

# Fueling Regional Growth Through Housing Solutions: Planning District Commission Grant Program

## **Virginia Housing**

Rental Housing: Encouraging New Construction and  
Promoting Preservation

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*"WPPDC had no involvement in housing and no way to put any priority on regional housing needs. The grant allowed the PDC to hire a Housing Programs Director who could facilitate conversations and develop a regional approach to housing needs. The PDC has placed a high priority on housing with the addition of two housing employees. Our commitment to housing is evident in the programs outlined in other sections of this report." – West Piedmont PDC*

*"This program has helped open a line of communication between the PDC, local affordable housing providers and locality staff around the status of affordable housing in the region." – Crater PDC*

*"The Virginia Housing PDC Housing Grant has allowed for further integration of new sustainable technologies and processes into the affordable housing pipeline." – Middle Peninsula PDC*

*"The grant funding served as a catalyst for attracting projects that had additional investment from various sources. The funding provided critical gap funding and important local matches for continued fundraising. This project gave us a safe/low-risk opportunity to be creative identifying ways to address affordable housing needs." – Thomas Jefferson PDC*

*"The flexibility and functionality of this grant design has been a key contributor to bringing on new units in the region." – Northern Shenandoah PDC*

### Brief Description

Virginia's Planning District Commission (PDC) Grant Program represents a bold, statewide initiative aimed at unlocking affordable housing solutions through regional collaboration. This program has empowered all 21 PDCs — local development districts that span the Commonwealth — to step into a leadership role in housing for the first time. With grant awards ranging from \$1 million to \$3 million based on population size, PDCs were given both the resources and the flexibility to shape housing strategies that reflect the distinct needs of their regions. The result has been a wave of innovation, investment, and lasting change for underserved communities, low- to moderate-income families and Virginia's essential workforce.

*"This funding made an impact on a number of different levels. In the community, it allowed us to push critical projects over the finish line and to give some of our nonprofit partners the added support they needed to be able to deliver a quality product."*

*– PlanRVA (Richmond Region PDC) Executive Director Martha Shickle.*

### Why It Was Undertaken

The program was initiated in response to a pressing housing shortage in Virginia that impacts numerous localities. While Planning District Commissions (PDCs) were traditionally established to address regional planning challenges, they had largely overlooked the critical issue of housing and lacked the resources needed to drive conversations. Recognizing their untapped potential, Virginia Housing proudly launched the PDC Grant Program, empowering these regional entities to become conveners, coordinators and implementers of innovative affordable housing solutions. This visionary approach is grounded in the principle that regional challenges demand collaborative responses — asserting that housing, like transportation and infrastructure, must be addressed beyond the confines of individual jurisdictions for more sustainable housing for all Virginians.

## What We Have Accomplished

Since the program's inception, results have been impressive. Nearly 2,700 new housing units are expected to be completed by the end of the year, equating to a remarkably efficient public investment of approximately \$15,000 per unit. Additionally, the program has catalyzed over \$180 million in leveraged funding, drawing from local governments, nonprofit organizations, private investors and federal partners. More importantly, the program has permanently increased the capacity of PDCs, many of which have hired housing staff for the first time and are now leading regional housing conversations, securing development partnerships, and launching long-term initiatives such as regional housing trust funds, revolving loan programs and nonprofit development arms.

Beyond the numbers, the PDC Grant Program is innovative in its design. It fundamentally restructured the relationship between state and regional actors, shifting from a centralized, one-size-fits-all approach to one that is decentralized, responsive and driven by local knowledge. PDCs were given latitude to experiment with new delivery models tailored to their geographies — whether rural, suburban, coastal or urban. These models include gap financing mechanisms, programs focused on permanent supportive housing, competitive funding initiatives, and even climate-resilient housing strategies in vulnerable coastal areas.

This local empowerment is further reinforced by a comprehensive support system established by Virginia Housing. From the outset, the agency engaged PDC representatives in program design to ensure buy-in and relevance. Ongoing technical assistance is provided through biweekly calls, peer learning sessions, and a robust online portal filled with FAQs, model contracts, templates and more. This infrastructure not only supports implementation but also fosters a culture of shared learning and continuous improvement across regions.

## Why It Is Meritorious and Meets NCSHA Award Judging Criteria

### ***Innovative***

This program reimagined the role of PDCs, empowering them to go beyond planning to execution. By shifting from a top-down funding structure to a decentralized model, it enabled regionally tailored responses and unlocked a wave of creativity. PDCs have become more than participants — they are conveners, decision-makers and, in some cases, developers. As one PDC leader put it: "We're no longer asking to be at the table — we're building the table."

