

**Mr. James Eason  
Hampton Roads Partnership  
Board of Directors Meeting  
June 16, 2006 – 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary**

Good morning! It is a pleasure for me to be here and participate in a wonderful event- the celebration of the Partnership's tenth anniversary. I appreciate being asked to offer some reflections and comments.

I strongly feel the Hampton Roads region has taken its place among the perceived great regions of this country. This is so because our individual communities are doing so much in their physical development and redevelopment and we truly are performing more and more as a region. Our acceptance level is increasing to the idea that in this highly competitive global economy the real boundaries of this country are those of commerce, not those of political division. Therefore, there is no good strategy for one city or two as to how it will survive and thrive. It must be regional based and all communities of the region must be strong if the region is to be strong.

By any objective review and measurement, the Hampton Roads Partnership in its ten years has helped in a significant manner advance the ball. It has done so in a way that clearly recognized its mission and focused on the three basic questions any organization must ask and answer if it hopes to have success:

- 1- Where are we today
- 2- If we do nothing different, where are we likely to be in three to five years
- 3- If we don't like the answers to these questions, what are the issues we can manage to arrive at a different result

This is a strategic thinking or planning process. This is the foundation of the Partnership. You are the only organization in Hampton Roads that has as its mission to "bring everyone to the table" to identify those strategic issues which, if successfully addressed, will have a positive impact on our citizens' standard of living and quality of life.

We have articulated this by expressing our vision as having full participation in a robust economy as measured by:

- 1- Low unemployment

- 2- High per capita income
- 3- Little poverty

In this context the Partnership has stressed the crucial tasks of economic development as:

- 1- Raising the region's human capital through education
- 2- Laying an adequate physical infrastructure for the future rather than the past
- 3- Nurturing an attractive, both natural and man-made, environment

Sometimes when we became a little "punchy" from talking about the Partnership's role we described our mission by telling the story of the old man who encounters a frog as he walked in the woods:

- Hey old man, pick me up and kiss me and I'll turn into a beautiful young princess
- Old man walks right on by
- Didn't you hear me.....
- Old man picks the frog up and immediately drops it in his pocket
- Frog is now indignant- What is the matter with you? Didn't you hear me say.....
- Yes, I heard you say if I picked you up and kissed you, you would turn into a beautiful young princess. But at my age, I'd rather have a talking frog!

Well, the message is, the Partnership must not be too old or tired, we must kiss the frog and turn Hampton Roads into the beautiful princess we all know it can be.

As we reflect on what we have accomplished, it would be insightful and possibly helpful to remind ourselves how we arrived to this point. It's always good to honor your roots and remember the past is quite often a prologue to the future.

For the Hampton Roads Partnership, we are fortunate to have had two very strong and meaningful efforts contribute to our formation and success. These are Plan 2007 and the Urban Partnership. Just a few quick thoughts about each.

The process for Plan 2007 began in 1993 and was initiated by the Hampton Roads Chamber of Commerce. There were eight other sponsoring organizations and it was patterned after similar regional planning efforts done in several other southeastern communities. Plan 2007 was in response to wide spread concern about the impact on our economy of recession, defense downsizing and the intensified competition from other eastern seaboard ports and southeastern metropolitan areas.

During the summer of 1993 over 400 business, university and public leaders from all parts of Hampton Roads participated in a series of brainstorming sessions. From these came Plan 2007 which offered strategies and related action plans for creating jobs in those principal industry clusters which will drive the growth and diversification of our regional economy in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The six building blocks addressed were education, infrastructure, quality of life, government, private sector leadership and economic development. As good as the plan was there were three problems:

- 1- There was no money to implement it
- 2- There was no organization to take charge of the implementation
- 3- There had been a lack of significant public sector participation.

This was significant because the implementation of some of the important objectives required collaborative action on specific projects by private and public organizations.

In May 1994 the regional City Managers, as they have done many times, came to the rescue. They engaged the Mayors who then identified who they wanted in the room to discuss how to move forward. In response to this, David Goode hosted a meeting on November 14, 1994. It was excellent. A steering committee was formed and was charged with doing three things:

- 1- Validate Plan 2007 with a focus on any parts that could be a problem for the public side
- 2- Choose several action issues from Plan 2007
- 3- Recommend an organizational model to implement specific initiatives

The committee of fifteen did a tremendous job. What is now the

Hampton Roads Partnership was the suggested model. All of our communities endorsed the steering committee's report and the organizational meeting of the Partnership was held May 15, 1996.

