Reality Check
Envisioning our region's growth

Where Will 2 Million New Residents and 1.6 Million New Jobs Go?

ULI Washington

Smart Growth Alliance
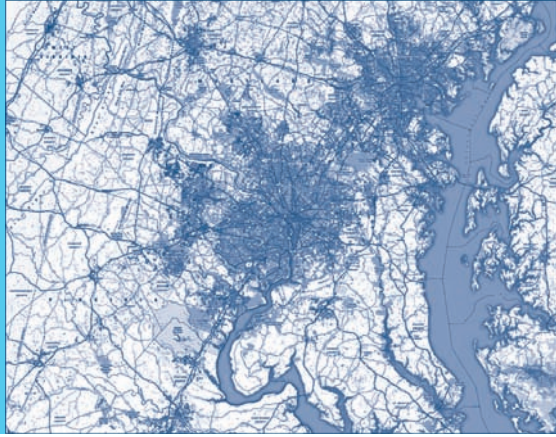
> Robust job creation is fueling the regional economy and, in turn, the demand for housing, schools, commercial buildings, and infrastructure. Experts tell us that by 2030 the region will have generated 1.6 million new jobs and have 2 million new residents, requiring an additional 833,000 housing units. Where will these new homes go? Where will our new residents and families live, work, and play?

Reality Check Sponsors

ULI Washington is the Washington, D.C., metropolitan area district council of ULI – the Urban Land Institute, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit research and education organization supported by its members. Founded in 1936, the Institute now has 26,000 members and associates worldwide, representing the entire spectrum of land use and real estate development disciplines, working in private enterprise and public service. As the preeminent, multidisciplinary real estate forum, ULI facilitates the open exchange of ideas, information, and experience among local, national, and international industry leaders and policy makers dedicated to creating better places. The mission of the Institute is to provide responsible leadership in the use of land to enhance the total environment. ULI's district councils offer a variety of learning, networking, and community outreach opportunities at the regional level.

The Smart Growth Alliance is a unique partnership formed by five distinct groups representing developer, civic, business, and environmental interests. These groups, which often sit on opposite sides of the table when it comes to growth issues, have elected to put aside their differences and work together on common goals for smart growth. The Smart Growth Alliance manages project and open-space recognition programs in the region. The five member groups are ULI Washington, the Chesapeake Bay Foundation, the Greater Washington Board of Trade, the Coalition for Smarter Growth, and the Metropolitan Washington Builder's Council.

Fannie Mae is a Fortune 500, shareholder-owned company with a public-spirited mission: to tear down barriers, lower costs, and increase the opportunities for homeownership and affordable rental housing for all Americans.

The Fannie Mae Foundation creates affordable homeownership and housing opportunities through innovative partnerships and initiatives that build healthy, vibrant communities across the United States. The foundation is specially committed to improving the quality of life for the people of its hometown, Washington, D.C., and to enhancing the livability of the city's neighborhoods.

Partner Organizations: The Chesapeake Bay Foundation | The Coalition for Smarter Growth | George Mason University | The Greater Washington Board of Trade | Johns Hopkins University Real Estate Department | Metropolitan Institute at Virginia Tech | Metropolitan Washington Builders' Council | The Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments | National Capital Planning Commission | National Center for Smart Growth at the University of Maryland

Executive Summary

The very name of the event – Reality Check: Envisioning Our Region's Growth – said it all. It was an opportunity for hundreds of leaders from throughout the Washington metropolitan region to pause for a single day to take stock of the pace and magnitude of the region's expected growth. In doing so, it served as a "reality check" for those leaders about where the region is headed.

Reality Check was a chance for a diverse group of stakeholders to think about how and where the 2 million new residents and 1.6 million new jobs that are expected to come to the region over the next 25 years will be located. For many of the participants, these statistics were a sobering reminder about the rapid rate of the region's growth and the pressing need for a regionwide conversation about how this growth will affect our economy, our environment and our quality of life.

Sponsored by ULI Washington – the Washington D.C. metropolitan area district council of the Urban Land Institute – and the Smart Growth Alliance, the Reality Check event was held February 2, 2005, at the Ronald Reagan Building and International Trade Center in Washington, D.C. More than 300 invited elected officials, business executives and leaders of civic and nonprofit organizations from

Washington, D.C., and 21 surrounding jurisdictions in nearby Maryland and Virginia, spent the morning participating in a regionwide visioning exercise. In the afternoon, an audience of approximately 800 heard the results of the morning exercise and a frank discussion of the political, financial, and social challenges the region faces in accommodating so much new growth in such a relatively short time.

Encouragingly, there was broad agreement among this diverse group of participants on several major points:

▶ Participants expressed widespread recognition that substantial growth is coming to the region, and a new appreciation for both the challenges and opportunities this growth will present.

▶ More importantly, there was a surprising level of agreement among the stakeholders about where the new growth should be located as well as universal support for protecting the region's natural areas.

▶ Finally, participants unanimously expressed their support for a more sustained and robust visioning and implementation effort throughout the region in the months and years to come.

"Reality Check was a chance for a diverse group of stakeholders to think about how and where the 2 million new residents and 1.6 million new jobs will be located."

By almost every measurable indicator, Reality Check participants said they want the Washington region to offer more households and jobs close to transit, more mixed-use development, a better balance of jobs and housing, and more compact development within or adjacent to existing cities and towns. For the most part, participants would keep most of the new development that is headed to the region away from the lightly developed suburban fringe – a shift that would be sharply contrary to the current trend throughout the region.

Participants collectively identified the following set of principles they said should guide future decisions on how to accommodate the new growth coming to the region:

▸ Preserve and protect natural areas, green spaces, and waterways;

▸ Create a better balance of jobs and housing and encourage mixed use development;

▸ Provide more housing opportunities for people at all income levels;

▸ Focus development near transit stations and along existing transportation corridors;

▸ Increase development on the eastern side of the region, especially in Prince George's County and east of the Anacostia River in Washington, D.C.; and

▸ Concentrate development near existing towns or other hubs of economic activity.

The results of the Reality Check exercise demonstrate the commitment of regional leaders to accommodate future growth, but to do so in ways that would result in a far different development pattern than the one that will unfold if the region's current growth trends remain unchallenged and unchanged. Participants seem to agree that the only way that can happen is if the regional conversation that was begun at the Reality Check event is continued and expanded to include other groups and individuals who are willing to help develop – and support – a vision for how the Washington region should grow in the decades to come.

Part 1 | Background

The Reality Check event was more than a year in the making. Inspired by a similar ULI-sponsored Reality Check event in Los Angeles and regional visioning exercises in Salt Lake City, Chicago, San Diego, Boston and elsewhere, the Washington effort brought together a large and varied group of stakeholders with a common interest in taking a regional look at our growth patterns and projections. (For a full list of participants, see page 25.)

