



# **IMPROVING THE COMPETITIVENESS OF HAMPTON ROADS**

**The Hampton Roads Regional Structure Project**

**Recommendations for the**

**H.R. Partnership: Visioning**

Prepared by the Future of Hampton Roads, Inc.

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SG2B

HAMPTON ROADS REGIONAL STRUCTURE PROJECT

**REPORT OF STUDY GROUP 2B**

**HAMPTON ROADS PARTNERSHIP: VISIONING AND MEASUREMENT**

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Report of SG2B  
Hampton Roads Partnership: Visioning and Measurement

## 1. Study Group Task

*Report No.2-Transforming the Regional Structure* includes the following proposal with respect to the mission of the Hampton Roads Partnership (HRP):

“To provide an overall sense of direction in a form that captures the aspirations of our citizens and highlights opportunities for the various business and service sectors of our regional economy, the Hampton Roads Partnership would be charged with creating and maintaining a comprehensive regional vision. As it does now, it would bring together business clusters and opportunity groups to set strategies and goals, not just for economic development but also for quality of life initiatives. Implementation would be tracked by a broad system of performance measures.”

The task of Study Group 2B is to provide further description of the process of visioning as well as the reasons that would justify its use as an additional planning technique by HRP.

## 2. The Role of the Hampton Roads Partnership in Regional Planning

### A. HRP's Planning Practices

**1. The chosen mission of the Hampton Roads Partnership—dealing with strategic issues that impact the competitiveness of Hampton Roads—determines that its primary activity is regional strategic planning.** HRP itself was created in response to a regional visioning effort—*Plan 2007*—and it is required to have a regional strategic plan to qualify for funding under the state's Regional Competitiveness Act (RCA). As HRP has a small staff, implementation of plans is largely carried out through local governments, non-governmental organizations, or private sector companies best placed for achieving results. HRP thus acts as a catalyst for organizing leadership to turn shared goals into results through the actions of others, a process at which it has excelled since its creation in 1996.

**2. HRP is the organization best positioned to prepare a comprehensive regional vision.** Although the Hampton Roads Planning District Commission (HRPDC) is empowered to prepare long range plans, it has not done so (with one exception) because of the difficulty of bringing all local governments to agreement. The exception relates to transportation, where qualifying for federal funding requires HRPDC's Metropolitan Planning Organization to prepare long-range multi-modal transportation plans. Furthermore, with a board

composed entirely of government officials, HRPDC deals almost exclusively with the planning needs of local governments. This situation provides the opportunity for HRP

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to undertake long range regional planning on other matters, including those affecting the performance not only of local governments but also of private sector and non-governmental service organizations.

**3. HRP has adopted and revised its strategic plans periodically.** Following its creation in 1996, and in order to qualify for state RCA funding in 1997, HRP validated and adopted *Plan 2007*, a 1994 initiative of the Hampton Roads Chamber of Commerce that involved 430 participants in preparing a vision statement and related strategies for several primary economic clusters. During 1997 the plan was further refined into a business plan for the Partnership itself. In 1999-2000 the selection of priority issues for strategic planning was used as a technique for deciding how to allocate RCA grants among numerous applicants. During 2003-4, strategic plans were again reviewed in order set new priorities and action plans. In 2006 the Executive Committee decided to adopt the Council on Virginia's Future's proposal to serve as a pilot program for creating a regional vision and set of comprehensive metrics for assessing regional performance.

**4. HRP has used a range of planning techniques.** It has gathered data, done opinion surveys, performed cluster analysis, and organized small group brainstorming and focus group discussions in the process of prioritizing issues, selecting issues on which to focus staff resources, setting objectives, and preparing action plans. In general, the initial stages of such planning have been undertaken by HRP staff working with a small group of selected HRP board members. Topics selected by that group as priorities for further planning and action have then been offered to the HRP Executive Committee and Board for ratification. Followup planning to move an issue into the hands of practitioners capable of implementing action plans has often involved assembling leaders from the sectors affected, sometimes in large numbers. In blending these various planning techniques in a top-down process, HRP has reached out to the larger public on only one occasion: During 2005-6, it engaged a consultant to meet with more than fifty community organizations to sample opinions on regional issues and regionalism itself. Transcripts of these "Listen and Learn Tour" meetings are available on HRP's Web site, and the ideas brought out in this process have informed HRP's regional citizenship strategy.

