

Virginia Housing Development Authority “Housing as Economic Development” Training Initiative

“VHDA’s training workshop provided an excellent opportunity to focus on a variety of essential skills such as workforce development options and financing strategies. A series of case studies produced an actual revitalization plan! I highly recommend this workshop to anyone in a related field.”

Steven B. Hall
Assistant City Manager, City of Emporia, VA

Brief Description

Training is vitally important, especially when it enables planning and development professionals to work smarter and generate positive community outcomes. But in the current economic environment, how can local governments with constrained training budgets access critical developmental training? An increasingly important resource is VHDA.

The core of VHDA’s mission is revitalizing Virginia communities and expanding the supply of affordable housing. One way VHDA is working to accomplish that mission is by offering free training designed to increase the knowledge of community planners and local officials in how to develop the complex mixed-use/mixed-income deals that can transform their communities.

“Many of Virginia’s localities have neighborhoods where market forces aren’t working to sustain the neighborhood, and the physical infrastructure is deteriorating or obsolete. Creating an actionable plan can be an important first step in the revitalization process for these neighborhoods,” said Mike Hawkins, AICP, and VHDA Director of Community Housing.

“Securing financial resources requires creativity, perseverance and a well-thought out revitalization plan. It’s important to assess project costs, develop a budget and start to identify resources, particularly for priority projects, as early as possible. This part of the development process is critical, as the availability of financial resources often plays a key role in determining what is, and is not, done when it comes time to implement a revitalization plan,” said Hawkins.

VHDA also realizes that leveraging government redevelopment incentives—such as federal Historic Tax Credits—with a variety of other financing options can be complicated, especially if economic development officials and government leaders don’t understand how these types of deals are put together.

Why/When it was Undertaken

Most local governments have separate housing, community and economic development departments speaking different jargon-laden languages. This creates an unfortunate silo effect that is often a roadblock to successful community redevelopment. As local governments became increasingly interested in VHDA’s mixed-use/mixed-income (MUMI) financing as part of their revitalization efforts, we responded by creating a two-day, “Housing as Economic Development” Training Initiative. The training targets Virginia housing, community and economic development, and housing authority planners to help bridge departmental silos and boost neighborhood and downtown revitalization.

VHDA’s “Housing as Economic Development” workshop training includes:

- Identifying key players and their roles
- Taking inventory of neighborhood conditions
- Developing visioning strategies

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- Understanding economic and neighborhood commercial development fundamentals
- Identifying interventions and financial resources
- Real estate acquisition strategies
- Case study presentations of plans prepared by participant project teams

The free two-day workshop is approved for 14 American Institute of Certified Planners (AICP) Certification Maintenance credits.

Why it is Meritorious and Meets NCSHA Award Judging Criteria

Innovative

In the past, many local governments viewed VHDA as simply a lender for multifamily housing developers. Today, VHDA is being invited to assist in helping localities define feasible downtown and neighborhood revitalization strategies, and then participate in implementation with our MUMI financing and other affordable housing programs. This new role is particularly noteworthy given that the Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD), the state’s housing policy agency, administers HUD’s Community Development Block Grant program for non-entitlement communities as well as the Virginia Main Street revitalization program. The DHCD and these programs typically have been more associated with community revitalization. Now, VHDA partners with local governments and the DHCD, and our “Housing as Economic Development” Training Initiative has significantly helped redefine the perception of VHDA’s role as the state’s housing finance agency.

Responds to an important state need

As have many other states, Virginia has struggled to fund escalating road maintenance and construction costs amid static revenues. In response, the Virginia General Assembly mandated that faster-growing localities create Urban Development Areas that identify areas for higher density development in proximity to transportation and other infrastructure to accommodate 10 to 20 years of projected growth, and thus reduce the need for new transportation improvements.

While local governments currently are revising their comprehensive plans and other growth management tools to comply with this mandate, infill development and the revitalization of existing commercial corridors and their surrounding neighborhoods figure prominently in these plans. The “Housing as Economic Development” Training Initiative not only complements this important state mandate, it also provides local housing, community and economic development, and housing authority planners with important tools to help them address this issue.

