

Green Infrastructure Working Group Briefing Note

January 20, 2023

Introduction

At the October 27, 2022, Planning Commission meeting to discuss the Draft Green Infrastructure Working Group Report, Commission members voiced their support for the recommendations in the Report and requested that the working group elaborate on the next steps, implementation, and how to move the Report forward. The Working Group met on December 15, 2022, to discuss the following seven items: Priorities; the Collective Impact (CI) Model including potential partners; the formation of a Transition Group; funding; next steps; a name for the initiative; and a suggested motion. For reference, Annex 1 includes the minutes of the Planning Commission meeting of October 27, 2022.

The working group's recommendations outlined below were presented and discussed at the Planning Commission meeting on January 12, 2023. Commission members concurred with the recommendations and the suggested motion. They proposed that the Report and this accompanying briefing note are forwarded to the City Council at the next Planning Commission meeting on January 26, 2023.

1. Priorities

The Planning Commission asked the working group to suggest priorities in the next draft of the Report.

The Green Infrastructure Working Group recommends focusing initial priorities on **Promoting Healthy and Sustainable Neighborhoods**. The following suggestions are offered to initiate a discussion.

- **Active Citizens.** Complement Live Healthy Rockbridge programs that encourage exercise and well-being by prioritizing infrastructure improvements related to walking and biking between Lexington's neighborhoods and major destinations through annual enhancements based on existing plans. Include areas where significant infrastructure investments offer opportunities to upgrade sidewalks after construction. Continue annual incremental improvements to Jordan's Point based on the Jordan's Point master plan and improve and maintain other recreational areas and open spaces.
- **Tree Canopy/Planting.** Expand the City's tree canopy program managed through the Tree Board, Public Works, and the City Arborist. Assess and summarize the findings of the 2022 Urban Tree Canopy Report and recommend a program for tree planting and management in public spaces, including school grounds. Consider directing street tree planting to neighborhoods to provide shade and green corridors where biking and walking are encouraged. Consider similar support programs to promote tree planting in private and institutional settings. Review existing ordinances to encourage tree planting in parking areas and develop an educational program to preserve existing mature trees with the support of organizations such as Master Gardeners.
- **Stormwater management best practices.** Protect and improve our waterways' water quality by assessing the functioning of previously installed stormwater management best practices and locations for new installations. Review the study on impervious surfaces to recommend higher-priority improvements and build a public awareness campaign on the merits of a dedicated fund to improve

stormwater management. Suggest revisions to our zoning code for land-use regulations that limit runoff.

- **Sustainability and Renewable energy**
 - Encourage Lexington Mayor and City Council to **join the [Global Covenant of Mayors for Climate and Energy](#)**. (Charlottesville, Roanoke, and Blacksburg are members.)
 - Tap the staff, faculty, and students at W&L and VMI to assist in developing a **baseline inventory of municipal energy use and costs**, including estimates of carbon footprint and greenhouse gases produced. Recommend specific improvements, cost savings, and potential financial resources for selected City buildings such as City Hall.
 - **Convene a working group** to explore a program to **increase sustainability and resiliency** in cooperation with Rockbridge County, Buena Vista, and non-profit community groups and educational institutions.
 - **Waste reduction**, support and expand existing initiatives to reduce waste going to the landfill, preserve natural resources and save money.
- **Wildlife**. Support urban wildlife and biodiversity initiatives such as "[Monarch Butterfly City](#)" or "[Bee City](#)" designations. Establish **use classifications for greenspaces** to allow different planting, maintenance, and mowing protocols.

2. Collective Impact Model

The Planning Commission requested that the working group elaborate on the structure of the collective impact model.

As noted in both the Report and Commission presentation, we are fortunate to have three examples of the collective impact model in Lexington/Rockbridge:

- **Live Healthy Rockbridge (LHR)** is a coalition whose mission is *working together for community wellbeing*. The backbone organization for LHR is Carilion Clinic, which provides a full-time employee to coordinate meetings, maintain minutes, and provide leadership for the coalition.
- **Rockbridge Outdoors** has a part-time support person who coordinates meetings and prepares minutes through a grant from the Central Shenandoah Planning District. Leadership is provided from within the members, with rotating officers. While the list of objectives the coalition would like to accomplish is long, they agree upon a small number of initiatives each year to focus their energies and resources.
- **Rockbridge Waste Reduction Roundtable** brings together local organizations working on waste reduction. Using the Collective Impact model, with Boxerwood as the backbone entity and a staff member as a facilitator, members organize their efforts by disseminating information among the coalition. Members work on a common interest, with each member bringing their own strengths to the table. Regular communication has created a synergy in which new opportunities become apparent.

