

Livability In Action



In The New River Valley

January 2016

The Livability Initiative was a three-year regional planning process which provided an opportunity for New River Valley residents to develop a vision for the future and develop strategies that businesses, community organizations, local governments, and individuals can use to make this future vision a reality. This newsletter provides a progress update on the partnerships, projects and initiatives underway in the region that are contributing to the vision and goals outlined in this plan.

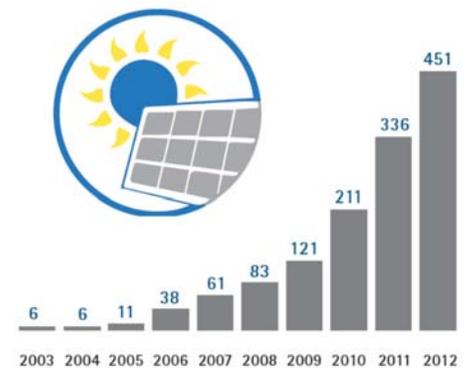


Solarize Blacksburg Receives U.S Conference of Mayors Climate Protection Award for 2015

Solarize Blacksburg, a priority strategy that emerged from the Livability Initiative's Regional Energy Plan, was recently awarded the U.S. Conference of Mayors Climate Protection Award for 2015 along with a \$15,000 prize. The Solarize program was the first initiative of its kind in Virginia when it was launched in the Spring of 2014. This program became a game-changer for clean energy in the Blacksburg community, and rapidly spread across the New River Valley and the state. The prize money awarded has been contributed to the Susan Garrison Memorial Fund, managed by the Community Foundation of the New River Valley, and will be awarded for future conservation efforts. Susan was Town of Blacksburg's long-time Sustainability Manager and the chair of the Livability Initiative Energy Working Group. The Solarize program and the subsequent award were a testament to Susan's years of work to move Blacksburg and the New River Valley toward a clean energy future.

The success of the Solarize program also expands beyond positive environmental outcomes. We know that residents and businesses in our region spend nearly \$250 million dollars each year on electricity - dollars that leave the community immediately and permanently. Directly, about 40% of the cost of a solar array remains in the local economy paid as wages and overhead. Indirectly, each month after a solar array "goes live", Solarize households will offset a sizeable percentage of what they had been paying each month to their electric utility. Those avoided energy costs are retained by the homeowner, now available to support other economic activity within our local and regional economy. Conservatively, we estimate the direct economic impact to the community at \$440,000, with the positive indirect impacts from avoided energy costs persisting for decades.

Did you know?



NRV Cumulative Installed Solar Capacity in kW

Solar energy provides the most potential for renewable energy development in the NRV. Installing solar PV on 10% of the region's south facing roof tops could provide 35% of the region's electricity demand.

The Impact of the Solarize Program

4x existing kW residential solar installed in 6 months

\$1.1 million dollars invested in Blacksburg residential solar.

24 other Virginia communities, including Montgomery and Floyd have launched new Solarize programs.

Enhance Living and Working Environments

Goals

1. Provide Support for an Aging Population
2. Ensure Affordability of Housing, Energy, and Transport
3. Improve Transportation Options for Residents
4. Improve Building Energy Efficiency
5. Expand Renewable Energy



CHP Acquires Pulaski's Sun Valley Landings

Community Housing Partners is acquiring two residential properties in need of repairs that provide very affordable housing for 42 households. Both properties are located in Pulaski County, and one located within the Town of Dublin. The duplex, one story, garden apartments will all get new flooring, roofing, windows, mechanical systems, interior doors, appliances, casework, and kitchen and bathroom fixtures. All 42 units will be renovated to 'like new' condition, a community room addition will be added, and the exteriors will be upgraded. In addition, five units will be reconfigured to meet Universal Design and accessibility standards. The project will be EarthCraft Platinum certified to provide energy cost savings for the tenants. Ten of the apartments have rental assistance provided through Rural Development which makes this type of housing some of the most affordable in the region. For more information, contact: <https://www.communityhousingpartners.org/150/rental-housing.html>.

The AC Wilson Building Breathes New Life in Radford

When Taylor Hollow Construction acquired the AC Wilson building on West Main Street in Radford, it had been vacant for 30 years and was very close to falling down. With half the building built in 1897 and half built in 1903, Joe Fortier, the owner of Taylor Hollow, wanted to give the old building a new life. The reconstruction was completed this fall and the historic building is now home to 10 beautiful two bedroom apartments for low and moderate income people and two commercial spaces.

One of the new residential tenants is a Radford native who also works locally and decided to move into AC Wilson because of the impressive level of historical features retained in the front apartments. The exposed brick wall with the old ad signs drew her to the building.



