 17, 2021

**RE:** GWRC Draft Regional Strategic Plan

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We are submitting for the Commission's consideration a draft of the GWRC Regional Strategic Plan, 2022-2027. The draft plan has been prepared with input from GWRC staff, Commission members, regional chief administrative officers, partner agencies, and other regional stakeholders.

With the Commission's permission, the draft regional strategic plan is ready for submission to the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) and to the localities, as required by The Regional Cooperation Act.

The Code of Virginia, §15.2-4209, Paragraph C, states:

*"Before the strategic plan is adopted, it shall be submitted to the Department of Housing and Community Development and to the governing body of each locality within the district for a period of not less than thirty days prior to a hearing to be held by the planning district commission thereon, after notice as provided in § 15.2-2204. Each such local governing body shall make recommendations to the planning district commission on or before the date of the hearing with respect to the effect of the plan within its locality. The Department of Housing and Community Development shall notify the planning district commission prior to the hearing as to whether the proposed strategic plan conflicts with plans of adjacent planning districts."*

We ask that the Commission authorize the submission of the draft regional strategic plan to DHCD and the localities and the scheduling of a public hearing on the plan for January 24, 2022. Concurrently, the draft plan will be placed on the GWRC website for review and comment by interested parties.

Comments or suggestions received from DHCD, the localities, or other interested parties can be considered for inclusion in or amendment of the draft plan prior to its adoption in January 2022.

We will be available during your meeting on November 22<sup>nd</sup> to answer any questions.



# George Washington Regional Commission **Regional Strategic Plan 2022-2027**

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## I. Introduction

### A. Organizational Background

Tracing its origins to 1961 and officially chartered in 1970, the George Washington Regional Commission (GWRC) is the planning district commission (PDC) established by the General Assembly for the region comprising the City of Fredericksburg and the counties of Caroline, King George, Spotsylvania, and Stafford, known collectively as Planning District 16 (PD-16).

GWRC is responsible for encouraging and facilitating local government cooperation in addressing, on a regional basis, problems of greater than local significance, and provides a broad array of planning and support services for the benefit of the nearly 400,000 residents of PD-16. Current areas of focus include regional economic development, environmental services, human services, transportation demand management, rural and urban transportation planning, and special project coordination. GWRC is either solely responsible for or provides staff support to sister agencies in fulfilling important regional activities.

### B. Powers and Responsibilities

Planning district commissions were first created in 1968 when the Virginia General Assembly adopted the Regional Cooperation Act (Code of Virginia, Title 15.2, Chapter 42). By State Code, the purpose of a planning district commission is “to encourage and facilitate local government cooperation and state-local cooperation in addressing on a regional basis problem of greater than local significance.” The PDC is also charged with promoting, “the orderly and efficient development of the physical, social and economic elements of the district by planning, and encouraging and assisting localities to plan, for the future.” As a “public body corporate and politic,” the PDC has broad powers and authority, similar to local government, to act in fulfilling its responsibilities to the region that it serves.

One of the responsibilities of a PDC is to prepare a regional strategic plan. According to State Code:

*“The plan shall concern those elements which are of importance in more than one of the localities within the district, as distinguished from matters of only local importance. The plan shall include regional goals and objectives, strategies to meet those goals and objectives and mechanisms for measuring progress toward the goals and objectives. The strategic plan shall include those subjects necessary to promote the orderly and efficient development of the physical, social and economic elements of the district such as transportation, housing, economic development and environmental management. The plan may be divided into parts or sections as the planning district commission deems desirable. In developing the regional strategic plan, the planning district commission shall seek input from a wide range of organizations in the region,*

*including local governing bodies, the business community and citizen organizations.”*

The first regional strategic plan for PD-16 was developed and adopted by the Rappahannock Area Development Commission (RADCO), GWRC’s predecessor, in 2006. The plan was last revised and updated in 2014.

### **C. Plan Development**

Development of the regional strategic plan started with a briefing to the Commission in June 2021. During that discussion the requirements, process and timetable for plan development were reviewed. Additional meetings were held with the region’s chief administrative officers (County Administrators and City Manager) and with GWRC staff.

