

2026

NOVA RISE

Key Takeaways & Insights





KEY TAKEAWAYS & INSIGHTS

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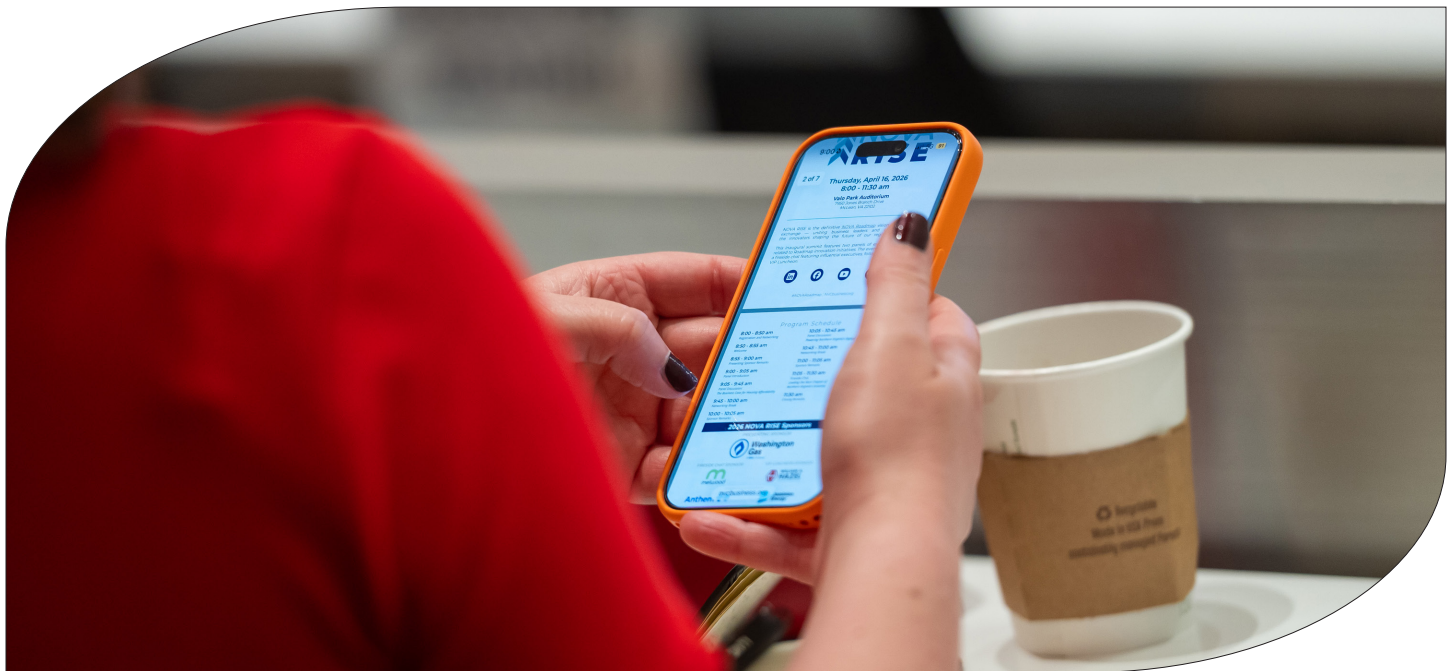
ABOUT

NOVA RISE

The **Northern Virginia Chamber (NVC)** is building a coalition to champion Northern Virginia’s competitiveness, and the **NOVA Roadmap Innovators and Stakeholders Exchange (NOVA RISE)** is a part of that call to action. Hosted in April 2026, this inaugural program mobilized leaders, ideas, and solutions for Northern Virginia’s greatest challenges.

The program featured two panels, “The Business Case for Housing Affordability,” and “Powering Northern Virginia’s Digital Economy,” and a fireside chat on “Leading the Next Chapter of Northern Virginia’s Economy.”

For more information, including panel descriptions and panelist bios, [view the digital program](#).



ABOUT

KEY TAKEAWAYS & INSIGHTS REPORT

Throughout the inaugural NOVA RISE summit, NVC engaged attendees through an interactive digital engagement tool. Many attendees submitted questions via this tool, and while many received responses during the live Q&A segments, many unanswered questions remained.