What brought this disparate group of homebuilders, environmentalists, civic leaders, developers, business leaders, elected officials, regional planners, and academics together was their growing concern about the social, environmental, and economic costs to the region of its current pattern of development. The warning signs are only too well known to Washington area residents and businesses:

▸ Some of the worst traffic congestion in the country;

▸ Air pollution that threatens public health;

▸ Housing demand that far exceeds supply, contributing to increases in housing prices and a lack of homes for moderate- and low-income residents;

▸ Deflection of growth from established communities within Washington and its older suburbs outward to second- and third-ring counties, rural enclaves, and even to neighboring states;

▸ Increasing costs to taxpayers to provide the infrastructure needed to support this increasingly dispersed development pattern;

▸ Steady deterioration of water quality in the Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries due to runoff from the region's expanding acres of paved and other impervious surfaces;

▸ Tax and other economic ramifications for a region in which individual jurisdictions too often compete rather than cooperate for a finite amount of resources; and

▸ Rapid loss of farmland, forests, wetlands, wildlife habitats, and scenic vistas throughout the region and, with that, a loss of rural character and resource-based industries.

Ironically, the region's problems are in many ways a reflection of its success as one of the nation's major economic engines. People continue to be attracted to the

Washington region because of the strong job market, top-quality schools and elite academic institutions, and the area's rich and varied cultural and natural resources. Simply stated, it is a great place to live and work. During the five-year period between November 1999 and November 2004, the region gained 223,000 new jobs, over 50 percent more than the next-highest growth areas of Phoenix and Las Vegas. In the last year alone, an estimated 70,000 new jobs were created throughout the region.

The men and women who fill these jobs are generally well educated, ethnically and culturally diverse, and have high income levels compared with those working in other parts of the United States. The region's estimated median income of $70,666 in 2003, as calculated by the *Claritas Household Trend Report*, was the highest of any metropolitan area in the country.

The core attraction for this job growth has always been the federal government – the region's largest employer – and the broad array of businesses associated with it. Economists say the long-term strength of the regional economy is expected to come from federal outsourcing of jobs as well as from high levels of in-migration and international immigration.

The region's period of rapid population expansion began in the 1930s. Its population doubled between 1950 and 1970, and increased another 58 percent between 1970 and 2000. In just the most recent census period, from 1990 to 2000, the number of residents in the region jumped from 4.7 million to 5.5 million.

As the population expanded over the past half century, jobs and housing for the region's workforce have migrated steadily from Washington to new rings of development outside the central city, first to a series of "streetcar suburbs" and later to suburban and then more distant rural counties. The ten-square-mile national capital that was plotted on the banks of the Potomac River in 1787 has bulged into a region that now in 2005, stretches across 6,000 square miles and extends from Fredericksburg, Virginia, to Baltimore, and from West Virginia to the shoreline of the Chesapeake Bay and beyond.

The benefits of this rapid growth, however, also have been unevenly dispersed across the region. Much of the new job and higher-end residential growth has occurred in the western half of the region, while concentrations of poverty persist and comparatively little job growth occurs in the eastern section.

The Region Divided: The State of Growth in Washington, D.C., a landmark study published by the Brookings Institution in 1999, documented a region divided by race, job growth, and public investment. The wealthiest households and most of the job growth are located in the western portion of the region, while lower-income households are concentrated in the eastern section of the District of Columbia and Prince George's County. This "east/west" divide worsens traffic congestion and limits opportunity for many of the region's residents as job opportunities move further away from housing.

It was not the region's past growth, however, but rather the forecast for its future growth that brought people together for the Reality Check event this winter.

"We might want to enhance collaboration among ourselves at the jurisdictional level and look at our patterns

"In just the most recent census period, the number of residents in the region jumped from 4.7 million to 5.5 million."

of growth, development and, indeed, our land use policy," suggested Gerry Connolly, chairman of the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors and a Reality Check participant.

By 2030, the region's population is expected to grow to 7.5 million people, an increase of 2 million people in just the next 25 years. With that growth in population will come another 1.6 million new jobs and the need to create 833,000 additional housing units. To accommodate that new growth, government – that is to say, taxpayers – will be asked to provide new schools, roads, police and fire stations, wastewater treatment plants, water filtration systems, parks, and other services and facilities.

"We need to be looking out ten to 20 or 30 years from now," said Montgomery County Executive Doug Duncan, another Reality Check participant. "What are we going to do with the people who want to come to this region to live, and how are we going to deal with the jobs that are coming to this region? How are we going to provide affordable housing for the people who are going to work in our economy?"

Growing concern about the shortage of housing at affordable prices was one of the troublesome trends that became an impetus for the Reality Check event. According to the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (COG), the median sales price of housing in the region has increased by 59 percent over the past six years, from $166,548 in 1997 to $267,047 in 2003, putting a large part of the area's existing housing stock out of reach for low- and even moderate-income residents.

Elected officials, local and regional planners, and building industry representatives recognize that until this scarcity of affordable housing is addressed, area residents

Jurisdictions within the Reality Check region

Douglas Duncan, County Executive, Montgomery County

Regional distribution of jobs paying $75,000 or more annually in 2000

Legend

1 Dot = 100

• Workers Earning over $75,000 in 2000

0 2 4   8   12   16
Miles
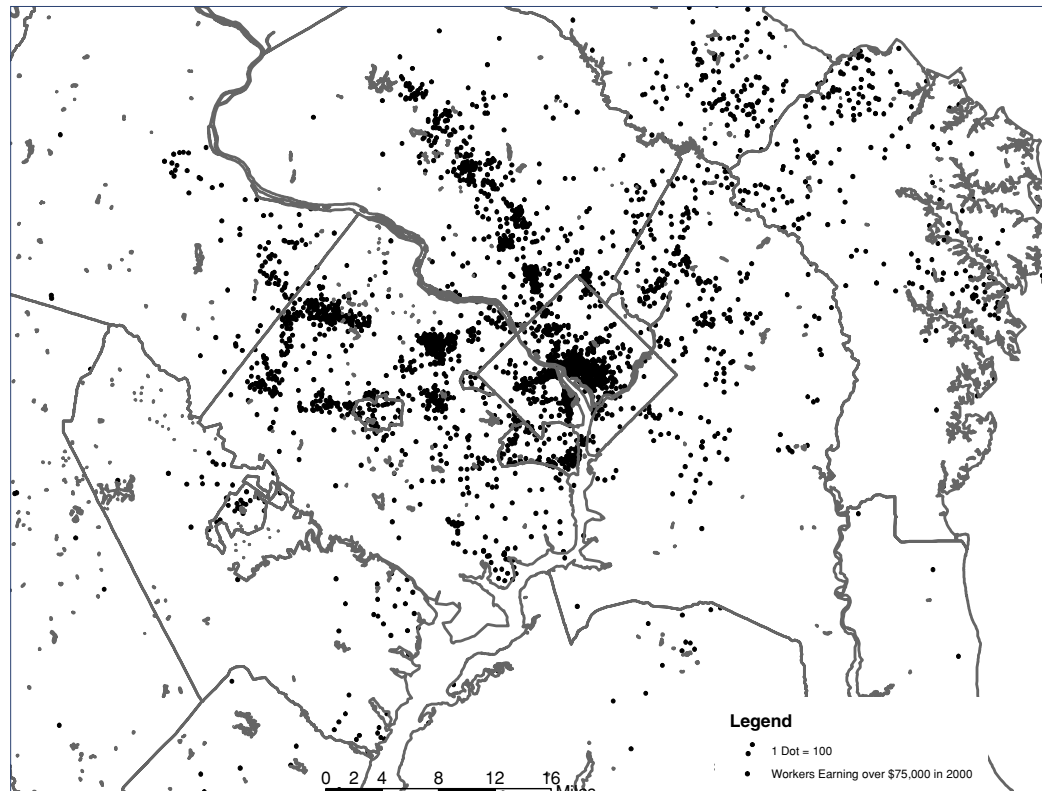
Source: Urban Institute, *Housing in the Nation's Capital 2004*.

will continue to move to distant locations where land and housing prices are more affordable. Such a shift places pressure on suburban and rural jurisdictions to provide more roads, schools, and other infrastructure; results in more time-consuming and costly long-distance commutes; and frustrates planning efforts that encourage a more compact regional pattern of development.

