



324 Places Initiative

Each of Virginia's 38 cities, 191 towns, and 95 counties is a unique place with its own identity. Together, these localities are the future of the Commonwealth. Throughout 2015, the Virginia Municipal League will be studying the key trends that will be facing Virginia's local governments over the next 10 years.

Our goal is to provide local officials a road map with strategies for effective operations and planning. From changing transportation needs to the future of workforce development, the 324 Places Initiative will identify key trends to help localities better prepare for the future. In addition, wherever possible the initiative will provide action steps for decision makers to consider.

Each month, Virginia Town & City magazine will explore one of the key study areas. Those articles will be followed by webinars that will delve into the specific topics even further. The initiative will culminate with the VML Annual Conference, October 4-6 in Richmond.

The conference theme will be, The Future of Virginia: 324 Places. Throughout the conference attendees will have the opportunity to work in groups focused on specific study areas. In addition, there will be discussions centered around the regional differences in the 10-year trend analysis.

The year 2015 marks the 110th anniversary of the Virginia Municipal League's service to the cities, towns, and counties of the Commonwealth. To honor this proud tradition, we are looking toward the future to help guide and empower local officials. Working together, we will shape the future of our great state. Working together, we can build amazing places for our citizens to live, work, and play.

Topics to be Studied in 2015

Transportation (Mobility): Driverless cars from Google, ridesharing from Uber, and changing preferences of young Millennials and aging Boomers are redefining mobility. In the future, people will seek neighborhoods and even communities that provide a range of options for getting around. Learn what to know and what to do today to get ready for "car lite" lifestyles of the future.

Workforce Development: In the future, there will be relatively fewer young people and relatively more older people. Experts are predicting a worker shortage, particularly in the public sector. Attracting and retaining Millennials – Young Professionals – today will become more and more important to ensure a readily available workforce in the future. Learn what to know and what to do today to make your community a Millennial magnet.

Community Image and Reputation: More and more cities and towns are branding themselves, finding a unified messaging platform to help build community pride and recruit newcomers and tourists. Learn how cities, towns and counties are embracing new municipal marketing techniques today to shape their future tomorrow.

Education: Budget cuts have caused huge problems for most public school systems today. Learn more about future prospects for additional funding; bolstering Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) Education; re-examining the importance of standardized testing; sparking innovation; ensuring opportunity for all; strengthening the teaching profession.

Public Engagement/Purpose: The ability and ease at which Millennials connect using mobile technology is redefining how local governments engage the public. Learn how cities and towns are getting ready for the new-style of electronic engagement. ALSO: The growth of organizations with a "purpose" – a cause greater than what they do or how they do it – will shine new light on how effective local governments deliver their own "purpose" of serving the public. Learn how cities, towns and counties are embracing "purpose" today and leveraging it for the future.

Economic Development: The days of attracting companies in order to attract people have shifted as Millennials more often select where they want to live and then seek employment. More placemaking is in

the future of every city, town and county. Learn how to shift the economic development model to be one of “placemaking” first.

Aging Infrastructure: By most accounts, much of the infrastructure in the United States – roads, bridges, buildings and water/wastewater – is in serious disrepair. As these critical systems continue to age and deteriorate, governments at all levels are struggling to pay for maintenance and upkeep – not to mention investments in much-needed upgrades and new projects. Learn about possible alternatives to the ways these types of projects have been financed in the past.

Sustainability/Resiliency: The concept of sustainability is based on the premise that people and their communities are made up of social, economic and environmental systems that are in constant interaction and that must be kept in balance if the community is to continue to function to the benefit of its residents – now and in the future. In practice, the pursuit of sustainability is fundamentally a local endeavor because every community has different social, economic and environmental needs and concerns. Learn how communities that want to pursue sustainability try to: Maintain and, if possible, enhance the quality of life for residents; enhance local economic vitality; promote social and intergenerational equity; maintain and, if possible, enhance the quality of the environment; incorporate disaster resilience and mitigation into its decisions and actions; and use a consensus-building, participatory process when making decisions.