### ***Replicable***

The program's structure — state-level funding, regional flexibility and capacity-building support — is highly adaptable to other states or large jurisdictions. Any regionally based governance model could adopt this approach by following key pillars: empowering local leadership, tailoring program design to regional needs and providing strong technical assistance. The success in Virginia demonstrates the value of trusting local actors to lead with accountability and creativity.

### ***Provides Benefits That Outweigh Costs***

The return on investment has been extraordinary. With a modest per-unit investment and over \$180 million in leveraged funding, the program has unlocked significant housing production. But its benefits extend well beyond unit counts — it has built durable regional capacity, fostered cross-sector

partnerships and permanently shifted the role of PDCs in the housing ecosystem. These long-term outcomes far exceed the initial cost of the program and promise sustained impact for years to come.

### ***Demonstrates Effective Use of Resources***

Virginia Housing maximized the effectiveness of its grant dollars by aligning awards with regional capacity and need. Funding was used strategically to close gaps in development, support nonprofit partners and attract additional capital. The agency's commitment to ongoing technical assistance, coupled with a centralized knowledge-sharing system, ensured efficient use of time, funds and expertise. The program has also created internal efficiencies by encouraging PDCs to share models, streamline processes and eliminate duplication.

### ***Achieve Strategic Objectives***

The PDC Grant Program directly supports Virginia Housing's Strategic Plan, particularly:

***Strategic Goal 1: Address State Housing Needs and Strategy 1:*** Preserve and Strengthen the Housing Delivery Network. By equipping PDCs to serve as housing conveners, the program has grown Virginia's delivery network, nurtured regional leadership, and aligned public resources with local and regional housing needs. It builds on Virginia Housing's long-term goal of cultivating a resilient housing ecosystem that centers local expertise and long-term sustainability.

***Strategic Goal 2:*** Address the unmet rental needs of low-income and critical needs populations.

***Strategic Goal 3:*** Strengthen homeownership for first-time homebuyers in Virginia, through the creation of new homeownership and rental housing opportunities.

## **Conclusion**

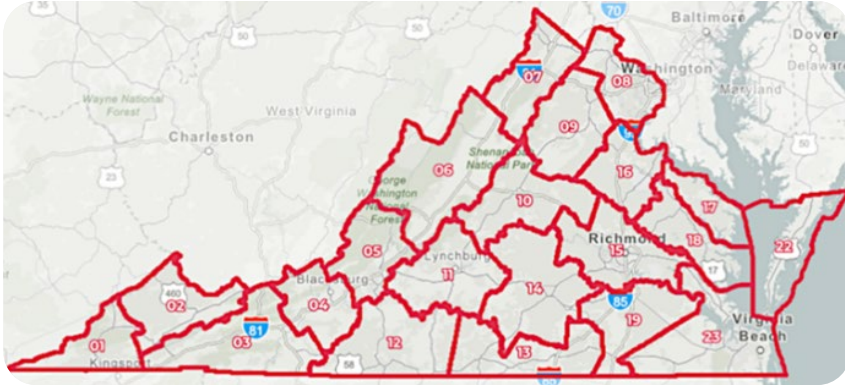
Planning District Commissions have expressed how this grant has remarkably transformed their role from simply sitting at the table to engaging in meaningful implementation. Many have boldly ventured into new avenues, such as establishing land banks and land trusts, and even stepping into the developer's role. The regional market studies provide critical data that fuels a wide range of innovative projects. Furthermore, the creative models devised by the PDCs have drawn new developers to Virginia, showcasing that these regions are not only thinking proactively about housing but are also actively crafting solutions — an essential strategy for attracting and retaining employers and their talented workforce.

The Planning District Commission Grant Program has redefined what's achievable when regional organizations are both funded and entrusted to take the lead. It has transformed planning districts into formidable housing partners, ignited new development opportunities, and strategically positioned Virginia's regions for enduring success. This program has already resulted in the creation of thousands of homes and laid a strong foundation for systemic change throughout the state. Most importantly, it has established a powerful model for how collaborative, regional solutions can tackle today's housing challenges with creativity, equity and a lasting impact. The Planning District Commissions will continue to be indispensable partners as Virginia Housing strives to enhance the availability of affordable housing units across every region of the Commonwealth.

## Appendix

Visuals showcasing the impactful results of PDC Resources.

### Virginia Map of the Regional Planning District Commissions



Source: [VAPDC.org/PDC-Map](http://VAPDC.org/PDC-Map)

### Church Hill Partnership



Photo courtesy of Partnership for Housing Affordability.

### Cool Lane Commons



*Before (left) and after (right) photos of Cool Lane Commons courtesy of Henrico County.*

### Old Tavern Road



*Photo courtesy of Powhatan Habitat for Humanity.*

### Waxpool Apartments



### Central Shenandoah PDC Projects



### Wooden Pickle Food and Spirits Apa – Marion, VA