Green Infrastructure Working Group members' comments on the above-referenced collective impact coalitions outlined key considerations when developing the collective impact model.

- Think of the model as a Venn diagram where the collective impact members work together where their interests and activities overlap and link to the resources of their extended networks. In effect, the model works as a network of networks.
- The goal of the adopted structure should be to build in and maintain enough flexibility to shift and adapt depending on what City Council and other community partners are willing to focus on at any given time.
- Bylaws or a general agreement among the partners can outline the governance structure.
- Ensure avenues for public feedback through City Council reporting and outreach and education efforts by involved partners.

A potential structure that is emerging regarding the Green Infrastructure initiative could be as follows:

- **Collective Impact Partners** supported by **their affiliated organizations and networks**.
- A **Steering Committee**, made up of representatives of partner organizations, to provide strategic direction, develop the shared agenda, seek funding opportunities, and monitor milestones.
- A **Project Coordinator** that can facilitate dialog and coordination among the partners and support the Steering Group;
- A **Fiduciary Organization** responsible for grant management; and
- **Working Groups** to progress agreed-upon projects and initiatives.

Potential Partners. We suggest beginning with a smaller group, with additional members joining as the initiative gains direction and experience. In this scenario of partners outlined below, there would at first be eight members of the Steering Committee. Current activities and/or indicative focus areas for participation are noted in parentheses; these suggestions will need further confirmation based on more detailed discussions among the partners.

1. Boxerwood

- a. Projects: Community/School Tree Planting and Native Tree Nursery; CORE Works offset and funding; Backyard composting and food waste reduction at schools; Green and Sustainable School Yards;
- b. Grant research and writing; Public Communications and Education; and Partnership Creation and school and multi-project coordination

2. City Councilor (Council liaison)

3. City of Lexington

- a. Tree Board and City Arborist (Tree Canopy and Open Space)
- b. Planning (Bike-Ped, zoning amendments)
- c. Public Works (Stormwater management)

4. Master Gardeners and Master Naturalists (Education)

5. RACC

- a. Projects: Waste Prevention; Energy and Climate; Watershed; Land Conservation; Trails and Owned Land
- b. Education and Outreach; Fiduciary role (for example, Friends of Brushy Hills)

6. Live Healthy Rockbridge (Active Citizens)

7. Washington and Lee (Climate Resiliency)

8. Virginia Military Institute (Water Modeling, Stormwater Best practices)

The Venn diagram structure with overlapping primary and secondary networks is helpful when considering how other organizations can be involved depending on the shared agenda and annual work program. For example:

- The Natural Bridge Soil and Water Conservation District can contribute to stormwater mitigation for homeowners.
- The Ministerial Alliance can assist in mobilizing its network for information dissemination and volunteers.
- The NAACP can support outreach efforts to identify needs and promote inclusive neighborhood initiatives.
- Friends of Brushy Hills can support trail maintenance and good forest preservation practices.

3. Transition Group.

With the completion of the Report, we recommend a transition group drawing on working group members to help guide the initiative from the Planning Commission to the City Council and support the initial efforts to organize the collective impact model.

4. Funding

Adopting a Collective Impact (CI) model for advancing Green Infrastructure will enable the City to achieve more than it can on its own. While still giving the City full say in the implementation and timing of any project, the CI brings additional resources to the table in terms of expertise and funding. In this model, CI organizations (both public and private) work together to identify attainable goals, sharing resources for those ends. These resources may include in-kind and cash matches and designated project funding secured by CI partners from grants, donations, etc. The Report lists a sampler of such potential resources.

As conceived, this CI model recognizes the City as a partner of special standing. While the approach to planning and implementation is collaborative, the City will always have first and final say in deliberations. CI partners must mutually agree on projects and associated financial commitments and contributions as a key step in developing their shared agenda and action plan(s). During this process, all partners will have the opportunity to note their priorities, willingness, and capacity to participate in any potential initiatives. Most significantly, through their participation in the collaborative, the City Council and the City Manager will have ample opportunities to convey City priorities and potential commitments for any CI-generated plan. In other words, action occurs at the intersection of partner and City interests and capabilities.