To obtain views and perspectives of regional stakeholders on GWRC’s strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) a survey was developed and pushed out to elected and appointed officials, partner agencies, and other regional organizations. Interested parties were also provided the opportunity to complete the survey through the GWRC website. A total of 154 people responded to the survey and included Commission staff members, elected officials, chief administrative officers, community partners, and other stakeholders and interested parties. A summary of the results, including all written comments, was provided to the Commission.

Survey results informed the following observations:

- Just over 50% of respondents considered GWRC’s current statements of Mission and Vision (from the 2013/2014 Strategic Plan) to align with GWRC today and in the future, with the remainder responding either “not sure” or “no.”
- A larger majority of 63% believed that the current statement of Core Regional Values aligned with GWRC now.
- Only 28% believed GWRC had the right governance structure and right level of local government participation to fulfill its mission/vision, with 52% “unsure” and 20% responding “no.”
- 54% of respondents considered GWRC to be a strong partner in the community and a resource to advance regional initiatives, with 31% “unsure” and only 15% responding “no.” To nearly the same degree respondents considered GWRC a leader in convening conversations about matters of regional importance.
- Correspondingly, 74% said GWRC should be a leader in identifying solutions to regional issues, with only 5% saying “no.”
- Only 43% agreed, and 57% disagreed, with the statement “the region’s localities often work together to find common ground when solving regional problems.”
- In addition to being asked in what areas GWRC performed well, and where it could improve, respondents were asked to force rank the relative level of regional

importance for 14 issues. The highest-ranking issues were the following: transportation, broadband, continuum of care and affordable housing, economic development, education opportunities, and workforce development and job creation. The lowest ranking issues were tourism, hazard mitigation, inter-operability of emergency communications, and telecommunications infrastructure.

The plan development process also included a review of the most current strategic plans adopted by planning district commissions in Virginia. That review revealed a patchwork of approaches, with a majority of PDCs completing a *Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy* (CEDS) instead of or in addition to a regional strategic plan. Because PD-16 is not eligible for federal funding from the U.S. Department of Commerce Economic Development Administration there is no requirement for a CEDS. Of the PDCs that have published a regional strategic plan, two types were evident: those that emphasized vision and priorities for their geographic region and those that focused on the future of the PDC as an organization. GWRC's regional strategic plan will continue to focus on both aspects.

Survey results, the review of other regional strategic plans and the activities of the various PDCs, and a working paper regarding the mission, vision, values, and strategic focus areas were shared with Commission members and chief administrative officers during a half-day retreat in October 2021. Input and feedback shared during the retreat were used to draft the strategic plan.

In November 2021, the draft regional strategic plan was presented to the Commission, forwarded to the Department of Housing and Community Development for review, and made available for public comment. A public hearing was held in January 2022 and the plan was subsequently adopted.

## **II. The Regional Strategic Plan**

This regional strategic plan for PD-16 will guide the George Washington Regional Commission for the next five years, through fiscal year 2027. While its mission, vision, and core values are expected to remain constant, the biennial priorities will be subject to annual review. Furthermore, additional topical focus areas, consistent with the mission of GWRC, could be added in response to new challenges or opportunities.

### **A. Mission of GWRC**

Facilitating collaborative action for the wellbeing of the region.

### **B. GWRC's Vision for the Region**

Building upon its unique geography and demographics, this beautiful and historic region will become better preserved, and more resilient, healthy, just, prosperous, and vibrant.

## **C. Vision for GWRC**

The region's convener of choice, recognized for analyzing, devising, and implementing workable solutions to shared challenges.

## **D. Core Values**

To uphold and promote:

- Regional solutions for regional issues
- Collaborative interjurisdictional leadership
- Energized citizen and stakeholder engagement
- Professional expertise and technical competence
- Efficient, effective, and equitable program management
- Ethical, honest, efficient, and open government at all levels
- Respect for individual freedoms and constitutional rights
- Putting the region first while respecting local prerogatives

## **E. Long Term Aspirations and Biennial Priorities by Topical Focus Area**

### **1. Developing the Economy**

#### **Long Term Aspiration**

We aspire to see a more robust and diversified economy that is more resilient, supporting high paying jobs and thriving local businesses, and we will work in active support of regional economic development projects.

