July 12, 2021: Vibrant Virginia Book Launch Transcript

Leland Shelton: Good morning and thank you for joining us for the Vibrant Virginia Virtual Book Launch. The book covers topics including economic and workforce development, placemaking and public engagement, public health and social services, and infrastructure. It takes a deeper look into how individuals in Virginia's communities and regions are working together to create a strong, vibrant and inclusive economy in the Commonwealth. I'd like to introduce our first moderator, Stephen Moret, President and CEO of the Virginia Economic Development Partnership. Stephen.

Stephen Moret: Thank you very much, Leland. Great to be with all of you today. What an exciting moment for the Commonwealth and for rural development with all this great work happening on this very, very, important topic. I'm really pleased to moderate the panel this morning with Margaret Cowell, Associate Professor of Urban Affairs and Planning at Virginia Tech as well as Sarah Lyon-Hill, Senior Economic Development Specialist at the Virginia Tech Center for Economic and Community Engagement. It has been a special privilege for me to work with you all as a small contributor to this project and I'm excited to finally be at this day when we're getting ready to get everything launched and on its way.

So why don't we just kick it off, and have you guys talk a little bit about how the Vibrant Virginia initiative began. What is it, and what are the goals of Vibrant Virginia?

Sarah Lyon-Hill: Hi, I can start off there. The Vibrant Virginia Initiative, really -- the seeds of the Virginia Virginia initiative were kind of there from the beginning. I mean, there have been discussions about how can higher education be more engaged in communities across the state. Not that they aren't already engaged, but how do we kind of show that more? How do we enhance it, how do we grow it and grow those relationships.

And then there's been the discussion about -- our state is very diverse, very different. How do we help the different regions of the state keep up and grow in their own unique way. So these two ideas, I think, became even more public, even larger when you have the state initiate the Rural Virginia Initiative, which was to get higher education to start talking amongst themselves to say, 'Hey, how can we engage more, to help rural areas in the state?"

And then you had the 2016 presidential election, where people really started to discuss this idea of an urban-rural divide.

So from that, the Virginia Tech Office of Economic Development and its partners -- we're now Virginia Tech Center for Economic and Community Engagement, if anyone's completely confused by that -- we came together and we started talking about what are ways that we can address this idea about an urban-rural divide, and how can we get higher education to work towards understanding this more and maybe think of it more as a continuum and how we're all very different across the regions of the state.

So basically the mission of the Vibrant Virginia Initiative is to promote and enhance engaged scholarship across Virginia's urban-rural spectrum for a more vibrant Virginia. Maggie, do you have anything to add?

Margaret Cowell: We borrow the idea in some sense, or at least the preliminary thoughts about how this might come together in the book form -- which we'll talk about in just a moment, I'm sure -- comes from the work of our colleagues in Oregon. They put out a book in the early 2010s called *Toward One Oregon*. It came from Oregon State University. And we imagined that as a sort of starting point for us. I think it's a really great body of work if you're interested in how other states are sort of grappling with these issues. I think starting with that book is a great place. And then looking to ours as a sort of unique spin on that exact same model, which is just thinking about how universities and community partners can work together to think about and shed light on issues that impact quality of life across urban and rural areas. So sort of borrowing from the Oregon example, which I think set a really great sort of preliminary framework for us to think about and then bring our own Virginia twist to it.

Stephen Moret: And Maggie, can you elaborate on that a little bit, how does the book we're talking about today really fit into the larger Vibrant Virginia Initiative?

Margaret Cowell: Sure, absolutely. So it's been a multi-pronged effort and I want to thank our partners, including John Provo, who's the director of the Center for Economic and Community Engagement at Virginia Tech, who spearheaded this. He has Oregon roots. And so I think he saw that as a great example. And as I mentioned, we put our own twist on it.

In thinking about Vibrant Virginia, we laid out kind of four strategies to try and engage as best we could across the Commonwealth and really get to get together with partners and to shed light on important challenges, but also opportunities.

And the four prongs were first we had a series of really engaging and innovative conversations. We called these Community Conversations, in which essentially a small team of us from Virginia Tech embedded in communities for a couple of days over the course of about a two-year period and post COVID, we intend to ramp this up. So I think that's something to think about if you're a community partner listening in on this call. And these community conversations were essentially trying to set the stage in various parts of the state, and we were all over the place with these conversations. And in the conversations, we usually worked with local partners to think about what are the issues that you're grappling with right now? What are the things that excite you, but also what are the challenges?

And on our end, we started to think about what expertise could we bring to the table, with recognition that when we're coming from the university, we're subject area experts, and we need community partners in order to do good engaged scholarship.

So these community conversations were a chance to sort of exercise those muscles, grow our networks, but also bring together experts from Virginia Tech that could be helpful in thinking through some of the conundrums that some of these localities are facing.

So the community conversations both offered us a chance to take our show on the road, but also bring together experts and stakeholders and eventually identify themes that would come across in the book. So that's Part 1.

Part 2 was a series of Campus Conversations, which I think were also really helpful in their own way. These were on the Virginia Tech campus, I think exclusively in Blacksburg, but I, myself as a Northern Virginia colleague was a particpant in these, so it was multifaceted. But these were conversations where we brought together folks from across the university who were doing engaged scholarship in the field. So anyone who was working with community partners were invited to attend these. They were really informative, ideas about sharing funding, methodological innovations. Sometimes just talking shop, right? Exchanging ideas about how difficult and rewarding this type of work can be, and ways that we could maybe work together more efficiently, et cetera. So these were really great, to get a sense of what was happening on campus.

The third piece was seed grants, in which the center provided, with partners across the university, funding to scholars at Virginia Tech who were doing or had plans to do work in the field with community stakeholders, fitting with the themes of the Vibrant Virginia initiative. So ideas about bridging that urban-rural divide. So small bits of money to get things off the ground. And those were I think a very important part of this piece, and part of the initiative. Many of these have fed into chapters that are in the book, which I think is really neat, sort of coming full circle.

And then finally, here we are today talking about book, which is the fourth piece. This is the culmination of, I would say, phase one of Vibrant Virginia. We're going to talk at the end of today's session about what's next. But in terms of sort of wrapping up what's happened to date, I think it's been a really fun project. We solicited contributions from experts and community leaders working on or exploring the sort of ties that bind us across the urban-rural continuum. And the goals of the book were to wed those practical experiences, that practitioners and our stakeholders were experiencing, along with scholarly contributions. To try and walk this nice little tight rope between the ivory tower and the field, right, which is something that we arguably struggle with, right, in academia. But I don't think that's necessarily the case with this book. I think we brought together a lot of really great partners who helped us, as John Provo likes to say, connect the dots, between learning, discovery, and engagement, and try and advance the work being done not only at Virginia Tech, but also with partner institutions and colleges and universities across the state. And ultimately, we see this as a sort of celebration of the accomplishments of our community partners, but also our engaged scholars. So it's a lot of things. This has been, as I said, a multifaceted effort and the book being the sort of culmination of Phase 1 of Vibrant Virginia.

Stephen Moret: That's great. I'm curious; there's quite a number of people right, that have contributed to this book. How many folks altogether, and what different perspectives or domains do they reflect?

Sarah Lyon-Hill: Well, we have 15 chapters, but with each of those chapters we have multiple authors. I think we have one chapter in particular that might have 15 or 20 authors, mostly graduate students at CPAP. Center for Public Administration and Policy. As Maggie said, we really had an assortment of authors, so we had authors from four different universities, obviously Virginia Tech, but we also had authors from Virginia Commonwealth University, James Madison University, George Mason. And then we also had a lot of practitioners such as yourself, Stephen, well, you also have a P.h.D. But you wrote a very, very useful and broad chapter that really helps us to understand where the state as a whole is going with economic development.