"If demand and supply are out of whack within the city, then there's pressure on the suburbs," observed one Loudoun County official.

Reality Check participants uniformly agree that goals for the region should include the provision of more affordable housing and a better jobs/housing mix. Many, however, recognize that to achieve such a goal may require the public to become more accepting of mixed-income housing within their jurisdictions and more supportive of government programs to help finance such housing.

One of the principal goals of Reality Check was to raise consciousness about the level and pace of growth that is coming and ignite a regional dialogue about what to do about it. For a single day, participants engaged in a planning exercise that afforded them a bird's-eye view of the region and temporarily empowered them to make sweeping decisions about how and where the region should grow. By inviting elected officials, business leaders, and representatives from nongovernmental organizations representing all 22 of the region's jurisdictions, event organizers were determined to acknowledge the legitimate points of view of all stakeholders.

"Developers and builders and environmentalists are beginning to see there are some concentric rings where we agree more than disagree," said Will Baker, president of the

Chesapeake Bay Foundation. "Events like [Reality Check] help to expand and develop those concentric rings where you agree. It is democracy at its finest."

While the results were significant, it is important to remember that this was only a three-hour exercise, not a three-year planning effort. It was intended to identify a general direction for the region, not to produce specific results or create a regional plan. February 2, 2005, was a beginning, not an end. Above all else, it was an effort to get people in the region talking with each other about how and where our region should grow.

"I just wish that all of our communities could engage in that kind of open and honest debate and perhaps we would have better planned communities," said participant Jim Upchurch of the Interfaith Housing Alliance.

February 2, 2005, was a beginning, not an end. Above all else, it was an effort to get people in the region talking with each other about how and where our region should grow.

Washington region population and employment change, 1900–2030
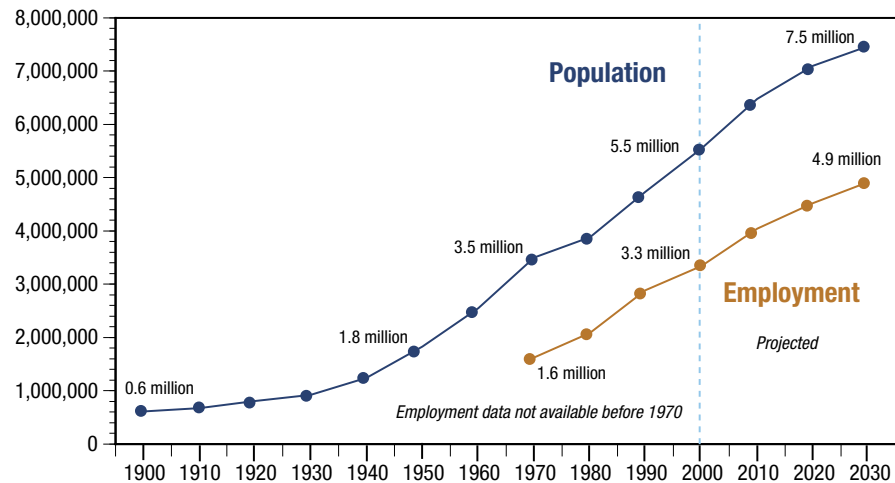
Courtesy: Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments

To envision the future of the Washington region, Reality Check participants were assigned to 30 tables, ten participants to a table, and asked to think about how and where the region should grow. On each table was a six-foot by eight-foot map of the region, shaded in various colors to represent the existing population and employment density.

Part 2 | How the Game Was Played

Maps and LEGO blocks

To envision the future of the Washington region, Reality Check participants were assigned to 30 tables, ten participants to a table, and asked to think about how and where the region should grow. On each table was a six-foot by eight-foot map of the region, shaded in various colors to represent the existing population and employment density. The maps also depicted major highways; Metro; MARC; and VRE rail lines and transit stations; parkland or other protected conservation areas that are off limits for new development; airports and other government installations; and rivers and other bodies of water including, of course, the Chesapeake Bay. In addition, the maps depicted the 58 regional activity centers identified by COG, primarily on the basis of job and commercial activity within the region. These centers have special significance for future economic and cultural growth, since they account for more than 50 percent of the region's employment. The "urban envelope" is a U.S. Census designation that essentially separates already developed areas from rural areas and was used in the Reality Check context to reflect the current boundary of existing development in the region.

To encourage participants to think regionally rather than locally, all jurisdictional boundaries were intentionally omitted, although place names of cities and towns helped participants orient themselves. Each table was staffed with a computer operator to capture results, a scribe to take notes, and a trained facilitator to lead the exercise. Participants were given three hours to plan the entire region.

Participants at each table were given a set of markers and a box of LEGO® blocks to represent the new jobs and population forecast for the region. Every yellow LEGO block represented 3,000 new households and every blue block represented 6,000 new jobs. Each of the 30 teams was asked to place enough blocks on its map to represent the new population and employment headed to the region by 2030: 280 yellow blocks (representing the projected increase of 2 million new residents, or 833,000 new households) and 270 blue blocks (representing the projected increase of 1.6 million new jobs). The maps were overlaid with a checkered grid at a scale of one square mile and sized so a single block would fit on each grid. Participants who wanted to add more than 3,000 households or more than 6,000 jobs to a single square-mile grid simply needed to stack their yellow or blue blocks. Those who proposed a mixed-use development pattern could represent this by stacking yellow and blue blocks together.

"To encourage participants to think regionally rather than locally, all jurisdictional boundaries were intentionally omitted."

