

ENVISION GREATER WASHINGTON

Report to the Organizing Committee
By Co-Convening Sponsors

Community Foundation for the National Capital Region
Greater Washington Board of Trade
Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments

March 2007

Background

In February 2005, an innovative regional planning exercise sponsored by the Urban Land Institute-Washington District Council and others, called Reality Check on Growth, demonstrated that consensus, at least at the “what if” level, might be found around an alternative growth vision for the National Capital Region. That effort was followed a year later by more than 140 leaders from the public, private and civic sectors that convened in February 2006 under the auspices of the Potomac Conference to consider if the time was right for the National Capital Region to embark on a multi-sector, multi-year regional visioning campaign.

Several regional leaders then agreed to participate in an organizing committee convened by the Community Foundation for the National Capital Region, the Greater Washington Board of Trade, and the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (COG). Over the course of an intensive, three-month period, participants examined efforts underway or planned in other regions, explored potential opportunities and challenges for a visioning effort in our region and developed recommendations for the boards of directors of the three convening groups. The recommendations were captured in the July 2006 report, *Envision Greater Washington: Moving our Region Forward. Together. Now.*

Directors from the convening groups were briefed on the EGW report in the summer and fall and focused on many of the issues that the organizing committee also found challenging:

- What are the specific elements/activities that would be carried out through a visioning effort, how will it be funded, and how will progress be measured?
- How can the region avoid reinventing the wheel and how can we be sure there is added value from this effort?
- Does the region need more planning or should we focus our resources on advancing the vision and plans we already have?
- What will be different, better and/or measurable as a result of this effort?

Directors from the convening groups each established committees to further explore these questions and directed staff to develop a draft business plan, timeline and budget. These elements were completed in January 2007.

Update

While recognizing that the business plan responded to several of the issues previously identified, co-convening sponsors concluded this month that their organizations would not be able to lead and

support the Envision Greater Washington campaign effort as outlined in the July 2006 *Moving our Region Forward* report and the accompanying business plan.

In reaching this decision, co-convening sponsors acknowledged the excellent work of the organizing committee and the ensuing dialogue among the sponsors, which might not have occurred had the EGW effort not come forward. The co-convening sponsors concluded that many EGW goals could be accomplished through a re-commitment to support and sustain existing organizations, networks and relationships, rather than building and investing resources in a new regional structure at this time.

The co-convening sponsors outlined their respective current priorities to advance the principals and goals of the common vision shared by not only the Community Foundation for the National Capital Region, the Greater Washington Board of Trade and COG, but also by many other regional and local stakeholder organizations, as well. Finally, there was strong acknowledgement that the dialogue begun through Envision Greater Washington needs to be sustained in some meaningful way through existing organizations and rapidly advancing communications tools and technology.

Co-convening sponsors agreed that moving forward; individual and collective efforts should embrace the following principles associated with Envision Greater Washington:

- Stronger multi-sector, multi-jurisdictional and citizen engagement.
- Leveraging existing plans and visions.
- Public choice through deeper understanding of the impact and consequences of alternative growth and investment scenarios.
- A commitment to action and outcomes.

Next Steps

In reviewing the history of the Envision Greater Washington effort in the National Capital Region, individuals associated with similar efforts in other communities cautioned that progress is often not linear, and that sometimes these types of initiatives circle back at another point in their maturation.

Representatives of co-convening sponsors acknowledged that while there may not have been consensus to support the Envision Greater Washington campaign, as originally proposed, the goals of multi-sector collaboration and civic outreach are even more relevant now than when the organizing committee began its work. Additionally, there was a desire to move quickly to regional and local actions (by the public, private and civic sectors) that are grounded in the principles identified through Envision Greater Washington.

In reaching their conclusion on the Envision Greater Washington proposal, several representatives of co-convening sponsors asked the question, 'if not this (Envision Greater Washington), what else or what next?'

Greater collaboration between existing organizations and stakeholders was an area of common agreement. Improved communication was another area of agreement, as well as interest in leveraging the work of existing organizations to advance consensus goals. The Smart Growth Alliance's promotion of growth principles and best practices and the Washington Regional Equity

Network's collaboration among the philanthropic and non-profit sectors were two examples of potential leveraging.

Co-convening sponsors pledged continued teamwork, for example, COG and the Greater Washington Board of Trade have worked together for the past two years on Metro dedicated funding. Co-convening sponsors also asked COG staff, with oversight from COG's Metropolitan Development Policy Committee (the COG Board of Directors' principal policy advisor on regional growth and development) to develop a response to the challenge, 'if not this, what else or what next?' The Community Foundation has also expressed interest in working with COG to expand public outreach and civic engagement as it moves forward and to leverage the resources of the civic sector for scenario analysis and other activities.

A preliminary report will be presented to the COG Board of Directors at its April 11, 2007 meeting, with the Metropolitan Development Policy Committee expected to prepare a detailed action plan for subsequent Board approval and implementation. The Committee may recommend the following COG activities to respond to the regional challenges confronting the public, private and civic sectors: a regional clearinghouse role to foster improved information sharing and collaboration; a "refresh" of regional and local visions and plan; expanded scenario analysis and use of visualization and other presentation tools; and more aggressive public outreach and engagement. In these and other potential activities, COG will reach out to its partners in the private and civic sectors.

Thank you again for your contribution to this effort to strengthen our region and work together for sustainable growth.