But I would say you have a lot of different groups that go anywhere from Northern Virginia, all the way down to the Southwest Virginia, over to Richmond and Hampton roads. We tried to get a lot of geographic diversity and a diversity of opinions on various topics that went from economic development, your kind of basic economic development, but then we spread out to the idea of entrepreneurship, STEM, then to placemaking, looking at the arts and culture, enhancing places through art. Looking at Virginia's main street programs of course, and scenic preservation. And then two other topics that are becoming more and more prevalent in our communities as we start thinking about the opioid crisis or refugees and migrants coming into our communities and understanding how can we embrace them and have those communities become diverse and lush in some way as well as the idea of public health. I mean, that's something that really came up quite a lot during COVID.

And so understanding those broader topics and how they really affect the vibrancy of our communities is important.

Stephen Moret: I realize the book, obviously, there's quite a diverse range of perspectives and even topics for that matter. What were some of the high-level findings that came out of the book? And in particular, I'm interested obviously from my position in terms of things that contributors offered, in terms of suggestions for how the Commonwealth can achieve a stronger, more vibrant, more inclusive economic growth?

Margaret Cowell: Great question, $1 million question. We spent a lot of time trying to figure out when we take the book as a whole, what can it say, right? What are the main takeaways? And in writing the conclusion in sort of recent months, I think maybe four main themes became pretty apparent. And I'll try to go through these quickly and not too dryly.

But the first idea is that what we discovered, and this should be no surprise, but this idea of vibrancy is a pretty fuzzy concept. There's a woman in planning scholarship named Ann Marcus (sp) and she talks about the fuzziness of these concepts that we like to throw around. And I'd say the idea of vibrancy is the type of thing that you can kind of describe, you think you now what it means. The formal definition, the most simple definition, is the idea that something that is vibrant is full of life and energy. But when you start to think about what does vibrancy mean in the context of communities or municipalities, or even a state as a whole, you start to see there's pretty stark divergence in terms of what people think about when they think about vibrancy.

So throughout the book, we see, and I think we've kind of curated a collection of narratives of vibrancy so that we could sort of weave them together in a way that we hope is meaningful, with the idea that the book collectively brings together insights into vibrancy at the scale of say, the block, but also at the neighborhood level, at the community level, the regional level and the state level, right? And to think about the nestedness of those structures, which is also a theme, and thinking about how we're so interdependent in that way. But also urging us to consider who the vibrancy applies to, right. Who has the quote-unquote 'right' to participate in these conversations about vibrancy, and who has had a seat at the table to have those conversations?

And I think one of the things we take away from the book is that we need to hold and create more space

for people whose voices have typically not been a part of the conversations in the past, right? To think about who should be at the table helping us make decisions, or driving the conversation, rather, about what a vibrant community really looks like. So I think that's one of the main themes; we're playing around with the idea of who is the who involved in the conversation about vibrancy and what it means for our community, our neighborhood, our region to be vibrant.

Second main thing is the idea that local vibrancy is linked to kind of the regional state, national, and even international vibrancy, right, in which we find ourselves. So no locality or community is an island, right? We're inherently nested in the structure. And that's by design, right? And it makes a lot of sense. And those linkages between scales, it can be either positive or negative. The ties that bind us to our neighborhood, or from the region to the state, can be either beneficial or they can be a challenge, right? And we see that explored throughout these chapters, there are highs and lows and they're very difficult conversations that our authors and contributors are having with the communities in which they engage. And I think that interjurisdictional cooperation is a theme that gets teased out as part of that conversation. And I think cooperation, as we've seen throughout the pandemic, is inherently important, right? Most of these chapters were written -- the bulk of them were written before the pandemic issue, before we had any sense of what it would entail. But I think coming out of it, I think there are going to be lots of opportunities, particularly in terms of the American Recovery Plan. Thinking about how can we cooperate together? How can we leverage the strength of that interconnectedness, right? And the linkages between neighborhoods and communities and regions and states, to think about the best ways to utilize these funds and to think about what vibrancy and recovery looks like.

Third main theme is that vibrancy tends to benefit from inertia of prior investment. But also the opposite can be true, right? So that snowball can either be a positive thing or a negative thing. And yet, thinking about it that way could be sort of defeatist, if that's your perspective. Thinking like disinvestment has started, it's just going to continue to escalate and my community is going to suffer. But we see opportunities, we see examples in the book. You know, places where little tiny investment through little tiny successes can actually be built upon and leveraged. And then we can think about snowballing in a positive way.

And so we see chapters on the entrepreneurial ecosystems or the main streets program, as Sarah mentioned. They show that some of these smaller investments can really add up, especially in rural areas. Your chapter Steven, talks about rural localities across Virginia and the immense potential that they offer for growth and for the opportunities or idea that we could harness potential positive feedbacks. So little investments can beget further investments which can hopefully turn the direction around on some of these things.

But I think there are a lot of good reminders in the book that historical legacies of disinvestment are also important too. And we have to sort of think about that flip side of the equation and think about how we can overcome some of these historical disadvantages we've seen in a number of communities across the Commonwealth.

Finally, the fourth main theme is the idea that vibrancy is place-specific. I think again we saw great

examples. What works well in one part of Virginia might not work well elsewhere and probably won't, if you apply the exact same policy across a diversity of municipalities or localities. Might not work the same, might not be quite as successful. And I think, in this era of fast policy where we're all looking for good ideas, and in many cases we're tempted to replicate them, just sort of apply them to our community when we've seen them work elsewhere, I think it's a good time to sort of remember that there is no "one size fits all." No chapter in this book spells out exactly what we all should be doing in Virginia. Rather, they provide elements of things that might be working in one place or models that we can think about replicating or modifying in other domains. And I think that's something just to remember. So we give the example in our writings on the book that splashy investments like Virginia Tech's Innovation Campus was a really good idea for Alexandria. However, some less conspicuous investments might make more sense in other parts of the state. The Innovation Campus isn't going to work everywhere and they work in a handful of places. There are smaller investments that will be a good idea for other places and just different types. And finally, we end with the recognition that there's a lot of work to be done. We can't be overly optimistic, right. There's lots to celebrate, but we have a lot of work to do and you know that better than anyone, Stephen, you've got a long list of things that we have accomplished, but also the things that we want to still accomplish, right?

Stephen Moret: That's absolutely right. Sarah, is there anything -- by the way, that was a beautiful summary, Maggie, I'm actually amazed by your ability to synthesize so much that was in the contributions. Sarah, anything that you would want to add there?

Sarah Lyon-Hill: No, I think Maggie covered it really well. I think this idea of the complexity that really encompasses the idea of a Vibrant Virginia is important to note and there's no one route to it. And you see that in each and every chapter that there are different approaches and those different approaches actually need to work together in order to create that unique concept that is a community and what a community is for each and every one of us.

Stephen Moret: Sarah, and really a question, I guess for both of you, but when you think about more personally, were there any insights that you personally uncovered during the process of the book's development that you might want to share?

Sarah Lyon-Hill: Some of the conclusions of the book really were, what Maggie said, really were there. I think the process of this book really reinforced for me all of the amazing work that is already being done, that we could really leverage and build on moving forward and how important it is to appreciate everyone's contributions and everyone's approaches to helping communities or working with communities. I would say we need to think more broadly about what it is when we're talking about community or economic development. We need to understand the part that everyone plays and really embrace that and appreciate it.

Stephen Moret: Maggie, anything you would add there from a personal prospective?

Margaret Cowell: I think what I found most interesting...it's always really fun to read how other people are thinking about these things and curate the collection of stories that you want to tell. I thought what was most fascinating to me were the many ways in which people are engaging in these communities,

right? So we have represented in the book, we have story circles, which is this really interesting method that is essentially storytelling in a community. And Max Stevenson and his colleagues at the Institute for Policy and Governance here at Virginia Tech engage in that method pretty frequently, which is just something that you don't think about necessarily. It makes a lot of sense because we all get together and tell stories, right? That's what life is about, is a sort of exchange of stories. But when you think about that as like an actual method to communicate and convey both multi-directionally between the community and people who might be doing scholarship in those communities, I think that's really interesting.