The second effort was the Urban Partnership. This began also in mid 1993 when Mayors of Norfolk, Richmond and Roanoke began meeting to discuss their various problems. From this rather small beginning, it ultimately included eighteen communities in Virginia, the Virginia Chamber of Commerce, Virginia's colleges and universities, business and lay people from all over the state. The underlying principles of this effort were as follows:

- 1- Increasing economic and social problems in Virginia's core cities, large and small
- 2- Problems now know no geographical boundaries and are negatively affecting surrounding communities
- 3- In turn, this is having a negative impact on Virginia's economic competitiveness

Measures of competitiveness were defined and work tasks developed. This was a unique effort because it:

- 1- Focused on competitiveness of the state as a whole
- 2- Unique partnership with the private sector
- 3- Commitment was made to complete the study and plan and work to gain legislative approval

There was a lot of research done to verify the underlying principles and evaluating policy choices that will lead to more competitive urban areas. The presumptions based on the research were:

- 1- Areas which are doing better than Virginia's regions to boundaries differently, not the City and suburban split
- 2- In those states which are doing well, the state assumes a role in wide are of activities so that boundaries don't make a difference

The Urban Partnership's reaction to this was not to advocate boundary changes but to make policy adjustment that preclude boundaries from making a difference. The work product was entitled "A Sound Structure for Virginia's Competitiveness". It addressed thinking and acting regionally and unleashing neighborhood potential.

As part of this, the Plan called for regional development incentives. Through the hard work of several people in this room today the General Assembly passed the Regional Competitiveness Act in 1996. Money for an incentive fund was appropriated. To be eligible, among other things, a region had to have a partnership which included local elected officials and managers, business and civic leaders and education representatives. The partnership had to have a regional strategic plan, a report card measuring progress and offer proof joint services were being provided in the region.

There is no question Plan 2007 and the work of the Urban Partnership provided a solid footing for this organization as it began its operation in July 1996. Equally important was the faith and confidence that was expressed by the region's chief elected officials when they designated the Partnership to be the region's entity to qualify for the state's Regional Competitiveness Act funding. The first application was due June 30, 1997. It was a laborious process but very fruitful for us. In the first round, of the nineteen designated regions in the state, only seven qualified. We received the most points. As a result of this over the next five years the Partnership received over \$11 million. Since you as members cover the Partnership's operating expenses, all of this money was able to be allocated to our strategic issues. It was unfortunate the state terminated the program at the end of 2002.

In June 1998 we began an extensive strategic planning process. We analyzed where we were in regard to the Plan 2007 initiatives, sought input as to other pertinent topics, had a process in which the Board ranked the issues and formed committees to meet, discuss and offer opinions and recommendations. By the time the Strategic Plan was approved in June 1999, we had approximately 50 formal committee meetings and a large number of smaller informal meetings and discussions. There were over 500 people who agreed to serve and contribute to the process.

The issues and their chairmen were as follows:

- 1- Transportation- Josh Darden, Chairman; Tom Frantz, Vice Chairman
- 2- Technology Based Economic Development- Charlie Bainley
- 3- Ports- Jim Babcock
- 4- Workforce Development- Debbie DiCroce and Shirley Pippins, Co. Chairman

5- Regionalism- Bill Butler

6- Tourism- Mayor Meyera Oberndorf and Bob Wilburn, Co.  
Chairman

In addition to the six main areas of concentration, there were two supplemental areas:

1- Plight of the cities

2- Military Partnering

For each of these eight issues, goals, objectives and strategies were prepared.

With the Plan in place during the summer of 1999, we had a clear vision as to how the \$11 million in Regional Competitiveness Act funding should be spent. By the time the program ceased, we had funded over sixty items directly connected to our strategic areas of focus. These took the form of financial support for affiliated organizations' ongoing operations, studies and consultants, and various other activities.

The 1999 Strategic Plan was an excellent tool. For the next several years it provided guidance for our daily work. During this time we also had several special meetings to determine the need for modifications. The 1999 Strategic Plan Final Report was presented on January 16, 2004. It contained an impressive list of accomplishments. Time does not allow a full reporting but I will mention a few that I believe really stand out.

1- Transportation-

- The 2002 referendum. It is difficult for me to connect a loss to anything good. However getting to Election Day was, in my opinion, one of Hampton Roads finest hours. Along the way, the competence of the Planning District was demonstrated time and again. The fact all of our communities endorsed projects that would make a big difference on a regional basis may be one of our biggest accomplishments as a region. The Partnership's efforts for the three years prior to the vote were very commendable:
  - Consultant's study that looked at the past twenty-five years of transportation planning
  - The mobilization of twenty-four local and regional stakeholder groups to advocate during the 2001

session which led to a legislative committee being formed to study the unfunded needs