One of the commercial spaces has been leased to the Radford Coffee Company, which uses the proceeds from the business to support a tax-exempt nonprofit that funds about six schools in Nicaragua. The schools serve about 2,500 children between 5 and 13 years old, according to Eric Johnson, the owner. The other commercial space has been leased to Kibbles on Main, a long time Blacksburg business providing pet food and supplies that decided to open a second location in Radford.

Joe Fortier recognized the partners that helped make the project happen and said "Without the help of NRV HOME funds, this project would never have gotten done." For more information on the project or available spaces: [Taylor Hollow Management](https://www.taylorhollow.com) at 540-641-1794.



NRV Aging in Place Action Plan

The New River Valley (NRV) Aging in Place Leadership Team recently developed 6 priority action items in the **Aging in Place in the NRV: Next Steps towards Building Lifespan Friendly Communities guidebook**. The guidebook raises awareness about supportive service and housing-related obstacles faced by older adults and caregivers; addresses policy that impedes aging in place; connects service providers with regional resources; and trains geriatric and housing & community development professionals on the intersections among successful aging, housing options and community design that extend independence and improve health and well-being for older adults. The following action items were developed based on feedback received at a 2014 workshop which explored financial, policy, and decision-making obstacles that interfere with NRV residents' ability to age at home.

1. The **Lifespan Friendly Homes Program** implements home modifications that improve mobility and energy efficiency for at risk seniors.
2. A **TimeBank** provides a community-based network of mutual support in which members exchange services, encouraging connection to neighbors.
3. A **Regional Housing Survey** collects data regarding the housing status of older residents and structural needs of their homes.
4. The **Aging in Place Services Connector** enables older residents, family caregivers, and service providers to locate and access comprehensive information regarding local services that support older adults' ability to live safely and independently in their homes and communities.
5. **Land Use and Development Policy** examines how neighborhood design can facilitate successful aging, shifting towards a lifespan framework and changing the way housing is designed and built.
6. The **Age-Friendly Community Certification** adapts structures, housing and services to support residents regardless of age, disability, or need.

To download the guidebook: <http://www.nrvlivability.org/124>

Downtown Blacksburg Housing Market Strategy

Is there a market for non-student housing in downtown Blacksburg? And if so, what does that market look like? A recently commissioned study found that there is a fairly significant demand for non-student housing in downtown Blacksburg and recommended a variety of actions that would need to occur if the Town decides to move in that direction, including targeting young professionals, identifying places for full block development and downtown expansion, and undertaking a joint plan with Virginia Tech to accommodate future growth, to name a few. The study considered site context, marketability opportunities and constraints, socio-economic trends and characteristics, the performance of peer cities, competitive supply, and demand and market segmentation. The study will assist in providing future direction to downtown housing development in conjunction with other types of uses and provides a starting point for non-student housing conversations. Want to learn more? See: <http://www.blacksburg.gov/downtownhousingstudy/>.

Make the Business Environment More Productive

Goals

10. Enhance Education and Workforce Readiness
11. Support Infrastructure Needed for Economic Development
12. Support Small Business Development
13. Strengthen Agricultural Viability



Pulaski Broadband

Pulaski County was awarded a \$40,000 grant from DHCD's Virginia Telecommunications Planning Initiative (VATPI) to develop a community telecommunications plan for improving broadband connectivity, capacity and availability. The plan will serve as a road map for the community to support a telecommunications infrastructure that will spur improvements in educational opportunities, medical services, economic development, and overall quality of life.

Pulaski County will host a facilitated strategy planning session in January. Members of the combined committees, County staff and Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development representatives will meet to develop a project work program and timeline. The County also will solicit professional expertise (through an RFP) to assist with plan development working in conjunction with the combined committees and the community. Input from the committees, community and existing providers will be important for this project to be successful and for future implementation of the plan developed.

Pulaski Grow is Now Taking Root

Pulaski Grow is an innovative new non-profit organization that provides workforce readiness training for youth 14 to 18 within a working aquaponics business. Aquaponics is an agricultural system where fish and crops live in a mutually beneficial environment. Lee Spiegel, founder of Pulaski Grow is working hard to create a pipeline of job ready employees, strengthen youth prospects in Pulaski County and provide program sustainability to the nonprofit. Through the program youth are able to participate in five levels of training, gaining skills in: interviewing, resume writing, product research and development, marketing, and customer service, in addition to aquaponics growing. Once basic skills are mastered, trainees can move on to management and entrepreneurship trainings, as well as internships with local businesses and agencies. Training is free but participants are required to work 25+ hours within the business where they gain experience seeding, transplanting, growing and harvesting organic produce, learning to care for fish, and working with customers and visitors. Pulaski Grow also provides volunteer work experiences for younger youth, college interns, and adults. To learn more, contribute or get involved contact: pulaskigrow@gmail.com.