So we see things like story circles. We see focus groups, which is a pretty common method amongst qualitative researchers. We see embedded scholarship, we see policy analysis, we see highly quantitative kind of calculations in some of the chapters. And it comes together in a way that I think is just really interesting and, and reminds us that there's a lot of different ways to engage in this kind of work. And there's much that we can learn as scholars from the communities with which we partner, especially in those formats like story circles or sort of embedded scholarship, which I think is fascinating.

I also think to me, one of the -- I got lost in the internet for about a day doing one specific part of this that I wanted to do -- which is looking at the day of the Amazon announcement that their second headquarters would be located in Arlington, Virginia, November 13th, 2018. I hope I have that right, Stephen.

Stephen Moret: Yes.

Margaret Cowell: Okay, good, because the rest of the story is that I then tried to figure out what else was happening in Virginia on that day, what was happening in other communities across Virginia in terms of how other communities might -- that was the big deal, right? The whole world was reading about that particular deal. But some of the other things that were happening; we looked at the city council in Martinsville; on that day they discussed a proposed list of projects to be included in their 2019 comprehensive economic development strategy. And they listed an $800,000 proposal to purchase blighted properties and a $100,000 proposal to recruit manufacturers of clean energy. 80 miles west of there in Martinsville, the Blue Ridge Crossroads Small Business Development Center announced on their Facebook page that they were celebrating the grand opening of the Graceful Goose, a fine decoir and gift shop on South Main Street, and it goes on and on. We saw an announcement by Pharell Williams talking about the music festival that he was helping get off the ground in Virginia Beach. Just a fascinating snapshot of what community and economic development looked like in Virginia on arguably one of the biggest days in Virginia in sort of economic development history, right?

And it looks different in all of those places. And yet there are common themes in all of those announcements and all of those economic development activities. And yet obviously very big differences, differences in scale, difference in focus. And yet thinking about what's going on in the field on that given day was a really fun exercise for me. I got lost in a lot of internet black holes and it was a lot of fun. But for me, when I think about my experiences in working on this book, thinking about what other places were thinking about on that particular day and how things play out in different

communities and localities was a lot of fun. And I think it serves as a snapshot of this book and kind of what we're aiming to do.

Stephen Moret: Yeah. Maggie, just building on your point. I was struck most, as I was working on this, just by the incredible diversity and range of work that's happening on these topics across Virginia, by so many people that have made such significant contributions over time. I was thinking about, for example, Augie Wallmeyer who wrote a really important book years ago that got a lot of us thinking more seriously about some of these topics. Christiana McFarland, at the National League of Cities, who's obviously a contributer to the book, but also has done some really important research about intraregional connectivity. Deborah Flippo, who has worked with so many communities across Virginia that are working to position themselves for growth. And then I think about all the great local economic development practitioners, folks like Jerry Davis and Lisa Hollen (sp). Liz Povar. So many others that have contributed to rural development. And they're working to support the growth of rural communities across Virginia.

It's going to be neat to see many of those voices directly or indirectly reflected in some way in the book. And I guess that was the last question I want to ask before we sort of close this out is, what's next for the Vibrant Virginia book. And how do we ensure that it's read? And that people are aware of it among a diverse audience?

Margaret Cowell: I know we're getting close on time for the next scheduled panel. So some of this we're going to talk about in that last bit, the third portion of the morning. But I think the takeaway is that later on this summer, maybe the early fall, depending on sort of behind the scenes, typesetting and such, the book will be available as a download in PDF format for free from Virginia Tech Publishing. Or you can purchase a hard copy of the book online as well. So this will all be available at www.publishing.vt.edu. And we also, I believe, have collected emails or have a mechanism to do so, which we will share later on so that we can notify you where to go and when to do that, and when you want to take a look at the full book.

I think that second part of that question, Stephen, is very important. How do we get this into the hands of people who can do the most good with it, with this information, right? Of course we want people to pick it up as a beach read. I'm laughing as I say that, I don't know -- maybe some people would enjoy reading a book like this at the beach. But we want to take the show on the road, right?

So this fall, we're sort of now in the stages of trying to think about how we do so, right? So how do we, through a combination of in-person talks, possibly op-eds, social media, kind of awareness and such. Thankfully, there's some great people on John and Sarah's team at the center who do this work all the time and do a great job with it. And I think that's the goal, is to get moving, get the show on the road and try to make sure that the right folks get this. If you have any suggestions, Stephen, we of course welcome them.

Stephen Moret: Wonderful and just remind us before we shift to our next panel, what's the rough timeline for the book to go live?

Margaret Cowell: I think realistically very early fall. So my hope is as we open the doors to the campus again for the new semester and such, we will be more or less ready to go with the book, which will be great timing.

Stephen Moret: Wonderful. Well, Maggie, Sarah, I want to thank you both very much, not just for the panel this morning, but for the wonderful work done pulling together this really special and important project. And thank you again for this morning, and I'm going to turn it over to our next moderator, Michael Pope, who's going to lead a panel. Michael is a reporter at Virginia Public Radio. He's going to lead a panel focused on takeaways from the book. Turn it over here to Michael. Thank you.

Margaret Cowell: Thank you, Stephen.

Michael Pope: Thank you, Stephen, so much. And thank you for the invitation to appear here. When I was approached to do this panel, I thought about the urban-rural split is something that I've reported about dozens of times. So I went back to my old radio scripts and found me reporting on this urban-rural divide about out-migration, about of course politics. The right-to- work law, urbanization, income differences, criminal justice, jails, economic recovery, religion.

So I mean, this is sort of like the underpinnings of a lot of how Virginia government works differently, perhaps in urban areas versus rural areas. So we've got a great panel here, to talk about those differences. And this book, which I have to say does in fact make great beach reading. I didn't literally take it to a beach, but I did get an advanced copy and I would take it to a beach if I had the opportunity to do that.

I want to introduce our panel for this segment, which is a very exciting panel. We've got up Conway Haskins, who is director of the Entrepreneurial Ecosystems at the Center for Innovative Technology. So thank you for joining us.

We are also joined by Evan Feinman, who is the Governor's Chief Broadband Advisor and Executive Director at the Tobacco Commission, as well as Liz Povar, Principal of the RiverLink Group.

And I want to start with Conaway Haskins, who has a view that perhaps challenges what we think of the urban-rural divide. Or perhaps creates a sort of specific Virginia variant on that, which is in a lot of states, there is a big city. Like in Maryland, they've got Baltimore. And so the difference between urban Maryland and rural Maryland, is actually a lot different in Virginia because Virginia has no equivalent of Baltimore. There is no sort of mega city in Virginia, so Conaway Haskins, I'm going to turn it over to you, and talk about how the urban-rural divide in Virginia perhaps works differently than in many states across the country.

Conaway Haskins: Yeah. Well, thanks Michael for that and I think you know, part of it, as you just teed up, I think that the thing about Virginia is we don't have -- in thinking about the urban-rural divide and particularly tying it to, as Maggie mentioned, one of the inspirations for the Vibrant Virginia project was *Toward One Oregon*. In comparison to Oregon, Portland and the Portland metropolitan area represents like 60 % of the entire population of the state of Oregon.

So between the city itself and then the surrounding areas, that's a massive imbalance; whereas in Virginia, our largest city is Virginia Beach, in terms of population. But it's still right under half a million people. And even with that, there are several cities, even across the state border, and North Carolina, like Raleigh, has more people than Virginia Beach; Charlotte is much larger. So in Virginia, we don't have the range of huge mega cities. Even think about New York, where you've got New York City and then the rest of the state -- it's such a huge dichotomy.

