



BETTER COMMUNITIES THROUGH SOUND GOVERNMENT

2025 Community & Economic Development Policy Statement

Community and economic development are essential elements for the vitality of the Commonwealth of Virginia.

Diverse communities and neighborhoods are critically important to the health of Virginia’s local governments. VML supports legislation to encourage state and local cooperation efforts that promote the diversity of and safety of all populations, that encourage the maintenance and protection of property in neighborhoods, and that improve the livability of Virginia’s cities, towns, and counties. This includes improving the environment and quality of life in our localities.

VML urges the state to partner with localities to develop, share, and carry out the state economic development strategic plan. Local governments are also encouraged to work together in regional efforts to improve the quality of life and take advantage of economic development opportunities. State support should be included in regional efforts in collaboration with local elected officials.

Incentive programs, such as GO Virginia, Opportunity Zones, the Commonwealth’s Opportunity Fund, and the Virginia Enterprise Zone Program are important economic development tools, particularly in a challenging economy. All parties benefit when the state works cohesively with local governments to ensure that economic development efforts focus on improving opportunities and sustainability. This cooperation includes technical assistance from the state and coordination on site acquisition and development. VML supports clarification on criteria for grant programs especially regarding fiscal health and/or economically distressed localities. Grant programs must consider the totality of the circumstance of a local government’s fiscal health.

Efforts that we deem appropriate include grants and state tax incentives and efforts to assist minority, veteran-owned and women-owned businesses. The state should strive to fully fund programs that strengthen local governments’ commercial and industrial tax bases to reduce pressure on the residential real estate tax base.

VML encourages the state to engage localities very early in the process when assisting with economic development prospects so that localities can better prepare for potential impacts. Site Readiness and Certified Economic Development Sites are important to localities and assistance from the State is encouraged to prepare these sites.

38 **PLANNING AND LAND USE**

39 VML encourages the Governor and General Assembly to expand local authority and land use
40 management tools provided in the state code to ensure that the policies of the Commonwealth
41 and localities encourage and support healthy cities and towns. Localities should have the
42 flexibility to encourage mixed use and inclusive communities along with varying densities. The
43 policies of the Commonwealth should support sustainable growth in and around urban centers to
44 help local governments create more livable, environmentally responsible communities, thus
45 reducing the environmental impact of growth. In addition, policies should alleviate
46 transportation funding problems for the Commonwealth and should promote transportation
47 priorities to promote public transportation modes as well as pedestrian and bicycle
48 transportation. VML supports multi-modal transportation options for regions and localities with
49 local input on access to multi-modal facilities.

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51 Planning and land use control are two of local government’s most important functions.
52 Localities must maintain control of local land use decisions. Neither the state nor federal
53 governments should usurp or pre-empt a locality’s power to make such decisions or impose
54 processes that weaken planning and land use functions. This includes home businesses and other
55 activities that may put one individual’s property rights into conflict with another’s. The General
56 Assembly should allow local governments to exercise land use authority in the manner that the
57 local government deems appropriate for its circumstances. Coordination of local land use
58 planning, the availability of public water and wastewater and transportation planning improves
59 the ability of all levels of government to deal with and manage growth-related issues the
60 Commonwealth faces in the long-term.

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62 All localities should be guided by their comprehensive plan for future development. However,
63 VML encourages a review of the components of the comprehensive plan to ensure that they are
64 both necessary and include only essential functions of local government. State agencies should
65 be required to comply with local comprehensive plans and local land use regulations and
66 policies. VML opposes any additional legislation that would exempt religious organizations or
67 provide special entitlements to individuals and industries from neutral, generally applicable local
68 ordinances, and in particular, local zoning and public safety ordinances.

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70 The General Assembly should enhance local government’s ability to plan for future growth by
71 authorizing a complete spectrum of land use and growth management tools and should allow and
72 provide localities more creative, locally initiated planning and land use mechanisms.