Funding for CI projects will come from two sources. First, existing resources from the CI partners themselves, who may already be engaged in one or more of the targeted implementations with their own dedicated funds. Second, new external funding secured by the CI Steering Committee (or its partners) that either supports the coordinating work of the CI model itself, and/or provides dedicated funding for agreed-upon projects such as green street initiatives, BMP stormwater practices, etc. These funds can include federal grants that will be flowing down to the States for environmental and sustainability initiatives. While such funds are competitive, it's worth noting that applying as a multi-partnered coalition with a shared agenda is highly favored by grantors and thus itself, a strategy for success.

5. Next steps

Activity	Outcome
Planning Commission Meeting of January 12 & 26, 2023	Review and forward the Green Infrastructure Working Group's Report for Council's consideration and a joint work session.
Joint Council and Commission work session [Date TBD].	Review and discuss the report, its recommendations, and public comments. Finalize the Report based on City Council recommendations.
Form Steering Committee	With support from the Transition Group, form a Steering Committee, draft a governance structure, develop a shared agenda and initial priorities, and explore funding possibilities.
Identify potential grant sources and seek funding.	Identify funding sources for projects and a part-time position. (Note that the CI model can begin w/o funds for the coordinator).
Launch!!!!!!	Let the CI model and green infrastructure initiatives begin!

6. We need a name!

This initiative will need a name that conveys its mission and activities.

7. Motion

The Planning Commission will pass a motion when forwarding the Report to the City Council; below is the suggested text for a motion.

To achieve the goal, objectives, and strategies established in the Green Infrastructure Chapter of the 2040 Lexington Comprehensive Plan, the Planning Commission endorses the Green Infrastructure Working Group Report, *Getting Greener in Lexington – Moving the Conversation Forward*. The Commission concurs with the Report's proposal to consider the Collective Impact Model approach, and we encourage the city staff to review the Report to identify opportunities to integrate green infrastructure initiatives into ongoing work plans.

A. Green Infrastructure Working Group Final Report

1) Introductory Remarks from Planning Commission Liaison –

Commissioner Driscoll reminded the Commission that the Green Infrastructure Working Group (Working Group) was charged with recommending how the City can achieve the goals, objectives and strategies in the Green Infrastructure chapter of the Comprehensive Plan and said the Report represents the recommendations, suggestions and collective wisdom of an engaged and thoughtful group that knows Lexington well. He suggested the goal for this meeting was to familiarize the Planning Commission with the Report and the recommended Collective Impact model approach to implementation.

He explained that the Working Group organized itself around the six initiatives that are a focus of the Report and learned from one another what various local organizations are already doing – pointing out the multi-disciplinary nature of green infrastructure. He offered that the initiatives were synthesized from the strategies in the Green Infrastructure chapter of the Comprehensive Plan and form the basis of an integrated approach. He noted the Report also provides potential partners; a suggested model for project implementation and potential funding sources. He emphasized that the Report is not a statutory document, but should be used as a road map to continue the conversation and to develop a strategy for implementation using the varied resources available within the City.

Commissioner Driscoll explained that the Collective Impact model is a means of bringing together and harnessing the efforts of existing organizations rather than creating a new institution. He noted it is becoming the preferred adaptive management technique for addressing complex sustainability challenges, is favored by funders, and is a model already used by other local groups. The Working Group has recommended the model as the most economical way to accomplish the strategies in the Comprehensive Plan as it provides flexibility with a low budget start up. He asked that the Planning Commission explore and validate the model as a viable approach, and participate in and support the development of the model as a means of accomplishing many of the Green Infrastructure initiatives. He reported the next steps would be to finalize the Report after discussion with the Commission, presenting the Report to City Council, developing consensus about who would act as the backbone of the organization(s), supporting that person in communicating with interested parties, and supporting them in seeking funding.

Commissioner Tuchler expressed enthusiasm for the report and gratitude for the work involved and asked how the Commission could see that it becomes an action item. A. Glaeser noted that the Commission could make a recommendation endorsing the plan, but implementation would be up to City Council. J. Driscoll emphasized that the priority for the Planning Commission should be the validation of the Collective Impact model as an implementation tool, rather than suggesting actionable individual projects.

Before opening the hearing to public comment, Chair Shester, on behalf of the Planning Commission, thanked the members of the Green Infrastructure Group for their diligent work over the past year and the impressive results.

