

Department of Community Revitalization

History

Henrico County's Department of Community Revitalization was created in 2004 to administer the County's growing revitalization efforts and community development programs. The Department was created after a reorganization of the Planning Office to address ongoing changes and stabilize Henrico's older residential and commercial areas. The mission of the Department of Community Revitalization is to provide a coordinated and comprehensive approach to addressing the problems in the County's mature areas, in order to foster healthy and vibrant residential and commercial communities.

The first Director was John R. Marlles who helped to create the Department and came to the position with extensive community development experience earned as Director of Planning for the County of Henrico and the City of Roanoke. Mr. Marlles' untimely passing in the fall of 2005 led to the appointment in November 2005 of the current Department head, S. Mark Strickler. Mr. Strickler came to Henrico after serving in a variety of planning positions with the Virginia Department of Transportation, Chesterfield County and the City of Richmond as the Director of Community Development.

Directors

John R. Marlles, 2004 - 2005
S. Mark Strickler, 2005 - Present

Division Heads

Community Development
John A. Young, 2004 – 2011
David A. Sacks, 2011 – Present

Community Maintenance
Paul A. Johnson, 2004 – Present

Divisions

The Department of Community Revitalization consists of two divisions, the Division of Community Development and the Division of Community Maintenance. The Division of Community Development is responsible for planning and managing the Commercial Assistance Program, the Enterprise Zone Program, the Community Development Block Grant Program, the HOME Program and the Emergency Solutions Grant Program. The Division also prepares commercial revitalization plans for various older commercial areas in the County, serves as a resource on housing and community development issues and undertakes special redevelopment projects. The Division of Community Maintenance is responsible for enforcing zoning and environmental ordinances, which

relate to the condition and maintenance of privately owned residential and commercial properties. These ordinances include tall grass and weeds, trash and debris, inoperable motor vehicles, and zoning violations. The Division seeks to identify resources and volunteer services for homeowners in need of assistance to maintain their homes. The Community Maintenance Division also provides information and technical assistance to citizens and neighborhood groups interested in undertaking efforts to improve their community. Since the inception of the Department in 2004 over \$20 million in CDBG/HOME and Community Cleanup Program funds, and approximately 95,000 community service hours have been invested throughout the County.

Major Milestones:

2003-2004

The Community Development staff within the Planning Department, and soon to be part of the new Department of Community Revitalization, had a significant impact on the County's landscape by steering the County through the April 2003 application and approval process for Henrico's first Enterprise Zone. The zone encompassed portions of West Broad Street and Nine Mile Road. It provided state and local incentives aimed at encouraging business investment in older commercial areas and was a key element in attracting Philip Morris to relocate its corporate headquarters to Henrico County.

2004-2005

The first order of business for the new Department was to consolidate its offices at 4062 Crockett Street. The Community Maintenance Division was already located there and additional office space was leased to accommodate the Community Development Division and Director's office. The Department marked its first full year of operation in FY05 with a key achievement: the expansion of the Enterprise Zone. With the expansion, which doubled its size, the zone was extended to commercial and industrial properties along segments of Brook Road, Hilliard Road, Lakeside Avenue and Staples Mill Road.

2005-2006

On September 20, 2005, the Department suffered the loss of its first director John R. Marlles. Mr. S. Mark Strickler was hired to lead the Department as its second director on November 30, 2005.

One of the department's revitalization efforts earned special recognition from the National Association of Counties Achievement Award program. The Commercial Assistance Program works to facilitate rehabilitation of older, declining business areas by providing several enhancement activities, including preparation of commercial corridor plans; planning and coordination for infrastructure improvements; facilitation of rehabilitation grants; design assistance for building façade improvements; and the designation of Enterprise Zone corridors.

The Department of Community Revitalization continued its work to enhance community development efforts in the County in FY2005-06, obtaining another expansion of the Enterprise Zone by adding portions of Staples Mill Road, Williamsburg Road, Laburnum Avenue, Mechanicsville Turnpike and Audubon Drive, increasing the acreage of the zone from 1,822 to 3,246 acres.