#### **Biennial Priorities**

- Support GO Virginia Region 6 in developing a new Growth & Diversification Plan (adoption by the Region 6 Council in January 2022).
- Support GO Virginia Region 6, in conjunction with the Fredericksburg Regional Alliance, with the implementation of the new Growth and Diversification Plan.
- Lead regional partners in implementing the strategies identified in the Good Jobs Here Strategic Plan.
- Facilitate a review of the economic development plans of member localities and the identification of potential opportunities for efficiencies through coordinated governmental efforts (completion by December 2022).

- Collect and maintain demographic, economic, and other data concerning the region and member localities, and act as a state data center affiliate in cooperation with the Virginia Employment Commission (ongoing).

## **2. Preserving the Environment**

### **Long Term Aspiration**

We aspire to see a region using land wisely and growing thoughtfully, better appreciating the natural beauty of its piedmont and coastal realm, working to protect its natural resources (land, air, and water), taking actions to minimize the impacts of natural disasters, and preserving its cultural heritage and historic resources.

### **Biennial Priorities**

- Update the Regional Hazard Mitigation Plan by January 2023.
- Continue to work with the Environmental Managers Technical Committee to implement the strategies outlined in the Environmental Services Strategic Plan, specifically those related to resilience and water quality, through the annual Chesapeake Bay and Coastal Zone Management work plans.
- Continue to support the Plant Central Rappahannock Natives Campaign.

## **3. Building Community Health**

### **Long Term Aspiration**

We aspire to see a region committed to greater regional collaboration and joint action to build a healthy community, working especially in the areas of homelessness, affordable housing, and community health.

### **Biennial Priorities**

- Continue to support the Fredericksburg Regional Continuum of Care in carrying out its mission to prevent and end homelessness.
- Support efforts to implement creative solutions identified in the Housing Affordability Study and Action Plan.
- Assess GWRC's role in other regional community health efforts.
- Continue to support local Emergency Food and Shelter Program (EFSP) allocations.

#### **4. Facilitating Transportation Solutions**

##### **Long Term Aspiration**

We aspire to develop a regional transportation system with fiscally sound short- and long-range transportation plans that identify multimodal strategies to move people and goods more safely and efficiently, alleviate traffic congestion, and address the needs of rural communities.

##### **Biennial Priorities**

- Develop a new GWRideConnect strategic plan by December 2022.
- Enhance local ridership options through the Commute!VA ridesharing app.
- Support FAMPO in completing the East-West Mobility Study by 2023.
- Support FAMPO's completion of the 2050 Long Range Transportation Plan and associated air quality conformity assessment by March 2022.
- Support FAMPO's development of the FY24-27 Transportation Improvement Program to ensure limited transportation dollars are programmed effectively.
- Complete current rural transportation projects, including the Ladysmith Bike/Ped Plan and King George Transit Feasibility Study, and maintain the 2050 Rural Long Range Transportation Plan.
- Initiate a Regional Freight Summit to address freight network issues with industry, local, state, and federal partners in 2022.

#### **F. Enhancing Organizational Responsiveness and Effectiveness**

GWRC's strengths are its ability to provide professional research and analysis of complex regional issues, to serve as a convenor for regional discussions, to assist in planning regional solutions, and to provide expertise in seeking and managing funding for regional programs. GWRC's service as the fiscal agent for regional programs reduces costs and increases efficiency.

To sustain and enhance its ability to provide management expertise in support of current and future regional programs GWRC will work to improve in the following areas:

- The appropriate governance structure, organizational structure, and staff resources to manage current topical focus area programs and to respond to evolving issues identified by the Commission.
- The adoption of best practices, policies, and procedures to ensure efficient and effective operations, particularly in the areas of financial management and human resources.
- The development of a protocol, including appropriate guiding principles, for determining if GWRC should initiate or take on the management of a new program to

address a regional issue on behalf of two or more localities. (e.g., Before the establishment of new programs under current or new topical focus areas, an analysis of the staffing and other resources necessary to support the program will be conducted.)

