Residents’ vision becomes reality

Neighborhood revitalization is not a speedy process—it can take years before a community sees the changes take effect. But when those changes do occur, the result is contagious.

Northside’s Six Points intersection is a completely different scene than it was two years ago. The results of the revitalization planning and implementation all seem to be coming together at once.

The Highland Park Senior Apartments ribbon cutting event in June celebrated the completion of 77 affordable apartments for seniors. The fully occupied building was bought by the D.C. real estate developer Community Preservation and Development Corporation (CPDC) and transformed from an old vacant school building into a state-of-the-art apartment facility, complete with a community room, kitchen and salon. Virginia LISC played a critical role in encouraging CPDC to move into the Richmond market and supplied a capacity building grant to fund the CPDC employees in Richmond.

"CPDC came to us highly recommended from the D.C. LISC office, and we knew they would be a great partner for our Highland Park revitalization work," said Candice Streett, executive director of Virginia LISC.

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Residents’ vision becomes reality—Northside efforts continued

Residents from the Gilpin Court Faye Towers moved to the Highland Park Senior Apartments in the spring of this year and are enjoying their new homes.

Having the influx of senior residents is a good thing for the neighborhood too.

“The increase in foot traffic in the neighborhood will be good for the businesses on the corridor and will help to deter crime in the area,” said Candice Streett, CPDC and other partners at the Highland Park Senior Apartments ribbon cutting. Photo credit: Killeen King, LISC

The seniors won’t be the only ones increasing foot traffic at Six Points.

**The 6 Points Innovation Center**, 6PIC for short, also opened its doors in June. 6PIC, located diagonally across the intersection from the Highland Park Senior Apartments, is the collaboration effort of a number of nonprofits that wanted to take a vacant space on the corridor and turn it into a creative neighborhood center for youth.

Storefront for Community Design, Art 180, Groundwork RVA, Saving our Youth, Boaz & Ruth, CPDC and Virginia LISC all partnered to make the space happen by applying for and receiving the Robins Foundation innovation grant for the initiative. Virginia LISC also supplied capacity funding to Storefront for Community Design, the organization that spearheaded the project.

The center will provide after-school programming for youth, but it will also serve as a way for youth to take a leadership role in their neighborhood.

“We want this to be a place that brings agency back to the youth,” said Ryan Rinn, executive director of Storefront for Community Design.

He explained that there will be a program called Changemakers—a teenage council in charge of budgeting and generating programs at 6PIC.

“I feel like putting them in processes as youth that they will experience as adults and letting them navigate it now just makes them better prepared,” said Rinn.

Speaking of youth, The Richmond City Police Department and Virginia LISC are working on another youth programming effort on the Northside this summer.

**The Midnight Youth Basketball League** will be kicking off in mid-July and continuing through August. The league will include Richmond police officers and at least 50 Gilpin Court youth in basketball games that will be held from 10 p.m. to 2 a.m. during the summer nights. Virginia LISC is providing the funding for the program this summer and hopes to find a corporate sponsor to continue the program in future years.

“This program is a great way to keep youth engaged in a positive way in their neighborhood, while at the same time, igniting friendly relationships between youth and police,” said Ebony Walden, program officer at Virginia LISC. “Community policing can have such an encouraging effect on a neighborhood, especially when the youth get to know and trust their local police officers.”

Youth engagement is one part of Virginia LISC’s Crime Safety Initiative that is in the midst of implementation. The other is targeting **crime hot spots** in Northside. Virginia LISC and Storefront for Community Design are busy implementing three early action beautification projects near crime hot spots. Two of the targeted areas are in Highland Park—one at Six Points and one on 4th Ave. The third is in Gilpin Court.

Residents were asked what beautification they would like to see. Photo credit: Killeen King, LISC

“The idea behind the beautification projects is that if you clean up a space and actively work to make it look nice, it will deter loitering and petty crimes from occurring in that space,” said Walden.

The Six Points corridor businesses are also going through a beautification phase.

**6BIZ**, a Virginia LISC and Capital One small grant program for businesses already located on the corridor, provides grants to business owners to make façade improvements and equipment purchases.

The program launched this spring and the three selected businesses are working on improvements—Chicken Box, LSG Enterprises and Stay Focused Hair Salon.

Stay Focused Hair Salon, 6BIZ grant winner.

“I have had my business here for 14 years,” said Stay Focused Hair Salon owner Penny Burnett, “and to see what these changes will do, well it will draw attention and I am excited about that.”
Northside FOC feature client: Mr. Reid

By Killeen King

Some people just know intrinsically how to captivate an audience. And as soon as Mr. Michael Reid stepped up to the podium, I knew he was one of those people.

