

METROPOLITAN WASHINGTON COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS
Annual Retreat
July 31 – August 2, 2009

Hyatt Regency Chesapeake Bay
Cambridge, Maryland

Summary Report

Background

The Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (COG) held its eleventh annual retreat on July 31- August 2, 2009 at the Hyatt Regency Chesapeake Bay in Cambridge, Maryland.

COG initiated an annual, summer retreat process beginning in 1999. At the first retreat, there was an intensive facilitated process that resulted in the landmark COG Strategic Plan “New Directions, Shaping Opportunities” formally adopted by the COG Board in November 1999. The 1999 Strategic Plan has provided an excellent framework guiding the work of COG policy boards and committees, technical committees and staff. Following the 2004 retreat, the COG Board adopted its first major revision and refinement to the Strategic Plan. The Strategic Plan is now more fully integrated into the COG fiscal year work program and budget.

Since 1999 COG has used the summer retreat as an opportunity to address specific regional policy and agency operational issues and further develop COG’s strategic direction. The retreats have also served as an important networking opportunity among COG members and senior staff.

Retreat Planning

COG Board Chair Penny Gross and Vice Chairs Kwame Brown and Andrea Harrison provided direction to COG staff in developing retreat goals and the draft program. Board leadership recommended that, though times are tough financially for many, the annual retreat is essential in laying the ground work for the organization’s policy focus for 2010. The general consensus was to return to the Hyatt Regency Chesapeake Bay for an intensive work session that maximized time and resources but also provided the networking opportunities so valued in the past. Mindful of the economic pressures facing COG and its member governments, management recommended and the COG Board leadership approved several measures to reduce retreat expenses and instituted a guest fee for non-member adults attending the retreat. Retreat expenses decreased by approximately 25 percent compared to the previous year.

Retreat Evaluation

Planned sessions allowed participants to be heavily engaged in discussions on advancing the work of the Greater Washington 2050, identifying and understanding the interconnectedness of climate change and transportation policies, and considering the complexities and opportunities of social networking. COG received retreat evaluation forms from 14 participants and all evaluations were positive.

Participants

Retreat invitees included the COG Board of Directors, COG corporate officers, mayors and chairs of local boards, chairs and vice chairs of the National Capital Region Transportation Planning Board, the Metropolitan Washington Air Quality Committee, and all COG policy committees. Elected and appointed officials who attended some or all of the retreat and the final retreat program are provided as Attachments.

Policy Focus on Growth and Development

Beginning in 2004, the COG Board established a multi-year policy focus on growth and development. This multi-year focus was chosen as a means to achieve greater policy consensus and direction for the region. To that end, the 2009 Retreat agenda was created to provide attendees with an opportunity to help shape the future priorities and goals of the organization, both in the short and long-term. The opening dinner provided a “View from the Hill” from two of Congress’ newest members, Representative Gerry Connolly (VA) and Representative Donna Edwards (MD). Each spoke to the value and necessity of working regionally, specifically on issues of climate change and transportation. They also pledged to support and advocate for COG’s work, both with their peers in the Congress and with the Administration. COG will also seek to sponsor and organize more regular meetings of the congressional delegation on regional matters, as well as intensify its ongoing interaction with delegation members and staff.

Saturday morning’s program focused on shaping the direction of regional planning in the Washington metropolitan area and identifying opportunities to better integrate its planning and improve quality of life and outcomes through Greater Washington 2050. A panel of active members of the Greater Washington 2050 Coalition provided a brief history of the initiative, its impetus and mission, and progress to-date. Overall, retreat participants were pleased with the direction of the project and how its success would positively impact this region in the next 40 years. Several concerns were raised regarding the branding of the compact document, ensuring that there are measurable outcomes and the need to refine metrics in several of the topic areas including transportation, health, education and public safety. Staff will finalize the compact document and its associated targets and metrics and return to the Board with a final product for adoption and signature by member governments in early 2010.

Participants also received a presentation on the emerging linkages between climate change and transportation legislation currently being debated by Congress. Public perception regarding the implications of climate change has resulted in major shifts in the marketplace, specifically the demand driven push for smart-growth communities. This shift is significantly impacting the way in which lawmakers craft both bills; specifically in that each bill is very interrelated and contains aspects of the other. It is likely that metropolitan areas will be significantly, if not positively, impacted by the passage of both as future funding is targeted to regionally-focused, well planned projects that integrate transportation, land use and environmental policies.

The luncheon keynote was provided by Chuck Fox, a senior EPA advisor for the Chesapeake Bay who provided a sobering account of the health of the Chesapeake Bay and the financial resources that may be required of local governments to restore its vitality.

In addition to Saturday afternoon's focus on the policy priorities for the coming year, participants received presentations on the use of social networking technologies by local governments and public officials. While the presentations stimulated thinking about utilizing the new forums for communication to better engage constituents, it also brought to light some associated technology anxiety, specifically the issues of privacy and monitoring. COG staff will plan a more in-depth workshop in the spring for those who are interested in learning more.

COG's Policy Focus and Priorities for 2009-2010

The final session of the retreat was a regional roundtable focused on achieving COG's 2009 goals and identifying those issues for continued or renewed focus in 2010. Clearly the completion and implementation of the Greater Washington 2050 Initiative in the next 6-9 months is a top priority for this organization and the region. In keeping with the focus on long-term planning, several members stressed the need for a revision of COG's strategic plan to better reflect current sentiment on building and growing sustainably.

The region's economic sustainability and vitality must continue to be a top priority for this organization. The Workforce Development Taskforce will craft recommendations in the coming months on better linking workforce and economic development policies to ensure that the region emerges from this economic downturn more resilient and internationally competitive in the new economy. Related is a push for COG to think more innovatively as Congress and the Administration begin to focus additional resources on regionalism and projects with cross cutting qualities.