**5. Sound planning supports effective political activity.** As an assemblage of the region's most influential business, education, military, and elected leaders, HRP possesses immense political clout. The presence of all the region's mayors and chairs on the board lends necessary legitimacy to its planning. To the extent that its planning work is buttressed by sound research, tested reasoning, and consultation with practitioners in the areas taken under consideration, HRP's recommendations should command respect from legislators. The response sometimes heard that its work reflects merely a consensus among the community's "elite" can be challenged by using properly designed public surveys as well as consultative methods that involve widespread public participation.

## **B. Visioning for all Major Regional Sectors**

**1. HRP's various strategic planning initiatives have not yet involved preparation of a comprehensive regional vision.** An emphasis on concentrating the Partnership's own limited resources on key issues and opportunities has neglected the need to produce an overall vision for the region's future. The process tends to reproduce the short-term focus of the Planning District, though it is recognized that several of HRP's strategies require a long-term effort. *Plan 2007* produced the last relatively complete regional vision statement; although it developed objectives and strategies only for several key economic clusters, it at least offered vision statements with respect to all the most important building blocks of regional development.

**2. A comprehensive vision and plan covers all essential building blocks of the region's economy and quality of life.** A vision statement indicates what the region aspires to become, and in its complete form describes strategies for achieving the following results:

- Concerned citizens with a regional outlook
- Involved private sector leaders
- Good government – state and local
- An outstanding educational system
- Strong economic clusters
- A supportive environment for entrepreneurs
- Adequate physical infrastructure
- Sound environmental protection
- A vibrant arts-culture-recreation complex
- An advanced health care system
- Adequate social services

The relative priority accorded to particular sector strategies will vary from year to year, but a vision statement that neglects any of the above key building blocks gives a distorted picture of the region.

**3. A comprehensive vision statement, supported by strategies and action plans, has several benefits.** Creating a vision statement with long-range objectives, strategies, and action plans is a motivational process in itself. Properly organized, the planning process can not only validate the intellectual part of the plan elements but also engage the sentiments and emotions of the participants and thus energize implementation. Both the planning process and the resulting document offer other significant payoffs. **They can:**

**a. improve public understanding of all the elements required for successful regional performance;**

**b. foster a sense of regional citizenship among all sectors** in support of regional cooperation;

**c. support economic development recruiting efforts** by demonstrating that the region has a sense of direction, that it is a potential hot spot with an exciting future;

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**d. strengthen regional unity** by showing how all sectors contribute to the region's economy and quality of life;

### **C. Visioning and Public Participation**

**1. The top-down internal planning process of the Hampton Roads Partnership has proved valuable in tapping the thinking of the region's top leaders in local government, business, and higher education.** Such leadership is well placed to select important targets of opportunity for regional economic development. Subsequent involvement of cluster practitioners in the planning and followup implementation draws on their expertise and engages their commitment to producing measurable results.

**2. Augmenting present methods with a broader visioning process that also involves the public at large would add important benefits. It would:**

**a. broaden citizen understanding of the facts underlying proposed plans of action.** Well-organized public planning efforts include presentations by experts and written materials with appropriate data and analysis. Discussion results are then based less on uninformed opinion and more on rational consideration of alternatives.

**b. help determine priorities.** The public's priorities may differ from those of business or public leaders, and where the issues are involved in the political process, the views of voters rather than business leaders may be more critical to persuading politicians to act. For example, in reporting on town meetings organized by Norfolk's government, the *Virginian-Pilot* (October 12, 2006) noted that city council had expected complaints about high taxes, crime, spending on roads and neighborhoods but were surprised by citizen calls for improved libraries and teenage recreation programs.