Those questions were subsequently synthesized and submitted to moderators and panelists, who then responded to those items most relevant to their areas of expertise. This report contains herein those responses, as well as highlights from the audience engagement data. Each respondent is denoted before their respective response. Graphics labeled “NOVA RISE Attendee Feedback” represent the aforementioned audience engagement highlights.

NOVA RISE ATTENDEE FEEDBACK

What is the biggest hurdle to increasing housing supply in Northern Virginia?

COMMUNITY OPPOSITION

#1 ATTENDEE RESPONSE

This is an example of audience engagement included in the 2026 NOVA RISE Key Takeaways & Insights Report. Each highlight includes the pertinent question posed to attendees, as well as the top audience responses.

THE BUSINESS CASE FOR HOUSING AFFORDABILITY

This conversation centered on one of the greatest challenges facing our region: housing affordability. This panel of experts discussed the critical shortage of housing inventory, regulatory obstacles, and actions the business community can take today to address this threat to Northern Virginia’s economic competitiveness.

Below, these housing policy experts expand on key themes from NOVA RISE, addressing specific attendee questions regarding the entitlement-to-built pipeline, the impact of multi-jurisdictional advocacy, and the policy levers available to local and state government to reduce development costs.

Responses provided by:



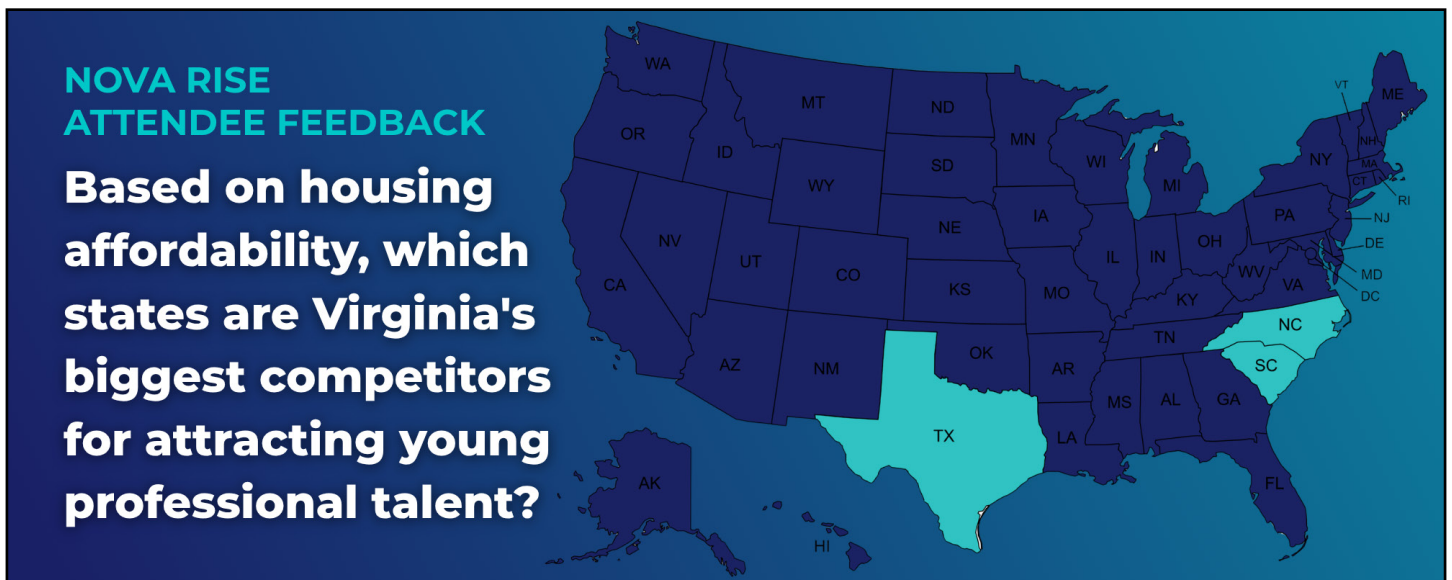
DAN ALBAN
Strategic Advisor & Co-Founder
YIMBYs of NOVA



THOMAS FLEETWOOD
Director
Fairfax County
Department of Housing and
Community Development



CARMEN ROMERO
President & CEO
True Ground Housing Partners





Carmen Romero (left) moderates a discussion on housing affordability in Northern Virginia. Panelists share policy insights from their respective organizations as well as recommendations as to how business owners can engage on this issue.



