



Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy

2020-2025



SPDC
SOUTHSIDE PLANNING
DISTRICT COMMISSION

DRAFT

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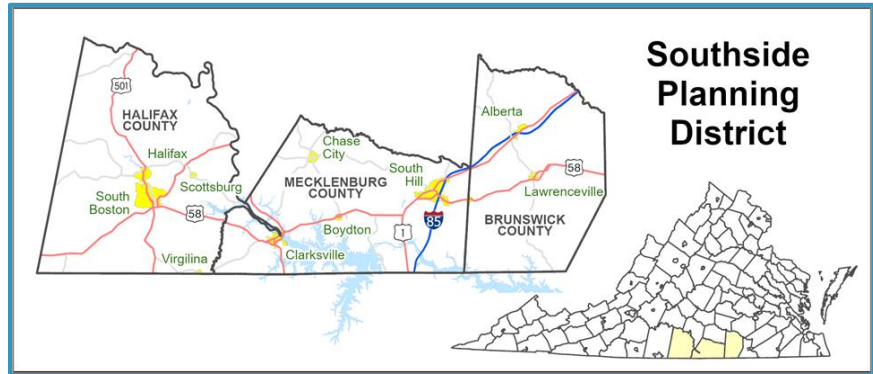
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The [Southside Planning District Commission](#) (SPDC) was chartered September 15, 1969 and became the seventh organized Planning District of the Commonwealth. It is a public body, created by the Virginia General Assembly, with a focus on intergovernmental cooperation to better serve citizens. The SPDC was also designated as an Economic Development District by the U.S. Department of Commerce - Economic Development Administration (EDA). The District is comprised of three counties (Brunswick, Halifax, and Mecklenburg) and twelve towns. The SPDC has been a leader in cohesive regional efforts regarding economic development, infrastructure improvements, land use and transportation planning, hazard mitigation, water resources, housing availability, and community development.



A major role of the SPDC staff is providing technical assistance and securing project grant funding for local governments. The grant application process is lengthy and complicated. The staff has the expertise to guide localities through this labyrinth, including project planning, contractor procurement, directing required meetings, adherence to funding guidelines, and managing additional essential tasks to see the project through its completion. Grant applications submitted by the SPDC have a remarkably high success rate. They have secured many millions of dollars in grant funding over the years for the District.



SPDC office building.

For over fifty years, the SPDC has worked fervently to advance the prosperity of the District. Every five years, the overall economic and community well-being is evaluated to adequately realign regional goals documented in the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS). Goals center around business and industrial development to encourage job and wage growth, community and housing improvements, infrastructure upgrades, and enhancing the recreational and quality of life components of the District. A key component of the CEDS process is the input of the CEDS Committee. This group is comprised of local stakeholders including government officials, small business owners, private citizens, and representatives from the education, healthcare, and industrial communities. A Community Input Session was held at the SPDC in December of 2019 where 28 participants conducted a SWOT analysis of the District to be included in the 2020 five-year update. As a final step

in the update process, the SPDC advertised a 30-day public comment period to encourage stakeholder participation and public input. Comments received were reviewed for reflection in this Update. The final document was then approved by the SPDC in October 2020.

The Region has four primary goals on which to focus its efforts as follows: 1) Increase employment opportunities for the Region through the creation of an environment attractive to new businesses and expanding industries through improved economic programs and services, 2) Improve and expand existing infrastructure to provide a safe, efficient transportation network and reliable broadband access to encourage economic growth and expansion across the Region, 3) Promote community development and enhance quality of life by increasing the availability of affordable housing and childcare, revitalizing downtowns, and preserving the Region's historic and natural resources, while promoting the area to tourists, and 4) Expand educational opportunities for youth and provide a versatile workforce training network, including advanced technical skill certifications, to strengthen the Region's overall workforce skillset and promote wage growth.



SPDC staff left to right: Lisa McGee, Chad Neese, Ashleigh Zincone, Deborah Gosney, Andy Wells, Stephanie Creedle, & Sangi Cooper

The SPDC has identified the goals, objectives, and strategies needed to achieve a resilient, growing economy and outlined the Action Plan needed to accomplish its goals. A few examples are: 1) Regional cohesiveness in workforce training and infrastructure improvement efforts, 2) Improving information and data compilation and sharing methods to allow for more customized project development, and 3) Continued pursuit of grant funding and public/private partnerships to facilitate community and economic development projects.

DEMOGRAPHICS & SOCIOECONOMICS

Just over 80,000 residents call the Region home, with 75% of them residing in rural areas outside of the twelve incorporated towns. Overall population is dwindling rapidly with a 5% decline projected per decade through the year 2040. The population is also aging. It is above average for persons aged 65 and older and has fewer persons under age 18 when compared to both state and national numbers. The median household income is substantially lower than Virginia's median income, while the poverty rate is nearly double that of the state. On a positive note, the rate of poverty has decreased 1% per year consecutively for the past decade, outpacing national improvement averages.

ENVIRONMENT

The District lies in the southern Piedmont region of Virginia along the North Carolina border. It encompasses more than 2,000 square miles, just shy of 1.3 million acres. It is characterized by gently rolling hills and is situated midway across the state between the Atlantic Ocean and Appalachian Mountains. Nearly one-third of the District's acreage is farmland. The remaining undeveloped land is comprised primarily of pine and hardwood forests. The Region is home to over 70,000 acres of lake waters and a vast network of rivers and streams. Residents enjoy a well-balanced climate and experience the four traditional seasons. The sometimes hot, humid summers are bookended by a pleasant spring and fall. Winters are typically mild with an occasional snow or ice storm passing through.



Lake Gaston.

INFRASTRUCTURE

Transportation and communication networks are particularly advanced for rural Virginia and expansion efforts are ongoing. Currently, there are more than 1,900 miles of advanced, open-access fiber network across Southern Virginia, with more coming soon. This access reaches 100% of industrial parks, technology parks, and K-12 schools in the Region. Along with transportation and broadband, additional infrastructure upgrades to water, sewer, and gas seek to expand existing business and industry operations and improve the lives of its citizens. The Region is unique in its mixture of rural character and modern infrastructure. Relevant markets are just inside of a day's drive and major urban centers are within a 100-mile radius. The Port of Virginia, the 6th busiest shipping port in the U.S., is easily accessible to area industries.

INDUSTRY

Commercial growth has been relatively steady in South Boston and South Hill, while remaining largely stagnant or declining in the smaller towns. The Region's 400-year-old agricultural roots have given way to the pursuit of manufacturing and advanced technology endeavors. Much emphasis has been placed on the modernization of infrastructure, such as broadband capacity and natural gas access, to encourage expansion of the industrial sector. The Region offers several Industrial Parks properly developed with sufficient water, sewer, broadband, and transportation to support existing and new industries. Governmental support of public/private partnerships, tax credits, and other incentives are in place to encourage the growth of industry.



Worker at ABB plant in South Boston.

WORKFORCE

The historically agricultural and manufacturing Region has suffered several decades of workforce and economic decline. However, through innovative recruitment efforts, recent years have seen an increase in more diverse employment opportunities. Local government, which includes education and healthcare, currently leads the employment sector. The Region fully supports community and business development projects which focus on improving the skillset of local workers. Much effort has been made to converge the needs of local industries with educational and training center offerings to bridge the technical skills gap of the workforce. The SPDC strives to support and facilitate the funding of projects which result in the creation of advanced technical training opportunities, industry expansion and a higher paid local workforce.

HOUSING

Housing plays an essential role in the overall health of a community including the recruitment of new businesses and industries to an area, and therefore, is a high priority of the SPDC. The Region boasts some of the most affordable housing in Virginia with median home prices half of the state median. Regional housing efforts include transforming empty commercial structures into mixed use facilities offering retail, recreational, and housing units in one location. Projects to remodel deteriorated houses for low income persons to improve safety and quality of life have been successful. The Region has seen much of its residential development over the past 20 years concentrated around the lakes and within the larger towns. Many of the lake properties have been developed as vacation homes and subdivisions. The lake effect aspect of the housing sector attracts much needed tourism dollars and is of great importance to economic prosperity.



The Groom School affordable housing complex in South Hill.

HEALTH SERVICES & PUBLIC SAFETY

In 2018, the Region welcomed the opening of a new state-of-the-art 167,000 square-foot hospital facility. While there is still a shortage of primary care physicians across rural Virginia, efforts are being made to improve medical care access. Cancer treatment centers, cardiac rehab activities, skilled care rehabilitation, and Medicaid priority dental facilities can now be found locally. The Region offers adequate public safety protection which relies heavily on volunteer responders. Many of the local volunteers are experienced, highly trained emergency services responders that work professionally at one of the urban departments within an hour's drive of the Region. We are fortunate to have volunteers who invest their time and lifesaving skills in their home communities.



Southside Rescue Squad ambulances.

EDUCATION

The Region currently offers all basic educational opportunities but continues to strive for excellence for its over 10,000 school aged children. A new, expansive secondary school complex is slated to open at the center of the Region in 2022. The pursuit of a college degree is made more attainable to residents through satellite campuses found throughout the area. In recent years, high school students and workforce members have been encouraged to pursue lucrative trade skills certifications. There is an abundance of training opportunities available representing numerous skillsets. This training is touted by regional economic developers as it is instrumental in supporting resilient regional economies and producing the high-quality workforce needed by local employers.



Southside Virginia Community College student.

