

Community Deliberation and the Virginia Beach Public Library

Background: Virginia Beach, VA is the largest city (est. 450,000) in the Commonwealth of Virginia. The City Council has an adopted policy to protect the rural southern portion of the city from development which means that a major source of economic development must come from redevelopment in the rest of the suburban-patterned community. And as in many places, redevelopment is a controversial term calling forth distrust and perceptions of zero-sum decision making. To encourage a more thoughtful approach to redevelopment policy, the City Manager decided to pursue a community-wide deliberation on redevelopment.

Librarians at the center: Because of early leadership on the expansion of citizen involvement, the library department played a major role in the two-year Public Voices on Redevelopment initiative. A half-dozen staff members of the library department were involved on the project management team and/or the research team. Librarians also wrote sections of the community “reader,” hosted forums in their library community rooms and moderated community deliberations.

Making the information accessible: Doing what librarians do better than anyone, the research team collected and organized a prodigious amount of information on the hot-button topic. Great care was taken to find, solicit and provide multiple views.

The libraries’ research team developed multiple information tools.

- Glossary of redevelopment related technical terms
- Reading list
- Webliography with links, in alpha and subject order
- Bibliography
- City Documents

Samples are attached.