**c. help build consensus for political action.** The ability of the Partnership to say to our legislative delegation that voters have validated the region's strategic objectives—the vision—could have an immense impact on creating unity within the delegation on a non-partisan legislative agenda. Surveys of public opinion are part of the process, but face to face discussion is also part of the necessary process.

**d. foster the sense of regional citizenship** that is one of the Partnership's worthwhile goals. Rhetoric and exhortation about the need for regional cooperation is no substitute for bringing people together to discuss issues, a process that invariably discloses not just the differences usually emphasized but also basic shared interests that can lead to new ideas about shared solutions. Actual experience with this process—in the Future of Hampton Roads, Plan 2007, and the Partnership

itself—has invariably been encouraging. Real conflicts of interest can still arise, but the impulse to cooperation is sometimes astounding.

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**e. enable two-way dialogue** rather than one-way communication. Dialogue builds a sense of real participation, which is the way to create the support and commitment needed to create movement in the workplace and political arena. To the extent that more citizens are able to articulate regional needs and the regional vision and strategies for dealing with the needs, the stronger the sense of ownership in efforts to implement desirable changes.

**f. exhibit commitment to the basic political value of seeking “consent of the governed.”** A process that involves voters in responsibly expressing their needs and opinions is bound to expedite the political process in Hampton Roads, in Richmond, and in Washington.

**g. strengthen the Partnership itself** by demonstrating the willingness of the organization to engage the general public in becoming aware of and validating its work.

**3. Broadly participative forms of planning do not preclude focus on key short-term initiatives by a handful of leaders.** Ideas on planning process inevitably must begin in the minds of a few charged with leadership. Top-down initiation is invariably the usual first step in the planning process of any organization. Furthermore, sometimes the best way to accomplish a meaningful result is simply to ask key leaders to exercise their individual influence with legislators or other decision-makers, often in a prudently confidential manner. Preparation of a comprehensive regional vision and strategies, and its revision every few years, in no way obviates the need or opportunity for the Partnership to call on its members to exercise these other forms of effective leadership.

#### **D. Performance Measurement**

Key measures of regional performance such as per capita income, total income, or the rate of income growth are often very difficult to move with programs initiated by organizations like the Hampton Roads Partnership. Nevertheless it always worthwhile to track changes in these and other indicators, even if only to spur motivation to do better.

The comprehensive set of metrics proposed for adoption by the Council on Virginia’s Future as part of the state’s pilot program in regionalism meet this requirement.

### 3. Recommendations

As no other organization creates the regional vision, it is urged that the Partnership realize its potential as the regional planning organization by implementing the following additional planning practices:

**Recommendation 1: HRP should prepare a comprehensive regional vision statement covering all the main building blocks of regional performance.**

**a. The important building blocks include both economic clusters and clusters dealing with quality of life matters.** A complete vision and plan would cover not only the port, transportation, key economic clusters, higher education, and military assets but also pre-school, k-12, and higher education; arts and culture; health care; social services; and environmental issues, among other key contributors to regional performance. Some matters require local government action, others concern the private sector.

**b. At present, just to take one example, the Partnership's strategic plan does not concern itself at all with education.** Yet quality of workforce and the educational institutions that support it are the primary criterion of corporate relocation prospects. What our economy can produce a decade or two from now is determined by the workforce we are now educating. That many institutions other than HRP work actively to support education does not preclude HRP from bringing them together as a cluster to articulate a regional vision statement, strategies, and action plans. The effort might even discover some valuable additional initiatives for the attention of local governments and our legislative delegation. But even if the resulting vision statement and plans cover familiar ground, their presence in the HRP planning document will underscore HRP's recognition of their vital importance to the region's performance

**c. Because HRP has limited staff, the sector visioning may need to be accomplished over one or more years.** Even now, as it pursues planning for economic clusters, HRP is constrained to tackle the process one cluster at a time. But the HRP staff is certainly capable of sequencing sector planning efforts over a one or two-year time frame. Prior efforts both by the Future of Hampton Roads in the 1980s and Plan 2007 in the 1990s suggest that comprehensive visioning can be done. Furthermore, the Partnership's recent commitment to implement the program of the Council on Virginia's Future will involve tracking metrics for sectors not now included in HRP planning. Finally, a sound comprehensive vision statement can last for a decade, while the strategies for implementing the strategies may be good for at least five years if not longer.