CULTURE & RECREATION

The Region is fortunate to have an abundance of history, open spaces, natural resources, waterways, and trails. Sites registered as both state and national Historic Landmarks can be found across the area. Outdoor recreation flourishes with over 70,000 acres of lake waters and countless miles of trails. To capitalize on tourism dollars while enhancing resident enjoyment, the SPDC actively pursues cultural and recreational projects. These include improving lake access by constructing new watercraft launch sites and expanding walking, biking, cultural, and heritage trails across the Region. The Tobacco Heritage Trail is one shining example of these efforts. This regional project has developed abandoned railroads into miles of pristine paths for public enjoyment.



Parade through South Boston.

ECONOMIC RESILIENCY

Economic resiliency is essential for a healthy, sustainable regional economy. Southern Virginia has experienced major sector changes, manufacturing closures, and economic downturns. Not putting “all your eggs in one basket” is crucial to achieving a resilient, diverse economy. Economic impacts are not always made by large industries with hundreds of employees. Sometimes, it is the little things that make a difference. Warm, welcoming residents, quaint downtowns, and outdoor recreation are the ties that bind the Region. The many annual festivals and church homecomings beckon to those who moved away bringing in tourism dollars. Visitors, along with locals, enjoy the ongoing cultural and recreational improvements and downtown revitalization taking place across the Region. Streetscaping, building facade remodels, parking upgrades, and small business incentives have brought “all but forgotten” downtowns back to life. The wide variety of businesses found in the downtowns contributes to local resiliency. Restaurants featuring locally grown products, modern hair salons and hometown barber shops, stylish clothing retailers, and inviting gift shops are just a few stops along the diversified downtown streets. While ongoing efforts are made to attract and retain industry, the eclectic blend of downtown offerings and vast selection of outdoor recreation options does its part to diversify the regional economy.



Hands of an artisan farmer from Mecklenburg County.

PARTNERSHIPS



GO Virginia Region 3 All Hands meeting 2020 in South Boston.

SPDC will continue to work with its regional partners and localities to shape growth and development in the Region. This process has unveiled a strong and common vision for a sustainable and diverse economy focused on the 21st Century. Specific goals and priorities have emerged which blend traditional and innovative ideas. At the end of the day, the effective recruitment and retention of business to the

Region lies in having a diverse, well-trained workforce, reliable infrastructure, and the offering of a good quality of life for residents. This requires partnerships, educational advances, financial commitment, and planning. The SPDC welcomes this challenge and looks forward to serving the Region for another fifty years.

REGION SUMMARY

Demographic and Socioeconomic

Population

Municipal services and facilities are based upon the current population and its future projections. Specific needs are then identified through population composition analysis. The distribution of population is of great importance to determine the most efficient way to allocate services and utilize facilities.

In 2018, it was estimated that 81,154 persons resided in the Region representing a 6.07% decrease since 2010. During this time, all three Counties faced population decline. Halifax exhibited the slowest rate of decline with 5.85%, Mecklenburg dropped by 6.35%, and Brunswick



South Hill community gathers for town park clean up day.

suffered a 6.02% decrease in population. Meanwhile, the state of Virginia's population rose by 6.25%, and the national population saw 5.81% growth. The population centers consist of twelve incorporated towns situated throughout the rural landscape. Population estimates for 2018 revealed that 24% (19,486) of residents live within these town limits. Just over half of the population, 55% (48,876) is White/Caucasian. Black/African American persons account for 42% (32,060) of the population. The Hispanic population is estimated at 2.4% (1,976), a number which has increased in the Region by about 10% since 2010.

The Region's population remains 8% above state and national averages for persons aged 65 & older. Conversely, data shows the Region to have 5% fewer persons under age 18 when compared to both state and national numbers. This trend emphasizes the challenge of retaining its youth and young families, while caring for an aging population. A sobering population decline of 4-5% per decade is currently forecast for each decade through the year 2040.

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Income and Poverty Rate

Throughout the Region, income levels continue to remain significantly below state and national numbers. The median household income averaged \$42,080 from 2014 through 2018. During this time, the Virginia median household income was \$71,564 while the nation reported \$60,293. The per capita income average for the Region is \$22,438 with an 18.5% poverty rate. This is nearly double the Virginia average poverty rate of 10.9% and much higher than the national poverty rate of 11.8%. On a positive note, the overall poverty rate for the Region has decreased steadily over the last decade at a rate of roughly 1% per year. The regional poverty rate shows a more sustained rate of decline when compared to the national rate which has seen a consistent decline for only the past four years.

The overall poverty rate for the Region has decreased steadily over the last decade at a rate of roughly 1% per year.

Environment

Physical Geography

The District's geology is quite diverse with terrain characterized by gently rolling hills. The elevation along its eastern border is 200 feet above sea level which progressively increases to 600 feet as you travel westward across the Region. The availability of both groundwater and surface water resources are present throughout the area which includes two large lakes. Lake Gaston is a 20,000-acre reservoir managed by Dominion Power. The U.S. Army Corp of Engineers operates the 50,000-acre Buggs Island Lake, also called Kerr Lake. Both are used to generate hydroelectric power and mitigate flood damages. State managed lakes include Brunswick Lake, Lake Conner, and Lake Gordon. The following rivers flow through the District; Nottoway, Meherrin, Roanoke, Banister, and Dan. The entire area is within either the Roanoke or Chowan Watersheds which drain into the Albemarle Sound of North Carolina.



Prepping a red clay field for planting hemp in Brunswick County.

Agriculture and forestry dominate land use. The predominant soil type is clay which is acidic and low in natural fertility but can be agriculturally productive with inputs of lime and fertilizers. The District spans just over 1.3 million acres. This includes 416,500 acres of farmland with 145,000 of those planted in crops. Most of the remaining acreage is either woodlands or waterways. Farmers are required to routinely attend pesticide and herbicide educational sessions, provided primarily by the Virginia Cooperative Extension, to mitigate adverse farming environmental impacts. While forestry provides less than one percent of local employment, managed timberland accounts for tens of thousands of acres. Responsibly managed tree farms greatly decrease the environmental and public risk of wildfires.



A beautiful Spring day in the Region.

Climate

Climate is an important environmental factor as it affects tourism, recreation, agriculture, and even has industrial concerns. The Region has a moderate climate and experiences the four traditional seasons. The average annual mean temperature is 58.7 degrees Fahrenheit with an average annual rainfall total of 46.3" (2013-2017). While the area can certainly experience periods that feel quite hot or cold, scientific data shows that no future occurrences of extreme temperatures will occur on any regular basis. Area lakes are one of its biggest assets. Their water has an average summer temperature of 76.5 degrees Fahrenheit and average winter temperature of 42.4 degrees Fahrenheit.



Mecklenburg Electric Cooperative lineman.

Thunderstorms, hailstorms, and high wind events are the most common adverse weather-related issues. Southern Virginia is considered to have a mild climate; however, some winter storms can be quite harsh. These storms can consist of heavy snow, freezing rain, ice, sleet, and high winds. Winter storms, although infrequent, are notable in that they can completely disrupt normal life and bring everything to a halt across the District. Hurricanes are notorious for their high rainfall amounts, damaging winds, and threat of tornados. By the time most hurricanes have reached the area, they have been downgraded to a tropical storm. However, rainfall totals from this type of storm can be tremendous. Saturated soil coupled

with high winds frequently lead to fallen trees resulting in power outages. As with winter storms, area electric companies are well equipped to respond to these incidents, and outages are typically brief.

Infrastructure Assets

Infrastructure for industrial use, such as water, sewer, and power, are available in key locations. Traditional infrastructure modernization is an ongoing effort of the SPDC. As of June 2020, \$929,701 of grant dollars were actively addressing infrastructure improvement projects. Sidewalk upgrades, improving downtown parking and streetscapes, the development of a Regional Rural Transportation Plan, and better utilization of GIS technology across all economic development efforts are ongoing. The SPDC is currently working with EDA to secure funding to upgrade water infrastructure and establish redundancy (fire hydrate backup system) for emergency situations in South Hill. Mid-Atlantic Broadband, with assistance of the SPDC staff, is applying to EDA for a regional project incorporating fourteen counties to further advance fiber optic Middle Mile. A diversified industrial economy is contingent on the continual expansion and maintenance of the required infrastructure both strategically and economically.

Water & Sewer

The Great Creek Reservoir in Brunswick County supplies water for Lawrenceville and Alberta hosting a two million gallons per day (MGD) capacity with the Meherrin River serving as an auxiliary water supply source. One MGD of this capacity is pledged for industrial development purposes. Lawrenceville operates the public water systems and a wastewater plant with a treatment capacity of 1.2 MGD which provides service to Alberta as well. Most rural residential areas across the District are supplied by groundwater wells and septic systems.



Great Creek Reservoir in Lawrenceville.

The Roanoke River Service Authority has a ten MGD capacity and supplies drinking water to the towns of South Hill, LaCrosse, Boydton, Chase City, and Brodnax. The Town of South Hill operates a wastewater treatment plant for industrial and domestic wastewater for South Hill, LaCrosse, and Brodnax. Chase City operates its own wastewater treatment system. Clarksville owns and operates their water treatment and distribution systems with a one MGD capacity and sources water from Buggs Island/Kerr Reservoir. The town also operates a wastewater treatment facility with a 550,000-gallon daily capacity.

Halifax County and the Towns of South Boston and Halifax established the Halifax County Service Authority (HCSA) in 2008 to own and operate public water and sewer systems. The HCSA currently manages and operates the water and wastewater systems serving the Towns of South Boston and Halifax as well as portions of Halifax County. The Towns of Virgilina and Scottsburg continue to operate and maintain their respective water and wastewater systems independent of the public service authority. The HCSA water treatment plant has a design capacity of 3 MGD with an existing 5 MGD withdrawal permit on the Dan River and their wastewater treatment capacity is four MGD.

