



Civic Engagement Brief

July 2005

Civic Dialogue is the Focus of Community Planning Workshops at George Washington Birthplace and Appomattox Court House

A pilot program in the Northeast Region has introduced the community partnership workshop process for parks engaged in the general management planning process. The workshops bring together community and business leaders, local officials, agency representatives, adjacent landowners and others with a special interest in the park for a facilitated session to explore areas of common interest and benefit. Workshop content and discussions are directed towards identifying issues, assets and opportunities shared by the park and community and form the groundwork for developing an action agenda through which mutual benefits can be realized. The two parks participating in the pilot program are George Washington Birthplace National Monument, which is beginning its General Management Plan, and Appomattox Court House National Historical Park, which is completing its plan.

George Washington Birthplace National Monument

This day-long session held on April 12, 2005 drew approximately 55 community leaders, local officials, agency representatives, adjacent landowners, and others with a special interest in the park, along with park staff. Ed McMahon, the nationally-recognized conservation leader, was the principal speaker,

The most valuable part of the workshop was “the dialogue among the participants and the open expression of ideas and concerns.” *George Washinton Birthplace Community Workshop participant*



Participants at the George Washington Birthplace workshop met at Stratford Hall, a historic site not far from the Birthplace.

and two local elected officials provided commentary on county trends and planning efforts. The park's community profile, a digital data product focused on regional land use trends and an assessment of significant natural and cultural resources, was presented to help build an awareness of shared community and park interests. Large group discussions facilitated by the staff of The Conservation Fund identified community assets and challenges, focusing on those shared by the park and community. In the closing exercise of the workshop, participants selected five topics for discussion in breakout sessions (education, linking attractions and interpretation, preservation of open space, community involvement and water quality). The small groups generated numerous ideas for developing or furthering collaborative relationships, assessing the impact and feasibility of the ideas in order to identify those with the most potential. Many

of the comments from the workshop will be integrated within the park's General Management Planning process. The public involvement program for the plan, now under development, also provides an opportunity to build on workshop outcomes.

The workshop was planned collaboratively with three community partners: representatives of the Northern Neck Planning District Commission, Westmoreland County government (the county the park is located in), and the Northern Neck Tourism Council. The partners also co-signed the letter of invitation to the workshop. Stratford Hall, a nearby visitor destination, also emerged as a workshop partner when it stepped in at the last minute to provide a suitably sized meeting space. The level of interest in participating in the workshop was high and the park's meeting space

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Attendees at the Appomattox Court House workshop engaged in a question and answer session with Ed McMahon of the Urban Land Institute

was not large enough to accommodate all those who wanted to attend.

Appomattox Court House National Historical Park

The day-long session held May 19, 2005 was entitled "In the Shadows of the Past- A Light to the Future." The workshop drew over 40 participants, including community leaders, local officials, agency representatives, adjacent owners, local business owners and others with a special interest in the park, along with park staff. The workshop was preceded by a public presentation by Ed McMahon of the Urban Land Institute on the evening of the 18th, which approximately 110 people attended.

A question and answer session with Mr. McMahon led off the workshop the next day. The park's community profile, drawing from the General Management Planning project, presented regional trends, park related resources outside the boundary, and regional visitor destinations. The workshop was planned collaboratively with representatives of the town and county of Appomattox, and the Region 2000 Planning District Commission, under the guidance of staff from The Conservation Fund. The workshop facilitators successfully led large group discussions on community assets and issues and opportunities for collaboration, and guided participants in an exercise to select five areas for small group discussions. The five areas were transportation, resource preservation, community vision, physical and programmatic linkages between the park and com-

munity, and a steering committee. The small groups each came up with several ideas for further action, and their work was briefly presented to the full group. The wealth of the ideas generated and the enthusiasm of the participants suggest a high potential for collaborative actions to emerge and to create a rich community fabric with the park.

The workshop was planned collaboratively with representatives of the town and county of Appomattox, and the Region 2000 Planning District Commission. The mayor of the Town of Appomattox was an enthusiastic supporter, taking on the responsibility of publicizing the public presentation, sponsoring a dinner for local officials and community leaders prior to the evening talk, and presenting Ed McMahon with a key to the town of Appomattox. The county provided meeting space for the public presentation and the workshop.

Note: The workshop pilot project is a collaborative endeavor between the NPS Northeast Region and The Conservation Fund. The project has adapted the 'gateway community' model to support park and community partnerships in areas of mutual benefit. The Conservation Fund staff has guided workshop planning, developed the community profile, and facilitated workshop sessions in conjunction with NPS regional and park staff.