Base map from Reality Check exercise
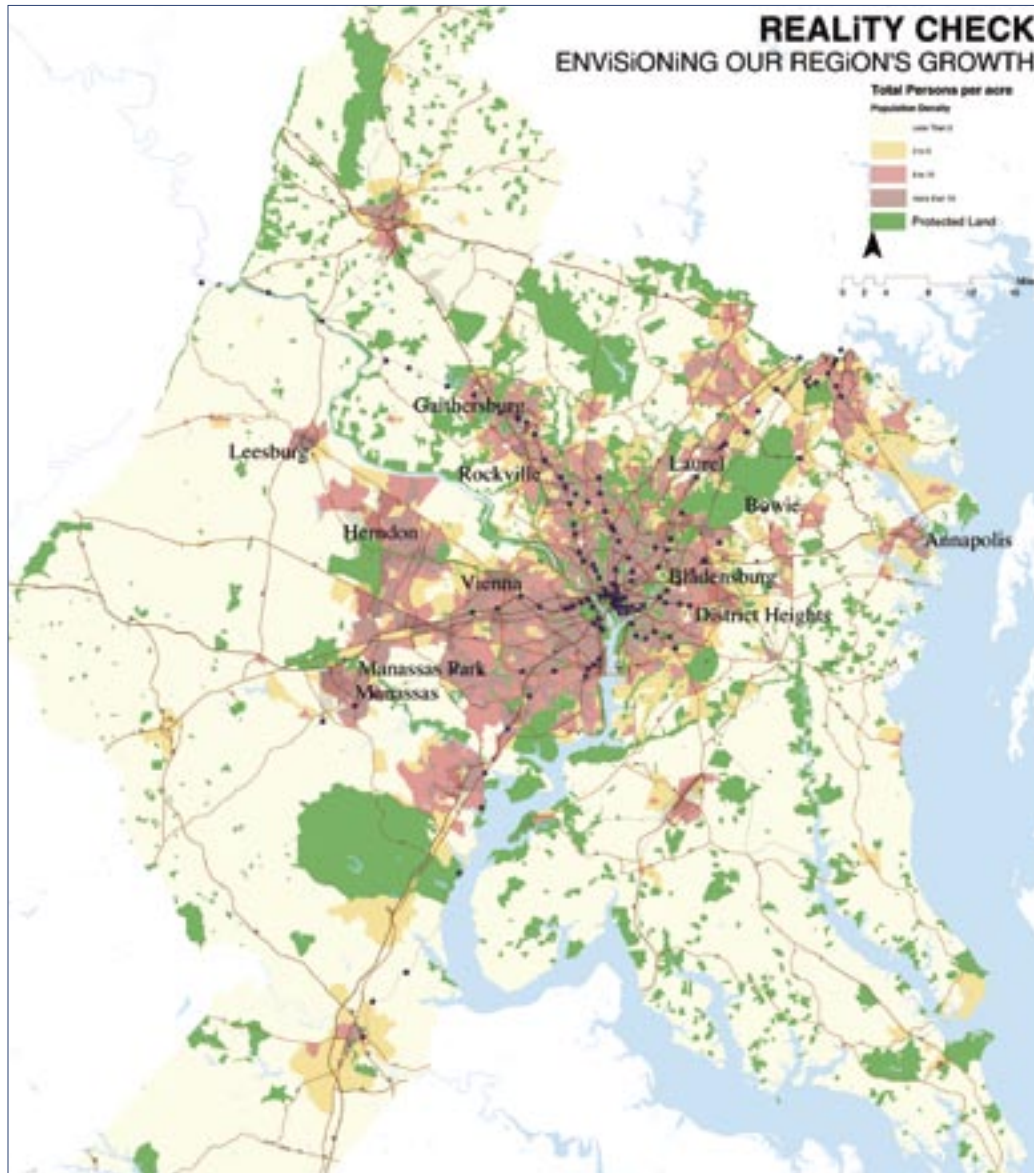
Jay Fisette, Arlington County Board Chair

Cathy Hudgins, Fairfax County Board of Supervisors

Participants also could use their markers to delineate areas they wished to protect from development.

Finally, each table was given a supply of white LEGO blocks to use anytime they placed new housing or jobs on grids already occupied by existing housing or jobs. These white blocks enabled participants to better see the cumulative effect of their decisions on density, as three-dimensional LEGO block towers rose from different grids on the map.

"As a professional in the business, I knew it was big," remarked Jim Todd, president of the Peterson Companies, a major development firm in the area, "but until I saw it physically on a map, with those little plastic blocks, I really didn't know how big it is."

After playing the game, Washington, D.C., Mayor Anthony Williams predicted the Reality Check event "is going to have an impact because it is a very ingenious way to use a map and a physical demonstration to exemplify these issues of density and land use that really go to how we feel about ourselves politically and economically and in every other way."

Principles to guide development

Before the first LEGO block could be placed, participants at each table were asked to suggest and agree upon a set of overriding principles to guide their growth decisions. Facilitators insisted that all views be considered and that consensus be reached before a principle could be adopted. Scribes at each table recorded the principles, which were later collected and tabulated.

Anthony Williams, Mayor, District of Colombia

Participants playing the game by stacking LEGO blocks stacked on the maps.

"The enthusiasm in the room is palpable," said Kate Hanley, former chair of the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors. "The broad areas of consensus were amazing and as I wander around the room I found it not only fun, but very educational."

"Back room" computer operators analyze the results.

Although the participants came from different parts of the region, represented different constituencies or points of view, and were of varied races, genders, ages and political affiliations, they enunciated remarkably similar sets of guiding principles. The most frequently cited principles include the following:

▶ Preserve and protect natural areas, green spaces and waterways (cited at all 30 tables);

▶ Create a better balance of jobs and housing throughout the region (cited at 22 tables);

▶ Focus development near transit stations (21 tables);

▶ Concentrate development along existing transportation corridors (13 tables);

▶ Increase development on the eastern side of the region and/or along the Anacostia River (12 tables);

▶ Concentrate development near existing towns (12 tables) or in the COG-designated regional activity centers (11 tables);

▶ Encourage more mixed-use development (11 tables);

▶ Provide more housing choices (nine tables);

▶ Focus development around existing infrastructure (eight tables); and

▶ Concentrate development inside the Capital Beltway (five tables).

Every grid on the map was numbered in advance. When the exercise was over, each table's computer operator

captured the results by attributing every LEGO block to the grid on which it was placed and recording this information in the table's computer. After every table's results were fed into a central computer, a team from the University of Maryland's National Center for Smart Growth Research and Education and Virginia Tech's Metropolitan Institute converted the results into two- and three-dimensional (2-D and 3-D) maps for each table, analyzed the results, and prepared a display of maps showing the tables that placed the most or fewest jobs or households in the following locations:

▸   Close to transit;

▸   Inside the Capital Beltway;

▸   Inside the Washington region's urban envelope; and

▸   In the more lightly developed areas outside of the urban envelope.

Reality Check indicators

Washington D.C.