Regarding the gap between entitled units and built units — beyond financing, what are the primary hurdles to closing that gap in our region?

DAN ALBAN: “Beyond financing, permitting delays and related red-tape are frequently a cause of the gap between entitled units and built units.”

THOMAS FLEETWOOD: “I think that the lingering effects of the pandemic on prices, interest rates, labor, etc. have dampened development plans across the region. There is a lot of uncertainty in a market whose hallmark has heretofore been stability, thanks to the presence of the federal government. The many changes over the last 18 months, and the attendant uncertainty, do not do much to encourage development.

Finally, making our local regulatory processes even more nimble, consistent with our Board’s guidance in September 2025, will be critically important as previously approved development plans may need to evolve. Multiple contributing factors include rising construction costs driven by tariffs, labor shortages, and material price increases; elevated borrowing costs associated with interest rates and financing costs; a widening gap between wages and housing costs, particularly for low and middle-income households; and community sentiment.

Fairfax County established a Housing Task Force focused on the primary levers within the County’s authority to increase housing — namely land use and zoning policies, entitlement and approval processes, and targeted economic incentives.”

CARMEN ROMERO: “It’s important to re-emphasize that financing is a major challenge right now for entitled properties. Local and state budgets are strained, and private investors are cutting back. However, there are still things we can do to lower time and costs in the meantime.

Localities can look to move to administrative site plan processes and to speed up permitting processes. For example, some states have moved to allow licensed and certified third-party review of housing permit applications. Other countries, such as the UK and Japan, and other states, such as Florida, Tennessee, and Texas, already allow this.”

NOVA RISE ATTENDEE FEEDBACK

What is the biggest hurdle to increasing housing supply in Northern Virginia?

COMMUNITY OPPOSITION

#1 ATTENDEE RESPONSE

How effective can advocacy for affordable housing be when some advocates don't live in the jurisdiction where they are presenting their case?

DAN ALBAN: "It depends on their connection to the housing and/or whether they have an interesting personal story about how they benefited from affordable housing. We generally just encourage our members to show up for hearings in their own jurisdiction because we think locals are usually the most effective advocates."

But we have occasionally had advocates testify about why they'd like more housing in Arlington because they'd like to move here but can't afford it. And I once testified about how Fairfax should adopt its 'Parking Reimagined' reforms because similar reforms were effective in making my neighborhood in Arlington a more walkable community with density near transit where I can walk to grocery stores, restaurants, and other amenities."

THOMAS FLEETWOOD: "Focusing on two things are important in this context: 1) the challenge of housing affordability is truly an issue of regional economic competitiveness; and 2) businesses — our corporate citizens — have a huge stake in our economy providing housing that meets the entire range of need."

Affordable housing development — providing housing options for the workers needed in our economy — is truly economic development.

Fairfax County is one component of a larger, interdependent regional economy and housing market across the metropolitan Washington area. As of 2024, 39% of the people working in Fairfax County live in another jurisdiction; and about one-third of County working residents work outside of the County. The housing market is not confined to county lines, and we must continue to identify ways to address housing challenges as a regional priority."

CARMEN ROMERO: "This is why state and regional-level advocacy is so important. The current status quo of locally controlled housing and planning laws do not match the needs of regional housing markets."

Typically, workers who cannot afford to live in a certain jurisdiction do not have a voice in the democratic process that determines zoning laws.

Regional or state level advocacy, such as the recent Commonwealth Housing Coalition, aims to give a voice to those people who have been 'zoned out' of localities with an intense shortage of housing."

How do we address the needs of middle-income and growing families who are being priced out? There is often a misconception that “affordable” only means “low income.”

