



Play, Performance & Planning

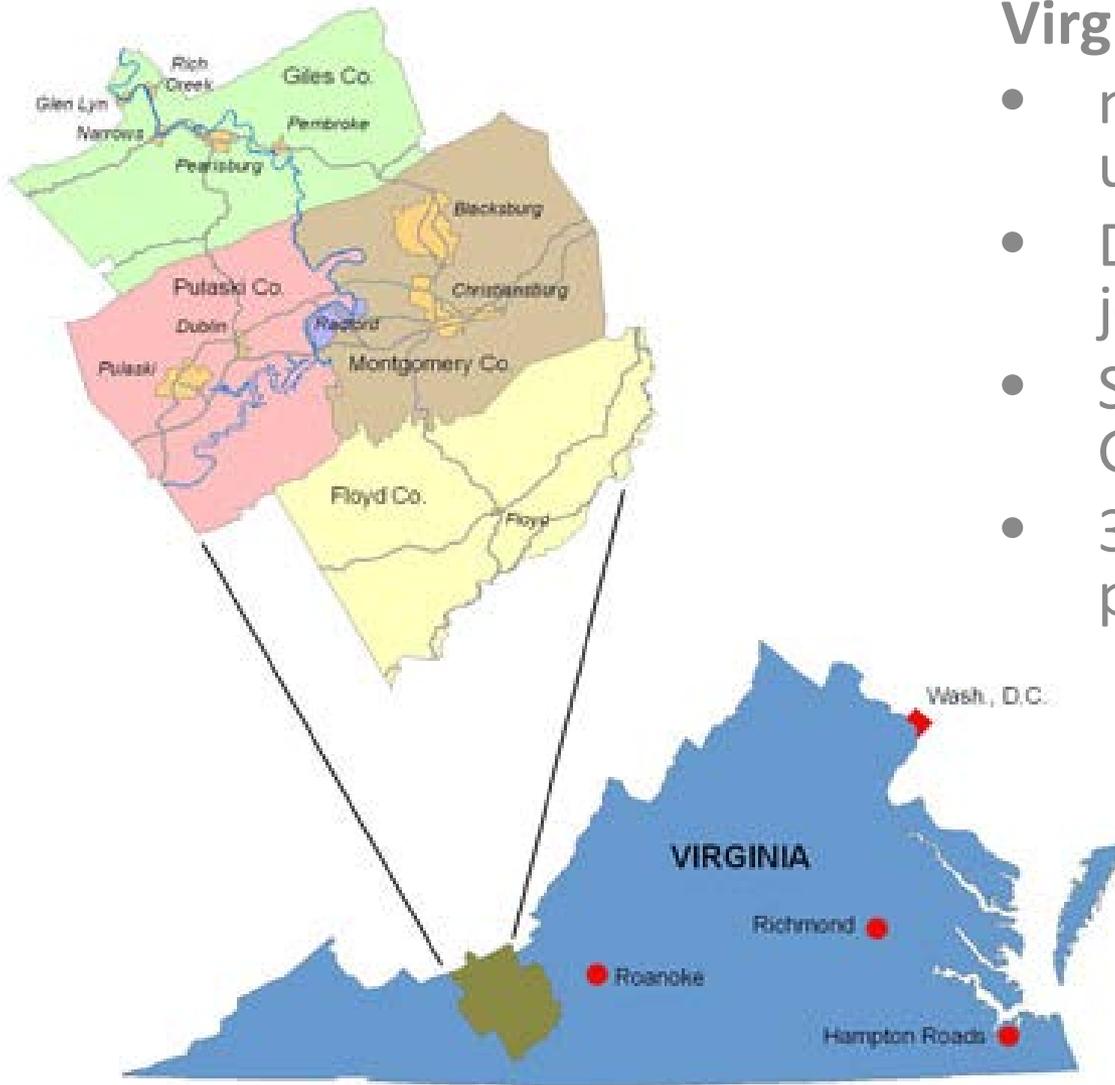
Nontraditional Methods in Community Engagement

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*New River Valley Planning District Commission &
New River Valley Livability Initiative*

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Virginia's New River Valley:

- mostly rural and small university towns
- Decline in manufacturing jobs in rural counties
- Sustainable Communities Grantee, 2010
- 3 year regional planning process – 9 topic areas





Our Outreach Goals (these may sound familiar):

- Multiple stakeholder groups - broad representation
- Equity of engagement – reaching the harder to reach
- Common priorities across region *and*
- Particular needs of communities within region
- Two-way communication
 - elected and staff understanding of citizen needs/concerns
 - citizen understanding of intersecting issues, competing needs, resource limitations
- Build capacity for civic problem-solving





And some “not-so-standard” engagement methods:

- Virginia Tech Department of Theater and Cinema Masters program in Directing & Public Dialogue
 - BuildingHome: Story Circles & Story Corner
 - Interactive Community Performances: Whether System, Behind A Stranger’s Face
- Sojourn Theater
 - BUILT game

We were really skeptical at first.....