- Ongoing, effective, and equitable engagement with member localities, regional partners, and the public at large.
- Building relationships with member localities to promote an understanding of their needs and how GWRC is able to provide assistance in a cost-effective and efficient manner.

### **Organizational Action Steps**

- Determine office space by March 2022.
- Develop a new commission member orientation manual and process
- Complete new commission member on-boarding by April 2022.
- Implement a career progression structure for GWRC staff positions by July 2022.
- Create a full-time environmental services staff position by July 2022.
- Develop a marketing and communications plan to include personal outreach, newsletters, social media, an enhanced web presence, etc., to elevate GWRC's profile in the community by July 2022.
- Create financial sustainability targets related to fund balance, cash flow, and local funding by December 2022.
- Update the Employee Handbook to better align with Stafford County's payroll and benefits administration and new laws and/or regulations by December 2022.
- Develop a process for two or more localities to initiate a new program managed by GWRC on their behalf by December 2022.
- Develop a Financial Policy and Procedures Manual in stages, with completion by December 2023. Implement efficiencies identified throughout manual development.

### **III. Conclusion**

#### **A. Regional Strategic Plan Implementation**

To enable concrete and timely implementation, the Regional Strategic Plan provides two main components:

- First, nineteen Biennial Priorities in four Focus Areas prescribe the near-term objectives of the George Washington Regional Commission. (Priorities which require

a time horizon longer than two years are expressed in terms of what needs to be done during the next two years to accomplish or advance the longer-term objective.)

- Second, ten Organizational Action Steps direct how the Regional Commission will grow and change as an organization to accomplish its objectives.

The time frame for implementation in the near future is:

- Adoption of the Regional Strategic Plan in first quarter of Calendar Year 2022.
- The statements of Long-Term Aspiration for each Focus Area cover at least the next five years, though June 30, 2027, or until updated or amended.
- The Biennial Priorities identify specific actions or targets to be accomplished by the end of the current biennium, that is by June 30, 2024, if not sooner. When Biennial Priorities describe actions which are expected to be ongoing beyond the two-year time horizon, they will be restated and/or updated in future updates to the Regional Strategic Plan as described below.
- The Organizational Action Steps prescribe specific actions needed to improve responsiveness and effectiveness of the organization over the next two years, through June 30, 2024, with more precise target completion dates within that time frame.

## **B. Annual Work Plan, Budget, Assessment and Reporting**

The Regional Strategic Plan is designed to be integrated within the Commission's existing system of annual work plans, annual budgets, and annual reports. The Plan is intended to drive and to guide priorities in work plans and budgets, and to provide a framework for assessing agency performance and reporting agency progress to the community.

Importantly and intentionally, the four Topical Focus Areas in the Plan align with the major categories in the Commission's annual work plan and budget. Moreover, the Focus Areas provide a consistent template for organizing the Commission's Annual Report. The following steps show the flow:

- Use newly adopted Regional Strategic Plan Biennial Priorities to guide the Commission's Work Plan and Budget preparation for both Fiscal Year 2023 and Fiscal Year 2024.
- Adopt GWRC Work Plans and Budgets annually for the July 1 start of each fiscal year.

- Adopt and publish the Commission's Annual Report during the first quarter of each fiscal year. The Annual Report should cover accomplishments in the prior year, and plans for the coming year, all aligned with the Regional Strategic Plan.

By annually restating the Long-Term Aspirational statements in the Annual Report, and by reporting what has been accomplished and not accomplished relative to the Biennial Priorities and Organizational Action Steps, the Commission will transparently hold itself accountable for its performance to its member jurisdictions, its partners and to the public.

Useful strategic plans are iterative and changeable, not static. The world changes and the community changes. New opportunities arise, as do new threats. Good strategic thinking can actually be impaired by an overly rigid "decide once, then execute" strategic planning approach. However, useful strategic plans also help agencies to say "no" to new ideas or proposals that are inconsistent with the organization's mission. New activities that do not align with the strategic plan can be identified as such, acknowledging that they divert attention and resources from agreed upon priorities.