Beltway

Urban Envelope

0.5 Mile Radious Buffer of Transit Station

30   15   0   30 Miles
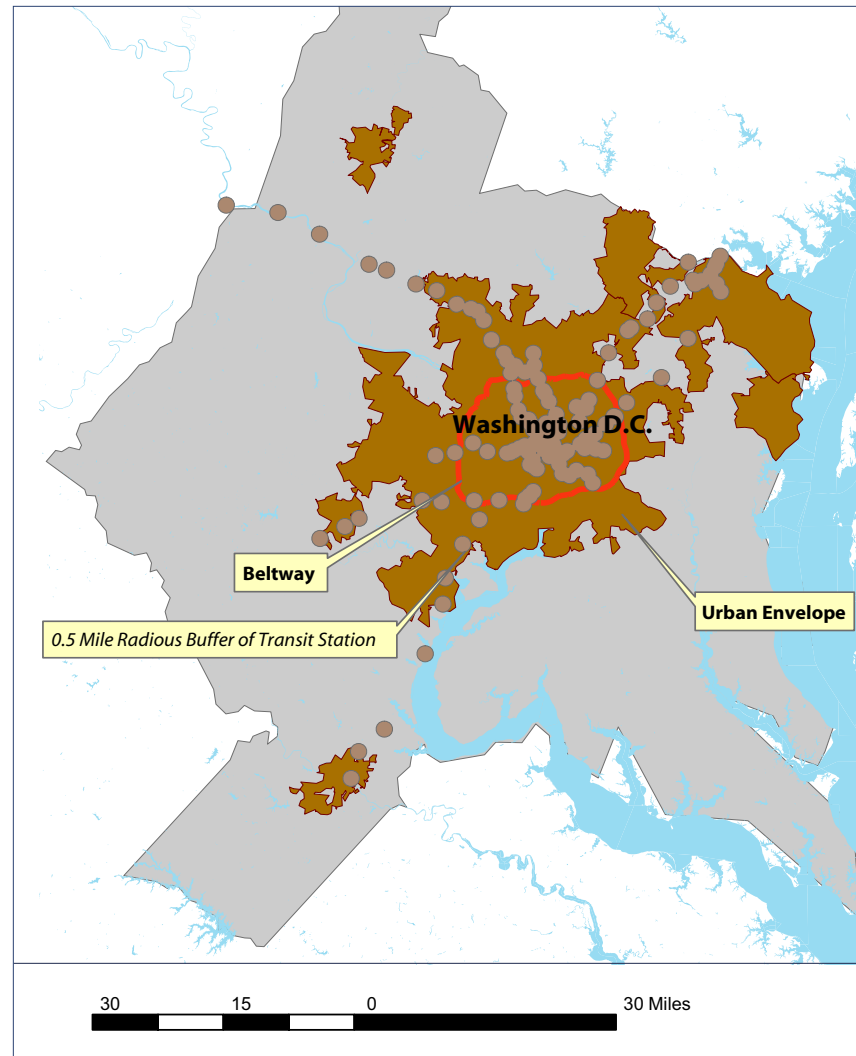
Tables that produced unusual variations in development patterns also were identified and highlighted during the final presentation of results.

An hour and 45 minutes after the game ended, Gerrit Knaap, executive director of the University of Maryland's National Center for Smart Growth Research and Education, presented the results to an audience of 800 assembled in the Ronald Regan Building's amphitheater.

Using examples of the 2D and 3D maps, Knaap described the tables that placed their LEGO blocks in the most compact pattern, those that placed them in the most dispersed pattern, those that placed the most jobs close to transit stations, and so forth. The results, said Knaap, illustrated that "a diverse group of people can come together to address common regional issues." He added that "there was an extremely high level of participation."

Gerrit Knaap presenting the game results to the audience in the amphitheater.

"As a professional in the business, I knew it was big," remarked Jim Todd, president of the Peterson Companies," but until I saw it physically on map, with those little plastic blocks, I really didn't know how big it is."

Part 3 | Specific Results

The analysis revealed that Reality Check players remained remarkably true to their lists of guiding principles. At every table, for example, participants chose to protect the shorelines of rivers, the Chesapeake Bay, and other bodies of water from new development, demonstrating a broad understanding of the linkage between development and water quality. In placing new development on the maps, most players also gave a wide berth to parks and other existing protected natural areas. Participants searched for ways to provide for future growth while protecting natural areas and the region's history and sense of place.

By almost every measurable indicator, the participants said by their actions that they wanted the Washington region to provide *more* households and jobs close transit, *more* mixed-use development, a *better* jobs/housing balance, and *more* compact development in already developed towns and cities. For the most part, participants at each of the 30 tables avoided placing new development in the lightly developed suburban fringe, even though that is clearly the current trend throughout the region.

As eye catching as these results may seem, they are even more compelling when compared with COG projections of where growth in the region is likely to go if current development patterns remain unchanged. The COG forecasts are based on regional econometric modeling of employment, population, and households combined with locally generated forecasts that are based on short-term permit activity and long-term comprehensive plans.

In comparison with the Reality Check results, the COG analysis generally predicts a region that will have *fewer* houses close to transit, *fewer* inside the Beltway, *far fewer* inside the region's larger urbanized areas and *substantially more* housing on the suburban fringe. While this analysis represents current trends for the region, most Reality Check participants insisted that these trends need not be the region's destiny.

Transit-oriented development

For example, at every table, Reality Check participants increased the amount of households that would be located near transit stations, expressing a common desire to take advantage of the existing public investments in the Metro, MARC, and VRE systems and to make alternative forms of transportation more accessible as a means of alleviating chronic traffic congestion. In some cases, this proposed increase in residential development around transit stations was

"Participants searched for ways to provide for future growth while protecting natural areas and the region's history and sense of place."

Jobs/Housing Balance at Tyson's Corner and Near Dulles

The concept of improving the share of housing that is located near jobs was clearly on the minds of many Reality Check participants, especially as they placed Legos on the map around two bustling areas in Northern Virginia – Tysons Corner and Dulles International Airport. In both of those areas, jobs are expected to far outstrip the construction of new housing unless current trends are changed.

But changing those trends was precisely what Reality Check players proposed.

Tysons Corner, home to nearly 90,000 jobs and the region's largest commercial shopping mall, is expected to gain another 42,000 jobs by 2030, but only 7,100 more households, according to forecasts by the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (COG). So much development is already concentrated in the Tysons Corner area that Fairfax County officials are now entertaining proposals that would transform this suburban shopping Mecca into Northern Virginia's urban hub – a new "downtown" in the suburbs, not unlike what has happened in Bethesda and Silver Spring, Maryland.

The Reality Check participants agreed with that idea. Recognizing that Tysons Corner is a major, COG-designated "activity center" for the region, they placed 20,000 jobs within the 9-square-mile area considered Tysons – less than half as many as COG is forecasting. But to make those jobs accessible to more households, the Reality Check participants added 11,000 new households – about 35 percent more than COG forecast.

The existing ratio of jobs to households in the Tysons Corner area is 4.3 to 1, but if trends forecast by COG occur, the ratio will become even more unbalanced at 4.6 to 1. But if the changes in housing and jobs proposed by the Reality Check participants were to occur, the ratio would be reduced to 3.4 jobs for every household.

The Reality Check results were similar within an 80-square-mile area surrounding Dulles International Airport. COG analysts predict the Dulles area will attract 70,547 new jobs by 2030, but only 6,566 new households. Participants at the Reality Check event, however, placed even more jobs – 92,802 – around Dulles, but attempted to balance them with 35,500 new households – more than five times more households than current trends would indicate.

Even with such a huge influx of new housing, the jobs-to-housing ratio around Dulles would be 1.9 jobs for every house, but still better than the 2.2-to-1 ratio based on the COG projections.

Clearly, the Reality Check participants felt no reluctance supporting intense development in already heavily developed areas outside-the-Beltway like Tysons and Dulles. But, just as clearly, they sought to turn these areas into more balanced edge cities, where workers could reasonably expect to find housing nearby.

"But, just as clearly, they sought to turn these areas into more balanced edge cities, where workers could reasonably expect to find housing nearby."

Bethesda Row

substantial. Participants at a number of tables also said they intentionally placed more housing and jobs on certain parts of the map, such as at Tysons Corner and in the vicinity of Dulles International Airport in Virginia, because they anticipated an expansion of the region's rail network to those areas.

About 11 percent of households within the region currently are located within a half-mile radius of transit stations. Reality Check participants would increase that figure to 18 percent. That would mean nearly one in five

houses in the region would be easily accessible by transit. In sharp contrast, the COG forecasts predict that the number of households close to transit actually will fall to ten percent, meaning only one in every ten of the houses in the region would be in close proximity to transit.