2) Public Comment –

Holly Ostby, 16 Edmondson Ave – stated she is a member of the Working Group and works for the hospital where she leads a coalition that uses the Collective Impact model. She suggested the model would allow the City to coordinate with other local organizations to better prioritize and to best utilize resources. She said the model is similar to a regular coalition with the difference that with Collective Impact there is a framework. The collective approach brings more resources to bear with greater impact, but in order for it to work there must be a backbone entity and a point person to stay in touch with all parties and facilitate communication. She suggested the model could involve one, over-arching “Green Infrastructure” group with various committees for specific topics. She said she envisioned the point person as acting as extra staff for the Planning Director to keep the City abreast of projects in the area and inform the projects the City decides to allocate resources to. She stressed that the point person need not be a City employee and could perhaps be housed in a local non-profit serving as the backbone entity. L. Straughan remarked that she thought that was a realistic model and encouraged an approach that was not City led but included a City staff or Council liaison.

Charles Aligood, 506 Cavalry Rd. – expressed support and approval of the Report and extolled the Working Group’s efforts in developing it and in influencing the

Comprehensive Plan and Catalyst Projects. He recognized the work of Commissioner Driscoll as well as that of former Planning Commission Chair, Jamie Goodin, and praised the entire group’s benefit to the City. He agreed that a liaison should be identified and pledged to lend his support here and in City Council.

Arthur Bartenstein, 614 Stonewall St. – remarked that Lexington is appreciated for its historic character and that he sees green infrastructure as not only relevant to recreation, the environment, and health, but also to Lexington’s historic identity. He noted the strong, local preservation community and suggested they would be an interested party. He observed that many cities have a dedicated Parks Department and said it was a concern of his that Lexington has no staff who is specifically concerned with the City’s open spaces

Lee Merrill, 2 S. Randolph St. – stated that, as a member of the Working Group, he was very encouraged by the Commissioners supportive reaction to the report. He voiced support for the Collective Impact model as a means of implementation and indicated there was potential for big impacts within the next several years. He remarked on the community’s wealth of resources and argued a backbone entity would be necessary to make this work.

Responding to questions from various Commissioners about practical organization and procedure, Ms. Ostby recommended the adoption of loose bylaws or a general agreement among the partners, but noted bylaws are not necessary. She indicated the goal should be on building in and maintaining enough flexibility to be able to shift and adapt depending on what City Council and other community partners are willing to focus on at any given time. She added the coalition partners would decide and agree together on a shared metric to measure progress and provided a brief explanation of how her coalition functions while stressing that other Collective Impact coalitions function differently.

Elise Sheffield, 1 South River Rd. – explained she, through her affiliation with Boxerwood, is part of a Collective Impact model, the Rockbridge Waste Reduction Roundtable, and offered a description of how it functions as a way of assisting the Commissioners in understanding how this type of model works. She encouraged the Commissioners to think of the model as a Venn diagram and explained that Boxerwood, in its work with schools and waste reduction, found that it and other local organizations also working on waste reduction were stepping on each other's toes. Using the Collective Impact model, with Boxerwood as the backbone entity and Ms. Sheffield as the facilitator, they were able to organize their efforts simply by disseminating information among the coalition members. She said it allows the members to work on a common interest with each member bringing their own strengths to the table, and she has found having the various entities in communication has created a synergy in which new opportunities become apparent.

- 3) Commission Discussion – Chair Shester suggested the Commission discuss next steps, implementation and how to move the Report forward. M. Tuchler requested that emphasis be placed on moving the report on effectively so that it is well used and referenced in the future. L. Straughan agreed and said she would encourage the idea of an outside entity acting as the backbone entity and housing the coordinator. She suggested the details be better fleshed out before being presented to City Council so as to be better received and more quickly acted upon. Following additional discussion of how and when to make a recommendation to City Council, J. Driscoll suggested the Green Infrastructure Group would tighten up the implementation priorities, provide potential funding sources and identify outside organizations to act as the backbone entity. It was determined that the Commission would consider the Working Group's more specific practical language at its December 8th meeting. There appeared to be a general understanding that the Commission would make its formal recommendation at its joint meeting with City Council to be scheduled in early 2023.

Responding to a question from L. Straughan about an item that came to her attention with the recognition of the City's Arbor Day, Betty Besal of the Tree Board provided a brief explanation of an effort to expand protection of private trees by adding the designations *memorial heritage specimen* and *street trees* to the Tree Ordinance.