Natural Gas

Historically, lack of available natural gas infrastructure had been an Achilles' heel for the Region in attracting some industries. The Dominion Virginia Power Plant in Brunswick County is fueled by natural gas. It began service in 2016 and has greatly expanded gas access for the Region. The natural gas power plant services 340,000 homes and has a net generating capacity of 1,358 megawatts. In the first full year of operation, the expected fuel savings were about \$96 million highlighting the cost efficiency of natural gas power. In 2020, plans for the Atlantic Coast Pipeline, a natural gas pipeline scheduled to traverse Brunswick County, were scrapped handing an economic blow to the industry.



Dominion Energy's natural gas fueled power plant in Brunswick County.

Broadband

Telecommunications infrastructure has become an essential need for a locality to be competitive. The COVID-19 pandemic brought additional urgency to this need as working remotely became the new normal. The [Mid-Atlantic Broadband Communities Corporation \(MBC\)](#) utilizes grant funding in public-private partnerships to operate more than 1,900 miles of advanced, open-access fiber network across Southern Virginia. This access reaches 100 percent of industrial parks, technology parks, and K-12 schools in the Region. MBC has helped strengthen the Region by supporting local and regional economic development groups which have directly resulted in over a thousand new jobs and \$1.7 billion



[*MBC's infrastructure map.*](#)

in private investments. MBC's network was vital to locating Microsoft's Data Center in Boynton, along with its recent expansions. With assistance from SPDC staff, and utilizing GO Virginia and EDA grant funds, plans are underway to complete the "Middle Mile" project which will take fiber optic networks one step closer to essential community services, businesses, and households across rural Virginia.

Regional electric service provider, [Mecklenburg Electric Cooperative \(MEC\)](#) received a \$2.62 million Tobacco Commission grant to deploy 135 miles of last-mile fiber broadband across the area through its subsidiary, [EmPower Broadband Cooperative \(EBC\)](#). "Last-mile" is the terminology utilized to describe the final leg of a broadband connection from main line fiber to a home or business. They also received a \$1.8 million grant from the [Connect America Fund](#) for additional fiber installation and are pursuing DHCD's [Virginia Telecommunication Initiative \(VATI\)](#) program which supports efforts to extend broadband service to currently unserved areas.

Transportation

One of the most important factors in site selection by new or relocating industry is access to an efficient transportation network. The SPDC staff works with local and state agencies to continually evaluate land use changes.



They assess the potential impacts on all modes of the transportation system and determine how improvements to the system may foster economic and tourism growth. The District is served by an Interstate Highway (I-85), several U.S. Highways (1, 15, 58, 501, and 360) and many state highways and secondary routes. The Commonwealth Transportation Board has designated U.S. 58 as a Corridor of Statewide Significance (CoSS), meaning that it supports multiple modes of transportation, provides for an extended corridor for the movement of freight, connects regions and activity centers, accommodates a high volume of traffic, and helps fulfill a statewide goal or function. Interstate 85, U.S. 58, U.S. 15, and U.S. 360 are part of the National Highway System (NHS), which are roadways of importance to the nation's economy, defense, and mobility. U.S. 58, eastward from I-85 through Brunswick County, is also part of the Strategic Highway Network (STRAHNET). These are roadways identified as being important for their access, continuity, and emergency capabilities as it relates to the U.S. strategic defense policy.



Interstate 85 runs from Petersburg, VA to Montgomery, AL.

Highways are not the only means of transportation in the Region. While there are no commercial airports, there are three general aviation airports, Mecklenburg-Brunswick Regional, William M. Tuck, and Lake Country Regional and two local airports Chase City Municipal and Lawrenceville-Brunswick. While most former railway routes are now public trails, there are several short rail lines providing service for the movement of freight. Passenger rail is currently not available in the Region, although the Southeast High-Speed Rail Project, a collaborative vision of local government and the [High-Speed Rail Alliance](#), may provide access to this mode of transportation at some point in the future. For residents lacking vehicle access, there are three public transit services in the area: The Brunswick Express operated by the Blackstone Area Bus System (BABS), Halifax Area Regional Transit (HART), and Lake Area Bus (LAB) operated by Lake Country Area Agency on Aging.



Mecklenburg-Brunswick Regional Airport in Brodnax.

REGIONAL LONG-RANGE TRANSPORTATION PLAN

Goal 1: Plan and provide a transportation system that facilitates the safe and efficient movement of people and goods on all transportation modes

Goal 2: Improve economic vitality in Virginia and Region by increasing access to economic opportunities for all

Goal 3: Enhance quality of life and minimize impacts to environment

Goal 4: Promote efficient transportation system management through well-defined maintenance and construction programs

A major planning component for the regional transportation network is the [2045 Regional Long-Range Transportation Plan](#) (RLRTP). This Plan was a collaborative effort between VDOT, the SPDC, local governments, and the public. It consists of Regional Transportation Goals, an inventory of the Region's transportation networks, visionary projects from each locality, and a wide range of prioritized recommendations to address existing and future needs. The various transportation modes considered in the plan are roads, rail, transit services, airports, as well as, bicycle and pedestrian trails and facilities. Railroads are often thought of as a thing of the past. However, further infrastructure expansions are still needed, particularly better rail access to the Port of Virginia. The Port of Virginia is the 6th busiest shipping port in the U.S. and boasts the most abundant rail access of any port on the East Coast. Better rail access will allow for a more diverse industrial sector.

Business and Industry

Commercial growth has been relatively steady in South Boston and South Hill, while remaining largely stagnant or falling in the smaller towns. Regionally, taxable sales increased 2% from \$816 million in 2018 to \$833 million in 2019. Higher sales were recorded in Mecklenburg with much of those sales attributed to Buggs Island/Kerr Lake tourism. The Local Option Sales Tax decreased regionally 1% (\$14,774) from 2018 to 2019. These totals have remained relatively steady for Halifax and Mecklenburg, since 2017, while Brunswick County has reported a persistent decline each year. The Local Option Sales Tax is often used to offset local or special projects, thus, reducing the load on taxpayers.

As the Region moves into the 21st Century and away from its agrarian roots, new large-scale land use projects have appeared in recent years. Some examples of these projects include a massive Microsoft Data Center in Boydton, a Dominion Virginia Power Plant east of Lawrenceville, an expansive hospital complex in South Hill, and proposed solar farm sites in Halifax and Mecklenburg. In an extensive study, [GO Virginia](#), an initiative that encourages regional collaboration on economic development activities, identified emerging industries for the Region as Environmental Technologies, Ag-based Products (hemp), and Autonomous Vehicles. The same study noted areas of critical need to promote industrial growth. The complete study findings along with a plan of action are detailed in the [GO Virginia Growth and Diversification \(G&D\) Plan](#).

Areas of Critical Need to Promote Industrial Growth:

- *Workforce Talent Development & Recruitment*
- *Cyber Infrastructure*
- *Innovation & Entrepreneurship Eco-Systems*
- *Industrial Site & Real Estate Development*

Industrial Clusters



According to Virginia Dept. of Agriculture, forestry has a \$21 billion economic impact yearly.

Recent decades witnessed the closings of multiple industrial and manufacturing plants across the Region. Meanwhile, some industries found success from utilizing local natural resources. The infrastructure necessary to attract these industries is available but needs to be continually maintained and expanded. A skilled



Brunswick County business, part of forestry industrial cluster.

workforce, natural resources, industrial sites, shell buildings, broadband, rail, gas, water, sewer, and transportation are all integral components to attracting industry clusters. Industry clusters are concentrations of related industries and their support services such as material suppliers, distributors, and worker training programs. This economic network, or cluster, utilizes existing assets and stakeholders to create a regional competitive advantage. However, any advantages are contingent upon that industry's supply chain and workforce requirements. Forestry and wood products are an excellent example of a successful local cluster.

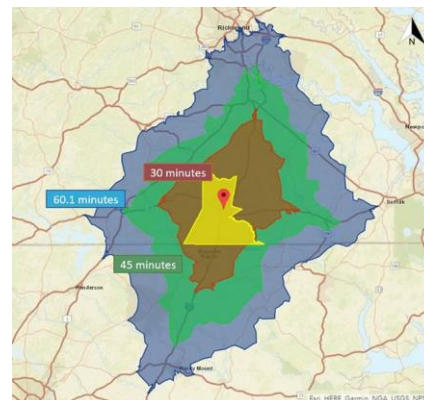


International Veneer Company in South Hill, part of forestry industrial cluster.

Industrial Parks

Planned industrial zones and commerce parks contain concentrated areas of land to accommodate manufacturing and business services. A properly developed industrial park allows various industries to produce goods in a flexible environment. This is especially important to the manufacturing community in terms of efficient production. The effectiveness of an industrial or business park is dependent upon infrastructure and land space. Sufficient capacity for water, sewer, and transportation are also of prime importance. The Region has several commerce parks and private Greenfield sites. A Greenfield site is undeveloped agricultural land being considered for urban or industrial development. The economic development offices in each County, along with [Virginia Economic Development Partnership](#) (VEDP), maintain a database of available property and land use characteristics as a resource for the site selection process. The [Brunswick County IDA](#), [Mecklenburg County IDA](#), [Halifax County IDA](#), along with [Virginia's Growth Alliance](#) and the [Southern Virginia Regional Alliance](#), are utilizing the internet to market available buildings and sites. Inventory information is housed in a [statewide database](#) facilitated by the [Virginia Business Ready Sites Program](#), created by VEDP, and is updated locally as availability changes. Virginia's inventory of certified sites is far smaller than that of peer states, particularly for large scale sites.