2006-2007

The Department undertook a special effort to market and promote the Enterprise Zone. Community Revitalization coordinated with Henrico County TV to produce the feature program “Enterprise Zones,” developed a brochure and information packet detailing the benefits of the Enterprise Zone and held a workshop for business and property owners. In September, the Department hosted a kickoff event — attended by some 75 people — highlighting the expansion of the Enterprise Zone. The event resulted in a 10 percent increase in business visitation over the same period in the previous year. The National Association of Counties recognized the promotion program, honoring Community Revitalization with one of its achievement awards.

Areas of the Enterprise Zone also were featured in another Department promotion effort in FY2006-07 — a revitalization bus tour held for members of the Board of Supervisors, Planning Commission, county officials and local media. The extensive, countywide tour made 40 stops at current development sites as well as mature commercial corridors and neighborhoods, providing a firsthand glimpse of various rehabilitation and new construction projects for county leaders.

2007-2008

The Department of Community Revitalization implemented another expansion of the Enterprise Zone. The expansion added nearly 200 acres to include portions of East and South Laburnum Avenue; Azalea Avenue; Richmond-Henrico Turnpike; and Hungary, Woodman, Quioccasin, Three Chopt, Eastridge and Parham Roads. With this latest expansion the Enterprise Zone totals more than 3,400 acres. In addition, Community Revitalization received approval to add several locally funded grants to the Enterprise Zone incentives package, such as building façade enhancement for existing small businesses, paving, landscaping and building demolition grants.

To strengthen its effort to market these incentives and the Enterprise Zone, Community Revitalization worked to catalog suitable sites for new and expanding commercial uses. Staff inspected all the streets of the Enterprise Zone, identifying vacant land and buildings and creating a detailed listing of each property. The resulting Vacant Building and Land Inventory enables the Department to target areas within the Enterprise Zone where vacancies are increasing and encourage investment in the properties. It also helps staff focus mailings and other marketing efforts to business and property owners. The extensive inventory lists nearly 900,000 square feet of vacant retail, office and warehouse space and 68 acres of available land. The National Association of Counties recognized the effort, presenting Community Revitalization with an achievement award for the Vacant Building and Land Inventory.

2008-2009

In response to frequent inquiries and requests, Community Revitalization created a homeowners association database. Designed to give associations an accessible, reliable source of information, the database brings together details on common areas; locations of covenants; maintenance requirements for building exteriors, streets and parking lots; and other pertinent information.

A Department effort to enhance an in house recycling program expanded into a comprehensive environmental campaign. The “It’s Time to Green Your Office” initiative examined ways to cut office energy consumption, reduce the miles placed on department vehicles and increase the volume of recycled materials. Community Revitalization installed programmable thermostats and compact fluorescent light bulbs, turned off lights and computer monitors when not in use, and replaced desktop computers with laptops for the field inspectors. These and other measures produced dramatic results — a 27 percent drop in electricity use from the prior year. The use of efficient travel routes led to a 17 percent decrease in miles driven by staff. The recycling program significantly increased the amount and types of materials collected. The expanded effort recycled more than a half-ton of white paper; approximately 600 gallons of mixed paper, newspaper and cardboard; and 300 gallons of glass, plastic and aluminum cans.

Community Revitalization simultaneously introduced measures that allowed it to increase its caseload by 17 percent. The Department streamlined paperwork to speed resolution of cases, inspectors adopted flextime schedules and increased their use of mobile field computers, among other measures. The boost in efficiency — accomplished without adding staff — allows the Department to direct more of its efforts into the community.

2009-2010

The Department of Community Revitalization added a new tool to its toolbox and sharpened another in FY2009-10 as part of its ongoing effort to preserve and rejuvenate Henrico’s mature residential neighborhoods and commercial corridors. The “Homeowner’s Enhancement Guide: Updates for Today’s Lifestyles,” a comprehensive handbook that offers ideas, direction and tips for modernizing aging homes, was released in April and quickly became a popular resource for local homeowners and prospective homebuyers. Designed with Henrico’s older neighborhoods in mind — nearly 40 percent of the County’s single-family homes were built between 1945 and 1975 — the guide offers suggestions specific to the architectural style of the home, such as ranch, cape cod, colonial, split level and bungalow. The 132-page handbook features illustrations, diagrams and checklists to direct homeowners as they work to boost their home’s curb appeal, increase its energy efficiency, plan an addition and more. Community Revitalization distributed nearly 100 hardcopies of the Homeowners’ Enhancement Guide in the first three months after publication. The Department also made the book available on its website, where more than 1,000 free copies were downloaded; the website received some 4,200 visits over the same period.