Similarly, at almost every table, participants proposed an increase in new jobs adjacent to transit stations. That, combined with the increase in residential development they also proposed near transit stations, allowed participants to demonstrate their support for more mixed-use development.

About a quarter of the jobs in the region are now within a half-mile of transit stations, a figure that would rise to 28 percent if the Reality Check decisions were implemented. Again, however, the COG forecasts predict an opposite trend, with the number of jobs close to transit actually declining to 19 percent over the next 25 years.

One explanation for the COG prediction is that the cost of living in close-in, transit-oriented developments may prove to be too high for many area residents, pushing them instead to lower-cost locations on the periphery of the region. Denser housing near transit often is more expensive than conventional greenfield development because the demand for such housing is high and because both regulatory obstacles and community concerns must be overcome to build such housing. Moreover, the cost of land generally is higher, as is the cost of developing structured parking and high-rise buildings.

If the Reality Check principles were actually to be implemented, they would result in a huge increase in the number of households near transit – nearly 241,000 more – and an even larger increase in transit-oriented employment,

Indicator comparisons

Indicators	Existing	Reality Check	COG Forecasts
Percent of Households within 0.5 Miles of Transit	11	18	10
Percent of Jobs within 0.5 Miles of Transit	25	28	19
Percent of Households inside the Beltway	34	35	28
Percent of Jobs inside the Beltway	43	41	36
Percent of Households within the Urban Envelope	84	84	67
Percent of Jobs within the Urban Envelope	89	88	72
Percent of Households outside the Urban Envelope	16	16	33
Percent of Jobs outside the Urban Envelope	11	12	28

with 461,000 more jobs located within a half-mile of transit stations. Working in favor of more development near transit is the expectation that much of the region's new growth will consist of households without children. The population per household has been declining for several decades, the result of fewer children per family, marriages at later ages, divorce, and other national and regional demographic trends. The average household size in the Washington area has decreased from 2.72 persons in 1990 to 2.62 in 2000 and is part of a continuing national downward trend. Households without children are more likely to look for compact development near transit than families with children.

Compact development

The most glaring difference between the development pattern envisioned by Reality Check participants and the trend that COG analysts have predicted relates to whether new households and jobs will be located within already developed areas or be permitted instead in more low-density areas on the outskirts of the region.

To accommodate the expected new growth in residents and employment, the Reality Check participants said they would essentially maintain the current ratio of households and jobs that are inside the Beltway, inside the urban envelope, and even outside the urban envelope:

- About 34 percent of existing households are located inside the Beltway; Reality Check participants would have about 35 percent inside the Beltway;

- About 84 percent of existing households are located within the region's larger urban envelope, a figure that would be unchanged if the scenarios painted by Reality Check participants came to pass;

- The same is true regarding the percentage of households on greenfield sites outside the urban envelope: 16 percent today; 16 percent under the Reality Check scenario.

"The group I was with was focusing on taking this [new] density and concentrating it on existing corridors of transportation, existing Metro centers, around existing airports, rather than breaking out into totally new areas, densifying and enhancing the areas that already exist," said Jim Todd of the Peterson Companies.

By assigning much of the new growth to already developed areas, the Reality Check decisions would result in densities in many places that would be comparable to those on Capitol Hill and in Old Town Alexandria, areas that are denser than most current development in the region.

It is not surprising, therefore, that the COG forecast of where growth in the region is actually headed shows a far different scenario in every instance. Instead of 35 percent of housing located inside the Beltway, COG predicts the figure will fall to 28 percent; instead of 84 percent of housing inside the urban envelope, COG says it is more likely to be 67 percent; and, most worrisome to those whose guiding

Compactness in household allocation
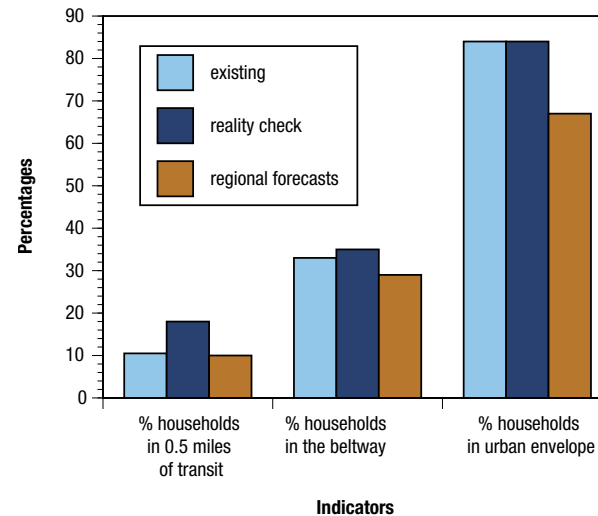
principle is to shield undeveloped areas from the pressures of new growth, the Reality Check goal of keeping housing developed on green field lots to about 16 percent would, instead, more than double to 33 percent. Most worrisome to those whose guiding principle is to shield undeveloped areas from the pressures of new growth, COG forecasts that the amount of housing developed on greenfield lots, rather than remaining at the Reality Check goal of about 16 percent, will instead more than double to 33 percent. This means that fully one-third of the region's housing would be located in the suburban fringe, with obvious and substantial impacts on farms and forests, commuting times, transportation investments, and business decisions. Such a shift would have

> "The debate all too frequently is, 'Are we going to grow or are we not going to grow?' That's the wrong question. [The right question] is, "How are we going to grow and where are we going to grow?'" said Montgomery County Councilman Tom Perez.

a direct effect on state and local taxes devoted to providing schools, infrastructure, and services. It also would affect the health, pocketbooks, and quality of life of those who live in the region and potentially threaten the region's overall economic competitiveness.

"The pressing issue, obviously, is the anticipated growth that's coming, whether we like it or not," said one Reality Check participant. "The debate all too frequently is, 'Are we going to grow or are we not going to grow?' That's the wrong question. [The right question] is, 'How are we going to grow and where are we going to grow?'" said Montgomery County Councilman Tom Perez.

Implicit in the decisions made by Reality Check participants was the recognition that the region's governments will never have enough money for all of the transportation projects, water and sewer systems, and other infrastructure needed to support such a dispersed development pattern. That is why so many of the Reality Check participants pursued a "fix-it-first" approach, agreeing that it makes more sense to develop in areas where the buildings, infrastructure, and services are already in place, even if in many cases that also will require upgrading existing buildings and infrastructure.

"You have to concentrate on issues such as using current infrastructure, specifically our transportation nodes, to really foster affordable housing, workforce housing, as well as jobs in the region on a very broad basis," suggested Retta Gilliam, president and CEO of the East of the River Community Development Corporation.

Part 4 | Next Steps

The 300 leaders from the Washington metropolitan region who assembled for the Reality Check exercise in February 2005 reached an almost surprising level of agreement that the region must adopt a better planned, more intentional pattern of development. They envisioned a region that is more convenient and more walkable, one in which they would spend less time stuck in traffic. They saw a region that provides greater access to parks and natural areas, more travel and housing choices, and a real opportunity to meet the needs of residents regardless of their age, income, or stage in life.