We hired these artists to help you with outreach...

Um... thanks?

But reflecting on our outreach goals, and ways that public meetings had broken down...

We decided to try some new approaches.



Civic Access to Public Policy Development

Public Meeting

Citizens input is “*welcome*” at a public hearing on codes, bylaws, ordinances and other things beloved by bureaucrats.

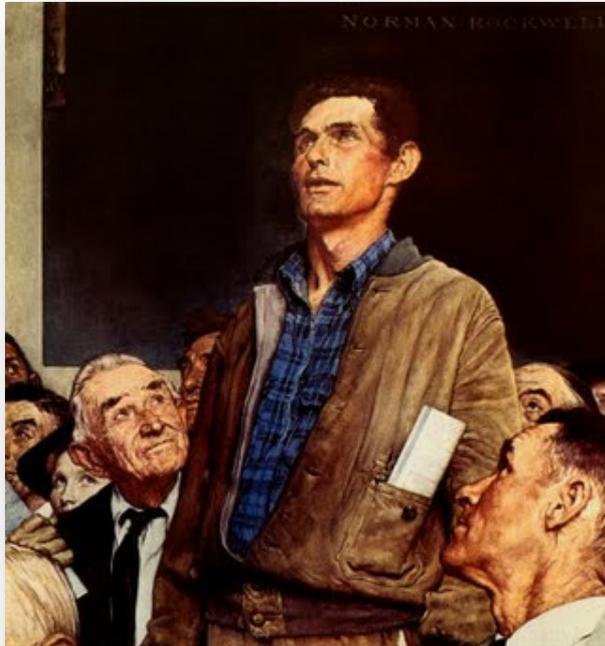
Tuesday at 6 p.m. in a room with uncomfortable chairs. Parking limited.

Low accessibility for non-experts.

- Unclear how citizen input impacts process or outcomes.
- Emerging proposals appear to be “done deals”



The Town Hall



- Who does it work for?
- How does the public perceive its role?
- High stakes, zero-sum outcomes
- Dialogue low, often absent
- Proposal may pass but...



BuildingHome - Community Gatherings

Crunching the numbers...

- 4 Counties + City of Radford
- 25 events over 10 months
- 6.5 hours of recorded stories
- 100+ pages of community gathering reports
- **510 participants (over 3,000 total)**

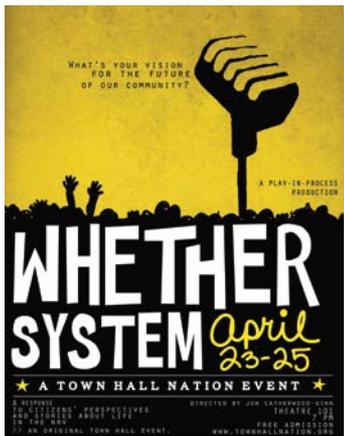
Depth v. Breadth in civic engagement



- **Pro tip:** Prepare to have the meeting after the meeting.



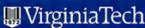
Whether System, our Town Hall Nation Event



Town Hall Nation
Sojourn Theatre, TEAM,
Imagining America
April 23-26, 2012 - Virginia Tech



Citizen Feedback: More Performances



behind a stranger's face

 an original play. a public conversation.

 citizens' stories from the New River Valley, Virginia

directed by jon catherwood-ginn

"a friend may be waiting behind a stranger's face."

 maya angelou

Nov 17 @2pm
 Radford Rec Center
 200 george street

Nov 18 @7:30pm
 Pulaski Train Station
 20 south washington

Nov 25 @7:30pm
 Floyd Country Store
 206 south locust street

Dec 3, 4 @7:30pm
 Theatre 101
 Virginia Tech

FREE ADMISSION

generous support for the Building Home project provided by

virginia tech department of theatre & cinema



CENTER FOR THE ARTS

 AT VIRGINIA TECH



 VIRGINIA COMMISSION FOR THE ARTS



Opening This Weekend!