Coal Reliant Communities Workshop

A team of regional partners representing Giles County participated in a November 2015 workshop series designed to help communities that rely on the declining coal industry to develop economies that are less reliant on coal, and provide support for workers who may lose their livelihood through coal mining or coal power plant closures and layoffs. The team included members from Giles County government, the NRV Regional Commission, the NRMW Workforce Development Board, the NRV Economic Development Alliance, and the Friends of Southwest Virginia identified several projects, such as improving broadband access, assessing job training programs' 'fit' with local careers, and small business development and infrastructure improvements related to Giles County's many outdoor recreation assets and opportunities to attract tourism.

& Resilient



The Roving Computer Lab– A New Resource

The Roving Computer Lab is a free new community resource offered by New River/Mount Rogers Workforce Development Board. The Roving Computer lab has four mobile labs that each contain 5 laptops with internet access and Microsoft Office, as well as an iPad lab that contains 7 iPads. Available Accessories to accompany the labs include a portable printer, hotspot and jump drives for saving data from the labs after use. The computer labs are free to use by businesses as well as nonprofit, community and government agencies that support the education, employment, and self-sufficiency of area residents and job seekers, in their offices or in a community space. Each lab can provide flexible programming for industry and partners to add applications and targeted skill development and training modules. The NRMR Workforce Development Board will also provide training on use of the labs and can support businesses and partners in outreach and employment supports for job seekers and employees. For more information contact: rcl@nrmrwib.org.

Giles County & New River Community College Partnership Increases Access to College

Giles County is the first locality in the New River Valley to participate in the “Access to Community College Education” initiative. ACCE is a public private partnership that makes college available tuition-free to current graduates from Giles County by covering the cost of tuition for two years at New River Community College. Giles County has committed to providing \$75,000 each year, leaving an additional \$75,000 to be raised from local business and industry sponsors. 11 students from Narrows and 26 from Giles high schools accepted ACCE funding last year, at an average cost of \$1,928 provided per student. Students in the ACCE program must also contribute 80 hours to a Giles County community service project over the course of each year. Qualifications for the ACCE program include a high school GPA of 2.5 or higher, residency in Giles County, and a completed financial aid application. To learn more about the program, contact: [Angela Covey at acovey@nr.edu](mailto:Acovey@nr.edu).

Innovation Award

Hollingsworth and Vose, an advanced materials company, recently won the Southwest Virginia Alliance for Manufacturing (SVAM) 2015 Innovations in Manufacturing Award. The award recognizes H&V’s Floyd team accomplishment developing the NanoWave® air filtration media and the associated advanced manufacturing processes.

“The recognition that the award brings to H&V and the Floyd site helps to reinforce our reputation as a global leader and manufacturer of advanced materials for filtration, battery, and industrial products. NanoWave® has a bright future and is now manufactured in the US and Germany,” said Vince Hatcher, the Site Manager of Floyd operations. With about 150 employees, H&V is the largest private employer in Floyd County and seeing growth ahead, recently added a second plant. “We are proud of H&V’s highly-skilled people in Floyd. It’s very exciting that they are solving major worldwide challenges here in innovative and environmentally-friendly ways,” said Jon Beegle, Chairman of the Floyd County Economic Development Authority.

Preserve Rural Heritage and Community Character

Goals

6. Encourage Development that Preserves Rural Character
7. Protect Natural Landscapes and Ecosystems
8. Recognize & Strengthen Natural, Cultural, and Historic Assets
9. Support Arts, Culture, and Community Character



New River Valley Trail Guide Now Available

The New River Valley Regional Commission and the tourism departments of Giles, Montgomery, Pulaski and Radford have teamed up to develop a regional guide of hiking and biking trails, helping guide visitors to the region's most popular outdoor recreation opportunities. The trail guide features information on 15 popular trails, such as the Cascades, the Huckleberry Trail, the New River Trail, and Wildwood Park. The guide has maps to each trail, and information such as trail length, elevation, major features, and nearby attractions.

The trail guide is one example of the partnerships that the New River Valley tourism staff have undertaken to promote the many outdoor recreation assets of the region, which can attract tourists to spend some time in the region-- and spend some money at local businesses during their visit!

The New River Valley Trail Guide is available at regional visitors' centers and online at the Explore New River Valley website at: <http://explorenewrivervalley.com/trails>.