There were around 100 people at Humankind’s partner appreciation luncheon, and my guess is that Reid knew only a handful of them. But as soon as he started talking, it felt like I was listening to a close friend.

And his story was one worth listening to.

“I am a former addict,” he started, “And I say this so that you know a little bit about my background and who I am.”

So who is Michael Reid? Besides being an exceptional public speaker, he is a counselor, an employee, a soon-to-be student and a Northside Financial Opportunity Center client.

“I first found out about the Financial Opportunity Center when I stopped by Ways to Work,” said Reid. Reid had enrolled in the Ways to Work program which helps individuals get low-interest car loans to working individuals. Reid needed a car for his job, which required him to travel around the region a fair amount.

“As I was getting ready to leave, Miss Laura Sinclair came up and introduced herself to me and asked if I had any interest in financial stability coaching,” explained Reid.

Laura Sinclair is the employment specialist at the Northside FOC.

“We initially scheduled an FOC appointment to discuss Mike’s career and education goals, but quickly realized we are both passionate volunteers in the field of reentry,” she said. “It turns out we have mutual goals surrounding criminal justice reform and were quickly able to build rapport.”

From there, Reid began working one-on-one with Sinclair and the other FOC coaches to better his credit and stabilize his finances.

“One of the first things we did was look at how I was budgeting my money and where we could make changes,” he said. “I’ve stopped eating out as much, and I have cut back on using credit cards.”

Sinclair said one of the most endearing qualities about Reid is his self-motivation.

“Mike had every opportunity to give up on himself and he didn’t. He meets challenges with bravery, confidence, and a natural ability to build supports that help him meet his goals,” she explained.

Reid said that the FOC coaches are not only a great help to him but they also are now like family to him.

“When I go in there I feel like I am going home. Everyone says hi when I walk through the door,” he said.

For more information on the three Financial Opportunity Centers in our community, contact Killeen King at kking@lisc.org or visit the Virginia LISC website at www.virginialisc.org.

Clean and Green

Greater Fulton has a Clean Team and they mean business.

Coordinated by community member Chuck D’Aprix, the clean team is actively working to keep the neighborhood trash free.

“A clean and litter-free environment leads to economic development and a better quality of life, so we started a grassroots effort to address the issue in our community,” D’Aprix said.

The group that started in the fall of 2016 has quickly gained traction and members. D’Aprix said they have around 25 members who are involved in the different initiatives now.

Those initiatives include targeted cleanups where the Clean Team decides on a particular location in the neighborhood to focus its cleaning efforts. The Clean Team is also placing trashcans in the neighborhood that are labeled with the Clean Team logo, placing city sewer medallions on the sewers in the neighborhood and managing an Adopt-A-Block program, where the team gives trash pickers and cleaning supplies to residents who offer to adopt a block to clean up on a regular basis. The Adopt-A-Block program has more than 40 participants.

Greater Fulton is one of Virginia LISC’s partner neighborhoods that has started cleanup initiatives. Highland Park, another partner neighborhood, holds regular cleanups on Saturdays where residents pick up trash. And Gilpin Court also has a cleanup crew that meets to keep the streets litter free.
Petersburg’s Gateway
The City of Petersburg is planning a new look for the entrance to the city from Interstate 95. A gateway project is in the early stages and will include new dramatic lighting, a new overpass bridge, way finding signage and reconfigured exit and entry routes off and onto the interstate.

The construction on the new gateway project will run congruent with the hotel redevelopment project also happening at the Exit 52 along Interstate 95.

Virginia LISC is providing predevelopment financing for the rehabilitation of the old Fort Lee Hotel, which has sat vacant since 2012, creating an eyesore for those visiting Petersburg.

The multi-million dollar hotel renovation is anticipated to include a full service restaurant, coffee bar, conference center and two swimming pools.

Later phases of the master plan will include retail shops and a residential component on Wythe Street.

Don’t miss our annual Celebrating Community Leaders event on Thursday, Sept. 28, 2017. The event is expected to draw more than 200 residents, corporate and philanthropic leaders from Richmond and Petersburg.

Remarks will be given by the Honorable Levar Stoney, Mayor of Richmond and National LISC CEO Maurice Jones.

Four honorees will be acknowledged at the event: long-time Church Hill resident leader, Mrs. Mary White Thompson; Virginia LISC nonprofit partner and leader in housing development, project: HOMES; Highland Park resident leader Ms. Sunday Jones; and Virginia LISC corporate partner on Richmond’s Southside, Altria Group.

Come enjoy small bites, drinks, live music and great company!

DATE: Thursday, Sept. 28, 2017
TIME: 5:30 p.m.-7:30 p.m.
PLACE: Richmond International Raceway Torque Club
ADDRESS: 600 E. Laburnum Ave.
RSVP: Tickets online at Eventbrite.com