[The Mid-Atlantic Advanced Manufacturing Center](#) (MaMaC), located in Greensville County which borders the District to the east, is a 1,600-acre mega-site located on Interstate 95. It sits along the mainline CSX railway with direct access to the Port of Virginia. It is targeted for large scale industry such as automobile manufacturing. The site is being funded by local and regional efforts, as well as, state and federal grant agencies. The City of Emporia and Mecklenburg County have joined with Greensville County to create a Regional Industrial Facilities Authority with a revenue sharing agreement to further develop the site. The site is publicly owned and has been cleared of standing timber. Water service and road access are in place and all environmental reports have been completed and accepted by governing agencies. An Army Corp permit can be obtained within 90 days of a client's site plan review, making it the most shovel ready mega-site in Virginia.



Worker commute times from MaMaC across the Region.

Incentives are provided for businesses that locate in [Virginia Enterprise Zones](#) (VEZ). The VEZ program is a partnership between state and local government that encourages job creation and private investment by utilizing grant funding and locality incentives. Currently, the Region has two VEZ's, the Brunswick/Mecklenburg and the Halifax/South Boston Zone.

Workforce

At the end of 2019, unemployment rates for the District were lower than they had been in two decades at 4.1%. When the COVID-19 pandemic struck in early 2020, unemployment skyrocketed, reaching 10.9% by April 2020. Some of the Region's top employment sectors were particularly hard hit, namely retail trade, accommodation providers, and food services. At the time of this Update, multiple economic recovery efforts and projects were underway to mitigate economic damages and develop plans to guide the District through recovery.

Virginia Employment Commission Top Employment by Industry 4th Quarter 2019

1. Government (federal, state, local, & school systems) - 5,066
2. Healthcare & Social Assist.- 4,613
3. Retail Trade- 3,218
4. Manufacturing- 3,137
5. Accommodations & Food Service- 2,148
6. Transportation & Warehousing- 1,557
7. Admin. & Waste Mgmt- 1,412

The [Virginia Career Works](#), a Virginia Employment Commission initiative, links prospective workers with employers and workforce training opportunities. It offers an array of links to assist job seekers in finding local job openings, on-the-job training, apprenticeships, and short-term training courses to [fast track](#) them into high demand jobs. Career Centers in South Boston and South Hill serve area residents.

Historically an agricultural, textile, and manufacturing region, the workforce and economy have both experienced losses over the last couple of decades. However, recent years have seen an increase in more diverse employment opportunities through innovative recruitment efforts. Local government, which includes school systems and healthcare, supported the highest employment numbers, followed closely by retail trade and manufacturing. The retail sector was led by gasoline stations, motor vehicle sales and parts dealers, and food and beverage stores.



Lake Country Advanced Knowledge Center in South Hill.

The SPDC is on a continuous mission to facilitate the funding of projects resulting in higher paid workforce for the betterment of the Region. The [Lake Country Advanced Knowledge Center](#) (LCAKC) in South Hill and [Southern Virginia Higher Education Center](#) (SVHEC) in South Boston are integral partners in this objective and have a tremendous impact on regional workforce training.

Phase I of The [Great Opportunities in Technology and Engineering Careers](#) (GO-TEC) collaborative is nearly complete. The primary goals are to expand existing curriculum offered by its six higher

education partners and build a regional system for career training in IT and advanced manufacturing. Additionally, the program seeks to develop a pipeline beginning in middle school to increase the number of students entering the targeted five training areas including precision machining, welding, IT/cyber security, robotics, automation/mechatronics, and advanced materials development for emerging technologies. Phase II is a nearly \$10 million project that will create a strategic talent pipeline initiative designed to attract twelve new companies within ten years, creating up to 600 new jobs with average salaries of \$61,250. Additionally, this project has the potential for up to \$100 million in new investment in the Commonwealth.

Housing

Housing plays an essential role in the health of an overall community including the recruitment of new businesses and industries to an area. As of June 2020, SPDC staff had ongoing housing improvement projects totaling \$6,345,414 in place. These projects primarily focus on the rehabilitation of deteriorating houses of low-income residents for their safety and improvement of quality of life. Some of the most affordable housing in Virginia can be found in the Region with median household values averaging \$118,900. The Virginia median housing value is \$264,900, exceeding the national average of \$204,900.



A completed SPDC Housing Rehab Project.

The housing stock in the Region is mostly single-family detached homes, 21% of these are mobile homes. There were only 1,205 new homes constructed from 2010-2018, reflecting a sharp decline from the previous decade which saw 5,114 new homes constructed. This decline was observed over the same period at both the state and national levels which each reported 70% fewer homes built.

Data reported through 2018 listed 45,351 total housing units in the Region. Of these, 71% (31,888) were occupied and 29% (13,463) were vacant. The Virginia vacant housing average is 10%. The reported number of vacant houses has been questioned by locals who live and work in the area. Daily observation leads them to believe the actual number of vacant homes is far less than the reported 29%. It is theorized that many of the homes reported as “vacant” are unreported rental properties. Of the reported occupied units, 72% (23,069) are owner occupied and 28% (8,819) are tenant occupied. The median gross rent

for the area is \$672 per month, which is approximately one half that of the Virginia average of \$1,202. Another indicator of housing health is the number of structures without indoor plumbing. As of 2018, 211 houses lacked plumbing and 187 lacked kitchen amenities. This trend shows an increase of 53 houses that lack plumbing and 72 houses that lack kitchen amenities since the 2012-2016 reporting period. The SPDC partners with the Southside Outreach Group to facilitate a housing rehab program which specifically addresses these issues as each case is identified.

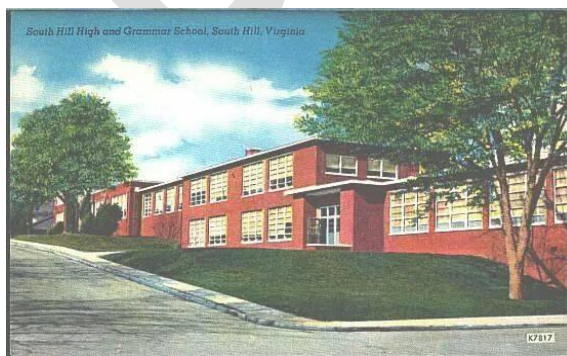
Several adaptive reuse projects creating mixed-income, multi-family housing from vacant buildings occurred across the Region from 2015-2020. This was accomplished by leveraging grant funds with public/private partnerships to remodel



New Brick Tobacco Warehouse becomes modern New Brick Historic Lofts, an adaptive reuse project in South Boston.

historic commercial scale buildings such as tobacco warehouses and old school complexes. The projects in Halifax County included the Imperial Lofts, New Brick Historic Lofts, and Halifax Lofts. These new complexes offer an additional 128 housing units. Of these units, about half are market rate rentals, the rest are affordable housing units. Historic features have been preserved and highlighted, as these projects utilized federal and state historic rehabilitation tax credits.

Mecklenburg saw the completion of the Groom School, the Lofts on Franklin, and Briar Cliff Apartments. The Groom School was remodeled utilizing historic tax credits allowing developers to preserve the nostalgic presence of the building. It features 55 low income housing units with an onsite playground. Similarly, the Lofts on Franklin is a remodeled historic school building. Each individual apartment and its upscale restaurant prominently feature the preserved schoolhouse character. The Lofts on Franklin and Briar Cliff Apartments have a combined total of 45 market rate, modern units filling the ever-growing demand for this style of housing. The Planters Brick Tobacco Warehouse in Clarksville is entering into Phase 2 of construction of the 14,500 square foot multi-use facility. Upon completion it will include 27 apartments and an onsite restaurant. The SPDC, along with local governments, are continuously seeking additional opportunities for public/private partnerships to facilitate the rehab of existing commercial structures into much needed housing units.



Historic South Hill school becomes upscale apartments.

Health Services and Public Safety

Healthcare

According to the [Robert Graham Center of Policy Studies in Family Medicine and Primary Care](#), about 12% of Virginia's population lives in rural counties and 11% of Virginia's family physicians work in these counties. Approximately 24% of Virginia's residents live in underserved counties with more than 2,000 persons per family doctor, including the Southside District. These figures exclude physicians who work primarily in hospital settings to get more accurate data on local access to primary care medicine.

In late 2017, the region welcomed the opening of a new state-of-the-art 167,000 square-foot hospital facility in South Hill. [VCU Health Community Memorial Hospital](#) (VCU Health CMH) is a 70-bed facility with a staff of 177 providers representing 26 medical specialties, clinical research, and virtual medicine. The new VCU Health CMH is one of the area's largest employers with over 800 employees. Housed on the same campus, the C.A.R.E. Building is a physicians' office and education complex offering comprehensive medical and dental services for the entire family. The western end of the District is



VCU's Life EVAC medical helicopter serves the entire Region.

served by the 192-bed Sentara Halifax Regional Hospital located in South Boston. The [Sentara Halifax Dental Clinic](#) in South Boston focuses on Medicaid-eligible and underinsured children under age 18. Both localities offer modern medical care such as cardiac services, MRI's, hemodialysis, and other specialized treatments. As recently as ten years ago, local citizens would have to travel to Richmond or Raleigh for access to these same life sustaining services. Critically injured or ill patients requiring the highest level of medical care are seamlessly transported via medical helicopter to Level-1 Trauma facilities in regional urban areas.