DAN ALBAN: “The housing crisis is not just about ‘affordable housing’ for those who are ‘low income,’ but also building enough quality housing that is attainable for middle income and growing families.

The fundamental problem is that supply is not meeting demand.

We need to build a LOT more housing to catch up on the deficit that has grown for nearly two decades after the 2008-2009 financial crisis. Dense housing types — such as high-rise and mid-rise apartments — allow us to catch up most quickly, but all housing types are needed, including accessory dwelling units (ADUs) and “missing middle” housing.”

THOMAS FLEETWOOD: “‘Affordable Housing,’ as practiced in Fairfax County, ranges from seniors and people with disabilities who have low incomes, to more moderate-income working families and individuals.

Our Board of Supervisors recognizes this, and has challenged us to deliver 10,000 new units of affordable housing for families earning up to 60% of the Area Median Income, or about \$98,340 for a family of four, and to provide policy changes and other opportunities to increase the availability of a diverse range of housing that is attainable for moderate-income families who want to move from renting to homeownership.”

CARMEN ROMERO: “Subsidy programs, such as housing vouchers or Low-Income Housing Tax Credits (LIHTC), remain critical programs for meeting the needs of everyday workers.

In a high-cost region like the Washington, DC MSA, being below median income often equates to working a full-time job in important sectors, like health care, childcare, or retail work. These workers are critical to a functioning economy.

In addition to direct subsidies, zoning for more starter homes, such as small-lot townhomes, plexes, and small apartment buildings, can help make room for more middle-income families.”

“The fundamental problem is that supply is not meeting demand.

We need to build a LOT more housing to catch up on the deficit that has grown for nearly two decades after the 2008-2009 financial crisis.”

— Dan Alban

What are the most significant things the state or local government could do right now to decrease the cost of new housing?

DAN ALBAN: “Here’s a handful of key things that need to be done now:

1. Liberalize zoning to enable more dense housing to be built by right in all residential zones (upzoning) while also allowing dense residential development in districts zoned commercial
2. Eliminate mandatory parking minimums
3. Reduce lot-size and square-footage minimums for all types of housing, including ADUs
4. Expedite permit processing & eliminate red-tape that causes needless delays.”

THOMAS FLEETWOOD: “There are so many factors in the housing market that are outside the control of local of government, but continued process innovation to help projects get to market faster and more easily, paired with consistent investment in affordable housing development, are essential. What we do not need are State mandates which impede localities’ ability to develop and deliver local solutions for local issues.”

CARMEN ROMERO: “First, they have the power to change zoning and permitting rules to allow for more small-lot starter homes and multifamily housing. This will allow new homes to be smaller and therefore more naturally affordable. It will also reduce market pressure on the existing stock of homes.

Second, they can offer publicly owned land for housing. This helps developers build low-cost housing in extremely land-constrained markets, such as in Northern Virginia.

Note that these two measures can move the needle at very low fiscal cost to localities. In fact, letting more diverse housing types be built can both help housing affordability and also be a net fiscal positive for localities by bringing in more tax dollars with a growing population.”

NOVA ROADMAP GOAL #2:

CULTIVATE AFFORDABILITY FOR OUR WORKFORCE

Make Northern Virginia an affordable place to live, work, and raise a family by prioritizing attainable housing and accessible, high-quality childcare.

**GET INVOLVED WITH NOVA ROADMAP!
VISIT [NVCBUSINESS.ORG/NOVA-ROADMAP](https://nvcbusiness.org/nova-roadmap) FOR MORE INFORMATION.**

NOVA ROADMAP FAST FACTS

NOVA Roadmap is NVC's strategy to strengthen Northern Virginia's economic competitiveness. Since July 2025, NVC has moved from vision to execution, advancing the Roadmap's policy priorities. Learn more about this future-focused initiative [here](#).