The Enterprise Zone was further honed during FY2009-10. Approximately 180 acres of commercial properties from across the County were added, including areas along Quioccasin Road, North Parham Road, Starling Drive, Eastport Boulevard and South Laburnum Avenue.

Also, the inspectors in the Department's Community Maintenance program managed a record number of cases without adding staff and while logging fewer miles on their County vehicles. The staff handled 11,345 cases — such as inoperable vehicles, overgrown grass and weeds or trash and debris on a property — marking increases of 3 percent over the prior year and 20 percent over two years ago.

2010-2011

The Homeowner's Enhancement Guide, produced in FY2009-10 as part of the Department's ongoing effort to preserve Henrico's mature residential neighborhoods, received national recognition in FY2010-11. The Guide got the attention of the American Planning Association County Planning Division and the National Association of County Planners, which named the publication an Award of Merit recipient. The Guide also won a 2011 Achievement Award from the National Association of Counties. It earned regional recognition as well, receiving the 2010 Vision Award for Leadership in Public Policy from the Urban Land Institute Richmond.

As part of a larger Volunteer Assistance Program the department coordinates Operation Paintbrush, a free program that connects volunteers with elderly and/or disabled, low-income homeowners. In FY2010-11 the program facilitated the painting and repair of 17 homes; 241 volunteers worked an estimated 2,041 hours on the projects. Some 169 Henrico homes have received a fresh coat of paint since April 2000, thanks to Operation Paintbrush.

Another amendment to the Enterprise Zone was approved in FY2010-11, adding more than 45 acres of commercial property. The acreage added included properties near Staples Mill Road associated with the Libbie Mill mixed-use development; the Zeller-Gmelin Corporation headquarters on Audubon Drive; and properties on Oakleys Court and the Mankin Mansion on Oakleys Lane. The amendment also added a new incentive to the package available for businesses making investments in the Zone. The county began offering a grant for the demolition, replacement or refurbishment of existing freestanding business signs. The grant pays one-third of the cost up to a maximum of \$2,000 for sign improvements, which enhance the appearance of commercial areas.

2011-2012

Enterprise Zone activity began an uptick after the recession with the Department awarding 20 grants, including architectural design assistance, building façade renovations, repaving of parking lots, new landscaping and sign replacement. Grants totaling \$157,341 helped to spur \$2.8 million in private investment.

The Department also worked with 70 low and moderate income families to provide \$859,470 in physical improvements to their homes or financial assistance toward homeownership. Community Development Block Grant and HOME Partnership funds from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development supported the effort. Of the 70 families, six property owners received forgivable loans for home rehabilitation, while 26 others received grants for emergency or minor home repairs. Of the others, nine had handicapped accessible ramps installed and 25 received forgivable loans toward home down payments and closing costs. Two homes were built, and two vacant homes were rehabilitated and sold to first-time homebuyers.

2012-2013

In FY2012-13 the Department worked with County leadership and the General Assembly to extend the life of the Enterprise Zone by eight years. The General Assembly approved legislation allowing the Zone to continue until 2022. The Zone, established in 2003, had been set to expire in 2014.