In order to achieve the recognition of its important work and to build and cultivate relationships with our state and federal partners, COG must continue to engage these stakeholders through regular communication and outreach meetings. A rebranding campaign with the media and others is also necessary to establish COG as the "go-to" for a range of regional data and leadership on regional policy matters.

Several new or expanded issues were raised for COG attention in the coming year: regional options for healthcare service provision and the potential for the creation of a consortium of providers; the need for a green business component in the climate action plan; and a renewed focus on housing, specifically the continued lack of affordable housing region-wide and the increase in overcrowding issues as a result of foreclosures.

Next Steps

The summary report will be presented to the COG Board on September 9, 2009. In addition, the summary report will be shared with the Budget and Finance Committee as part of its review of the proposed FY 2011 COG Work Program and Budget. The Executive Director and senior staff will also brief policy boards and committees to ensure that committee work programs reflect feedback from the retreat.

ATTACHMENTS

2009 COG Retreat Session Outcomes

Retreat Session	Key Outcomes and Next Steps
A View from the Hill	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff will continue to engage the region’s congressional delegation and seek co-sponsorship of periodic meetings.
Greater Washington 2050	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff will work on the marketing and promotion of the effort so that its intent and value is easier to understand by the general public. • Goals will be reviewed to ensure that there are measurable outcomes for each. • Several of the metrics are in need of refinement including those in the topic areas of transportation, health, education, quality of life and public safety. • Staff will schedule additional outreach presentations in the fall and also schedule concurrent briefings to key COG committees, e.g. Chief Administrative Officers Committee. • Staff will finalize the compact document and return to the COG Board for final approval in January 2010.
Emerging Linkages between Climate Change and Transportation Legislation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff will continue to monitor both the climate and the transportation reauthorization bills and reach out to the Congress, as required.
Recommitment to the Chesapeake Bay	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A similar presentation by Mr. Fox should be planned for the Chesapeake Bay and Water Resources Policy Committee.
Social Networking for the Elected Official	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A Social Networking 101 Workshop will be planned for spring 2010. • COG will go live on Facebook; several of COG’s major programs will have Facebook pages including Foster Care, TPB, Commuter Connections and Clean Air Partners.
Regional Roundtable	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The COG Strategic Plan is in need of review and update and will be docketed for discussion at the 2010 COG retreat, with preparatory work by COG members and staff. • Staff should continue to enhance its state and federal outreach strategy. • The development and implementation of a new or improved branding strategy for COG’s work should be explored.
Misc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recruit Maryland jurisdictions for IRE participation.

The Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments

2009 Leadership Planning & Work Session

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Participants

COG Members

Phil Andrews, Councilmember, Montgomery County
Benjamin Barnes, Delegate, Maryland House of Delegates
Marilynn Bland, Chairman, Prince George's County
Jacqueline Brown, Chief Administrative Officer, Prince George's County
Kwame Brown, Councilmember, District of Columbia
Sharon Bulova, Chairman, Fairfax County
Robert Catlin, Councilmember, City of College Park
Gerald Connolly, Representative, U.S. House of Representatives
Wally Covington, Vice Chairman, Prince William County
Judith Davis, Mayor, City of Greenbelt
Tom Dernoga, Vice Chairman, Prince George's County
Daniel Drummond, Councilman, City of Fairfax
Catherine Drzyzgula, Council Member, City of Gaithersburg
Donna Edwards, Representative, U.S. House of Representatives
William Euille, Mayor, City of Alexandria
Barbara Favola, Chairman, Arlington County
Jay Fiset, Vice Chairman, Arlington County
David Gray, Vice President, Frederick County
Penelope Gross, Vice Chairman, Fairfax County
Andrea Harrison, Councilmember, Prince George's County
Mary Hynes, Board Member, Arlington County
Alan Imhoff, Alderman, City of Frederick
Sidney Katz, Mayor and Council President, City of Gaithersburg
Michael Knapp, Councilmember, Montgomery County
Hal Lippman, Vice Mayor, City of Falls Church
Leta Mach, Council Member, City of Greenbelt
Andrea McGimsey, Supervisor, Loudoun County
Phil Mendelson, Councilmember, District of Columbia
Redella Pepper, Vice Mayor, City of Alexandria
Frank Principi, Supervisor, Prince William County
Geraldine Valentino-Smith, Councilmember, City of Bowie
David Snyder, Council Member, City of Falls Church
Bruce Williams, Mayor, City of Takoma Park
Chris Zimmerman, Board Member, Arlington County

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Guest Speakers

Geoff Anderson, President and CEO, Smart Growth America

Colin Delany, Founder and Chief Editor, ePolitics.com

Merni Fitzgerald, Director of Public Affairs, Fairfax County

Chuck Fox, Senior Advisor for the Chesapeake Bay, U.S. EPA

Steve Ressler, Founder, GovLoop.com

Harriet Tregoning, Director, D.C. Office of Planning

COG Staff

George Danilovics, Information Technology Chief

Paul DesJardin, Director, Department of Community Planning & Services

Stuart Freudberg, Director, Department of Environmental Programs

Nicole Hange, Policy Coordinator

Ron Kirby, Director, Department of Transportation Planning

Dave McMillion, Director, Department of Public Safety & Health

Ray Rawlins, Chief Financial Officer

David Robertson, Executive Director

Lee Ruck, Legal Counsel

Jeanne Saddler, Director, Office of Public Affairs

Pat Warren, Executive Assistant