2027 Legislative Positions

Broadband and the Internet

Broadband Provision: Support legislation by the state and the federal government that would assist localities and provide financial incentives to localities and their communities in deploying universal, affordable access to broadband technology, particularly in unserved and underserved areas, while at the same time preserving local land use authority for siting telecommunications infrastructure. This includes ensuring the completion of projects started as part of the Virginia Telecommunications Initiative (VATI). In addition, support legislation that would: (1) ensure that coverage maps used to determine underserved and unserved areas or census blocks are accurate; (2) amend the definition of "coverage" to mean that service actually exists in a census block or area and the service availability within that census block or area is substantial; and (3) ensure that affordable and reliable service is available to all residents and business in the Commonwealth

Net Neutrality: Unless the Congress or the Federal Communications Commission restores net neutrality at the national level, support legislation that would prohibit internet service providers from slowing down or blocking access to websites, charging companies extra to deliver their services faster, and other acts that adversely affect consumers and discourage competition.

Economic Development

Site Readiness: The biennium budget should include robust funding for the Virginia Business Ready Site Program to continue to improve the Commonwealth's position as a top state for business.

Growth Management, Environmental Protection, Land Use, and Transportation

Biosolids: Support legislation enabling localities, as part of their zoning ordinances, to designate, and/or reasonably restrict the land application of biosolids to, specific areas within the locality based on criteria related to the public safety and welfare of its citizens and the environment. In addition, support legislation regarding the land application of biosolids that protects the environment, public health and safety.

Environmental: Support legislation prohibiting businesses from using disposable plastic bags and straws and to require bottle deposits, or enable localities to do so, with exceptions applicable to straws for hospitals and other care facilities. Oppose legislation that reduces local authority to regulate new natural gas infrastructure for development projects. Support sustainable material management (SMM) legislation, including extended producer responsibility (EPR) legislation, that improves recycling rates, reduces litter, and reduces the amount of material being sent to landfills.

Erosion and Sediment Control Standards for Agriculture and Forestry Operations: Support legislation that would establish minimum statewide erosion and sediment control standards for agriculture and forestry operations. These standards could include those within the Chesapeake Bay Preservation Act's regulations, which include: (1) for agriculture operations, soil and water quality conservation assessments evaluating the effectiveness of existing practices pertaining to soil erosion and sediment control, nutrient management, and management of pesticides, and, where necessary, resulting in plans outlining additional practices needed to ensure that water quality protection is being accomplished; stream buffers are maintained; and best management practices for agricultural ditches are used; and (2) for forestry operations, requiring operations to be conducted using the appropriate best management practices as prescribed by Virginia's Forestry Best Management Practices for Water Quality, and requiring that a full 100-foot buffer be established in woody vegetation when the silvicultural activity ceases within the buffer area on the property and a new land use is proposed.

Local Authority Concerning Land Use Matters: Oppose legislation that erodes local authority over land use matters, including permissibility of and standards applicable to data centers and utility-scale clean energy projects.

Open-Space Easements: Support legislation that augments local efforts in natural resource protection through: (1) continued funding of the Virginia Land Conservation Foundation (VLCF) for locally established and funded Purchase of Development Rights programs (*e.g.*, the ACE Program in Albemarle County); (2) continued provision of matching funds to localities for their Purchase of Development Rights programs through the Office of Farmland Preservation; (3) retaining provisions in transient occupancy tax legislation so that funds can continue to be used to protect open-space and resources of historical, cultural, ecological, and scenic value that attract tourism; (4) increased incentives for citizens to create conservation and open-space easements; (5) fully allocating the Land Preservation Tax Credit transfer fee for the stewardship of protected land; and (6) restoring the individual cap on the use of the Land Preservation Tax Credit to $50,000 per year.

Stop Extending the Sunset Provisions for Certain Development Approvals that Would Otherwise Expire: Allow expiration of the sunset provisions in *Virginia Code* § 15.2-2209.1. First established in 2009 when the General Assembly adopted *Virginia Code* § 15.2-2209.1 to extend the validity of certain land use approvals during the Great Recession, the General Assembly has repeatedly extended the sunset clauses for various land use approvals. Most recently, the General Assembly extended the validity of these approvals in *Virginia Code* § 15.2-2209.1:1 because of the COVID-19 pandemic. The continued extension of these approvals results in the continued validity of non-vested and undeveloped but approved projects well beyond their otherwise applicable expiration date. Some projects protected by the extension of the sunset provisions were approved as much as 15 years ago. These projects may no longer be consistent with the locality's current planning policies or zoning or site development requirements.