- Commissioning several polls
- Partnering with Northern Virginia to form, in 2002, an alliance called Virginians for Transportation Solutions
- Achieving a major upset in obtaining legislation that would allow Hampton Roads and Northern Virginia to hold separate referenda on transportation
- Preparation of the briefing book and other educational materials during the campaign

## 2- Technology Based Economic Development

- We recognized that high technology was a primary driver of national, state, and regional economic performance in the 1990's
- The most important factor in this is the institutions of higher education and particularly their research and development activities
- Possibly one of our most successful efforts was the formation and funding of the Hampton Roads Research Partnership which includes the region's eight colleges and universities and two federal labs. Its purpose was to encourage research collaboration, to involve these institutions more in economic development and better communicate the collective strengths of all ten
- Other technology efforts were associated with our support of the Hampton Roads Technology Council, the Technology Incubator, the focus on identifying our clusters, studies directed at marine science, modeling and simulation and an assessment on how, in an overall sense, the region could boost both its technology and general economic development efforts.

## 3- Ports

- The Partnership through its port ombudsmen helped advance the goals of increasing the depth our inbound channel, building a fourth terminal, constructing the third crossing and advancing the Virginia Intermodal Partnership Project
- Advanced and new funding were the results of these efforts

## 4- Workforce Development

- Our continuing cry is, in the future, we will be what our workforce allows us to be

- This recognizes the growing importance of a highly skilled workforce and its link to our economic well being
- To the credit of the Partnership, there was significant focus on what we described as the emerging workforce
- We had several initiatives that focused on the period from birth through high school
- These included Square One, Hampton Roads Community Learning Center Network and career and technical education emphasis in K-12
- The Partnership played a large role in organizing what has become Opportunity Inc, the Workforce Investment Act Board for South and Western Hampton Roads. Our hope is ultimately have one Workforce Investment Act Board for the entire region

#### 5- Tourism

- Recognition was given to how important this sector is to our region
- There was a focus on the development of the tourism product
- Support was given to several major one time events as well as the Virginia Arts Festival
- The Partnership also played a leadership role in attracting a major league sports team to Hampton Roads

#### 6- Regionalism

- A lot of time was spent in talking about what regionalism really means
- The Partnership also sponsored publications and events
- We also conducted a poll
- To demonstrate the challenges when addressing the topic, consider some of the responses when people were asked to say what they think regionalism means
  - a big word put here to make me feel stupid
  - I have no idea why we are promoting that word. It's meaningless
  - It's a silly idea they cooked up to make work for some executives
  - Much like communism. Let's work together, but get nothing done
  - I have absolutely no idea what regionalism is. If you let me define it, I'd say it's bad
  - It's a jibberish term

- One of my favorite responses was a note passed to me before I was scheduled to speak to a Hampton civic club. It said:
  - Hampton Roads, a gaggle of contiguous, non-integrated and competitive communities, joined together by 40 miles of uncoordinated, behind schedule road work, a Sam's Club and consuming envy of Hampton High School football success.
- This frames our challenges quite well.
- As we advanced our thinking, we began to describe Regionalism in the following manner:
  - we compete as a region and therefore we must act together to be successful
  - It's about building relationships, developing a shared agenda, and taking collaborative actions
  - It's not about building regional structures of government or consolidation

In the last half of 2003 as we were completing the 1999 Strategic Plan we began to focus on what's next. A steering committee's conclusion was a traditional strategic planning process was not what the organization needed at the time, but instead a focusing process which results in a few key themes or issues which will determine our work for the next several years.

The issues chosen were regional citizenship, a regional economic strategy and a continuing concentration on the region's fundamental assets. The more I have thought about it, the more I agree with the thoughts expressed by Dr. Marc Weiss who spoke to us two years ago. He said the greatest barrier to regional coordination, cooperation and collaboration is the lack of a common metropolitan consciousness and citizenship. This is a powerful statement. It would be good for us to be ever mindful of it.

So, after all is said and done, it's been a very productive ten years for the Hampton Roads Partnership. In addition to the results I have highlighted, there are many more. Even in a larger sense the Partnership's value has been demonstrated many times. It has legitimacy and respect due to the composition of the board of directors, the ability to access decision makers, the ability to bring individuals and groups together to address key regional issues and it remains the only organization in Hampton Roads that concentrates on the strategic issues. It has a very positive record of serving as the focal point for important regional efforts.

I hope you feel good about yourselves and what you have accomplished. You should. The region has a great deal of potential. It's very important for this organization to play a major role in reaching it.

The years I was associated with the Partnership were extremely beneficial to me. Beside the friendships, it was extremely educational. For this, I would like to thank the Board members for their confidence and also thank Donna, Bob and Joyce. It's hard to imagine there could be a better staff. Thank you, and best wishes for continued success.