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74 When a county’s transfer of development rights program includes lands adjacent to a city or
75 town, the General Assembly should provide the municipality with the authority necessary to
76 fully participate in the decisions on transferring such rights when it is determined by the
77 municipality that the land-use change will impact its citizens.

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79 VML supports the state’s exploration of sustainable development, provided there is not an effort
80 to supplant the authority of local governments to determine their own land use policies and
81 encourages the consideration of incentives for localities to implement sustainable development
82 approaches.

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84 VML supports enhanced redevelopment opportunities through the adoption of an urban policy
85 for the commonwealth, and implementation of growth management policies that encourage
86 growth and economic development in urban areas.

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88 VML supports the position that the vested rights law is prospective only and that local
89 governments have the authority to amend zoning ordinances in the future.

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91 The law on nonconforming uses and structures must be maintained. The desires of a single
92 property owner should not outweigh the interests of the neighbors, who benefit from properties
93 coming into conformance with the zoning ordinance over time through the effects of the law on
94 nonconformity.

95

96 The General Assembly should not enact any legislation, under the name of private property
97 protection law, that seeks to weaken local powers to regulate land uses or that requires additional
98 compensation beyond judicial interpretation of the Fifth Amendment of the U.S. Constitution
99 and Article I, section II of the Virginia Constitution.

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101 **ZONING INCENTIVES FOR IN-FILL DEVELOPMENT AND REDEVELOPMENT**

102 The state code should continue to ensure that local governments have a full range of authority to
103 promote affordable and mixed income housing, including authority to facilitate in-fill
104 development, redevelopment, and mixing of uses in redevelopment projects. Therefore, the Code
105 of Virginia must not be changed to limit local governments' authority to enact land use
106 regulations for the benefit of all citizens of a locality

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108 **VARIANCES, SPECIAL EXCEPTIONS & CONDITIONAL USE PERMITS**

109 VML maintains that the law on variances should be retained in its current form. Because land
110 use is controlled at the local level, the General Assembly should not require or dictate any
111 specific procedures for special exceptions, conditional use permits or similar land use decisions.

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113 **HOUSING**

114 VML urges state and local governing bodies to develop and maintain a balanced housing mix,
115 including affordable and workforce housing. This balance should be determined by a locality, as
116 local officials are in the best position to determine that mixture. Local governments must be
117 fully involved in the decisions on the placement of affordable and workforce housing in their
118 jurisdictions. Procedures involving the granting of tax credits for projects must involve local
119 governing bodies. VML supports state funding for affordable and workforce housing while
120 working with local governments to encourage the development of mixed income development
121 and redevelopment, coupled with support for mixed use projects. In addition, all affordable
122 housing tools in the Virginia Code should be available to all localities.

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124 Any locality that issues a Section 8 housing certificate should have housing available in the
125 jurisdiction for the certificate's holder, to prevent persons who are granted Section 8 certificates
126 from having to leave their home jurisdiction in order to find housing.

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128 VML supports the Commonwealth enacting policies that allow persons with a prior felony
129 conviction to have the ability to acquire housing. This could include a model criminal history
130 screening policy or other methods that would support the reduction of homelessness.

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132 **SHORT TERM RENTALS**

133 The authority to regulate short term rentals should be maintained at the local level. VML
134 supports ensuring that there is no erosion of local authority and that there are robust registry rules
135 for enforcement and tax collection purposes.

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137 **HOUSING OPTIONS TO INCLUDE MANUFACTURED HOUSING, TINY HOUSES, 138 ACCESSORY DWELLING UNITS, ETC.**

139 Local governments must retain the authority to plan for the appropriate mix of residential
140 structures in their communities and must retain full authority to regulate the placement of all
141 types of housing without state intervention. New housing options must be explored in our efforts
142 to increase the housing stock.

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144 Accessory dwelling units should not be mandated; local governments must retain the authority to
145 regulate them.