Long-Term Transportation Funding and Investment: Support state and regional policies and legislation that:

1) establish a comprehensive, sustainable, transparent, and forward-looking transportation funding framework capable of supporting Virginia's transportation needs for the coming decades. Support a statewide effort to bring together the Governor, General Assembly, state and local governments, transportation agencies, regional planning organizations, business leaders, and other stakeholders to evaluate the performance of existing funding mechanisms, identify Virginia's long-term transportation needs, and develop a sustainable strategy to build, maintain, and modernize the Commonwealth's transportation system;
2) provide adequate and predictable funding for transportation project delivery and the staffing and administrative capacity necessary to plan, design, administer, and complete those investments;
3) authorize a Charlottesville-Albemarle Regional Transit Authority to establish a dedicated funding source to support regional transit and multimodal transportation;
4) expand transportation choices and support integrated multimodal transportation planning and investment; and
5) provide adequate funding for the maintenance and preservation of Virginia's rural and secondary road systems.

Oppose legislation or regulations that would require counties to assume responsibility for constructing, maintaining, or operating new or existing secondary roads.

Water Quality and Resources: Support state funding for (1) agriculture best management practices; (2) stormwater grant initiatives; and (3) wastewater treatment plant upgrades.

Health and Human Services

Child Care for Low Income Working Families: Support legislation to provide additional funds to localities to assist low-income working families with childcare costs. Funding helps working-class parents pay for supervised day care facilities and supports efforts for families to become self-sufficient.

Community Services Boards: Support increased state funding for Community Services Boards commensurate with the recommendations of the study entitled *CSB Behavioral Health Services* prepared by the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission (JLARC) and dated December 12, 2022.

Mental Health Services: Support expanded access to community-based behavioral/mental health services, including improved access to therapeutic services for adolescents, mobile crisis teams for community based behavioral health crises, and full staffing and operation of Crisis Intervention Team Assessment Centers (CITAC) as an alternative to Temporary Detention Orders (TDOs).

Housing

Affordable Housing Funding: Support legislation that would provide state funding to increase the supply of affordable housing, including increased funding for the Communities of Opportunity Tax Credit Program administered by the Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development.

Locality Right of First Refusal: Support a locality right of first refusal when affordable housing is sold or converted.

Rent Stabilization: Support a state study of rent stabilization/rent gouging protections.

Supportive Housing: Support legislation providing for the creation of permanent supportive housing and other supportive housing.

Local Government Administration and Finance

All-Virtual Public Meetings: Support legislation that would allow all local public bodies to hold all meetings virtually.

Civil Penalties: Support legislation that would allow for the establishment of a schedule of civil instead of criminal penalties for violations of local ordinances.

Composite Index: Support legislation to amend the Composite Index Funding Formula by re-defining the local true value of real property component of the formula to include the land use taxation value of real property rather than the fair market assessed value for those properties that have qualified for and are being taxed under a land use value taxation program.

State Mandates Funding: Request full funding for state mandates in all areas of local government including (but not limited to): local school divisions, costs related to jails and juvenile detention centers and state-supported human services positions

Taxing Authority: Support legislation to further enhance county taxing authority so that counties enjoy authority comparable to cities to address capital and operations needs and to reduce over-reliance on the real property tax as a revenue source. Consider or study local enabling authority, consistent with federal legal constraints, to impose a non-discriminatory personal property tax on all motor vehicles principally garaged in the Commonwealth, regardless of owner domicile.

Public Safety

Demerit Points for Truck Violations: Assign demerit points under the Uniform Demerit Point System for violations involving overweight or overlength trucks or unpermitted through trucks. (*Virginia Code* § 46.2-492)

Emergency Management and Community Resilience: Request expanded direct state support to localities for emergency management and community resilience, including expansion of the Emergency Management Performance Grant Program (EMPG).

Fire and Emergency Medical Services: Support legislation that provides for additional state funding for local fire and emergency medical services to ensure adequate staffing levels consistent with high levels of public safety and health.