The Region has a total of seven inpatient rehabilitation/long-term care facilities to support its aging population. The [VCU Massey Cancer Resource and Research Center](#), located in Lawrenceville, offers one-on-one and group support to individuals, public awareness, and education. The Center is funded partially by the Virginia Commonwealth University Health System and the Tobacco Commission. The Center also hosts a veterans' support group. The eastern end of the District is serviced by the VCU Health CMH/Massey Cancer Center which is provided in the [Hendrick Cancer & Rehab Center](#) and the [Solari Radiation Therapy Center](#) and provides not only clinical care but also provides clinical research and training. With above average cancer rates across the Region and rates on the rise in both Brunswick and Halifax counties according to the Center for Disease Control, these resources are a true lifeline to many residents.



Hendrick Cancer & Rehab Center in South Hill.

Public Safety

Each county in the District is serviced by its own E-911 communications call center and a county Sheriff's Department. Sheriff Deputies respond to citizen calls for assistance, serve court issued warrants and subpoenas, and in most areas provide school security. The Virginia State Police (VSP) provides troopers for each county as well. Their primary focus is on traffic law enforcement and accident investigations. Halifax and Mecklenburg both lie in VSP Division 3 and host area field offices in South Boston and South Hill. Brunswick County is in VSP Division 5. The larger incorporated towns each have police departments with officers that patrol and respond to calls for service within town limits. These agencies have a long history of providing mutual aid and assistance to one another to ensure officer and public safety.

Officers/Deputies per Department:

- Brunswick County- 40
- Alberta- 1
- Brodnax- 1
- Lawrenceville- 6
- Mecklenburg County- 52
- Boydton- 1
- Clarksville- 7
- Chase City- 10
- LaCrosse- 1
- South Hill- 20
- Halifax County- 45
- South Boston- 28
- Halifax- 5



South Boston Fire Department engine.

In most rural areas, the backbone of emergency services is its volunteers. The ever-increasing number of emergency rescue calls has led many localities to utilize combination departments. These departments are comprised of both volunteer and paid staff to ensure residents are adequately protected twenty-four hours a day. Many of the local volunteers are experienced, highly trained emergency services responders that work professionally at one of the urban departments within an hour's drive of the Region. We are fortunate to have volunteers who invest their time and lifesaving skills in their home communities. The Region is comprised of 27 fire

departments. Coverage areas, referred to as fire districts, average 75 square miles and range in size from 21 to 177 square miles. There are ten Emergency Medical Services (EMS) departments within the District that average 205 square miles in size.

Each of the three member Counties has a Department of Emergency Management which coordinates efforts between the various public safety departments. These departments are typically responsible for preparedness and the coordination of response to hazardous material spills, search and rescue missions, natural disasters, and mass casualty incidents. The Region sits aside 70,000 total acres of lake which draws over one million visitors per year. Area public safety agencies provide water rescue and underwater recovery trained dive teams who can be further supported by the Virginia State Police SCUBA team when needed.



South Hill Police, Fire, and EMS respond to an emergency.

Education and Workforce Training

Primary and Secondary

The Region currently offers all basic educational opportunities but continues to strive for excellence. Overall, there is an 80.8% high school graduation rate and 16.5% continue to obtain a bachelor's degree or higher compared to the Virginia averages of 92.5% high school graduates and 40.9% obtaining a bachelor's degree. In 2019, the Region was home to 10,639 children attending public schools. Halifax County, with 4,896 students has six elementary schools, two secondary schools, and one private K-12 school with 52 students. Brunswick County's 1,538 public school students attend one of three elementary schools or the two secondary schools. Approximately 328 students attend Brunswick Academy, a private K-12 school. Mecklenburg currently has four elementary schools, and four secondary schools serving 4,205 students. Ground has been broken in Mecklenburg County on a new combined secondary school complex which will serve over 2,300 students and include many state-of-the-art facilities. It is slated for opening in fall of 2021. The [Virginia Department of Education 2020 Accreditation Report](#) indicates that all schools in Halifax and Mecklenburg were accredited. Brunswick had two schools accredited with conditions while the others in the County were fully accredited.



Rendering of future Mecklenburg County secondary school complex.

A variety of training and educational workshops are offered by the [Virginia Cooperative Extension](#), a program through Virginia Tech University. Programs include Agriculture and Natural Resources, Family and Consumer Services, and 4-H Youth Development. A variety of summer day camps are offered to area youth focusing on gardening, food preservation, and other forgotten life skills. The Region is host to many additional opportunities through public/private partnerships such as Microsoft STEM and coding educational events for area youth.

Southside Virginia Community College



Students attending class at SVCC.

[Southside Virginia Community College](#) (SVCC) is the primary higher education entity in the Region. It has two local campuses, one in Alberta and the other just outside of the District in Keysville. SVCC satellite locations across the area improve access to higher education and advanced training. Satellite locations include the [Lake Country Advanced Knowledge Center](#) (LCAKC) in South Hill, [Estes Community Center](#) in Chase City, and the [Southern Virginia Higher Education Center](#) in South Boston. Many of today's students are encouraged to obtain lucrative trade skills.

These efforts begin at the high school level with Career and Technical Education (CTE) offering courses such as nursing, cosmetology, agriculture, and automotive repair. Area high school students may take dual enrollment courses at the newly renovated [Center for Information Technology Excellence](#) (CITE), pursue Industrial Electrical and HVAC training, or learn Welding skills at the LCAKC. Each program allows students to earn a college certificate and pursue industry recognized credentials. Adult students have the same opportunities to learn in these high-tech training labs. This training is supported by regional economic developers as it is instrumental in supporting resilient regional economies and producing the high-quality workforce needed by local employers.

SVCC offers [Old Dominion University's Distance Learning](#) program enabling students who live in remote locations to earn bachelor's and master's degrees from a four-year university much closer to home. This program also offers several doctoral and teacher licensure programs and is available at SVCC's Alberta, Keysville, and South Boston locations.

[Workforce Development Services](#) through SVCC aligns education with economic development to enhance training programs for local workers. [Tradesman Training](#) provides the required continuing education hours for new and renewing license holders for plumbers, HVAC technicians, electricians, and gas fitters. [Truck Driver](#), [Nurse Aide](#), [Phlebotomy](#), and [Solar](#) career training programs are also available, among others. A partnership between Mecklenburg Electric Cooperative, Southside Electric Cooperative, and SVCC led to the creation of a [Power Line Worker](#) program with training facilities located just outside of the District.



Power Line Training Program located in Nottoway County.

[Southern Virginia Higher Education Center](#)

Great strides have been made across the Region to make higher education and advanced workforce training accessible to rural communities. The mission of the [Southern Virginia Higher Education Center](#) (SVHEC) is “to advance southern Virginia’s economic potential through education, innovation, and collaboration”. The SVHEC’s [Career Tech Academy](#) (CTA) is a partnership with SVCC that offers training in [Mechatronics](#) and [IT skills](#) development. This year-long hands-on program is available to 11th and 12th grade high school students from Charlotte, Halifax, and Mecklenburg Counties. Additional workforce training programs offered at the SVHEC include Welding and HVAC. Soft skills training, resume preparation, mock interviewing, job search, and employment placement are incorporated throughout these programs to best prepare students for entry into the workforce.

Colleges Accessible Through SVHEC

- Danville Community College
- Southside Virginia Comm. College
- Old Dominion University
- Longwood University



SVHEC student and instructor.

The SVHEC also provides access to four-year colleges close to home as well as post-baccalaureate advanced technical courses with the [Commonwealth Graduate Engineering Program](#), a post-baccalaureate distance learning program for engineers and scientists practicing in the state of Virginia. In response to the increasing demand for STEM workers, the innovative [Commonwealth STEM Industry Internship Program](#) was developed to place area undergraduate STEM students with Virginia based companies. These internships opportunities jump start area students into lucrative, high paying careers.

[Additional Higher Education](#)

The [Institute for Advanced Learning & Research](#) in Danville offers internships to both recent high school graduates and college students. Its [Advanced Manufacturing Training Program](#) takes machining skill training and knowledge to the next level, prepping students for leadership roles within the industry. Two traditional college campuses, [Longwood University](#) and [Hampden-Sydney College](#), are located just outside the District in Farmville for students seeking the traditional college life experience.

Cultural and Recreational Resources

The Region is extremely fortunate to have an abundance of history, open spaces, natural resources, waterways, and trails and should capitalize on its natural aesthetics for recreation, tourism, and economic growth. As of June 2020, the SPDC had \$2,376,627 of active funding in place for various trails and recreational projects to promote tourism and enhance the quality of life of residents.

Culture and History

The Region is rich in Native American history influenced by the Tutelo, Meherrin, Nottoway, and Occoneechee Indians. The Occoneechee were prominent fur traders of the 17th century with a settlement on an island in the Roanoke River near Clarksville. Their trade routes, connecting English settlers in eastern Virginia and the Cherokee Tribes of western North Carolina, laid the path for modern day Interstate 85. The visitor center and museum at [Occoneechee State Park](#) introduces visitors to Native American history and the indigenous Occoneechee people. [Fort Christanna](#) in Brunswick County, originally founded in 1714, was at that time the western most European outpost. It is open for visitors to explore its 26 acres of walking trails with markers detailing the forts history.



Occoneechee Band of Saponi Nation Pow Wow.



Marker for Civil Rights Trail.

