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Salute the Regionaires

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LOCAL GOVERNMENTS are, as the saying goes, in straitened circumstances. The recession has shrunk budgets and forced painful decisions, which hasn't improved anyone's mood. What once seemed like cracking good ideas now may look like marginal whimsies; in this every-man-for-himself mode, regionalism is an easy target. So maybe it's time to say a word for our avatar of intergovernmental cooperation in these parts, the George Washington Regional Commission.

The GWRC does regional planning and seeks new industry for Planning District 16: Fredericksburg and the counties of Stafford, Spotsylvania, Caroline, and King George. There's a lot to keep the commission busy, because, of the state's 21 General Assembly-designated planning districts, No. 16 is the fastest-growing. Our population has shot up a net 80,000 since 2000. If you're reading this, the chances are about one in three you're part of that surge of humanity.

What specifically does the GWRC do? A wide variety of things, from running GWRide Connect, which sets up commuters with car pools, van pools, and mass-transit options; to keeping track of the disposition of the region's homeless population; to providing technical planning assistance to PD 16's five member governments and to non-governmental organizations hereabouts. Some of its programs benefit specific counties. For example, the Regional Rural Transportation Planning Program facilitates the mobility of King George and Caroline residents.

Finally, and most prominently, the GWRC staffs FAMPO (the Fredericksburg Area Metropolitan Planning Organization), which performs transportation planning for Fredericksburg and for Stafford and Spotsylvania counties. (Imagine the chaos and ill will if each of these physically inseparable jurisdictions pursued its own transportation projects in blithe disregard of their impact on the others.) The GWRC and FAMPO, reports the commission, have brought over \$43 million into our region since 2006. This amounts to a 46-1 return on investment for each dollar a local jurisdiction has kicked in.

Affordable housing riverine education for school kids litter control comp-plan review: It's difficult to name a regional or local topic concerning which the GWRC hasn't played a constructive role, always while deferring to PD 16's member governments. Like the nerve cells in a ganglion, the commission's many activities stitch our region together and help fit it with a unique identity. In the years ahead, this process can only raise our quality of life, defending our "differentness" against the encroachments of those who would presume to define us.