I think for us particularly, you know, having been involved when I was at Virginia Tech the last 4.5 years -- I came to CIT last month -- our urban-rural issue is really more of a continuum. It's a continuum of different types of urbanism, different types of rural. And even within the urban, a lot of stuff gets lumped into that. But what we're really talking about is Virginia is a heavily suburbanized state, in terms of "you know it when you see it" type of development. Where our cities aren't that dramatically big when compared to other places.

So I think that is a way of framing and shaping this, and I think it actually gives us hope for a little bit more continuum action among our rural areas, the core cities, the suburbs, the exurban areas. I think in Virginia, we need to think about these issues about urban and rural, but we don't need to necessarily accept the larger narratives that may be impacting other parts of the country that don't necessarily fit the model that we have here in Virginia.

Michael Pope: That's a great segue to Liz Povar, who says, "No locality is an island. And the weak link here sets the tone for the neighbors." Liz Povar, what does that mean?

Liz Povar: That's my own words, coming back to haunt me, John.

Michael Pope: That's what I do.

Liz Povar: What we all need to remember is we are part of a neighborhood. Maggie actually used that word in the previous comments. And neighborhoods are composed of a lot of different characteristics. But at the end of the day, the most challenged part of the neighborhood can impact and maybe negatively impact, the strongest part of the neighborhood. If you think about a chain, the weakest link will break first. So our ability to really be a Commonwealth, and I found this interesting in reading through the book, a commonwealth is by English definition, a political community founded for the common good. Think about that chain link. If that weak chain breaks, we're not helping the common good of what the purpose of the whole chain is. In a neighborhood, the property that's adjacent to a beautiful piece of property, that may have characteristics of not being well-maintained, impacts property value of the better neighborhood. In community development, what happens in Danville will impact what happens in Pittsylvania County. They share a laborshed. They share highway infrastructure. They in some cases, share municipal services. The inability of localities to think about their neighbors and where there are opportunities to be stronger together is really what I mean when I say no locality is an island.

Michael Pope: So this panel is a bit value-added to the book project because Conaway Haskins was involved in the creation of the book. Liz Povar was also involved in the creation of the book. But our next

panelist is offering kind of a counterpoint to the chapter on broadband. So the chapter in the book goes into great detail about how there's this coalition of business interests, mainly telecommunications people, cable providers, that have prevented community and municipal broadband from thriving in the Commonwealth. Our panelist, though, Evan Feinman takes a different view and is here actually to offer a counterpoint to that. So Evan Feinman, talk about the broadband chapter of Vibrant Virginia and your reaction to it.

Evan Feinman: Sure. Thanks Michael. Well, first, I want to thank everybody for having me. I also got to read the book, not with the thoroughness that I would have liked before fully discussing it, but it's a really excellent piece of work and I'm excited to dive in deeply, hopefully at the beach or in some other fun location. The broadband chapter was of particular interest to me. One of my roles is to serve as the Governor's Chief Broadband Advisor. And I think there were some really strong insights in the chapter. The political analysis was interesting. You know, I've been in the trenches pushing this, that, or the other policy as well as the Governor's budget proposals over the last three years. And I think you have a certain perspective when you're on the ground and you have a certain perspective when you're observing from a distance. And I think both are important.

The two places that I think my view diverges somewhat from the impression that the chapter would leave you with, are one, I think the chapter -- and this is sort of necessarily the case when you're writing an academic piece, particularly for a book -- is that it fails to capture the most recent developments. And I think our growth within the broadband program has been somewhat exponential. You can certainly see that in terms of our funding; when they began writing this book, we had just moved from a $4 million budget to a $19 million budget. We're now entering our second year of a $50 million budget. So that's a really dramatic change, particularly with federal funds on top of that.

And then the second is, I do think there's a very common view that the challenge of rural broadband would have been solved were it not for artificial constraints on publicly controlled or municipal networks. And I think the strongest counterargument to that is that there exist many states where there are no artificial constraints on publicly owned or municipal networks, and those states continue to have rural broadband issues.

Additionally, the reason there's not good broadband infrastructure in low density areas is a fundamental math problem. And that math problem is that a unit of broadband infrastructure costs the same amount in Arlington as it does in Allegheny. But the amount of revenue that you can gain through that investment in Arlington is far greater because there's just far more people that you can connect to that sort of mile of fiber, for example. That math problem exists for a municipal provider as well, which is to say that the outlay relative to the inflow is really quite significant.

On top of that, I would add that while there is what I would consider to be a fairly silly and counterproductive prohibition on municipal governments as municipal governments operating municipal broadband networks, there is nothing stopping any municipality in the Commonwealth from creating an authority which they can do by ordinance. They already have the power to do that under the Wireless Services Authorities Act. And that authority can take in any subsidization it wants from the local

government. It can build anything it wants. It can offer any sort of network technology to any customer at any price with no restrictions, period, full stop. So while there is this additional hoop that needs to be jumped through for creating a municipal broadband network, that hoop is not a difficult hoop to jump through. It has been done by, for example, the Eastern Shore, by the Roanoke Valley Broadband Authority, by the Wired Road, by previously Bristol Virginia utilities. And we have not seen a great flowering of municipal networks. I think there are some strong use cases for municipal networks, but broad rural connectivity is probably not one of them.

Michael Pope: So I want to ask Conway Haskins about his chapter on the Community Gateway Project. So, let's start by talking about what a gateway project is. So this is essentially about a series of pieces of public art. And I think when most people hear the term public art, they think of a statue that's in the town center or something like that. This is different. This is something, a large piece of art that you see from your car as you're driving into an area, which is why it's called a gateway project. Explain what the community gateway project is and perhaps describe it. Because I think many of our viewers have probably seen some of these things as they've been driving around.

Conaway Haskins: Yes. So the Gateway Project -- these are initiatives that are happening all across the country. It's this usage of public art and large-scale public art installations for a variety of purposes around community and economic development. So part of it is helping to capture in some sense the spirit of a place. And it's part of this movement of creative placemaking that we hear about a lot.

And also it stands in contrast to the traditional gallery based art, like a lot of places will have a local art gallery or local art museum. This is more -- it's public and it's accessible, it's visible to the public in many places. You can actually walk up and sometimes touch this.

But it also gives an impression for visitors to the community about what these communities are. And you know, that piece that I wrote about is one that actually happens here in the greater Richmond area, but particularly in the Tri-Cities, the smaller three-city region in the southern tier of the Richmond metropolitan area, the cities of Petersburg, Hopewell, Columbia Heights, and the surrounding counties.

And this particular Gateway project, this particular public art project, was really a first of its kind for a region that size. And part of the reason I actually chose to write about this is again, to get to this issue of the urban-rural continuum that you typically find these kinds of public art --particularly in a Virginia context -- in larger places. You will see these kind of installations in places like Richmond. The City of Norfolk actually has an entire public art map where you've got like 30 plus pieces of art located strategically around the city, that artists and sculpture artists and others have created to do this.

Now, what's interesting, Michael, is you mentioned statues. There's actually a school of thought in the placemaking community that these statues, particularly given that what they were put up for, also are considered a form of public art. And so these new pieces that you see are more contemporary; they're more contemporary art, reflecting what is happening now.

The other piece about this too is that when we talk about community and economic development, it is that internal and external balance. I think these Gateway initiatives, particularly like the one in the

Tri-Cities area, tries to strike that balance, where they got their own bridges, they're off of the interstates, or they're on major thoroughfares. It really sparked the question of who is our community? What is our community? Or for the visitor, what is this community? Who is this community; who's in this community?

I think these Gateway Projects looking at them not as 'art for art's own sake,' but art as a way to do civic engagement, to improve community. Or quite frankly, in some cases does it spark conversation about what it means?

There's a particular one that I didn't write on -- my chapter focused on the Petersburg area, Tri-Cities area projects. But for example, Arlington County and Rosslyn has created an entire public art walk, a public art trail to really help define and redefine what it means to be an Arlingtonian. What does it mean to live in Arlington? It is a county but it's very urban. It's actually, if Arlington was a city, it's actually the second most population-dense locality in the Commonwealth.

