

NCSHA's Annual Awards for Program Excellence
Legislative Campaign Category
Executive Summary

Name of entry: Virginia Housing Study Commission Partnership
Category name and number: Legislative Campaign, Category 12
Person preparing entry: Arthur N. Bowen III
HFA: Virginia Housing Development Authority

Virginia has a unique public body that studies and addresses housing issues. The Virginia Housing Study Commission, created in 1970, is a bi-partisan group that includes three members of the Senate of Virginia, five members of the Virginia House of Delegates and three citizen members appointed by the governor. The authority has long recognized the benefits of the Commission and has worked to build and maintain a strong relationship with its members. The Commission studies a range of issues related to housing, most of which affect affordable housing and VHDA in some manner. In fact, the Commission recommended the legislation that created VHDA. Because the Commission studies issues that often result in legislation, the authority works to positively influence the organization. A Commission study that results in legislation favorable to VHDA can provide long-term benefit to VHDA. The Commission also supports VHDA's programs and general direction.

VHDA's relationships with individual legislative members of the Commission likewise pay long-term dividends to the authority. Even after these members leave the organization, they continue to reflect the positive nature of the VHDA-Housing Study Commission relationship. For example, legislators might sit on committees that take up legislation dealing with affordable housing. Frequently, these legislators support VHDA and its positions on legislation. They also serve as an effective and influential voice in addressing VHDA's detractors.

In January, VHDA got another opportunity to fortify its relationship with the Commission. For FY 2004, the second year of Virginia's two-year budget, the Commission's existence was threatened by the state's budget crisis because it did not receive any operating funding. VHDA stepped in to assist the Commission by covering the organization's operating costs for FY 2004, totaling \$153,000. To accomplish this, VHDA worked quietly through the necessary political channels in the legislature and with the governor's office to ensure that the funding was included in the state budget. This effort was successful, and the Commission continues to operate today. VHDA also provides significant in-kind support to the Commission, including rent-free office and meeting space at VHDA and computer and telecommunications support.

VHDA leverages its relationship with these legislators by asking them to introduce legislation necessary to VHDA from time to time. Some of these legislators are members of VHDA's advisory groups, which are comprised of stakeholders from different business and community sectors, including lenders, Realtors, developers, non-profits, homebuilders, multicultural groups, and local governments. They give VHDA input on existing and proposed programs, and they are an effective channel to "get the word out" about major issues.

The clearest example of the value of the relationship is the Commission's most prominent current study, in which the organization is reviewing the Statewide Housing Needs Assessment completed by VHDA and the Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development in 2001. The Housing Needs Assessment was a comprehensive review of the housing issues facing various housing markets across the state. It was the first comprehensive look at statewide housing needs ever conducted in Virginia. The Housing Needs Assessment was based on both objective data gleaned from the just-released 2000 Census, as well as more

subjective input gathered through a series of nine housing forums conducted across the state. Nearly every commission member attended at least one forum.

VHDA has used the Housing Needs Assessment as one of the cornerstones of its long-range strategic plan. The Commission has clearly seen the relevance and value of the Housing Needs Assessment, and the organization is now studying its findings to determine the steps that can be taken to begin addressing those needs through development of a statewide housing policy. VHDA is well positioned to have significant influence over the directions and outcome of these deliberations by the Commission. The authority would not be in this exceptional position today were it not for the steps it has taken to build and solidify its relationship with the Housing Study Commission.

Virginia Housing Study Commission Membership

July 2003

Legislative Members

Senator William C. Mims, Leesburg (Northern Va.)

Senator Mary Margaret Whipple, Arlington (Northern Va.)

Senator Martin E. Williams, Newport News (Hampton Roads)

Delegate Thelma Drake, Norfolk (Hampton Roads)

Delegate Terrie Suit, Virginia Beach (Hampton Roads)

Delegate G. Glenn Oder, Newport News (Hampton Roads)

Delegate Bradley P. Marrs, Richmond

Delegate Jackie T. Stump, Grundy (Southwest Virginia)

Gubernatorial Appointees

F. Andrew Heatwole, Ripley-Heatwole Co. (rental housing developer, Hampton Roads)

F. Gary Garczynski, National Capital Land & Development (housing developer, Northern Virginia), Immediate Past President, National Association of Homebuilders

T. K. Somamath, Executive Director, Richmond Better Housing Coalition (non-profit developer, Richmond)