But if they are united in that vision, they are even more unified in their view that getting there will not be easy. It is one thing for players to place LEGO blocks on a map to suggest that more jobs should be created in under-served communities, but quite another to convince employers to locate there. It may be admirable, if not idealistic, for participants to suggest that more moderate- and low-income housing be built in or near the more affluent enclaves of Montgomery or Fairfax counties, but obtaining community support and/or the required approvals for such a change would be extremely difficult. Indeed, to achieve the Reality Check results would require significant changes in how

the region is growing and would face serious market and political challenges.

In short, without a fundamental shift in thinking – unless the public coalesces around a new vision for metropolitan Washington that recognizes that the quality of life of all residents is at stake – suggestions on how to improve the overall pattern of development may, in reality, have little chance of obtaining the community or political support that is needed.

"What is really at stake is the future of this region," said the Chesapeake Bay Foundation's Will Baker.

The task of convincing residents to accept even more development is not going to be easy, especially when many already consider their neighborhoods too crowded and their streets too congested. As Robert J. Grow, founder and chairman emeritus of Envision Utah, pointed out in his keynote speech on the afternoon of February 2: "When you're driving in the fog, the fog suddenly gets thicker and you're not sure where you are headed, your natural inclination is to slam on the brakes." Significant growth is coming to the Washington region and nothing is likely to change that fact. But, absent an overall vision that makes clear to the region's residents where we are collectively headed, it is only natural for them to slam on the brakes.

"What is really at stake is the future of this region," said the Chesapeake Bay Foundation's Will Baker."

The need for a regional vision

Many Reality Check participants believe the solution is to harness new development in ways that improve the community as a whole. The idea is to assure that residents will still love to live in the region even *after* the new growth occurs. But to do that, participants acknowledged, will require a process that keeps the big picture in mind, is fair to all stakeholders, and empowers the public in the decision-making process. The choice before us is simple to understand: There can either be a vision for how to accommodate the new growth in specific parts of the region, or it will just go wherever it is allowed to go.

"As a region, I think the issue is less one of controlling growth and more one of planning to accommodate it," said Tom Bozzuto, president and chief executive officer of the Maryland homebuilding firm, The Bozzuto Group.

Residents therefore need to realize the cumulative effect on the region when they and their local elected leaders say "no" to new growth. That new growth will not go away or disappear. It will just move elsewhere, perhaps to a place where someone else does not want it and possibly to a location where it will detract from the region as a whole.

Just as importantly, when local governments say "yes" to new growth, they need to make sure that increases in density are accompanied by improved community amenities. These can include grocery stores in under-served neighborhoods, new or better-maintained parks, or more options for travel. The region unquestionably needs to provide better ways for residents to move around in their cars, but residents also need more options to get around *without* a car, such as walking, bicycling, or transit.

A shared vision for regional growth undoubtedly will produce shared benefits, but it also will require residents to accept certain tradeoffs.

"We need more homes, we need more jobs, we need to respect the environment," said Tom Perez, president of the Montgomery County Council. "But we also need to respect communities and community concerns. We need to address school overcrowding, and the challenge that a lot of the policies you put in place are sometimes at cross purposes."

Beginning the conversation

The kind of changes envisioned by Reality Check participants – denser development in already developed areas, more development around transit stations or along transportation corridors, more mixed-use development, increased development on the eastern side of the region – can be attained only if there is a widely supported regional vision that supports such goals and the local political willpower to turn that vision into reality. The solution has to be supported simultaneously from the bottom up and from the top down.

The shortage of modestly priced housing, the long commutes thousands of area residents make to and from work each day, and the loss of farmland to new development will not change just because 300 men and women spent a single morning placing LEGO blocks on a map. Although a visioning exercise like Reality Check changes nothing on the ground, it can begin to change the way people think about the region's built environment – and the region's future.

As the Reality Check results so clearly demonstrate, there is a significant disconnection between the vision of where regional leaders believe future growth should go and

"The choice before us is simple to understand: There can either be a vision for how to accomodate the new growth in specifics parts of the region, or it will just go wherever it is allowed to go."

the trends in where new development seems to be headed. There also, obviously, is a gap between what people say they want and what local officials will approve or local communities will accept.

"People are beginning to understand when they sit in their SUV in a traffic jam that there is no immediate solution. The solution should have been started years ago," said Kevin Leahy, a member of the Spotsylvania County Planning Commission in Virginia. "People want there to be no one else sharing the road or the train with them, but they're beginning to realize that this is an impossible dream." The dynamic is changing as residents and decision makers begin to look at the bigger picture and accept personal responsibility for the decisions that affect the quality of life of the region as a whole: that is, when they begin to think regionally and act locally.

Change will not occur until there is a regional blueprint that is based on broad public participation, deep community involvement, and a high-quality design process that can overcome the objections of local naysayers. Although the development pattern envisioned during the three-hour Reality Check exercise may go farther than either political or market conditions are likely to allow, it also is clear that the current trend toward more dispersed development need not become the region's future. A scenario somewhere between the two, a development pattern that is economically and politically feasible, is more likely the solution. The key may lie in offering the region's residents a wide range of choices – including more and better options for transportation, housing – and compact development – but not attempting to prevent all new greenfield development.

Next Steps: Implementaion

What Reality Check achieved was to start a regional conversation about development, land preservation, and quality of life in the Washington metropolitan area. What must happen next is a process that engages a much broader cross section of the region's inhabitants in this conversation, to find out how *they* envision the region's future.

"The greatest benefit from this exercise is that there are 300 people that before today probably had no idea of the immensity of this significant issue that is ahead of us and the implications of how it impacts the fabric of this place we live in," observed Peter Crowley, a partner with the landscape architecture firm LandDesign. "We have the opportunity to create a fabric of a metropolitan area that can rival the other great metropolitan areas of the world."

Building on the momentum generated by Reality Check, the February event's sponsors already are engaging in both immediate and long-term actions designed to engage others in this regional conversation. ULI Washington, the Smart Growth Alliance, and the other Reality Check partners already have begun a "road show" designed to spread the word about the February event and generate broader enthusiasm. As a result, several jurisdictions have already begun their own "mini- Reality Check" events or have requested other technical or educational assistance. The goal of this short-term approach is to make jurisdictional cooperation a habit within the region rather than a rarity, to share best practices with both the public and private sectors, to educate citizens about the opportunities and challenges the region faces, and to acknowledge that bold action will be necessary if the Reality Check principles are ever to be realized.

"What must happen next is a process that engages a much broader cross section of the region's inhabitants in this conversation, to find how *they* envision the region's future."

Working on a parallel track at the same time, an effort is underway to form a broad-based steering committee with technical and working groups that would support an "Envision Utah-style" process for the Washington region. (Envision Utah is a nonprofit public/private partnership that has, using a broad-based coalition of stakeholders, spearheaded a regional dialogue that has fundamentally altered public perceptions about growth and resulted in a growth strategy designed to help preserve critical lands, promote water conservation and clean air, improve regional transportation systems, and provide housing opportunities for all residents.) Elsewhere around the country, similar regional visioning efforts often have been led by the private sector.