 Multiple Performances

 November 17th – December 3rd, 2012





A Different Community Conversation: BUILT NRV

**FLEA
MARKET**

PHARMACY

LIBRARY

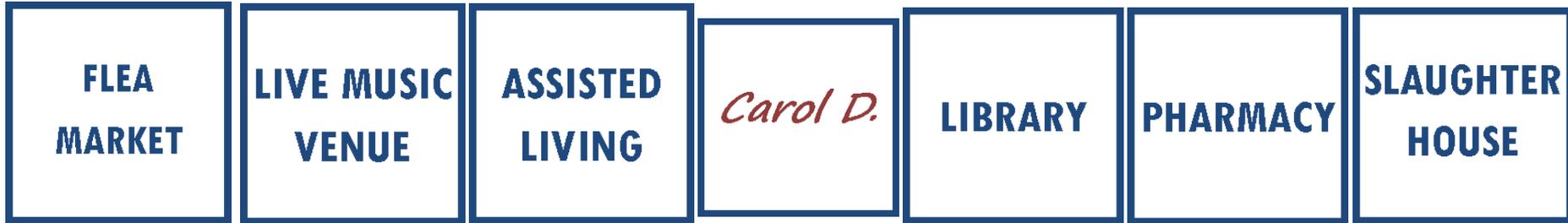
**SLAUGHTER
HOUSE**

**LIVE MUSIC
VENUE**

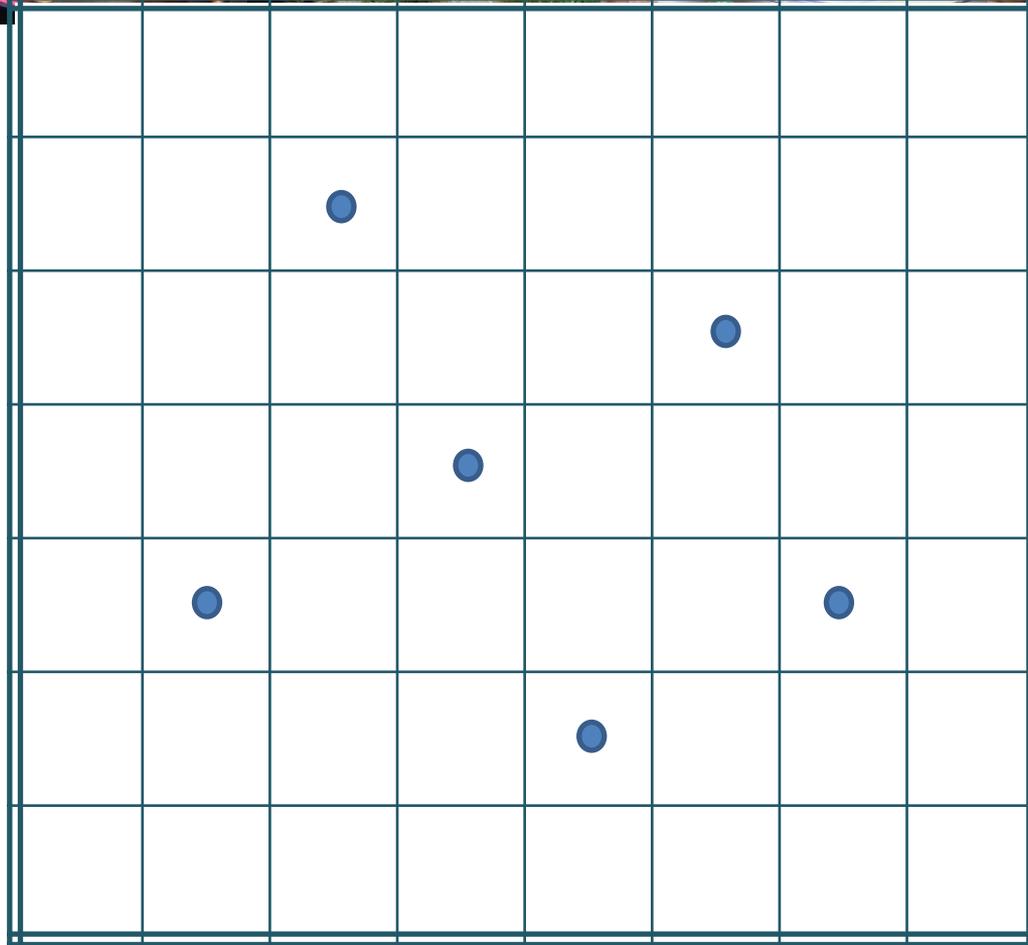
Carol D.