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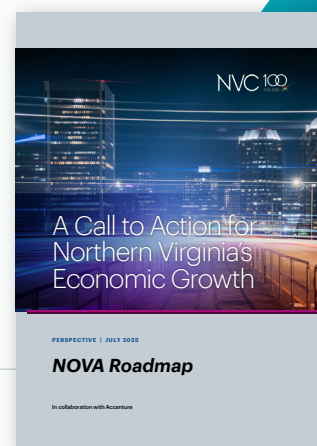
NOVA Roadmap investment dollars since July 2025

6

NOVA Roadmap Investor Executive Councils activated

4

all new Roadmap related coalitions



Download the full NOVA Roadmap report

POWERING NORTHERN VIRGINIA'S DIGITAL ECONOMY

This panel discussion centered on energy infrastructure in the region, the unprecedented power demands of the data center industry, and the strategic planning required to maintain grid reliability and regional competitiveness. Below, these infrastructure leaders expand on key themes from this discussion.

Responses provided by:



MARK LOONEY
Partner
Cooley LLP



BILL MURRAY
Senior Vice President
Corporate Affairs and Communications
Dominion Energy



Can you speak to newer technologies with respect to water reclamation and renewal for use in data centers? How do these differ from “legacy” data center operations?

MARK LOONEY: “Data center operators in Loudoun County actually were early adopters of the use of reclaimed water to cool their facilities and pioneered reuse programs with Loudoun Water in 2010-2012 that are now used by other municipalities in Virginia and beyond.

Indeed, very few (if any) data centers operating in Virginia use potable (drinking) water for industrial cooling. There are limits, however, to the volume of reclaimed water available for cooling purposes since the source of that reclaimed water is the wastewater created by homes and businesses operating in the water utility’s territory.

That is why many of the data centers built today rely on closed-loop cooling that functions similar to geothermal systems — the water-based coolant is sealed inside the system and is continuously recirculated.”



Beyond traditional renewables, what role will emerging technologies like small modular reactors and fusion play in meeting the unprecedented power demands of our region?

BILL MURRAY: “Dominion Energy Virginia exemplifies an all of the above approach for meeting load growth, including nuclear power, offshore wind, natural gas, solar energy, energy storage, and hosting a fusion energy pilot project.”

Does Northern Virginia currently have the skilled trade workforce needed to meet growth demand? If not, what are the most critical steps we should take now to recruit and retain that talent?

MARK LOONEY: "Because of Virginia's 25-year history as a leader in the data center space, it has a strong base of talent and experience that is envied by other states across the country. At the same time, the sheer volume of demand for skilled workers presents challenges as contractors and operators struggle to keep pace."

Many in the data center industry have formed relationships with trade groups representing key skill sets to promote training and apprenticeship programs that help develop the next-generation workforce. It also is important to develop relationships with local school systems to capture the attention of students in middle and high school so they understand the opportunities available in the data center and construction industries and can tailor their education and career paths accordingly."

BILL MURRAY: "Workforce shortages for skilled trades, engineers, and other technical experts are long-standing and nationwide."

Northern Virginia is as well-positioned as anywhere in the nation for four reasons. These include:

1. The strength of its K-12 system
2. One of the nation's leading community colleges
3. The vibrant network of colleges and universities in the region, and
4. The union workforce from apprentices to journeymen across the skilled trades."



How do you anticipate nanotechnology will impact power demand for data centers over the next decade?

MARK LOONEY: "In general, two things are happening at once that are somewhat in conflict. Chips are getting smaller and are able to process data more quickly and efficiently, but the overall demand for data/computing power continues to climb exponentially. So, gains in efficiency are offset by the increased demand."

I expect that a net increase year-over-year in power demand will continue for at least the next decade."

NOVA RISE ATTENDEE FEEDBACK

When it comes to energy infrastructure, which is your highest priority?

ENSURING GRID RELIABILITY

#1 ATTENDEE RESPONSE

LEADING THE NEXT CHAPTER OF NORTHERN VIRGINIA'S ECONOMY

The Fireside Chat featured Todd Stottlemeyer, CEO of Acentra Health and a long-standing leader in Northern Virginia's business community. In a candid dialogue, Mr. Stottlemeyer synthesized key takeaways from the previous panels and addressed the overarching mindset required of business leaders in order to sustain our regional competitiveness.



TODD STOTTMLEYER
CEO
Acentra Health

Below, Mr. Stottlemeyer expands on the audience Q&A by responding to additional attendee questions that emphasize regional scrappiness, corporate investment, and the evolution of leadership for the next generation of talent.