The purpose of this steering committee will be to create multiple development scenarios for the region, present them for public discussion, debate and, ultimately, adoption of one scenario – or a combination of several – as a regional blueprint. The steering committee would conduct community visioning exercises to develop the preferred scenarios and provide the programming, technical, and visioning assistance such an effort would require. Finally, to enable this effort to succeed, the steering committee would launch a regionwide communication and advocacy campaign.

"Planning tends to try to find a single outcome," cautioned Envision Utah's Grow. "Scenario planning and visioning looks at alternative choices and picks robust strategies for your future that, hopefully, cross multiple scenarios, but lead toward the ones you want the most." Only by engaging in such a comprehensive effort can regional leaders better understand the attitudes and preferences of residents concerning growth and development

in our region, communicate the consequences of both current trends and suggested alternatives, and develop consensus around key principles.

Once a regional consensus scenario is adopted, local leaders and the public at large will be more likely to recognize and approve projects and actions that support the agreed-upon scenario. Only then will area residents begin to see through the current fog and be willing to take their collective feet off the brake.

Final thoughts

Reality Check did not solve the Washington region's growth problem; it merely called attention to it. It also demonstrated that there is a common desire to address the growth and development issues facing the region. Moreover, there appears to be consensus about the general approaches the region should embrace.

"Our region is like a stepchild with 22 parents," said Len Forkas, chair of ULI Washington. "We all need to learn how to raise this child together."

Reality Check provided the momentum to begin this conversation. Organizers of the Reality Check event are now trying to broaden the discussion to other groups and individuals to find out what they think the next step should be. What do you think? How can we accommodate new growth and still meet the region's goals for environmental protection, provision of housing, and a balanced transportation network, all while maintaining our economic competitiveness and high standard of living? Without you, we cannot answer these questions.

Part 5 | Reality Check Participants

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Susan Swift, Town of Leesburg
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Gustavo Torres, CASA of Maryland
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James Zook, Fairfax County Government
Jeff Zyontz, Maryland-National Capital Parks and Planning Commission

Part 6 | Recognition

The February 2, 2005 Reality Check event in Washington, D.C., was the product of a group of stakeholders as diverse as the participants invited to play the game that day. It was led by ULI Washington and the Smart Growth Alliance (which includes ULI Washington, the Washington Board of Trade, the Chesapeake Bay Foundation, the Coalition for Smarter Growth, and the Metropolitan Washington Builders' Council).

The Reality Check chairs were **Len Forkas** of ULI Washington, **David Flanagan** of the Smart Growth Alliance, and **Roger Winston**, a partner with Linowes and Blocher, LLP. Project managers were **Laura Cole**, executive director of ULI Washington, and **John Bailey**, director of the Smart Growth Alliance. But the group of organizers, planners, and "worker bees" that labored together for months to put on the Reality Check event was much larger and even more diverse. The event's Advisory Committee included the following members:

Elizabeth Adams, Crescent Resources
Rita Bamberger, The Holladay Group
Sam Black, Squire, Saunders & Dempsey LLP
Len Bogorad , Robert Charles Lesser & Co., LLC
Suzanne Cartwright, ULI – the Urban Land Institute
Arnab Chakraborty, National Center for Smart Growth Research and
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John Coe, Ackman-Ziff Real Estate Group, LLC
Brian Cullen, Keane Enterprises, LLC
Michael Dehart, Piedmont Environmental Council
Paul DesJardin, Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments
James Duszynski, GreenVest L.C.
Lee Epstein, Chesapeake Bay Foundation
Jay Fisette, Arlington County Board
John W. Frece, National Center for Smart Growth Research and
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F. Gary Garczynski, National Capital Land & Development, Inc.
Marta Goldsmith, ULI – the Urban Land Institute
Kate Hanley, Fairfax County
Patricia Harris, Holland & Knight LLP
Robert Harris, Holland & Knight LLP
Charles Jones, Fannie Mae
Gerrit Knaap, National Center for Smart Growth Research and
    Education, University of Maryland
Fred Kober, The Christopher Companies
Julia Koster, National Capital Planning Commission
Susan Matlick, Maryland-National Capital Building Industry Association
John McClain, George Mason University
Chris Miller, Piedmont Environmental Council
Beth Offenbacher, Waterford, Inc.
Laura Olsen, Coalition for Smarter Growth
Ilana Preuss, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
Dale Rosenthal, Clark Construction Group
Thomas Sanchez, The Metropolitan Institute at Virginia Tech
Stewart Schwartz, Coalition for Smarter Growth
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Part 7 | Regional Resources

Are you interested in learning more about land use and growth in the Washington region? Here are some organizations that can help:

The Brookings Institution | http://www.brook.edu/

Chesapeake Bay Foundation | http://www.cbf.org/

Coalition for Smarter Growth
| http://www.smartergrowth.net/

Fannie Mae | http://www.fanniemae.com/index.jhtml

George Mason University, Center for Regional Analysis
| http://www.cra-gmu.org/

National Capital Planning Commission
| http://www.ncpc.gov/

Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments
| http://www.mwcog.org/

Maryland-National Capital Building Industry Association
| http://www.mncbia.org/

Reality Check Washington
| www.realitycheckwashington.org

Smart Growth Alliance | http://washington.uli.org/sga/

Smart Growth Network | http://www.smartgrowth.org/

1000 Friends of Maryland
| http://www.friendsofmd.org/

Urban Land Institute | http://uli.org

Urban Land Institute, Washington District Council
| http://washington.uli.org

University of Maryland, National Center for Smart Growth Research and Education
| http://www.smartgrowth.umd.edu/

Virginia Tech's Metropolitan Institute
| http://www.mi.vt.edu/news.asp

Washington Metro Builders' Realty Council
| http://www.realtycouncil.com/transportation.shtml

What can you do?

1 Begin a dialogue in your community by framing local growth and development issues in a regional context.

2 Evaluate whether or not your plans meet the challenges and opportunities associated with the projected growth.

3 Consider how the Reality Check themes match planning practices in your community.

Contact Us!

Are you interested in getting involved in the next phase of Reality Check? Here are four ways you can help:

▶ Schedule a Reality Check presentation in your jurisdiction or for your organization;

▶ Let us know which areas could benefit from technical assistance or by holding a mini–Reality Check event;

▶ Tell us if we can help facilitate educational programs on Reality Check themes that are meaningful to your community; or

▶ Simply help us identify key stakeholders who might be interested in joining our steering committee.

We need your involvement. We need your help. We invite you to join the effort. Check us out at **www.realitycheckwashington.org** or call us:
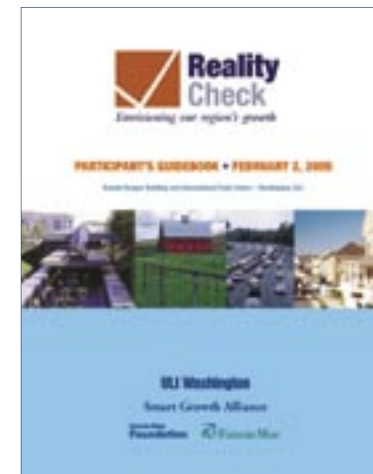
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PARTICIPANTS GUIDEBOOK

Want to know more? Check out the Participants Guidebook that was sent to all 300 participants at the February 2, 2005, event. It can be found at **http://www.realitycheckwashington.org/guidebook.php**.