In addition, the Zone was further expanded under an amendment approved in FY2012-13. The Zone was enlarged to include areas along Hermitage Road near Staples Mill Road, Darbytown Road near South Laburnum Avenue, Williamsburg Road near Leonard Avenue, Chamberlayne Road near Wilmer Avenue, Glenside Drive near Broad Street and a portion of the Richmond International Airport property slated for economic development. The expansion added 279 acres. The zone has attracted significant activity, with more than \$427 million in real property investment through 2011. In addition, 93 businesses have shared \$7.6 million in state tax credits, job creation grants and property improvement grants since 2003. Meanwhile, the state's real property improvement grants have leveraged private investments totaling more than \$167 million from 2005 through 2011. From 2003 to 2011, Henrico awarded 146 grants totaling more than \$946,000 for either design assistance or physical improvements to properties. In addition, the county approved more than \$1.5 million in property tax exemptions and more than \$922,000 in building permit fee waivers.

Thanks to a donation, the Department was able to design and install a gateway sign on Brook Road north of its interchange with Interstate 95. The sign, which measures 10 feet wide and up to 9 feet tall, recognizes Brook Road as part of the historic U.S. Route 1 corridor, extending from Maine to Florida. The sign and new landscaping enhance the Brook Road corridor and support Henrico's efforts to attract commercial investment. The Department also installed two gateway signs in the medians of Lakeside Avenue at either end of the Lakeside business corridor. The signs include a logo for Lakeside designed as part of the 1995 Lakeside Enhancement Plan produced by the County.

Also in FY2012-13, Community Revitalization continued to focus on promoting healthy neighborhoods and found that the number of code violations in certain communities has dropped sharply. A total of 3 percent of homes in surveyed neighborhoods had code violations in FY2012-13. That represents an overall decrease from FY2004-05, when 8 percent of homes in the survey had violations. The decreases have been dramatic in several neighborhoods, falling from rates as high as 25 percent and 23 percent to about

3 percent and 5 percent, respectively. The department has conducted the surveys annually to track neighborhood health and measure the effectiveness of efforts to reduce code violations. Neighborhoods included in the survey come from all five magisterial districts. The survey began with 15 neighborhoods, which combined for about 12,600 homes. Now the survey encompasses 27 neighborhoods and nearly 17,600 homes.

2013-2014

The Department worked with the Department of Recreation and Parks to renovate the Highland Springs Community Center and open a new neighborhood park on Brook Road. The federal Community Development Block Grant program funded both projects. The Highland Springs Community Center, at 16 S. Ivy Avenue, reopened following an extensive \$254,000 renovation. Recreation and Parks and non-county organizations use the facility. The Brook Road Neighborhood Park opened at 7202 Brook Road, adjacent to Belmont Golf Course. The 6-acre park site had been a trailer park before flooding by Tropical Storm Gaston in 2004. Henrico acquired the property two years later. Community Revitalization provided \$200,000 to clear and improve the property. The project included removing concrete pads, asphalt roads, utilities poles and dead trees; relocating utilities; and providing new topsoil, landscaping, decorative fencing and parking.

Enterprise Zone activity was up as 23 local grants were completed triggering \$265,000 of investment. Overall investment in the Enterprise Zone was over \$33 million for the year.

Also in FY2013-14, Community Revitalization continued to coordinate the Volunteer Assistance program including the Operation Paintbrush program. For the year, volunteers painted 24 homes. Overall, 586 volunteers worked 3,478 hours on the projects. Operation Paintbrush has improved more than 200 homes in Henrico since 2000.

2014-2015

A revitalization initiative was developed for the Highland Springs and the Richmond International Raceway areas. These are two areas of the County very much in need of attention and additional resources. As part of the development of the FY2015-16 General Fund budget, funding was requested and approved for additional code enforcement positions for Community Revitalization and Buildings Inspections in an effort to improve property and housing conditions in these areas. Additional funding was proposed and approved as part of the Federal Block Grant budget for FY2015-16 to acquire and rehabilitate vacant houses in these areas. Implementation will also include the study of the Highland Springs area as a National Register District, that if qualified could bring significant tax credit benefits to property owners that make improvements to their property. The Department applied for and received a State grant to pay for half of the National Register District study. Implementation of the initiative will

fully begin in FY2015-16. Community Revitalization will be carefully tracking results and progress of the initiative over time.