**ASSISTED
LIVING**

A Different Community Conversation: BUILT NRV



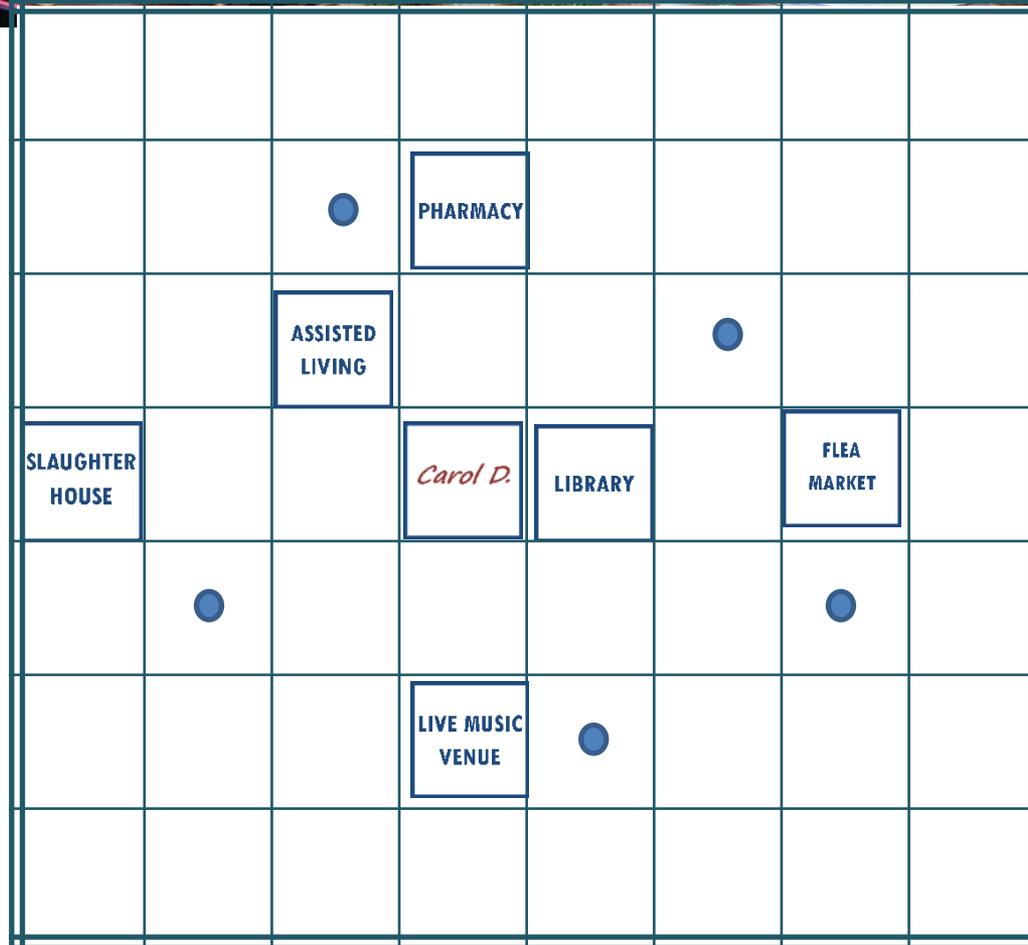
A Different Community Conversation: BUILT NRV



- FLEA MARKET
- LIVE MUSIC VENUE
- ASSISTED LIVING
- Carol D.*
- LIBRARY
- PHARMACY
- SLAUGHTER HOUSE



A Different Community Conversation: BUILT NRV



Further Collaborations - BUILT NRV

- Individual Priorities
- ↓
- Collaboration – *Neighborhood/Town*



- ➔
- Integration – *Town/County*

Participant Reflections - BUILT NRV

“Perspective is a powerful driver behind choices. Sometimes we make decisions too quickly without considering the impacts, however small and unintentional, that they may have on other people.”



(It made me think.....) “about the importance of understanding community dynamics, recognizing that compromises will have to be made, but working together as a whole it can be made better.”



Nonstandard Engagement: Using the Data

Beyond just numbers....greater context to citizen priorities and concerns

- **Past citizen experiences** with planning, land use, development patterns
- **Priority themes, key tensions** emerge – inform working groups, local staff, and elected officials at the *front* end
 - Ideas that can **shape goals and strategies**
 - More nuanced understanding of **community preferences** (*downtown revitalization, family-friendliness*)
- **Build partnerships** for eventual implementation, and capacity for **civic problem-solving**.





Changing Public Engagement

As planners and leaders in communities we must consider alternative forums for engaging people...

- Visioning based on **community values** will go much further than people reacting to proposed projects
- The level of **civic dialogue** is determined in large part by format utilized
- It is a **shared responsibility** between local government leaders, staff, non-profits, private sector and the list goes on





Contacts and Additional Information

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