How can we encourage more regional businesses to “put their money where their mouth is” and invest directly in housing solutions so employees can afford to live in the region?

“If we want more companies to step up like Amazon did, it starts with reframing housing not as a social issue, but as a core ingredient and critical factor for business growth. You cannot recruit, retain, and scale if your workforce is not able to live within a reasonable distance of where they work.

We can encourage this investment with data that shows business leaders that investing in housing is not philanthropy but a competitive advantage. It lowers employee turnover, strengthens culture, and drives performance. In addition, regional leadership, both public and private, needs to set expectations. If you are benefiting from this ecosystem, there is a shared responsibility to help sustain it.”

How do the healthcare cuts in *The One Big Beautiful Bill Act* impact your business specifically, and what is the broader impact you foresee for the Commonwealth?

“Acentra Health has been working with our clients to review how we are working together and how we use technology to drive costs out of the healthcare system. Across all businesses, employers are absorbing more healthcare costs, whether that is through higher premiums, increased demand for employer-sponsored benefits, or the indirect costs of a less healthy workforce.

Across the Commonwealth, the stakes get bigger. Healthcare is one of Virginia's largest economic drivers. Cuts at the federal level can strain hospitals, reduce access — especially in rural areas — and put pressure on the entire healthcare delivery system. That impacts workforce participation, productivity, and economic growth.”



NVC President and CEO Julie Coons and Acentra Health CEO Todd Stottlemeyer discuss the importance of leadership in Northern Virginia's business community as the region faces growing affordability and workforce challenges.



As we look toward the “Next Chapter” of Northern Virginia’s economy, what is the one leadership trait our region’s executives must embrace to effectively mentor and retain the next generation of talent?

“If I had to pick one trait for the next chapter, it’s *intentionality*.”

The next generation of talent is incredibly values driven. They’re not just asking, ‘what do I do?’ They’re asking, ‘why does it matter?’ and ‘where do I fit in?’ Leaders cannot afford to be passive about that and must focus on mentorship, culture, and growth pathways.

Intentional leaders take the time to engage, listen, and connect the dots between individual purpose and organizational mission. They create environments where people feel seen, challenged, and supported.

Northern Virginia is competing on a national — and global — stage for talent. If we are not deliberate about how we develop and retain people, we will lose them to regions that are.”

“We’ve got to be more action-oriented. We’ve also got to be more willing, I think, in this region to be willing to fail and fail quickly. We’ve got to push the innovation quotient.”

— Todd Stottlemeyer



KEY TAKEAWAYS & INSIGHTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This report was prepared by Alexis Reed, NVC Vice President of Marketing and Communications.

NVC would like to thank the following individuals for their time and contributions to this report:

- Dan Alban, Strategic Advisor and Co-Founder, YIMBYs of NOVA
- Thomas Fleetwood, Director, Fairfax County Department of Housing and Community Development
- Brian Goggin, Policy and Project Manager, True Ground Housing Partners
- Mark Looney, Partner, Cooley LLP
- Bill Murray, Senior Vice President, Corporate Affairs and Communications, Dominion Energy
- Carmen Romero, President & CEO, True Ground Housing Partners
- Todd Stottlemyer, CEO, Acentra Health

NVC would also like to thank the NOVA RISE sponsors, presenters, and attendees who took valuable time out of their day to participate in the first year of this new program and whose support made this inaugural event possible.

Special thanks to Jared Sloane, Emma Michels, and Rhea Ambanta from the NVC team for their assistance with the review and coordination of this project.



ABOUT

NVC

For over 100 years, the Northern Virginia Chamber (NVC) — the voice of business in Northern Virginia — has driven innovation and economic growth. NVC has championed key developments such as the Metro, Dulles Airport, and George Mason University. Representing over 400 members, NVC continues to lead on affordability, workforce, and regional development through the NOVA Roadmap as well as exclusive programming and events.

For more information about NVC membership or NOVA Roadmap participation, contact Jared Sloane, NVC Senior Vice President of Member Engagement: JSloane@nvcbusiness.org.

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