



## SUBMISSION FORM

All submission forms must include the following information. Separate submission forms must be turned in for each eligible program. **Deadline: July 1, 2023.** Please include this submission form with the electronic entry. If you do not receive an email confirming receipt of your entry within 3 days of submission, please contact [Gage Harter](#).

### PROGRAM INFORMATION

County: Chesterfield

Program Title: Boots on the Ground

Program Category: Community & Economic Development; Criminal Justice & Public Safety

### CONTACT INFORMATION

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### SIGNATURE OF COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR OR DEPUTY/ASSISTANT COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR

Name: Joseph P. Casey, Ph.D.

Title: County Administrator

Signature: 

*Brief Summary*

Chesterfield County's Boots on the Ground program is a collaboration between 49 County staff members representing 13 County departments and the local division of the Virginia Department of Health. Participants include staff from Community Enhancement, the Fire Marshal's office, Building Inspections, Planning, Mental Health, community police officers, and Social Services, among others. Staff from these departments are the County's representatives physically present in the field. They are the County's representatives who most frequently interact with Chesterfield's residents and observe the conditions of residential and commercial properties across the county.

BOTG provides an opportunity for Chesterfield's front line staff to regularly address shared problems related to zoning enforcement, housing for vulnerable populations, remediating blighted properties to promote safe neighborhoods, and unique issues that are best solved by a coordinated approach from the County. Boots on the Ground members are supported by the County Attorney's office and the Deputy County Administrator for Community Development. Boots on the Ground is a forum that promotes intragovernmental cooperation and communication by creating a trusted, collegial space for front line staff to share observations and expertise and ask for input from departments who may have different perspectives on the same issue. Boots on the Ground meets quarterly, and communication between staff is encouraged between meetings as issues arise. As a result of Boots on the Ground, relationships between County departments are created and strengthened, communication pathways are established, and issues relating to health, safety, and welfare of County residents are addressed in a timely and holistic manner.

*Executive Summary*

The objectives of Boots on the Ground are: (1) to provide a forum for connecting County staff from various departments whose jobs overlap in meaningful ways; (2) to introduce staff from different departments to each other and establish relationships so that front line workers feel comfortable breaking down silos and calling other staff for input and advice based on their specific area of expertise; (3) to gather expertise from a variety of professional backgrounds and apply that expertise to solve problems that conflict with the County's goals of safe housing, beautiful neighborhoods, and healthy residents.

Meetings are held quarterly in-person. During the Covid-19 pandemic, meetings were held virtually. Before each meeting, Boots on the Ground members are asked to contribute topics for discussion at the meeting and no topic is off limits. At the meeting, each member is given the floor to present their topic and to open it up for questions and discussion from the group. This creates an atmosphere of openness and trust. It also creates stability so that at each meeting, members can report progress of certain cases, discuss changes, and celebrate successes.

Boots on the Ground and its members take time to break down silos, come together, and search for solutions to problems that affect the County and its residents. The group improves the administration of County services to vulnerable populations by making a wide variety of County staff aware of issues that have been observed in the field and requesting input on what can be done. These discussions lead to connecting citizens with resources, identifying "frequent flyers" who may indicate a larger problem than what can be seen on the surface, and improvement of blighted properties that are not being cared for in accordance with safety and aesthetic standards set by the County. By creating a safe, cooperative space to share information, Boots on the Ground promotes cooperation between departments, which results in more efficient use of staff time and more targeted allocation of resources and enforcement to increase quality of life in Chesterfield County.

*The problem, challenge or situation faced by the locality and how the program fulfilled the awards criteria (innovation, partnering or collaboration and a model for other localities).*

Chesterfield County is the fourth largest jurisdiction in Virginia. It has a rapidly aging population and a very large density of single-family homes. Often these homeowners are senior citizens, have mental health issues, and/or have limited financial means. Additionally, housing has become increasingly expensive, both nationwide and in the Richmond metropolitan area (which includes the County). Hotels have become a common housing option for low-income populations or those with substance use disorders. Zoning, fire and building code violations are more common at these properties because homeowners are unable physically or financially to maintain their homes and landlords do not want the expense of renovating a large property like a hotel. Properties that are not cared for become unsafe for their inhabitants, become eyesores and drag down property values, and attract crime and trespassers.

These needs present a multiplicity of demands on County services – including zoning enforcement, social services, police response, and building code enforcement. Often these properties and their residents are known to Chesterfield Fire & EMS and Mental Health Services as well. Staff from all of these departments work every day in the field and with Chesterfield's residents. Boots on the Ground is a tool that allows these departments to gather in one place to discuss all of the services that could be applied to each particular case, promoting efficient delivery of services and faster problem solving.

