



GIC News Release

For Immediate Release
Contact: Karen Firehock
434-975-6700, #222

Report shows opportunities for a greener Richmond

January 19, 2011: The Green Infrastructure Center Inc. (GIC) and E² Inc. partnered with the Richmond Regional Planning District Commission (RRPDC) and the City of Richmond in 2010 to assess the city's green infrastructure in a new report *Richmond Green Infrastructure Assessment*. Green infrastructure includes the tree canopy that keeps the city cooler in summer and cleans the air; the rivers that provide habitat for fish and recreation for people; and the parks and other greenways that provide respite for people and habitat for birds and other wildlife. Green areas also help infiltrate water to reduce stormwater impacts to the James River and its tributaries. As Richmond has developed over time, much of the city's green space has been lost or has become disconnected as roads, or other developments bisected natural areas and storm damages reduced tree canopy. Large expanses of paved areas contribute polluted runoff to the James River and its tributaries during rainfall events.

For the first time, the city has a comprehensive map of opportunities and key strategies to help the city evaluate its current green assets and to inform the city's strategy for reconnecting key natural assets. Funded by a grant from the Altria Family of Companies, the Virginia Coastal Zone Program and the Virginia Department of Forestry, the project utilized satellite imagery, city data and state models to map existing natural assets and outline potential opportunities for adding green infrastructure to currently underserved areas. The study found more than 9,000 vacant or underutilized parcels that could be redeveloped or regreened. The study includes neighborhood concept plans for the Blackwell and Bellemeade neighborhoods that identify specific catalyst parcels along with strategies for these areas to contribute to the city's green space and quality of life. A compendium toolkit and case studies provide implementation guidance to create new pocket parks, community gardens, stream buffers and trail networks.

According to GIC Director Karen Firehock, "Infiltrating water is an important focus of the project since the James River runs through the heart of Richmond and it's a major tributary of the Chesapeake Bay." Richmond, like all Chesapeake Bay localities will be required to find more ways to infiltrate water now that the entire Bay drainage must be restored as part of the Bay's listing by the U.S. Environmental Protection Area as an impaired water body.

The project team also hopes that re-greening the city with vegetation will create another kind of green. Studies have shown that people shop longer and pay more per item in tree lined areas. Businesses with higher paying jobs are also more likely to relocate in areas where employees have access to green space. City residents also benefit by living in areas with better air quality and safer streets. Even vacancy rates for both commercial and residential areas are reduced when neighborhoods have more green space.

This map of green opportunities will be used to inform the city's future development and city planning. For example, the city can use the green map to determine where to acquire future parkland or to make new trail connections. Neighborhood groups can target areas of their communities for tree planting, community gardens and other activities that can absorb and filter water. Businesses can use the maps to locate closest to green areas or to find parcels to revitalize by adding more trees, vegetation and other features that cool the city while reducing runoff. Firehock added that "Paying attention to green infrastructure is just as important as grey infrastructure when seeking to revitalize a city where residents and businesses can grow and thrive." Free copies of the report can be downloaded at <http://www.gicinc.org/Richmond.html>

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The GIC is a nonprofit organization located in Charlottesville, Virginia that assists communities in developing strategies for protecting and conserving their ecological and cultural assets through environmentally-sensitive decisions, lifestyles and planning. The **GIC** and its partner firm **E² Inc.** conduct research, economic analysis, land use planning and land assessment and mapping to provide the suite of tools needed by communities to protect and restore green assets. This project is one of a series of green infrastructure plans that the GIC has developed for regions, counties, and cities over the past four years.

*Green Infrastructure Center, 921 Second Street, SE, Charlottesville, Virginia, 22902. 434-975-6700, #222
<<http://www.gicinc.org>>*