Achieves intended results

In September 2010, the training began being offered to Virginia planners. VHDA secured American Planning Association approval of 14 Certification Maintenance credits for professional planners who are members of the American Institute of Certified Planners (AICP) and participated in this workshop. We also received strong support from the Virginia Chapter of the American Planning Association. Among the 37 participating planners at the last workshop, 20 chose to rate this workshop on AICP’s national website and gave it a score of 4.5 out of a possible 5.0.

Provides benefits that outweigh costs

VHDA has devoted our own resources in creating the “Housing as Economic Development” Training Initiative, at no cost to participants other than their own travel expenses. However, judging from comments posted on the AICP website, plus those noted on our evaluation forms,

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participants found this workshop very valuable. They stated that the workshop not only helped them understand that planning for affordable housing is required by Virginia code, it also enabled them to realize that affordable housing can be a positive factor in their communities.

VHDA has been extremely pleased with the training’s reception, as noted above, and views the costs associated with it as a sound investment in furthering affordable housing in revitalized communities across Virginia.

Conclusion

A successful revitalization strategy is heavily dependent on the vitality of surrounding neighborhoods that help supply the spending needed to support major revitalization activities. In addition, an often-overlooked element is that housing development and redevelopment in and of itself generates its own positive economic multiplier effect and thus is also an important economic development tool. To help instill these concepts at the local level, VHDA created the “Housing as Economic Development” Training Initiative and offered the free revitalization workshop to local government CDBG program and housing authority staffs.

Training includes one and one-half days of lecture and hands-on analysis of a case study by participants, and culminated in team presentations of a revitalization plan for the case study community during the remaining half day. (Two case study communities were developed – urban/suburban and rural, and both have been used in workshops depending on the types of localities represented by the participants.)

Positive comments generated from the workshop led a consortium of housing authorities in Southwest Virginia to request their own “Housing as Economic Development” workshop, which was held at VHDA’s Wytheville office in Southwest Virginia.

Last year, the “Housing as Economic Development” workshop was first offered to Virginia planners, along with the 14 AICP Certification Maintenance credits. One of the reoccurring comments received from among these planning participants was that they believed their office colleagues would be interested in this training if it was offered again. As a result, VHDA again has secured approval for 14 AICP Certification Maintenance credits and will offer another “Housing as Economic Development” training workshop in September, 2011.

Attachments: Workshop photos and agenda.

Revitalizing Neighborhoods Through Housing and Economic Development



Day One

Introductions

Group: Name/Title/Organization/Role/Training Objective

Training Agenda Overview and Training Center Logistics

Group: Opportunities for Questions

An Overview of the Neighborhood and Issues

Group: Distribute/Discuss Case Study & Identify Groups & SWOT Analysis/Asset Mapping

Players, Roles, & Leadership

Group: Case Study - Identify the case study actors

Overview of the Revitalization Planning Process

Determining Neighborhood Existing Conditions

*Group: Case Study – Evaluate expertise on your team & Determine roles
Analyze Existing Conditions and Assets*

Lunch

Developing Vision & Statement of Strategic Direction

Group: Case Study - Developing the community vision

Housing = Economic Development

Group: Case Study – Analyze housing opportunities and potential economic impact

Neighborhood Commercial Development

Group: Case Study: Analyze Commercial Corridor & Outline Action Plan



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Day Two

Workforce Development

Group: Case Study: Evaluate workforce development options

Range of Interventions

Group: Case Study - Identify target components & potential interventions

Acquisition Strategies

Group: Case Study - Acquisition

Financial Resources: Budgeting & Fundraising

Group: Case Study – Identify Financing strategies to address interventions

Lunch

Crafting the Plan/Plan Development

Group: Case Study – Bringing it all together, Complete Plan for Presentation, Resolve approach conflicts

Revitalization Plan Group Presentations