So, but what does it mean? And I think the usage of public art in different places is to help revitalize or reconnect the image both internally to the local residence, but also externally to those coming into a community.

And I think these are things that -- part of the reason I wanted to write a chapter about the Tri-Cities pieces is that these were small communities. You don't see this a lot in small communities, especially in Virginia. You will see traditional art, but this moving and movement towards having these large-scale public art projects is something I think is interesting to showcase as a possible other way for communities to look at how they can improve themselves, how they can beautify, and how they can raise conversations about what does it mean to be in this community and what are we all about?

Michael Pope: And worth pointing out: the book has several photographs of these art installments. So when you take it to the beach, you can enjoy those photographs.

Liz Povar, I want to ask you about competition between localities. So one of the -- I was mentioning earlier -- I was sort of reviewing times that I had done news reporting on sort of urban versus rural. And one of the contexts that you actually see this come up pretty frequently is competition between cities and counties. So the General Assembly, there's often, of course, Republicans versus Democrats. There's also Northern Virginia versus rest of Virginia. And then, there's oftentimes cities versus counties acting sort of in a tribalistic way against each other. You have some thoughts about how localities could think differently about that, especially in school systems and public education, K-12. Talk a little bit about how jurisdictions might think differently about offering K-12 services.

Liz Povar: Sure. So one of the things I think -- to put some context around this -- you have to think back to historically the fact that rural and urban are very much defined by physical environment. So think about mountains, rivers, soil conditions, and geographic location. Think about East Coast, West Coast, middle of the country.

But we know that creativity and intellect are not limited by location geographically, or the physicality of

a place. Intellect and creativity are often the heart of a healthy community. The good news here is that we have this kind of intellect and creativity in Virginia's rural communities and our urban communities. But we also have some barriers. And one of those barriers, in my view, is the independent city structure, which causes revenues to flow either to a city or a county. If school systems need money to fund their services, they need to think about which jurisdiction they're located. This independent political structure is a barrier.

I also think there's a barrier in terms of technology. And with all due respect to my friend Evan, who I think has done a marvelous job in this administration focusing resources on broadband. Broadband is a solution, particularly in the K-12 area. So I want to give you one example, and I'm gonna give you two examples, actually. One of them I won't go into too deeply, Michael. Second one, I will.

The first one is the independent cities and counties. If you go back to the 1970s, think about the era back then. This ties a little bit back to the equity issues that Maggie talked about. Greensville County, a county of 10,000 people has a school system, K12. The city Emporia, 5,000 people, has a school division. It does not operate a school system, but it has a school board and it hires a superintendent. The total school population in those two communities is less than 2,500. There's no reason to have two separate independent school divisions. And yet we still do. It's a legacy, a holdover from a historic issue that as part of Vibrant Virginia, we need to consider when we think about education.

The other example I'll give you is something that's been resolved through the use of technology and strategic planning regionally. The GO TEC project in Southern Virginia takes all 15 local K-12 school divisions and programs and provides capital equipment to those systems at the middle school level, enabling students to be introduced into careers in information technology, healthcare, and mechatronics. It is a system-wide approach, multiple school divisions, to what is going to become and still remains an occupational demand need in that region.

So thinking about how K-12 can better deliver services, curriculum, training on a regional level, whether that's combining school systems or efficiencies, or providing curriculums and equipment for common training for a labor market area, is something I would challenge all of us to think about. And much of it relies on good satellite broadband, which, Evan, I'm happy with everything that's happened. And I hope that flexibility remains in enabling localities to address the broadband barriers, much like with real estate barriers by developing industrial parks.

Michael Pope: Thank you for setting up that question. Actually, I want to piggyback on that a little bit, which is to ask Evan Feinman about those restrictions. So Liz Povar was talking about barriers that create problems for education. I want to ask you about barriers that prevent access on broadband. So one of them you actually touched on in your earlier comments was that local governments aren't allowed to subsidize the development of infrastructure for broadband. A restriction that I think I heard you say was silly and counterproductive. The other restriction is that community and municipal broadband networks are not allowed to set prices lower than prices set by the incumbents. Like the Comcasts of the world and Cox, Century Link, Verizon, AT&T. Talk a little bit about those restrictions and can we see those restrictions going away in the near future?

Evan Feinman: Yeah, so a few things. One, I think Liz is completely right that, in the broader context of competition, the artificial lines, right -- nobody else cares when they crossover from Pittsylvania County into the city at Danville -- create a set of bad incentives when it comes to economic development, educational investment, infrastructure investment all across the board, right? And people have been talking about the importance of regionalism for years. And there are some places where you see breakthroughs, wearing my other hat, Michael, and I'll get to your question, I promise. But when you see breakthroughs, for example, in the Regional Industrial Facilities Authority between Danville and Pittsylvania County, where they go in 50/50 on expenditures for infrastructure for business, and then they split the taxes from those business parks, 50/50. They are working together hand-in-hand and they are crushing it down there. They are really, really, really an example of very strong success in rural Virginia around economic development.

As I said, on the municipal broadband piece, well, one, municipalities are subsidizing broadband infrastructure projects every single day and have been for years. We have, and I want to be really clear, we're in a great spot in Virginia right now. We have supported connections to more than 140,000 homes and businesses in Virginia that didn't have it before Governor Northam came to office. That's a tremendous number of Virginians whose daily lives have been improved. And the governor's going to be making a big budget announcement at the end of this week. But I will summarize that.

Michael Pope: Give us a preview.

Evan Feinman: Well, yeah, I'll summarize that to say, provided the General Assembly supports the Governor's proposal, the next Governor of Virginia will have the ability -- will solve the problem. Every single household, every single home and business in Virginia, will have a robust broadband connection.

The prohibition on municipally owned and operated networks is, as I said, on the one hand, sort of silly, right. Because you can't do it. The city of Richmond can't have RichmondNet unless...so they can't do it as the city. But if they simply take the preliminary step of creating the Richmond Broadband Authority, which they could do with an act of council, then they can create RichmondNet. And none of the rules that you were laying out there in terms of pricing and subsidization apply. That authority can take in as many taxpayer dollars as it wants. It can offer any sort of service to any customer at any price, at any time, for any reason, with no restrictions. Full stop. So it's a bit of a red herring. I agree that it's silly, that we've larded up our code with one set of silly and counterproductive restrictions and then created a two-step process by which one could go around those prohibitions and restrictions. But the end result is that in practice, but for a couple of unusual circumstances like when a municipality owns fiber -- there's a problem in Arlington, for example, using that approach because of the ownership structure of the fiber that they already have. So they can't create an authority and then give the city fiber to the authority. And so they can't leverage existing assets. So that's an area where it's just counterproductive to have the code look the way it looks.

But I think the key thing that we want to look at is that's the use case. An urban network is the strongest use case for a municipal network. Out in rural areas, the inability to enjoy the economies of scale that large-scale network owners and operators already have, means that you   undertake a great deal more

risk and you have a lot more in the way of fixed costs if you stand up, you know, one, two, 30, 40, different county networks. It's just that because the network engineering department that you would need, to run a network in Grayson County, which by the way is a county that is going to have universal broadband connectivity and already has a fully funded project to get to universal coverage, is not significantly smaller than the network engineering department you would need to run the whole State of Virginia. And so because of those large fixed costs and because of the relative scarcity in cost of network engineering, marketing, maintenance, operations professionals, et cetera, it just makes more sense to have bigger networks. And most of where bigger networks exist is in the electric cooperative space. In, we have a bit of a unicorn in this amazing middle mile network Mid-Atlantic Broadband, and in the for-profit ISP Universe. And so we've been able to leverage that pretty well.

Currently where we sit, we had 108,000 homes and businesses connected to new connections during the Northam administration, prior to the pandemic happening. That positioned us very, very, very well to go into the pandemic and see our economy do what it did, which is ride it out with sector by sector, very strong negative impacts, but across the whole economy Virginia rode the thing out pretty well.