ArtWorks for Us

ArtWorks for Us is a new public art project that aims to place art out in the open across the NRV where it can become part of the daily experience of community life and conversation. The Jacksonville Center for the Arts (Jax), located in Floyd, will pair artists and their works of art with business or community locations across the NRV in which to install temporary sculptural public art. Citizens and potential business leaders can think of this program as a reasonably-priced rental of public artworks. The artists' works get displayed for a time in an outdoor gallery, and the business owners get to spruce up their locations as a marketing tool, to add interest in their businesses among residents and visitors. In 2015, the Jax received a \$10,000 Community Impact award from the Community Foundation of the NRV. These funds will allow the Jax to offer low cost instruction to artists who want to explore ways of expanding their work to include large scale work for public display. The Jax will also develop a map/brochure of the public art trail to encourage self-guided trips across the region to see the public art. For more information email: info@jacksonvillecenter.org or call Leia Wood at (540)-745-2784.

New River Land Trust Reaches New Milestone

The New River Land Trust just reached a new milestone of helping to conserve more than 50,000 acres of farm and forest land in the New River region. Since 2002, the New River Land Trust has worked with 240 landowners and other partners to reach this milestone. These acres are forever protected as conservation easements and will remain rural, contributing to the quality of life and rural heritage of the region, now and into the future. In 2014, NRLT worked with the Bixler family to conserve a 48 acre farm property on Glade Rd in Blacksburg and in 2015, they finalized an easement on 389 acres of the Obenshain family's Thompson Place property in Montgomery County. They now hold or co-hold four easements in the region and are actively looking for new projects. For more information contact: nrlt@newriverlandtrust.org.

Build Healthy Communities



Goals

14. Enhance Access to Healthcare
15. Create Health Environments
16. Promote Healthy Behaviors and Lifestyles
17. Support Children and Youth Reaching their Full Potential
18. Protect and Improve Water Resources

Caring for the CareGiver

In September 2015, the Center for the Arts at Virginia Tech hosted visiting artist Stuart Pimsler—founder of Stuart Pimsler Dance & Theatre (SPDT)—for a residency focused on arts and health care. SPDT is an internationally recognized performance company that engages a diverse array of groups - students, caregivers, audiences, and community members—through its community inclusive work. The company has been lauded as a “National Model” by The Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, and its Arts & Healthcare work has been recognized for “Best Practices” by the National Endowment for the Arts. During his visit, Pimsler met with representatives from the Virginia-Maryland College of Veterinary Medicine, Virginia Tech Carilion School of Medicine, Edward Via College of Osteopathic Medicine, and Carilion Roanoke Memorial Hospital. SPDT will return to the NRV in April 2017 to present a performance of their newest piece “Matinee” at the Moss Arts Center in Blacksburg, as well as offer a series of “Caring for the Caregiver” workshops for health care professionals, patients, and community members.

Issues of Substance Abuse During Pregnancy

The Virginia Tech Institute for Policy and Governance is leading a project to track regional trends in substance abuse during pregnancy, and identify the resources that regional partners can provide to women and children at risk. The team of regional partners includes the New River Health District, the New River Valley Community Services Board, New River Community Action, the New River Valley Regional Commission, as well as local social services agencies, physicians, nurses and other health providers. The NRVRC and the NRHD are analyzing hospital, insurance and other medical records to identify regional trends related to this issue, as well as specific locations or groups of women who may be at greater risk. Virginia Tech IPG, along with community partners, is researching promising strategies and programs that can help to prevent substance abuse during pregnancy, or provide treatment to the mothers and children to end the cycle of addiction and related social issues that result.

Town of Blacksburg Bicycle Master Plan

The Town of Blacksburg recently completed Bike Blacksburg, a long range bicycle plan, in an effort to enable Blacksburg to become an increasingly bicycle-friendly community. Bike Blacksburg includes recommendations for new and improved bicycle facilities to make biking safer and more accessible to all citizens. The plan also includes an inventory of the existing bicycle network and ideas for encouraging bicycling through supportive policies and programs. The Town installed sharrows (Shared Lane Markings) on three streets this fall as the first step in implementation of the plan. For more information on sharrows and the Bicycle Master Plan, visit www.blacksburg.gov/bike.



The Livability Partnership

The Community Foundation of the New River Valley (CFNRV) and the NRV Regional Commission (NRVRC) are proud to be leading partners in supporting implementation of the Livability Initiative's many goals and strategies. The partnership will continue to convene the community around critical issues, support collaboration, track progress on key indicators, and identify the resources needed to move vision to action. To learn more about the Initiative or download a copy of the report, visit: www.nrvlivability.org or contact the CFNRV or NRVRC.

To support the Initiative with a tax-deductible contribution, visit www.cfnrvgivebig.org and make a secure contribution to the Fund for the NRV or any of the CFNRV's Future Funds supporting the Initiative's four main themes featured in this newsletter.



Contact Us

Do you want to share information on a project you are working on or would you like more information about the Livability Initiative or one of the featured projects?

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