Community Revitalization prepared yet another amendment to the Enterprise Zone, which was approved by the Board of Supervisors and the Richmond City Council, and awaits final State approval. This amendment adds properties in the Regency area, properties along November Avenue, additional land for the Mankin Mansion property, and 149 acres of prime industrial land between S. Laburnum and S. Airport Drive north of Seven Hills Boulevard. The amendment added 168 acres, bringing the total acres in the Enterprise Zone to 3,811, just 29 acres less than the maximum permitted by the State.

The Department also worked to produce the Five-Year Consolidated Plan and a new Analysis of Impediments to Fair Housing. These documents are required by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development as part of the County receiving federal Block Grant funds. Extensive public hearings and public input went into the development of these documents, that will guide how federal funds will be spent over the next five years.

Awards:

The Department of Community Revitalization's efforts have not gone unrecognized. The list below outlines the Department's achievements recognized by various associations and organizations:

1. NACO-2006 Achievement award for "Commercial Assistance Program"
2. The Virginia Downtown Development Association's 2006 Business Development, Promotion, and Marketing Award of Merit for "Promoting the Enterprise Zone Program and Incentives through Henrico County Television Show, DVD, Brochure, and Information Packet."
3. NACO-2007 Achievement award for "Enterprise Zone Marketing and Promotion Program"
4. NACO-2008 Achievement award for "Enterprise Zone Vacant Building and Land Inventory"
5. Urban Land Institute Richmond 2010 Vision Award – Leadership in Public Policy for the County of Henrico Homeowner's Enhancement Guide
6. American Planning Association County Planning Division and the National Association of County Planners 2011 Award of Merit for the Homeowner's Enhancement Guide
7. NACO-2011 Achievement award for "County of Henrico Homeowner's Enhancement Guide"



News Release

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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April 28, 2004

Henrico County has created a new agency—the Department of Community Revitalization—to administer the county’s growing revitalization efforts and community development programs. The agency will become operational May 5.

The new department represents a reorganization of Henrico’s Planning Office and indicates the key role that enhancement of existing residential and commercial development plays in the county’s economic future. Over the past several years, the county’s Board of Supervisors and administration have recognized and addressed ongoing changes in Henrico’s neighborhoods, said County Manager Virgil R. Hazelett, P.E.

“A new agency is needed now to properly coordinate our expanding community programs and revitalization efforts,” Hazelett said. “This change reflects our commitment to the county’s older residential communities and commercial corridors.”

The Planning Office will divide into two agencies: the Department of Community Revitalization and the Department of Planning. The broad array of programs and services previously housed in the Planning Office will be divided between the new agencies. Community Revitalization will administer the Community Maintenance program; Community Development Block Grant/HOME programs; Virginia Enterprise Zone program; Commercial Revitalization Assistance; Neighborhood Planning; and zoning enforcement for existing developed sites. Responsibilities of the reorganized Department of Planning will include comprehensive and long-range planning; rezoning; plan of development and subdivision reviews; small area land-use

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studies; zoning enforcement of new development; and staffing for the Planning Commission and Board of Zoning Appeals.

The reorganization gives Henrico a more comprehensive, coordinated approach to neighborhood and commercial revitalization, said Deputy County Manager for Community Development Harvey Hinson.

“This change concentrates our revitalization activities into one office location, under one management,” Hinson said. “It allows us to give a sharper focus and daily attention to these programs and will streamline the coordination and efficient use of county resources.”

The change will further enhance the quality customer service provided to Henrico residents and businesses, Hinson added. The reorganization is the result of recommendations made in the county’s Eight Critical Issues initiative, he said.

Current Planning Director John Marles has been appointed director of Community Revitalization; Randall Silber, currently serving as assistant director of Planning, has been named director of the reorganized Department of Planning. The majority of personnel for the departments will come from the current Planning Office staff; a total of three positions have been created to fill the departments’ staffing needs. Community Revitalization will have 24 personnel and Planning will have a staff of 43.

The Department of Community Revitalization will be located at the county’s Crockett Street facility, which currently houses the Community Maintenance program. The Department of Planning will remain in the Government Center Administration Building at Parham and Hungary Spring roads.

The Department of Community Revitalization represents Henrico’s first new agency since The Permit Center opened in August 2001.

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