Additionally, as I said, we're going to get to universal coverage here in the next couple of years. We're going to be the first, or one of the first, large states to do that. Michael, we talked on the phone. If you define Massachusetts as a large state, then we're going to be a little behind them, but we're certainly well ahead of most of our other medium to large state competitors.

Michael Pope: So you heard it here first, folks, by the end of the next governor's term...

Evan Feinman: Provided they maintain effort and attention. If the next governor makes a left turn, I can't speak for that.

Michael Pope: You know, it's interesting during the Democratic primary, the Democrats had the debate on Southwest, and I'm pretty sure McAuliffe made that pledge, that if he was elected governor by the end of his term as governor, Virginia would have universal broadband availability.

So I wanted to turn back to the Gateway Project here. Let's describe these things physically, what they look like. So people watching this, when they drive by and see them, they might recognize them. There are three of them I want to talk about. One of them is a bridge. And there is sort of like a red wrought iron thing that goes across the bridge. The other is a giant -- that's when you enter -- Sorry, can you help me out, Conaway.

Conaway Haskins: Yeah, so the bridge project is --

Michael Pope: Petersburg.

Conaway Haskins: Yeah, it's Petersburg. As you enter, as you're coming on 95, right before the [INAUDIBLE]

Michael Pope: I want you to describe these three of them.

right before the iPhone, I'm going to talk, I want you to describe these three of them. One is the red, sort of wrought iron design on that bridge as you enter Petersburg. The other's like this giant H as you enter Hopewell. And the third is actually not sort of that kind of gateway, it's more between Hopewell and Petersburg, where you had kind of a modern interpretation of the colonial garden and garden spires and that sort of thing. So describe these three pieces of art and what we're supposed to take from them when we see them.

Conaway Haskins: Well, actually, I think you've described them well, and I'll just do that really quickly because I think the project and the artworks themselves are really interesting. But the political contexts for these artworks, I think speak to issues to both Evan and particularly Liz brought up, about the separation of cities and counties and actually how that permeates the political culture of all of our communities across the Commonwealth.

So really quickly with the description, yes, you're right on I-95, at Exit 52, at Washington Street in Petersburg, that's where you see these red wrought iron sculptures that had been adhered to the bridge that are supposed to evoke sort of a modern interpretation of the historic wrought iron fence that you see around Petersburg, because Petersburg was a very old city. It's a colonial city. It's a traditional -- wonderful 18th century, 19th century buildings and estates and things like that, even in the city.

The one in Hopewell is evocative of the Hopewell industry, and Hopewell was known as the chemical capital of the South in the 1900s because it was a major producer. And it still has a number of those factories there. That sculpture in the shape of an H is designed to evoke sort of the historic industrial cityscape, industrial landscape of the city.

And then the other project is actually in Prince George County, south of Petersburg, actually between Petersburg and Stony Creek, near Emporia, when you're an exit 45 and that's the revitalization of a historic travel plaza in Prince George County, off of I-95. And that's supposed to evoke a modern interpretation of the colonial English gardens that you see around the county.

Interestingly enough with this project, the project was conceived by the Cameron Foundation, which is a regional grantmaker in that area. Cameron saw it as a regional initiative. However, as they went about developing the project, it became very clear that each locality, each city, each county had its own view, right, of it. And again, I think it goes to that notion that as Liz pointed out, about how the way that the Virginia government is set up, reinforces and to even Evan's point about the city of Richmond could do something or it can't do something, but it can create an authority. So it's like this way of governing itself impacts the behaviors in the public sector, impacts collaboration, or lack thereof.

And the thing about it too, is another context for Virginia, we're the only state in the nation that has this setup. There are 49 other states. And then there's Virginia. They're 40 or 41 independent cities in America. 38 of them are a Virginia, soon to be 37, because the city of Martinsville is going through a reversion process to become a town within Henry County.

So part of it is we need to think about what does this mean? When it touches on a public art community development project, it is still being impacted by this city/county separation because the cities are going

to fund part of it, the foundation was going to fund part of it, and in one case, particularly in Petersburg, VDOT funded part of it because it was a bridge initiative. But again, it ended up being reliant on this hyperlocal process. Whereas the foundation was initially going into this project thinking about, 'Hey, how do we improve the image or how do we connect the image of our region?' It got caught up in the locality versus locality type dynamics, which aren't totally understandable and it's not [INAUDIBLE]. It's just one of these things, that we need to think about this.

I think particularly as we're thinking about what's next for Vibrant Virginia 2, examining what does this mean, whether good or bad? We don't know, but what does it mean for us to have this continuous city/county separation. Across the border in North Carolina, Durham City and Durham County, have essentially merged almost all municipal functions to achieve those economies of scale, but also to [INAUDIBLE] how they position, whether that's schools, whether that's first responders, health facilities, and things like that.

You do see examples of that at Virginia, like Alleghany County Public Schools and Covington County Schools. You know, they're going through this process of looking at consolidation of public schools to save money, because of population decline, because of the lower numbers in the school system over time. These are conversations, I think we need to have. So any time this city/county, anytime the [INAUDIBLE] issue, which is a whole other piece of Virginia governance as well, is impacting where sculptures are placed in a community to beautify, I think it speaks to this larger issue that yes, it impacts broadband. It impacts public education, it impacts economic development, it impacts transportation. And it also impacts sculpture art. So I think that's something that we need to, really, as Virginians, need to consider...what does this mean for us in terms of our structure, our governance and policy-making structure.

Michael Pope: I want to turn our attention to economic development. We heard earlier about the day the Amazon announcement was made and all of the many other things that happened that day, the wide tapestry of other things that happened that day. I'm tempted to call it a vibrant tapestry. Liz Povar, you have some thoughts on the economic development numbers in Virginia. So if you just look at them on their face value, they actually look pretty good. But then if you take a deeper look, you'd see some disparities there. Explain your thoughts on what we should be thinking about when we look at economic development numbers in Virginia.

Liz Povar: Right. So my background is 38 years in the business of economic development here in Virginia. Of those and more than 20 at the state level -- and we historically measured Virginia's success collectively, as a Commonwealth, maybe that's the best way to look at it, as a Commonwealth. The numbers in terms of job creation, unemployment rates, new business announcements, expansions were always very good, always very good, in the top ten, if not the number one in the country. But they masked the diversity of rural and suburban Virginia. They masked weaknesses in our system. We had a one-size-fits-all approach to how we conducted economic development. And as Sarah and Maggie said, that doesn't fit in Virginia. What's so thrilling right now is the way that the Virginia Economic Development Partnership, along with some of its partner agencies, Virginia Tourism, Go Virginia at the Department of Housing and Community Development, are now looking at regional markets, regional

capacities, regional leadership to think about regional strength. What is needed in Southwest Virginia to help them succeed is different than what's needed in the Middle Peninsula or Northern Neck. These state agencies are now looking at strategies that are in part developed by local leaders, business leaders, civic leaders, who know their strengths and weaknesses, who know, kind of, what their vision is for their healthy economy and do need and want to access any state or non-profit or federal or private resource to help them get there.

So the benefit here I think, and Stephen Moret talked about this in Chapter 3, the benefit is there is no longer a one-size-fits-all economic development strategy. The mantle of taking control of your own communities is now in the hands of regional and local leaders much more visibly that it historically has been.

And the numbers that are reported, based on job creation, capital investment, traditional like that, those numbers are now available regionally, which helps us all think about: Where do we have to have some different solutions for different parts of Virginia?

The other thing I want to mention is that the expansion of entrepreneurship -- which both Conaway and Evan are also involved with -- the validity of that model I think helps with bridging the gap between rural and urban. There are many small companies in rural Virginia whose markets, whose markets are in urban areas.