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147 **BLIGHT AND NEIGHBORHOOD PRESERVATION**

148 The General Assembly should strengthen the authority of localities along with providing
149 funding opportunities to manage and reduce blight. This could be done through empowering
150 localities' flexibility with building permits issued for repairs or renovation. There are many
151 methods that could be considered to empower local governments including but not limited to:

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- 153 a) the requirement of timely completion of the work,
- 154 b) filing a legitimate plan by the owner, diligently pursued, to complete the work,
- 155 c) authorizing local government action to correct the health and public safety problems
156 created by incomplete work and to either seize available assets of the owner and use them
157 to fund corrective action or impose high fees that would recover the locality's costs on a
158 priority basis.

159

160 This would be similar to the localities' powers for retrieving unpaid taxes.

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162 Further, we would like the definition of derelict building to be expanded to include buildings that
163 are not completed to the Code of Virginia Sec. 15-2.907.1.

164 VML supports strengthening the minimum property maintenance code which is optional for local
165 governments to adopt.

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167 **RESPONSIBLE GROWTH MANAGEMENT**

168 Current state land use authority is often inadequate to allow local governments to provide the
169 infrastructure and services for growth in a manner that protects and improves the quality of life
170 in our communities. The General Assembly should authorize local governments to implement
171 growth management policies including impact fees in order to enable localities to facilitate
172 orderly, rational growth in a manner appropriate to their communities. The authority to impose
173 impact fees should include calculations for the cost of all public infrastructure, including local

174 transportation, transit, and school construction costs, caused by growth. Until a comprehensive
175 impact fee system is authorized, all localities should retain full authority for conditional zoning
176 to meet the needs of new citizens for public infrastructure.

177
178 The General Assembly should take all steps needed to assist towns and cities to work with the
179 surrounding counties to promote growth in patterns that help the vitality of the municipalities.
180 Any change must not shift the burden of paying for new infrastructure to existing citizens
181 through increased real estate taxes.

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183 VML supports the ability of localities to prepare for the closure of state facilities and supports
184 the state providing ample notice to localities of proposed closures and the loss of jobs. Further,
185 facilities being closed should not be left in a state of disrepair or blight, further impacting the
186 surrounding community.

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188 **DESIGN FOR ALL CITIZENS**

189 As life expectancy rises and as the number of citizens with significant physical disabilities and
190 limitations is increasing, Virginia’s local governments recognize that man-made environments
191 must be made accessible to and inclusive of all citizens, whether aging, disabled, homeless or
192 facing other limitations. Therefore, the state’s laws, regulations and policies must serve to
193 increase accessibility for the aged, disabled, and homeless populations. Such laws, regulations
194 and policies that do not assist in reaching these goals should be amended or repealed.

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196 Building codes should be amended to help achieve these goals in new and existing construction.
197 Further, state laws, regulations and policies must be amended, to give local governments full
198 authority to provide accessible private and public infrastructure.

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200 **EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT**

201 VML supports institutes of higher education complying with local land use and being a good
202 neighbor. For localities to have a strong and diversified economic base, education of all types is
203 desired, including two-year and four-year programs. In addition, VML supports all programs
204 which encourage persons to enter the workforce such as apprenticeship programs, certificate
205 programs or on-the-job training. Encouraging all types of education will attract new business
206 and allow existing businesses to compete effectively.

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208 **TRANSPORTATION**

209 Localities need greater input on how changes to VDOT managed infrastructure affect localities
210 as well as input on priorities for addressing infrastructure issues.

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212 **PRESERVATION OF RIGHTS-OF-WAY**

213 Road projects take many years from the planning stage to construction. Often localities need to
214 reserve miles of rights-of-way years in advance of any funding availability for these projects, or
215 risk development in the path of these road projects. Localities need tools to enable them to
216 reserve rights-of-way for longer periods of time. While current law allows reservation, localities
217 are often unable to provide the upfront funding needed to purchase these rights-of-way in the
218 allotted timeframe.