Additionally, Boots on the Ground serves as a model for other localities. At the time of this application, there are no other programs like Boots on the Ground in Virginia. One of the most positive outcomes from Boots on the Ground has been the response from its members. Members appreciate the relationships that are built through Boots on the Ground and the encouragement to reach out to staff from other departments to brainstorm ideas for problem properties. It means a

lot to them to be trusted to work together. Staff have reflected that their peers in neighboring jurisdictions do not feel as empowered by their leadership to work outside their departments to find creative, collaborative solutions to issues. Boots on the Ground members appreciate the broader insight about the County that Boots on the Ground discussions provide and the collaboration helps give context to certain issues they observe in the field and to feel like there are solutions available.

*Tell how the program was carried out, including financing and staffing, and the program's results.*

Boots on the Ground meetings are held quarterly in-person. During the Covid-19 pandemic, meetings were held virtually. A virtual option remains available for any member who cannot attend in person. A listserv of staff emails is maintained within the County's Community Development division. Staff from Community Development keeps track of participants, sets the meeting schedule, makes room reservations, and distributes meeting agendas. Before each meeting, Boots on the Ground members are asked to contribute topics for discussion at the meeting and no topic is off limits. At the meeting, each member is given the floor to present their topic and to open it up for questions and discussion from the group. This creates an atmosphere of openness and trust. It also creates stability so that at each meeting, members can report progress of certain cases, discuss changes, and celebrate successes.

#### Program Cost

This program has no associated costs. Boots on the Ground members participate voluntarily in the monthly meetings and use their own time and judgment to coordinate with members outside of those meetings. Leadership for each department has deemed Boots on the Ground to be a worthy use of their staff's time. Staff take time away from their primary duties to

participate in Boots on the Ground and view Boots on the Ground as a means of enhancing their individual roles in addressing blight, affordable housing, and code enforcement in Chesterfield.

#### Program Results/Successes

One outcome of Boots on the Ground's communication and collaboration is multi-departmental inspections of problem properties and creative solutions to large-scale problems. This coordinated approach allows staff from several departments to meet at a property to conduct a single inspection for violations of the building, fire code, and zoning ordinance. Police often accompany the departments to provide support. It also allows for involvement of unexpected areas of expertise, like social workers who can provide access to services for needy tenants, and Community Enhancement staff who can make connections between affordable housing partners and landlords.

Three success stories using this approach are Bermuda Estates manufactured home park, America's Best Value Inn off Interstate 95 and the Suburban Hotel off Route 10, each in Chesterfield.

Bermuda Estates manufactured home park is home to a large number of Hispanic and low-income residents. Following a fire at one of the mobile homes in the park, members of Boots on the Ground recognized a large number of building code violations, creating unsafe living conditions for vulnerable members of our community. A coordinated response from building inspectors, the Department of Planning, and the Department of Community Enhancement led to the issuance of hundreds of code violations to the property's owner. Pressure from the County to improve living conditions for tenants at Bermuda Estates led to the sale of the property to Project:Homes, a sale made possible by the County's introduction of Project:Homes to the property owner. As a result of Project:Homes' purchase of the property, a complete revitalization

of the property is planned, with support from BOTG member departments, and the community was not displaced. See attached news article.

A coordinated inspection at America Best Value Inn was the result of many discussions about concerns raised by Boots on the Ground members about the property, including safety concerns about the condition of the building and its rooms, use of the parking lot to store junk cars, and concerns about the safety of vulnerable people, including school children, who were living in the hotel. The inspection revealed nearly 200 building code violations. After the County issued notices of violation, the property owner completely renovated and updated the hotel, correcting all of the violations so that the building is once again safe for its residents and guests. They even updated their signage to promote that the building was “newly renovated”. See attached materials.

Similarly, for several years, activities at the Suburban Hotel were generating unusually high calls for service for the Police Department. The issue was raised at Boots on the Ground and the group agreed to assist the Police Department with a series of inspections and enforcement actions at the property. Management at the property responded positively to the County’s involvement and took action. As a result, calls for services to the Police Department dropped by **54%**. The decrease in calls for service resulted in a savings of man hours spent at the property by police officers and enhanced the safety of the building and the surrounding property for its occupants and neighbors.

## News Flash Home

The original item was published from 10/22/2021 4:57:00 PM to 10/22/2021 5:00:11 PM.

Posted on: October 25, 2021

### **[ARCHIVED] From Setbacks to Comebacks: Bermuda Estates Residents Experience A Greater Feel of Home**



*Bonnie Newton, Bermuda Estates resident*

Infested with termites, to the point that she once fell through its thin plywood floor, the problems with Bonnie Newton's 40-year-old trailer weren't merely cosmetic. It had become a health and safety hazard.

Finding anything better within her limited budget was a daunting challenge, with rents soaring across the region and a scarcity of safe, secure affordable housing for low-income residents.

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Then a groundbreaking partnership between Chesterfield County and a local nonprofit turned that equation on its ear.