The Region offers several cultural educational sites including the; [South Boston-Halifax Museum of Arts and History](#), L. E. Coleman African American Museum in Halifax County, Tobacco Farm Life Museum in South Hill, Brunswick Museum and Visitors Center, and [Brunswick County Byways Visitor Center](#) located in Lawrenceville. Educational equality for many Virginians began on the back roads of Southern Virginia. [The Civil Rights in Education Heritage Trail](#) is a self-guided driving tour tying together these historically significant sites.

The fine and performing arts are well represented by [The Prizery](#) in South Boston, the [Halifax County Little Theater](#), [Clarksville Fine Arts Center](#), and the [Colonial Center for the Performing Arts](#) in South Hill. Both the Prizery and the Colonial Center are registered on the National Register of Historic Places. Each of these theatres is home to active community theatre groups which produce quality entertainment showcasing local talent.



Community actors performing at Colonial Center.

[Berry Hill Resort](#), circa 1728, is a National Historic Landmark. This historic plantation encompasses 650 acres and features a conference center, spa, tavern, hiking trails, and boxwood maze. [Prestwould Plantation](#) in Clarksville, built in 1794, is described as "the most complete gentry home in Virginia" and is open to the public. [MacCallum More Museum & Gardens](#) in Chase City offers 6 acres of gardens with pathways adorned by artifacts, statuary, and architectural elements from around the world. The museum features rotating exhibits and a Native American artifact collection which contains over 50,000 pieces collected from the area. The [Kennon House](#) was built in 1792 and is a Historic Landmark in Brunswick County. Today, it is operated as an upscale dining establishment frequented by tourists and locals alike.

Recreation

The abundant beauty of the rural landscape drapes an area steeped in history and natural resources just waiting to be enjoyed. The Region is home to many miles of nature trails and waterways. The [Southern Virginia Wild Blueway](#) winds its way through Halifax and Mecklenburg Counties, incorporating the Dan, Staunton/Roanoke, and Banister Rivers, as well as, Buggs Island/Kerr Lake. Wildlife abounds for over 100 miles of navigable water and natural beauty. Visitors can paddle, fish, or picnic for a couple of hours at a lakeside recreation area or stay overnight at one of the areas 700+ camp sites or 30+ cabins provided by the various state and local parks.



Southern Virginia Wild Blueway.



Tobacco Heritage Trail.

There are approximately 1,100 miles of existing and proposed bicycle and pedestrian trails throughout the Region offering both on- and off-road experiences. The area is home to portions of [US Bike Route 1](#), [East Coast Greenway](#), and the [Beaches to Bluegrass Trail](#). Countless opportunities await visitors for viewing the flora, birds, insects, and other wildlife along the [Virginia Birding and Wildlife Trail](#), as well as, on the [Tobacco Heritage Trail](#). The Tobacco Heritage Trail segments its way across Brunswick, Halifax, and Mecklenburg Counties

following the abandoned paths of former railways. Trailheads in Boynton, Brodnax, LaCrosse, and South Boston allow for parking and easy access to the trails for walking, biking, and horseback riding. Picnic areas and four comfort stops with restrooms are positioned along the Trail.

Each year, hundreds of area children participate in organized sports including baseball, softball, basketball, soccer, football, and golf. The Region offers nine golf courses and several outdoor recreational pool facilities. A highlight in area youth sports is [Parker Park](#), a beautiful, state-of-the-art sports facility in South Hill. Park amenities include: 9 lighted baseball/softball fields, indoor baseball/softball training facility, 3 basketball courts, sand volleyball court, and two concession areas with restrooms. The park frequently hosts district, state, and national baseball and softball tournaments and has hosted several World Series tournaments.



Parker Park Sports Complex in South Hill.

Sports fishermen enjoy the variety of fish available in Buggs Island/Kerr Lake and Lake Gaston which have hosted many national fishing tournaments. Top sports fish are Bass, Striped Bass, Walleye, Bream, Crappie, Perch, and Catfish. The International Game Fish Association's reigning world record Blue Catfish weighing 143 pounds was caught in 2011 from Buggs Island/Kerr Lake. There are 26 Wildlife Management Areas surrounding the lake which provide year-round opportunities for hiking, wildlife viewing, birding, and more. The lake is managed by the U. S. Corps of Engineers and features the [John H. Kerr Dam](#), a concrete gravity



John H. Kerr Dam.

dam with seven electricity-producing turbines. It is the 4th largest dam in the country and connects Virginia and North Carolina via Route 4. Wildlife viewing is particularly popular just below the Dam, where waterfowl, bald eagles, and even the elusive river otter can be observed year-round.



Stanton River State Park is a Dark Sky location.

The [Staunton River State Park](#) offers RV, tent, and cabin camp sites, equestrian trails and stalls, walking trails, swimming pools, and a magnificent view of the confluence of the Dan and Staunton Rivers, forming the headwaters of Buggs Island/Kerr Lake. It is also the first designated [Dark Sky](#) location in the Commonwealth, offering monthly observations of special astronomical events. A Dark Sky area is devoid of artificial lighting to allow visitors to enjoy the true brilliance of celestial bodies in the night sky.

[Occoneechee State Park](#) on Buggs Island/Kerr Lake offers historical trails with markers, a Native American museum, camping, fishing, boating, sheltered picnic tables, playground, and lake front amphitheater. The recent addition of an outdoor splash pad has become a fan-favorite among area youth. [North Bend Park](#) is located at the John H. Kerr Dam on Buggs Island/Kerr Lake. It offers many camping sites, each with a swim beach. North Bend Park also has a large day use area with picnic shelters, 3 boat launching ramps, an amphitheater, and several hiking and biking trails.



North Bend Park day use area.

Festivals and Events

The Region hosts many annual festivals including the Halifax County Heritage & Antique Machinery Festival, the Virginia Cantaloupe Festival, the Taste of Brunswick (Stew) Festival, and the Virginia Lake Fest in Clarksville. These events draw crowds from across the state generating an influx of revenue for local retailers. Chase City and Halifax County host traditional country fairs each October, which are enjoyed by both young and old alike.



Local spirits tasting at Springfield Distillery in Halifax.

Active community organizations keep residents entertained and engaged with a calendar full of local events. Outdoor, summer concert series are held in towns across the area. They feature regional and East Coast artists from a variety of musical genres. These family friendly events are well attended and most entertaining. Local wineries, breweries, and distilleries are open for tastings and host larger scale events throughout the year. Organized fun runs and walks, 5k races, and other events are common along the Tobacco Heritage Trail. The Region is also host to various equestrian and ATV trail ride events.

Each holiday brings with it a selection of happenings. Local communities host various Valentine's Day dinners and dances, Easter egg hunts, firework displays, Memorial Day celebrations, haunted houses, parades, and festive Christmas celebrations to name a few. These events support the local economy while strengthening community bonds.



Hot air balloons at Clarksville's annual Lake Fest.



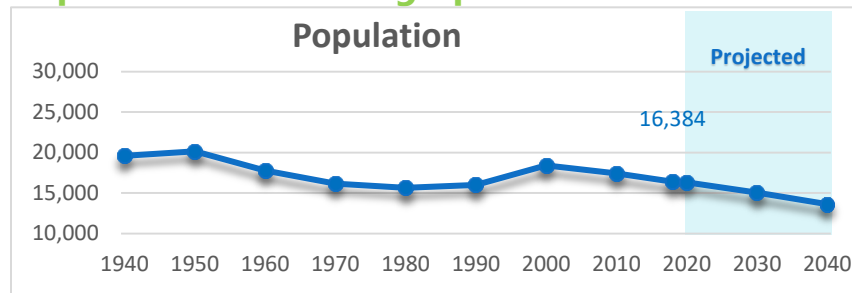
Fourth of July celebration at Rosemont Winery in Mecklenburg.

DATA FACT SHEETS

DRAFT

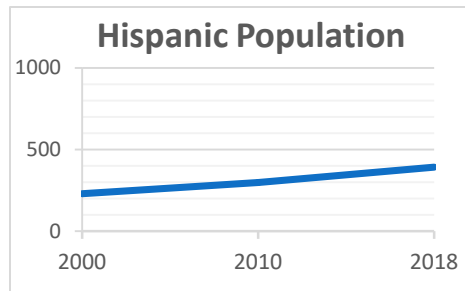
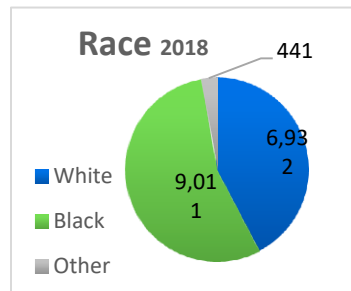
BRUNSWICK COUNTY

