



## **NEWS RELEASE: For Immediate Release**

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### **Roanoke Valley-Alleghany Regional Commission Receives \$625,000 Planning Grant from HUD Sustainable Communities Initiative**

**Roanoke, VA., October 14, 2010** – U. S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Secretary Shaun Donovan today announced that the Roanoke Valley-Alleghany Regional Commission is one of 45 out of 225 organizations that will receive a portion of a \$100 million Sustainable Communities Regional Planning Grant program. The Commission will receive \$625,000 from HUD to fund a three-year comprehensive economic, environmental, and housing plan for the region.

The planning process will be led by the Roanoke Area Sustainability Consortium made up of representatives from the Roanoke Valley-Alleghany Regional Commission, Council of Community Services, Roanoke Area Metropolitan Planning Organization, the cities of Roanoke and Salem; the counties of Roanoke, Craig, and Franklin; and Virginia Western Community College. The consortium is supported by a broad stakeholder group of nonprofits, private businesses, energy utilities and others, representing public health, environmental awareness, education, the arts, workforce development, green building, and more.

As proposed, the plan will begin with a broad analysis of local and regional plans, including municipal comprehensive plans, neighborhood plans, energy and water plans, and others to see where gaps exist between and within plans. A robust public input effort led by the stakeholder group will follow, with a final result of both a comprehensive regional sustainability plan, as well as a sustainable planning framework for future efforts. Copies of the grant application may be requested from the Roanoke Valley-Alleghany Regional Commission.

This grant is part of the Obama Administration's Partnership for Sustainable Communities, which brings HUD, the U.S. Department of Transportation, and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency together to ensure that the agencies' policies, programs, and funding consider affordable housing, transportation, and environmental protection together. This interagency collaboration gets better results for communities and uses taxpayer money more efficiently. At a time when every dollar the federal government invests in jumpstarting the economy is critical, the President's plan ensures that all these agencies are coordinating efforts and targeting resources with precision. Reflecting this new collaboration, these grants were judged by a multidisciplinary review team, drawn from eight federal agencies and from partners in philanthropy.

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# Roanoke Area Sustainability Consortium

## Summary of Application to the Sustainable Communities Regional Planning Grant Program

August 20, 2010

The unique characteristics of the Roanoke Metropolitan Statistical Area present challenges for planning and coordination on a regional basis. The region's physical geography creates a strong delineation between its urban and rural areas and contributes to multiple environmental and policy challenges. The urban core lies within a valley that has a high-density of population, whereas its rural neighbors largely reside outside the surrounding mountains in low-density communities. These and many other elements combine to form a *spatial mismatch* of transportation options, economic opportunity, affordable housing, and environmental quality. Further complicating the situation, the Roanoke Valley has a high concentration of local governments in a small geography, which creates interdependent challenges that are difficult to address in a comprehensive way.

Recognizing these challenges, the Roanoke Metropolitan Statistical Area recently formed the Roanoke Area Sustainability Consortium with the intent to apply for the Sustainable Communities Regional Planning Grant Program. The Consortium is applying as a **medium-sized, metropolitan statistical area** for **Category I** funding to develop a Regional Plan for Sustainable Development. Government representatives from the City of Roanoke, Roanoke County, Craig County, Franklin County and the City of Salem will serve on the Consortium as will representatives from Virginia Western Community College, the Roanoke Valley Area Metropolitan Planning Organization, the Council of Community Services, and the Roanoke Valley-Alleghany Regional Commission. These entities have united to develop a coordinated framework and plan that will integrate housing, land use, economic and workforce development, transportation, and infrastructure investments in the Roanoke Region.



The Roanoke Valley-Alleghany Regional Commission will be the lead applicant with responsibility for submitting the application, executing agreements with the funding source as well as assuming fiscal responsibility for the grant on behalf of the consortium. Advising the consortium and participating in the development of regional plans will be a Stakeholder Committee made up of a broad network of organizations from the private, government and nonprofit sectors. The stakeholders will provide content expertise and the ability to engage all segments of the regional community.

The Roanoke Area Sustainability Initiative will consist of three phases of research and gap analysis, community and stakeholder outreach and engagement, and production and planning over a three year period. Phase I will consist of data collection and gap analysis of existing regional plans, local comprehensive plans, transportation plans, and more, identifying gaps and inconsistencies between these plans. Phase II will collect and make available those gaps through a robust public visioning process, particularly focused on populations traditionally underrepresented in planning efforts. This phase will provide an opportunity for new gaps to be identified as these population segments provide their input. This will result in a *sustainability framework* that will drive Phase III of the process: the closing of gaps in

regional plans, the creation and synthesis of these efforts into a *Regional Plan for Sustainable Development* and the augmenting of the *sustainable framework* to be applied to future planning and implementation efforts.

The *Sustainability Framework* will guide the development of the Regional Plan and become a practical guide for Consortium members and other stakeholders to use in their planning or program development processes. The Framework will act as an implementation piece of the Regional Plan to help ensure that regional and local policies and plans contribute to a sustainable future for the Roanoke Valley. The Framework will be completed during Phase II of the planning process.

The *Regional Plan for Sustainable Development* will integrate housing, land use, economic and workforce development, transportation, and infrastructure investments in the Roanoke Region. The development of the plan will focus on the interdependent challenges of economic competitiveness and revitalization; social equity, inclusion, and access to opportunity; energy use and climate change; and public health and environmental impact.

The planning process and outcomes will be consistent with the HUD Livability Principles related to transportation choice, affordable housing, economic competitiveness, existing communities, leveraging investment, and valuing neighborhoods. The Consortium will identify the spatial mismatch between trip origins, destinations, and mode choice and make recommendations to improve mobility and reduce vehicle miles traveled. Implementation of home weatherization and retrofit efforts will be researched to determine their effectiveness and determine opportunities for improvement. Rural access to employment, education, and transportation will be key components of the planning efforts, especially in evaluating how to maintain successful and vibrant existing communities. The Plan will identify regional benefits of existing neighborhoods and regional opportunities to implement elements of neighborhood-level planning initiatives.

The outcomes of these interrelated processes will be a greater integration of all issues that impact the sustainability of the Roanoke region. It will reveal the strengths and weaknesses of our present plans and forge a new process to make them more interconnected. The planning process will tackle ways that federal, state, and local resources can be better coordinated to achieve sustainability. The community engagement and visioning process will engage the broadest array of stakeholders and citizens ever attempted in our region, especially those traditionally marginalized from the planning process. Most significantly, the Consortium will promote an ongoing process to ensure that regional and local policies and plans contribute to a sustainable future for the Roanoke Valley. This will be accomplished through the Sustainability Framework and by making the Stakeholder Committee a standing committee of the Regional Commission.

The stakeholder committee will work with staff and appropriate federal, state, regional, and local agency representatives to identify and agree upon indicators relevant to Sustainable Communities. Examples of indicators might include cost of housing, poverty rates, income levels, average miles traveled. The indicators will be tracked reports published annually. This process is already underway by the Council of Community Services, which produces an annual Community Indicators Report. The release of annual Sustainable Communities indicator reports will be coordinated as media and public education events. Ultimately, the indicators and reports will be organized around the Sustainability Framework. The use of indicators provides an opportunity for nontraditional populations to be involved in the project and provides a link between program outcomes and evaluation.