### **C. Strategic Planning Cycle**

Unfortunately, the fate of many strategic plans is to sit on the shelf largely forgotten. By following the steps described above, this Regional Strategic Plan will not only not be forgotten but will be integrated into the Commission's ongoing business. Equally important is for the Plan to remain relevant and timely by using it to assess performance and regularly re-examining the Plan itself. This can be done every two years by taking the following steps:

- Assess agency performance over the past two years against the adopted Regional Strategic Plan. To what extent were Biennial Priorities and Organizational Action Steps accomplished? (This would happen next in the summer and fall of 2024, concurrent with the preparation of the Annual Report for that year.)
- Concurrently, revisit the Long-Term Aspirational statements, as well as statements of Mission, Vision and Core Values, to determine if any change is needed. It is unlikely that any change to these foundational statements will be required for many years.
- Revise the Regional Strategic Plan's Biennial Priorities and Organizational Action Steps to cover the next two years, that is FY 2025 and 2026, through June 30, 2026. It should be expected that these statements will be changed significantly every two years.
- Repeat the above actions every two years going forward.

In this way the George Washington Regional Commission's Regional Strategic Plan will be evergreen, remaining useful and reenergized to guide the Commission in its work for years to come.

#### **IV. Acknowledgements**

Funding for the development of this regional strategic plan was provided by a Capacity Building Grant from Virginia Housing (formerly the Virginia Housing Development Authority).

Appreciation is expressed to the commission members, appointed officials, and staff who worked on the development of this regional strategic plan.

#### **GWRC Members**

##### **Caroline County**

The Honorable Jeffrey S. Black, Board of Supervisors, Western Caroline District

The Honorable Jeffery M. Sili, Board of Supervisors, Bowling Green District

##### **City of Fredericksburg**

The Honorable Jason Graham, City Council, Ward 1

The Honorable Matthew J. Kelly, City Council, At-Large

##### **King George County**

The Honorable Cathy Binder, Board of Supervisors, Shiloh District

The Honorable Ann C. Cupka, Board of Supervisors, At-Large

##### **Spotsylvania County**

The Honorable Timothy J. McLaughlin, Board of Supervisors, Chancellor District

The Honorable Chris Yakabouski, Board of Supervisors, Battlefield District

The Honorable David Ross (Alternate), Board of Supervisors, Courtland District

##### **Stafford County**

The Honorable Meg Bohmke, Board of Supervisors, Falmouth District

The Honorable Tom Coen, Board of Supervisors, George Washington District

The Honorable Cindy C. Lamb (Alternate), Board of Supervisors, Aquia District

The Honorable Crystal Vanuch (Alternate), Board of Supervisors, Rock Hill District

#### **Chief Administrative Officers**

Tim Baroody, Fredericksburg City Manager

Charles Cully, Caroline County Administrator

Chris Miller, King George County Administrator

Ed Petrovitch, Spotsylvania County Administrator

Fred Presley, Stafford County Administrator

### **GWRC Staff**

Chip Boyles, Executive Director  
Kate Gibson, Interim Executive Director/Deputy Director  
Michele Dooling, Director of Finance & Personnel  
Jennifer Morgan, Economic Development Coordinator  
Anne Marie Kluempfen, Program Coordinator  
Reba Gagne, Economic Development Intern  
Samantha Shoukas, Continuum of Care Program Director  
Todd Rump, Continuum of Care Intern  
Mike West, Continuum of Care VISTA  
Leigh Anderson, GWRideConnect Assistant Director  
JoAnna Roberson, GWRideConnect Support & Data Entry Specialist  
Kim Mitchell, GWRideConnect Support & Outreach Coordinator  
Ian Ollis, Director of Transportation Planning/FAMPO Administrator  
Stacey Feindt, Public Involvement/Title VI Coordinator  
Kari Barber, Transportation Planner  
Jordan Chandler, Transportation Planner  
Adam Hager, Transportation Planner  
Matthew Lehane, Transportation Planner  
Lana Bizeau, Transportation Planning Intern

### **Strategic Planning Consultants**

The Berkley Group  
Kimball Payne  
Jackson Tuttle