



GIC News Release

For Immediate Release
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Partnership Seeks A Greener Richmond

Thursday, Feb. 25, 2010: The Green Infrastructure Center Inc. (GIC) has partnered with the Richmond Regional Planning District Commission (RRPDC), the City of Richmond and the firm of E² Inc. to assess the city's green infrastructure. Green infrastructure is the natural building blocks that make cities liveable and healthful. Green infrastructure includes the tree canopy that keeps the city cooler in summer while cleaning 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.

This new partnership between the GIC, the RRPDC, the city and E² Inc. will evaluate and map Richmond's green resources and seek opportunities to expand it. Funded by a grant from the Virginia Coastal Zone Program and the Altria Family of Companies, and the Virginia Department of Forestry (DOF), the project will apply a variety of information sources such as satellite imagery, city data and on-the-ground inventories to map existing natural assets. This work is needed because Richmond, like many older cities, has large expanses of paved areas and older lots that have not yet redeveloped. These paved areas contribute polluted runoff to the James River and its tributaries during rainfall events. These areas will be evaluated to determine whether they can be re-greened to contribute to the city's green network by adding more trees, gardens or simply allowing water to percolate into the soil instead of running off into rivers. The project builds on a successful partnership begun in 2009, between the GIC, the Richmond Regional Planning District Commission (RRPDC) and the Capital Region Land Conservancy to map the region's green infrastructure.

According to GIC Director Karen Firehock, the city has many opportunities where water can be better infiltrated and cleaned. Firehock noted that "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. The bay is in trouble and impaired. The cities can do a great deal to help clean the bay by preventing polluted urban land runoff. As Richmond redevelops over time, we can create more green spaces to both clean the water and create a more liveable city."

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 are willing to 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 benefit by living in areas with better air quality and safer streets. Even vacancy rates are reduced in areas with more green space. "One of the most important ways that we can make a lasting impact is to do things in a more environmentally friendly manner," said city spokeswoman Tammy D. Hawley. "Mayor Jones has been consistent with his interest in specific environmental policies and practical actions. He believes that business success can be aligned with sustainability and that a comprehensive effort will augment the city's economic and community development strategy."

The project will identify those areas that are most strategic for creating a more healthful city. This map of green opportunities will create a "greenprint" for the city's future development. This future greenprint can be used when Richmond City staff are creating neighborhood plans or meeting with property owners to highlight opportunities for developing their parcels in ways that maximize green opportunities. The City's Department of Parks and Recreation 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 that they can develop as greener sites by adding more trees, vegetation and other features that cool the city while reducing runoff. Firehock added that this project builds on the existing planning that has already been done for the region. She noted that "Adding green infrastructure is just as important as the grey infrastructure when seeking to revitalize a city where residents and businesses can grow and thrive. Richmond can grow and grow greener too." For more on the project please visit <http://gicinc.org/Richmond.html>

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The GIC is a nonprofit organization located in Charlottesville, Virginia that was formed to assist communities in developing strategies for protecting and conserving their ecological and cultural assets through environmentally-sensitive decisions, lifestyles and planning. The GIC conducts research, economic analysis, land use planning and asset 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 three years.

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