- [Transportation Projects](#)
- [Circuit Court Public Advisories](#)

Working collaboratively with the [County Attorney's office](#), staff in the [Community Enhancement](#), [Building Inspection](#) and [Planning](#) departments facilitated the September 2020 acquisition of Bermuda Estates by Project:HOMES, which has ambitious plans to revitalize the Chesterfield trailer park, improve the lives of its residents, prevent displacement and eliminate the social stigma associated with mobile homes.



*Bermuda Estates trailer park*

*“We had a coordinated strategy. Everyone was on the same page and understood what we were trying to accomplish,” said Dan Cohen, Chesterfield’s director of Community Enhancement, acknowledging the county’s interests aligned with those of a willing seller and a buyer that is committed to making meaningful investments in the property.*

*“It was serendipity,” he added.*

Chesterfield has allocated more than \$200,000 in federal funding for infrastructure improvements at Bermuda Estates, including new lighting, updates to water and sewage systems and road repairs.

An additional \$40,000 that was collected from the property’s prior owner as part of a legal settlement of numerous building code violations also has been designated for the project.

While Project:HOMES has completed major home repairs for thousands of low-income people over the past three decades, the \$1.95 million purchase represented a significant departure from its normal operating model and what CEO Lee Householder called “the biggest risk we’ve taken as a company.”

Its plan for the 7.8-acre site is to gradually replace most of the 50 existing trailers with more sustainable, energy-efficient manufactured housing that meets Department of Housing and Urban Development standards.



*Bermuda Estates trailer park*

“Durability is at the top of our list because that is key to maintaining the value of the homes and the quality of the community,” said Zack Miller, manager of housing innovation for Project:HOMES. “They’re definitely built to last.”

Mobile homes are attractive to low-income populations because they’re much less expensive to purchase than stick-built homes. Such units don’t hold their value over time and tend to depreciate like automobiles, though, making it impossible for owners to build equity.

At Bermuda Estates, the replacement homes are being constructed with quality building materials, including cement-fiber siding that lasts much longer than wood or vinyl, as well as HVAC systems, eaves and gutters, front and side porches and custom-designed, sealed crawl spaces made of PVC.

Project:HOMES is heavily subsidizing the cost of the new 840-square-foot units, which can be paid for with a 10-year loan, and retaining ownership of the land beneath each residence to keep costs low. Once the loan is paid off, the resident owns the home, but not the lot.



Bermuda Estates remodel

“We can’t afford to do them all at once ... it’s going to take some time,” said Miller, noting there is a waiting list of interested residents.

Only current Bermuda Estates residents are eligible for the home revitalization program.

Newton, 71, was selected to receive the first new residence – a model with blue-gray siding and a bright orange front door – because her trailer was deemed to be in unlivable condition.

She and her son moved into the home in August. On a recent afternoon, her three cats were sleeping contentedly on the sunny front porch, seemingly oblivious to the presence of visitors.

*“It’s the size of a trailer, but it’s like a mansion to me,” Newton said.*

*“We’re just ecstatic.”*

Cohen called the revitalization of Bermuda Estates “an example of what’s possible in other manufactured home communities.”

Chesterfield is home to a number of trailer parks, in various states of repair, particularly along the economically challenged Route 1 corridor.

Lamenting the lack of quality housing that is affordable to low-income populations in the Richmond region, Newton prays every night that her fellow residents “get the help they need.”

“I hope everyone here has an opportunity to get a new home,” she added. “It’s going to be a beautiful day ... I hope I live long enough to see it.”



## **Boots on the Ground**

Tuesday, December 13, 2022, 3:00 p.m. – 4:30 p.m.

CD Multipurpose Room  
(Microsoft Teams Available)

- |  |                  |
|--|------------------|
| 1. <i>Opening Remarks</i>  | Emily Russell    |
| 2. <i>The Suburban Extended Stay Hotel</i>                               | Dustin Woolson   |
| 3. <i>500 Baptist Drive Enforcement</i>                                  | Rich Billingsley |
| 4. <i>Ettrick Proactive Enforcement</i>                                  | Rich Billingsley |
| 5. <i>Community Cleanups</i>   | Rich Billingsley |
| 6. <i>Colonial Ridge Update</i>  | Rich Billingsley |
| 7. <i>Meadowdale Success Story</i>                                       | Rich Billingsley |
| 8. <i>Non-Profits and Organizations Used for Cleanups and a Workshop</i> | Sarah Chua       |
| 9. <i>Bellwood Maisonettes</i>   | Robert Hyne      |
| 10. <i>Boatyard Update</i>   | Ron Clements     |
| 11. <i>Roundtable</i>  | All              |

### **2023 Meeting Schedule:**

Tuesday, March 14, 2023, 3:00 – 4:30 PM

Tuesday, June 13, 2023, 3:00 – 4:30 PM

Tuesday, September 12, 2023, 3:00 – 4:30 PM

Tuesday, December 12, 2023, 3:00 – 4:30 PM



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