



The Discovering Common Ground Workshop was held on November 16<sup>th</sup>, 2007 at Algonkian Park in Sterling Virginia. The intended audience included members of the Urban Forestry Community and Development/ Building Community. Sponsors included: Trees Virginia, Virginia Sustainable Building Network, the Potomac Watershed Partnership, Virginia Dept. of Forestry, Chesapeake Bay Program, Virginia Cooperative Extension, and the Northern Virginia Building Industry Association.

**Purpose:**

*As a result of this conference, urban forestry stakeholders and the building/development community will begin and continue a dialogue relating to urban forest conservation in an effort to better enable municipalities to meet conservation goals with tools and methods that builders/developers can work with.*

The keynote speaker was Dan Slone, Chief Legal Counsel to U.S. Green Building Council. He presented innovative opportunities that can result in better tree conservation on development sites. He introduced ideas to put environmental, social, and ecological principles forward to design sustainable communities where traffic, recreation, and ecological systems have been considered in the beginning of the planning process. He suggested using a transect concept to design tree conservation for the area of interest whether rural, urban or suburban- one approach does not fit all circumstances.

Speakers representing the stakeholders from the development community and the natural resources community presented the challenges they face in their work to address tree conservation. Delegate David Bulova from the 37<sup>th</sup> District reminded the conference group of the implications of the Dillon Rule in Virginia. He presented issues related to tree conservation, the consideration of utility placement, the longevity of trees that are saved in the development process and the economic outcome of housing prices if it costs more to conserve trees. He also gave the group ideas on what legislators look for when new legislation is proposed. Some suggestions were the need to be specific, make proposals easy to read, and include a degree of flexibility.

Some areas of common ground highlighted by Tanya Denkla-Cobb, an experienced facilitator with the Institute for Environmental Negotiation, were:

- The protection of ecosystems rather than individual trees
- A need for education of developers, municipalities, and politicians.
- Agreement that stormwater management is a part of the tree conservation equation.
- More incentives are needed to help make the process of tree conservation economical for developers.

A facilitated discussion period touched on the areas of common ground between the Development Community and Urban Forestry expectations for tree conservation. Some incentives for the Development Community were proposed:

- Reward developers who preserve trees/forest by fast tracking their future plans.
- Promote joint trenching for utilities.
- Give stormwater management credit to developers using natural flow and runoff pattern as well as leaving riparian forest buffers intact.
- Consider mitigation for forest land turned into non-forest public use.
- Create State award for developer exhibiting best stewardship (financial award and fast track plan status).
- Protect ecosystems instead of individual trees.

The workshop ended with the satisfaction that the discussion was realistic- most attendees felt it was successful in meeting the original expectations. The door is open to future education and communication between the Development Community and Urban Forestry Community. The development process can only be improved by the conversations that took place.