Population and Demographics

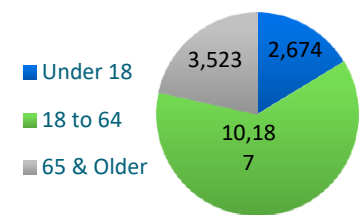


Population Facts

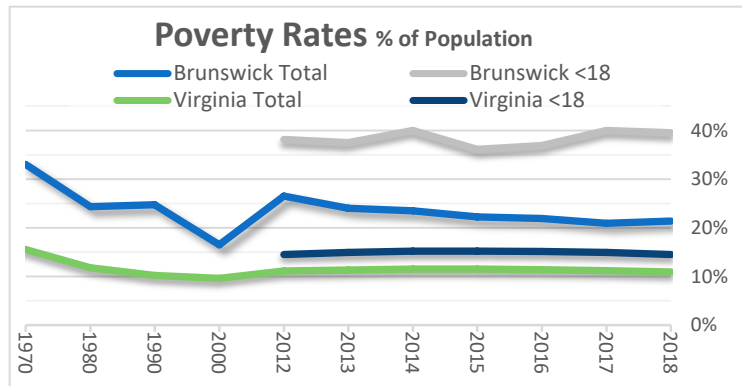
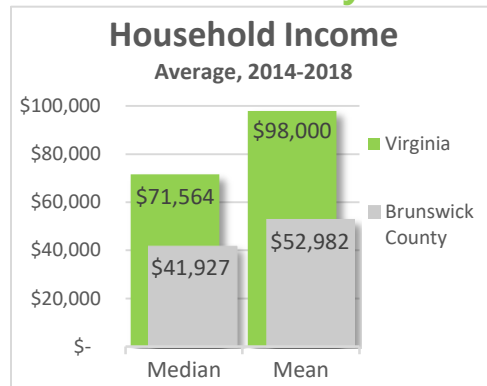
2018 Population Estimate: 16,384
2010 Population Census: 17,434
Growth Rate 2010-2018: -6.02%
2018 Median Age: 43.2
2010 Median Age: 41.3



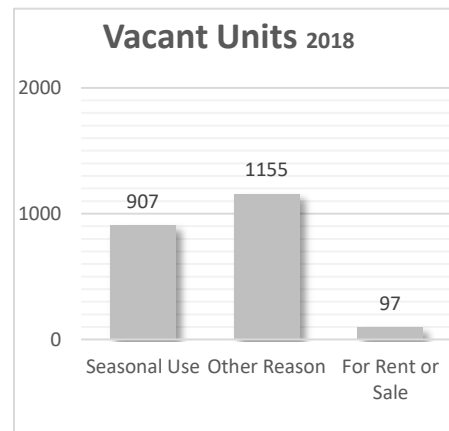
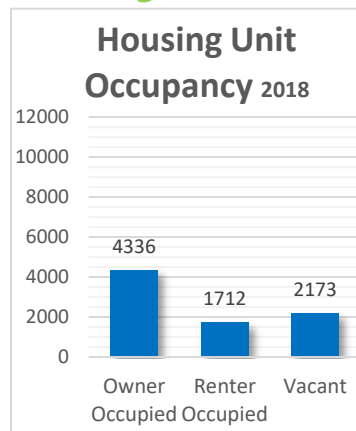
Age Groups 2018



Income and Poverty



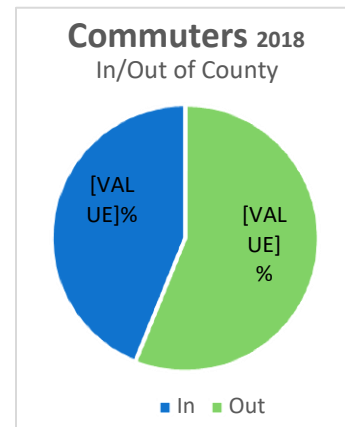
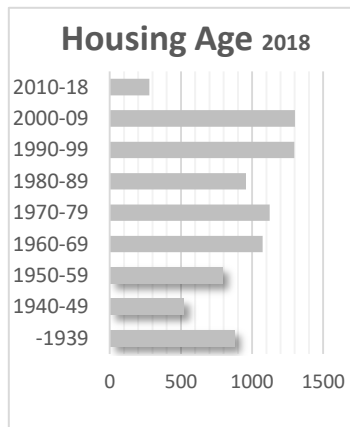
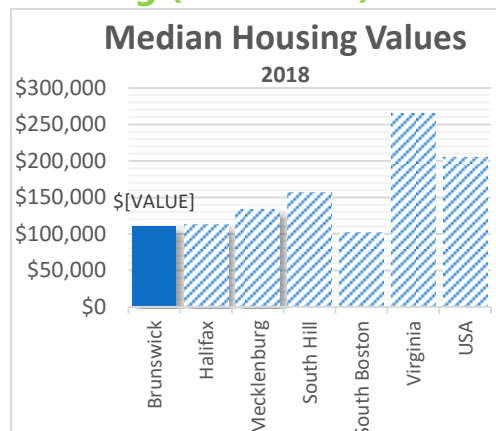
Housing



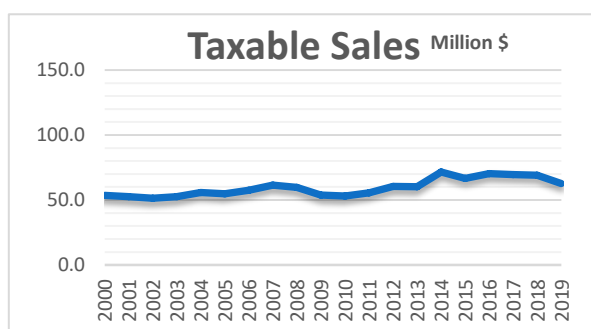
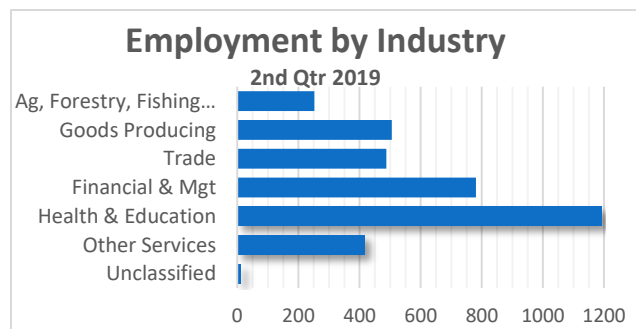
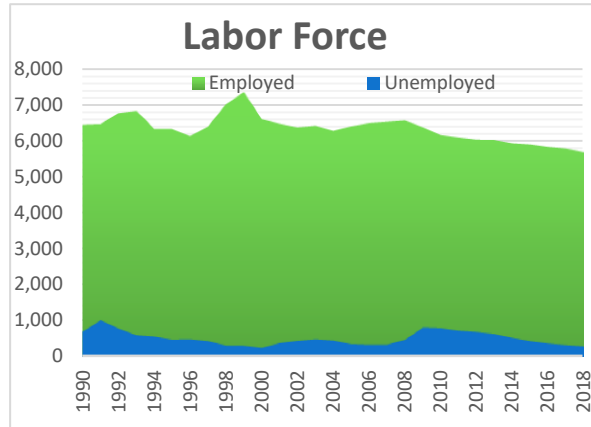
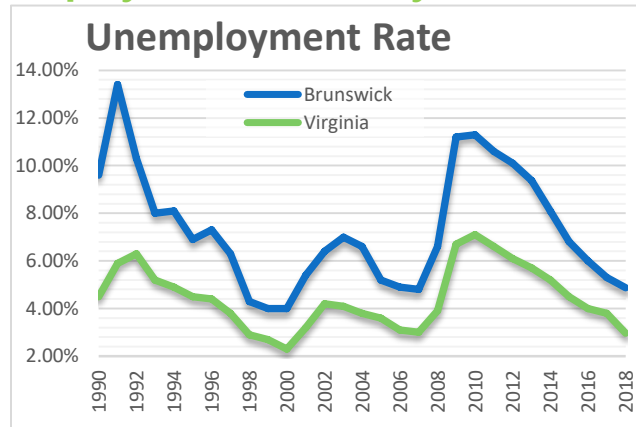
Housing Estimates 2018

Housing Units Estimate: 8,221
Median Household Value: \$110,800
Median Monthly Owner Cost:
 \$1,039 with mortgage
 \$376 without mortgage
Median Rent: \$679
Vacant Units / Occupied:
 2,173 / 6,048

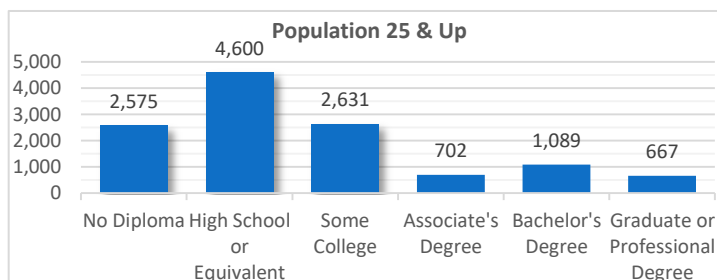
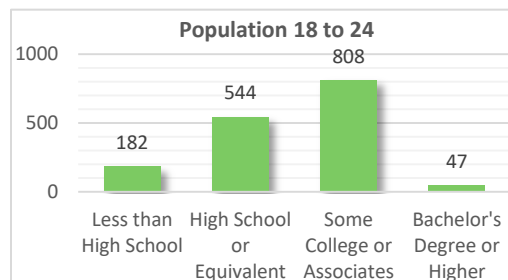
Housing (continued)