Think of some of these -- Events By Us Only, a small black owned firm in West Point. [INAUDIBLE} is a creative entrepreneur, but she is marketing to a very broad geography at the Hampton Roads, Richmond, Fredericksburg. She needs that connectivity.

Companies like the Clark Boys at Elba West, an agribusiness based company, who raise beautiful cattle, sell their product in Louisville or Las Vegas. You're in Pittsylvania County, you're connected to major markets.

Rappahannock River Oysters, based in Topping, Virginia, selling its product in China, but also to the major metro markets of D.C., Charleston, and Los Angeles. These business leaders are entrepreneurs who are demonstrating the very capability of rural Virginia, if leadership in rural Virginia recognize that they are connected to and can benefit from working with urban partners. I think it's a great story.

Conaway Haskins: And Michael, could I follow up on that really quickly?

Michael Pope: Go ahead.

Conaway Haskins: To concur with Liz's point, I think that's one of the things that particularly in the context of Vibrant Virginia and looking at this continuum piece; markets don't pay attention to the city and county borders. Markets don't even pay attention to state borders, right? Markets are global. Markets are integrated in terms -- or their industry supply chain markets.

I think we see that with the concepts of these urban and rural areas and the regionalism piece. If you look along, particularly the southern border of our state, a lot of those communities like Danville,

Martinsville, Henry County, Pittsylvania County. They are literally adjacent to metro areas across the border and they are part of [INAUDIBLE]. If you look at Lee County, our furthest west county in the Commonwealth; when you talk about Lee County in the context of Virginia, there are parts of Lee County, particularly in the western edge like out at Ewing and some places like that, that are actually closer to eight or nine other state capitals than they are to Richmond. While that may create a sense of isolation in terms of policy, when you're actually in western Lee County, you're 20 minutes from significant sized towns in either Kentucky or Tennessee. And the people who live there are going, "Oh, I'm going to go to my dentist appointment in Tazewell, Tennessee, 15 minutes away." Or "I'm going to go pick up something at the Kmart in Middlesboro, Kentucky, which is 10 or 15 minutes away." That's the reality people are living in.

I think when we talk about Vibrant Virginia, we also have to look at the fact that we are connected to other places. But I think the other story that our urban-rural framing needs to account for and it's not being told.

You see this somewhat in the chapter I write, but particularly in the other chapters is, urban Virginia is also quite diverse and different. What happens in our core cities? What happens in the city of Norfolk? What happens in the city of Richmond? What happens in those older core cities like Portsmouth and things like that? It's very different than what's happening in the suburbs around those areas. So to lump all of urban Virginia in together as one actually does a disservice. You know, five or six of the top cities in the country with the highest eviction rates in the United States are in Virginia, right? And those are in those cities, not that those issues aren't happening in the counties, but they're happening in our cities. But if we just talk about urban, urban, urban being so prosperous, we're missing the fact that there are a ton of people that are struggling in those core city areas, just like there are people who are economically struggling in rural areas and vice versa.

So I think part of the way we have to start thinking about these issues is to broaden our frame and understand the interstate/intrastate connectivity, the regional connectivity. I think, you know, to Stephen Moret's chapter piece, he talked about the regional strategy. No longer having to do scorecards for each city and county, but as a region, here's where job announcements are, because that's what really matters.

People are going to get in the car and drive to where they need to drive for job if it's reasonable and convenient. And to Liz's point about businesses, I live in Chesterfield County. A number of our public schools have been built by Kenbridge Construction, which is Lunenburg based, in small Lunenburg County. But those folks are coming and driving an hour or so and are building schools for one of the five or six largest localities in the Commonwealth.

So again, we need to think about this urban-rural issue as more of a continuum. We need to think about how we're framing it. And we also need to think about what are the policy implications -- whether it be broadband, K-12, or anything else we've talked about today -- of the way we do business as a Commonwealth. And are there ways to improve?

I mean, if you look at that area Evan mentioned, Grayson County and Galax, that area there. They'd

been doing regional cooperation on economic development and leading. They're sort of the innovators in regional economic development cooperation that other regions, even the larger metropolitan regions are now learning from. So I think these interconnectivity pieces are really where the future lies to really truly create a Vibrant Virginia.

Michael Pope: Really quickly, as a reminder to our panelists here, we are scheduled to end this thing at 11:15, so we only have a few minutes. And so we want to actually look ahead here to recommendations and kind of other takeaways we want viewers to see or to think about. And I want to start with Evan Feinman. I want to just circle back around to something you said earlier, which is that the book, of course was written largely before the pandemic and doesn't have the most recent developments. But the chapter on broadband does look ahead to an extent, where it talks about the $50 million increased budget for broadband deployment. And there's a warning there, that there's a concern that the same coalition of people that has stopped progress, in terms of getting rid of these restrictions, will also have an influence over how that money is spent. Again, we're talking about Cox, Comcast, CenturyLink, Verizon and AT&T. How should we think about this coalition that has sort of prevented progress in terms of community and municipal broadband and the influence they might have over how that money is spent moving forward?

Evan Feinman: Yeah. I mean, I'll just say again that, if the only benchmark you're using is the elimination of that particular code section, it was low on our priority list right out of the gate because we determined that it wasn't a hindrance to progress. And again, we have closed a significant portion of the digital divide. We will talk a little bit more about that later in the summer. But every single Virginian is going to have access to reliable broadband connection within the next couple of years, and we're going to do that sooner than any other state. So the argument that that, or any other large state; Delaware can do what Delaware wants to do.

But the argument that that coalition has created some kind of tremendous problem, I just don't think it holds water. I've been out here doing it. And to the extent I've had to deal with the members of that coalition, they've been helpful or at least, where it was in their interest, or they've gotten out of the way. And you look at the project that we just announced last Thursday on the Northern Neck; the entire Northern Neck is going to get Fiber to the Home coverage through a partnership between Dominion and All Points Broadband.

We've been asked a $16 million grant in Southwest Virginia. We're gonna get five counties universal coverage down there, between last year and this year's work. So we're getting it done without that...it's very easy to create a political narrative that's kind of a morality play and say, these are the bad guys and these are the good guys. But as you know, Michael and as Liz and Conaway know, it's like the stark urban-rural divide is an easy thing to write about, but not really doing a good job of capturing the reality, which is a continuum. There's a continuum of actors throughout all of this and they're pursuing their own interests. The for-profit sector is not a monolith. The non-profit sector is not a monolith. The municipal sector is not a monolith. And everybody's pursuing their own interests throughout all of this. I think the main takeaway I'm hoping everybody gets from this is that, you know, we've had a governor in Governor Northam, who made this a priority and who's going to get it done for Virginians. Who's

already gotten it done for hundreds of thousands of Virginians.

Michael Pope: All right, we're already over time, so I want to encourage our other two panelists to be brief and sort of wrap it up, in terms of the takeaways people should have. Conaway Haskins.

Conaway Haskins: The takeaway, without repeating anything, the other piece of the takeaway, I think is if you look at the book, one of the things I think that we need to look for in the future is to make sure that there are more diverse voices contributing to books like Vibrant Virginia in the future. If you look at the current roster and the dynamics of it, I think we could have much more diversity, particularly ethnic diversity, racial diversity, in terms of reflecting the Commonwealth of Virginia, which is a very diverse state. So that's a suggestion I would have in terms of a takeaway from the book and looking forward.

Michael Pope: And Liz Povar.

Liz Povar: My takeaway; Michael, first of all thank you for facilitating a good discussion and Conaway and Evan, it was wonderful to be here with you guys. And also, to John and the team who put this book together, thank you for taking the time to do this.