**d. Beginning the preparation of a complete regional vision statement might well be a goal for 2007.** Bringing a large number of citizens together in a participative

planning process during the region's 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary would be a very useful way of supplementing the other activities planned by HRP for its Year of Regional Citizenship.

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**Recommendation 2: The process of preparing the regional vision statement and strategies should provide for considerable public participation.**

**a. The Structure Project's study group on Public Participation offers recommendations on techniques for fostering such dialogue.** Hampton Roads has a number of professionals experienced in the techniques of planning public conferences, providing discussion facilitators, developing issues, and other practical details for organizing the fruitful involvement of citizens in visioning and strategic planning. The experience of other metropolitan areas in the country with participative public planning is also instructive. Please refer to the separate report of the Study Group on Public Participation.

**b. Media coverage of the public process should be encouraged** as a means of widening public awareness of the region, regionalism, the regional vision, and the Partnership itself as the primary regional planning organization.

### What Is It?

There are many definitions and approaches related to visioning and the related discipline of strategic planning. Visioning as used herein involves

- Gathering and analyzing information (related to past, present and future)
- Establishing a vision (future desired state)
- Identifying goals and metrics (how to measure progress – performance standards)
- Defining strategies for achieving vision and goals (prioritized activities that show “how to”)
- Specifying organizational responsibilities and accountability (how various constituencies will work together in pursuing strategies)

### Who Is Involved?

A visioning process for Hampton Roads would impact all citizens and therefore should have the widest involvement possible. Forums and surveys can be used to gather information from citizens. A planning team or agency should be appointed to carry out the work of visioning. This group can consist of members of existing governmental agencies and other groups who have knowledge and expertise of matters that are valuable to the visioning process (e.g., planning commissions). In most regions, this represents a significant time commitment – full-time for many staff people. Often a consultant is retained to help design and guide the process. A visioning board (made up primarily of elected officials to ensure legitimacy) would oversee the effort and assume responsibility for ensuring buy-in and implementation. Alternatively, the leadership of the Hampton Roads Partnership could assume this function as the Partnership board includes the area’s elected leaders.

### How Could the Process Work?

Buy-in and support (both conceptually and commitment of resources) of top elected officials is crucial at the outset. Thus, while a general process can be outlined, it is wise to allow elected officials to help shape the process and, in so doing, commit to it. This would lead to a public declaration of support for the process and encouragement for broad participation.

An ongoing communication process using all available media is vital to encourage broad participation and keep citizens informed. A comprehensive communication plan at the project’s conclusion helps ensure widespread understanding and support.

A review of best practices of regional visioning identified the following important process characteristics:

- Full stakeholder participation
- Routine inclusion of community opinions/interests, clearly and consistently
- Perception of welcoming all who want to participate (“no walls”); early resolution of perceived barriers
- Active engagement of community at large
- Involvement of universities in the region
- Specific means to engage persons who typically have a limited public voice (poor, minorities, youth, etc.)
- Inclusion of young knowledge workers
- Education of all in phase of gathering and analyzing information (public officials and the public); an understanding of regionalism in a global context
- Workshop and charette formats as well as survey instruments
- Comprehensive, multi-media communication effort throughout process
- Future scenarios via modeling and GIS techniques
- Means of reviewing progress with decisionmakers
- Partnership of government, business and civic leaders and organizations

---Matt Breitenberg, June 6, 2006

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