My takeaway comments are this. I can walk out to the end of Stingray Point in Middlesex County and I can see SpaceX launch from Wallops Island. I spent part of yesterday spending time watching the Virgin Galactic launch from Truth or Consequences, Nevada. Not exactly...Neither of these are exactly urban areas, but both of them rely heavily on many brains coming from urban areas as well as rural areas. My closing comment to everybody here is, we can all read the book. But if we don't take personal action as a result of it, the book is going to sit on a shelf and be useless. There are ways we can each take steps. There are a lot of good suggestions in the book and a lot of places for continued conversation. It will take intentional proactive action by every one of us to help build this connectivity between rural and urban in Virginia.

Michael Pope: Okay, thank you so much to the panelists. This was an excellent discussion. I'm going to turn it over now to the Director for the Center of Economic and Community Engagement, John Provo. And my apologies for handing it over to you a little late.

John Provo: Hey, listen, that is okay. This was a great session and worth every minute we gave you. And I thank the participants, I thank Stephen for the earlier discussion, and I thank everybody who's hung in here with us. I'm going to come in with the two editors, Maggie Cowell and Sarah Sarah Lyon-Hill, and talk a little bit about what's next for Vibrant Virginia 2.0. And particularly ask them to react to things that they heard over the course of the discussion today.

Just to queue it up for them...we started off with Stephen asking some questions about the program itself. I know we do have plans for later this summer to convene with some of the original partner schools in the original Vibrant Virginia effort. Some of that had been waylaid by the COVID crisis. But I think we're ready to get back together as a group with the other schools now.

I'm also sitting on about 60 proposals from faculty in Virginia Tech from what we're calling our Vibrant Virginia Impact Fund. And essentially, we built an angel network of units within the university, who had

strategic responsibility for different outcomes in economic and community and social activities around Virginia. And we're helping them connect and scale up those efforts. So we'll have some things to look at there. And well, actually, I know Maggie mentioned op-eds and other communications tools we may try to use to roll out some messaging from the book. I'm hoping Maggie and Sarah will think a little bit about book 2.0. I know that's a little daunting because they're probably a little tired after having worked so hard on the first one.

And I want to queue up maybe three issues for them to respond to, relative to what's next in the program or what's next in the book. One of them, we talked about a lot and a couple we only talked about a little. Well, first off, we've talked a lot about urban-rural connections and disconnections, and thank goodness, we gave Judge Dylan his five minutes of excoriation in the debate in the last section. So urban and rural connections is certainly a critical theme.

And I'd love to think a little bit about what we have and haven't learned. I think we talked a little bit about equity and inclusion issues. And I know, again, the book was pre-COVID but was also before a lot of the very important and visible protests and other sorts of considerations of equity and inclusion issues that have gone on since the COVID summer.

And then third, post-COVID. We may have something to look at relative to all of our economic and social and health systems. So I'm going to step back and ask the three of you to reflect on those themes I offered. Two of you. Sorry, I'm seeing triple because I'm looking at the screen. But think about those three themes. Think about things you've heard over the course of the day, and tell us what you'd like to see in the next program or in the next book.

Margaret Cowell: Start us off, Sarah? You're muted, so I think that's my signal, you want me to start? Thanks, John. And thank you, yes, to the panelists. I think that was a really lively conversation and some really important sort of critiques to think about, which is the hallmark of any academic engagement. We look for challenges to what we've sort of laid out.

So John, I think, I've been thinking a little bit about what's next. We're at a critical moment in the Vbrant Virginia initiative, where it's time to pause and reflect and at the same time, gathering steam as you mentioned, with the impact funds. That's really exciting to hear that so many proposals are on the table. I think I'm not on the committee that helps decide those so I'm even happier to hear about the number of proposals I'm not reviewing, but I think that's fascinating. I think it's a testament to the appetite for this type of work, right? We're seeing, I think, a positive movement in which folks are interested in doing this kind of work, and knowing that it's hard work, having some support and financial support and technical support from the university and other partners is great. And I think it's a testament to the good work that's been going on.

As we start to think about what's next, I think part of what Sarah and I are working on is trying to think about how we transform the findings from Vibrant Virginia 1.0 into practice and policy. And I think that's going to be, as I mentioned, a multifaceted effort, right? So we're hoping to interface hopefully in person. I think maybe that's a reality that we can think about. And start to work again alongside community partners. And as John likes to save the pracademic community, right? The folks who are at

the intersection of practice and academics, many of them are represented in this book, but we also know there's a number of partners we haven't included, or just weren't a part of this first phase. And I think there's opportunities to bring them in, in the 2.0.

So we'll work to get the word out about the book through op-eds and taking this show on the road. I think Sarah and I are both really excited about that. I mean, there were times a few years ago when we both probably logged too many miles, but now we're thinking, "Man, we'd like to log some miles. We'd like to get out and and talk with people and take the show on the road." So we're looking forward to that.

I think I'm also at a moment, at least personally, and I know Sarah is probably feeling similarly, given our conversations, but I think we are in a moment where we want to push ourselves to sort of evolve and to think about a new and improved 2.0 version. So like John mentioned, reflecting on the realities and the opportunities of that post-pandemic world.

And I really -- man, it's a challenge, right? There are so many obstacles that remain in front of us, but I really am trying a new thing where I'm trying to be optimistic and I'm thinking about the opportunities, right? There are ways in which this has forced us to cooperate, in ways that we haven't cooperated before. And I think there's going to be even more opportunities to do so as we start to shake out the new normal. And I'm optimistic and that's new for me. So I'm trying it on, and I think it's a good place to be.

But I also am doing a bit of soul searching. And I think even if, and perhaps, especially if, it's uncomfortable, I want to think about how we can take action and ensure and hold space for our BIPOC partners, right? People for whom the economic development and community development conversations have not typically included. I mentioned that before because it's something that matters a lot to me, and I really appreciated Conaway's point about -- we fell short of our goals in terms of making sure we had a diverse representation in the book and acknowledge that as a real downfall. I see an opportunity here, again, as we're pausing and thinking about 2.0. That's central, in my eyes.

And ultimately, I think, you know, my goal is to continue to work with community partners, to work with you all, and your center, to sort of imagine possibilities and co-create solutions to economic and social challenges. I see that as our mission, right? That's the 2.0 that we all aspire to sort of create. Sarah, back to you. Sorry, that was long winded.

Sarah Lyon-Hill: No, that was perfect. I'm not sure how much I can add, but I think saying that we need to imagine something more is -- I think that's probably the most important thing that comes out of this book, at least for me. I mean, in our panel today, "it's complicated" came up how many times -- like the urban-rural divide, equity issues, broad band; it's all very, very complicated. And it's easy to say that and write it off, and then just go about what we're doing on our day-to-day lives. But it's another thing to kind of understand our traditions and our legacies and what we've done in our communities and what we could possibly do.

So imagining those possibilities I think is really important and yeah, hopefully, Vibrant Virginia 2.0 might

help us do that, along with all of those wonderful new engagement program -- Vibrant Virginia grants that we're going to give out. I'm very excited about that. Thank you.

John Provo: Well, listen, thank you both. And maybe I'll just bring us to a quick close by thanking again everybody who's contributed to the book, everybody who participated in today's panel. All of you who've logged on at different points of the day. I think within the next 24 hours or so, my colleague, Julia will get a video of today's session posted at a link that I just put in the chat. So please take a minute to make sure you grab that, if you haven't already bookmarked that page.

And then, just before that in the chat, there's also a special sign up for notifications when the book is available for order. We did not do as much back and forth today, but you'll also find, I think we still have posted a sign up for Q&A on the draft book on our website. So there is a place for you to go and launch questions about some of the specific chapters, view and provide feedback on the chapters that are in draft form.

And we hope we'll see you again not too far down the road. And talk about all of these issues with you in your communities, in your institutions, when we're all together again, not too far from now.

Sarah Lyon-Hill: And in person.

John Provo: In person. Oh, did I not imply that? Yes. Thank you. So I'll throw it back to Leland to close this out, and thank you all.

Leland Shelton: Thank you John and thank you to all the moderators and panelists for joining us today. I hope you all have a wonderful Monday. Goodbye.