Employment & Industry

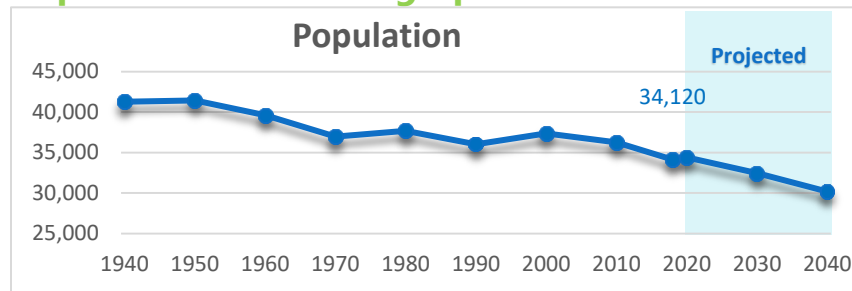


Educational Attainment



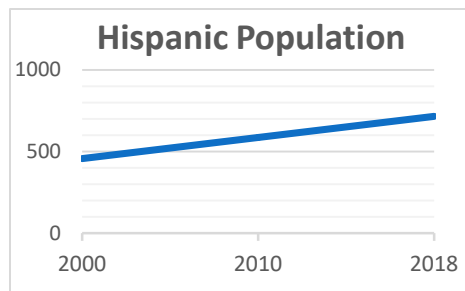
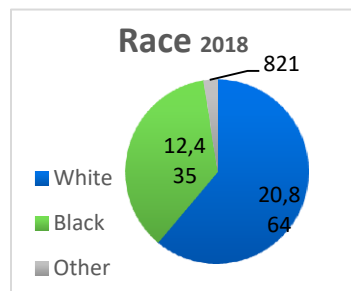
HALIFAX COUNTY

Population and Demographics

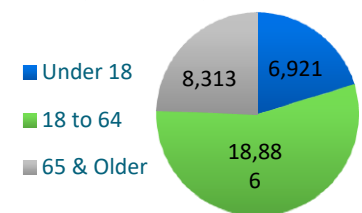


Population Facts

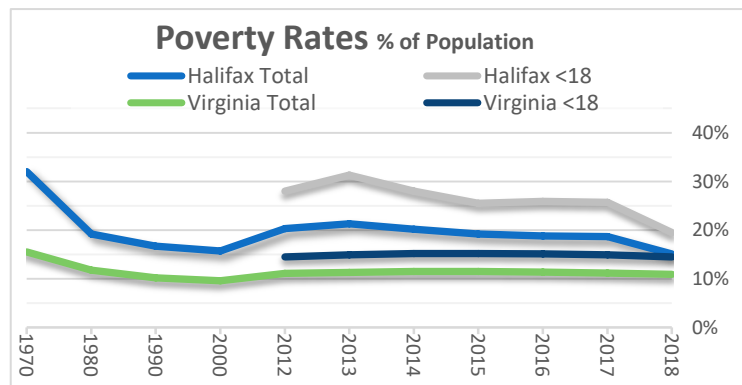
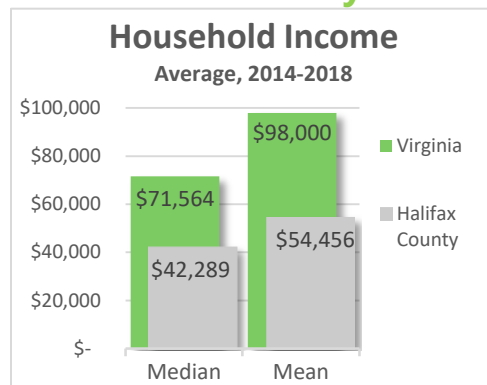
2018 Population Estimate: 34,120
2010 Population Census: 36,241
Growth Rate 2010-2018: -5.85%
2018 Median Age: 43.2
2010 Median Age: 44.7



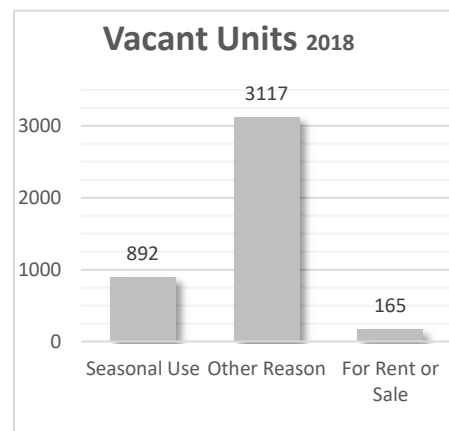
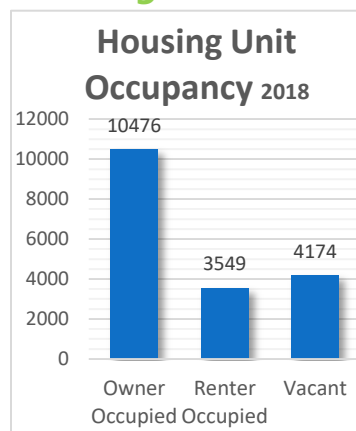
Age Groups 2018



Income and Poverty



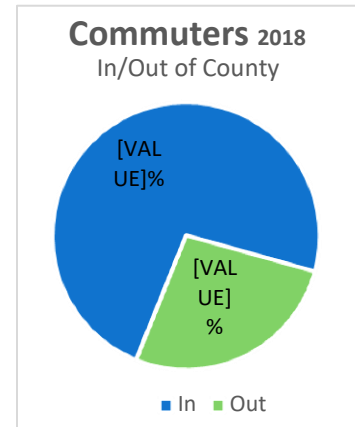
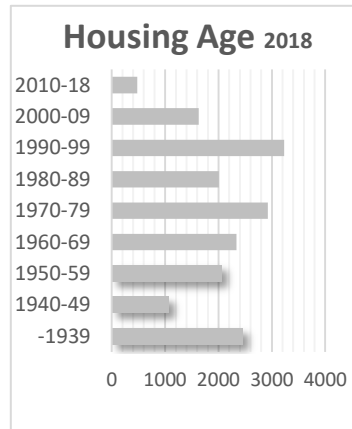
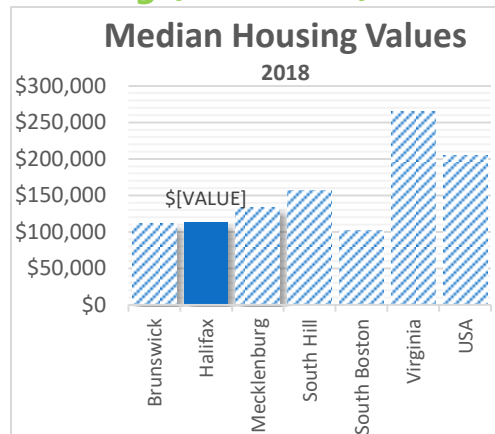
Housing



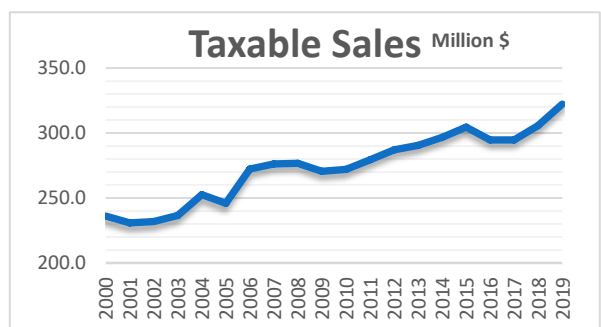
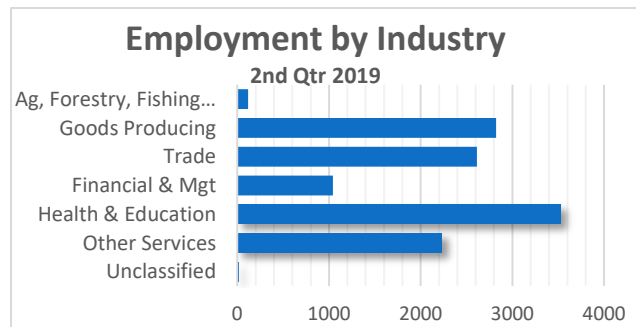
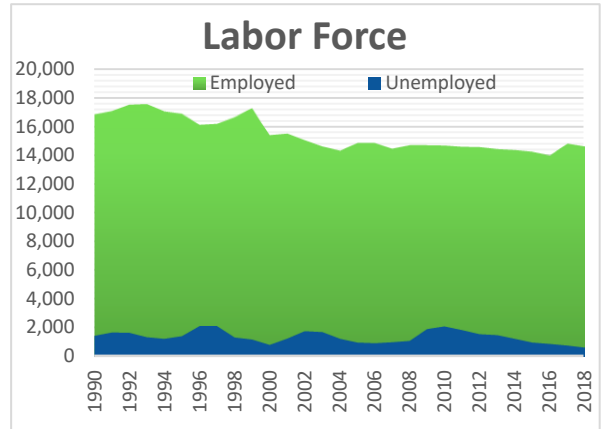
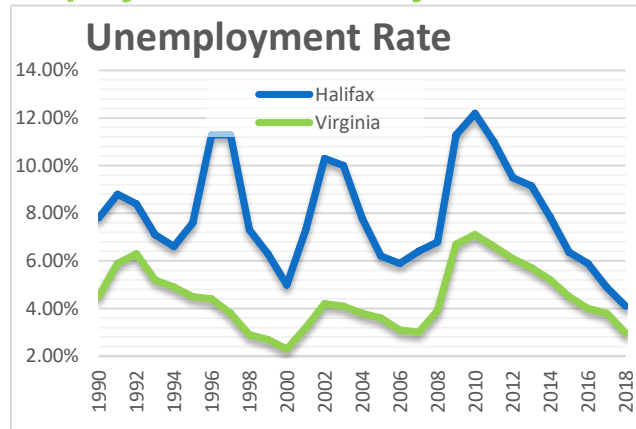
Housing Estimates 2018

Housing Units Estimate: 18,199
Median Household Value: \$112,700
Median Monthly Owner Cost:
 \$999 with mortgage
 \$312 without mortgage
Median Rent: \$693
Vacant Units / Occupied:
 4,174 / 14,025

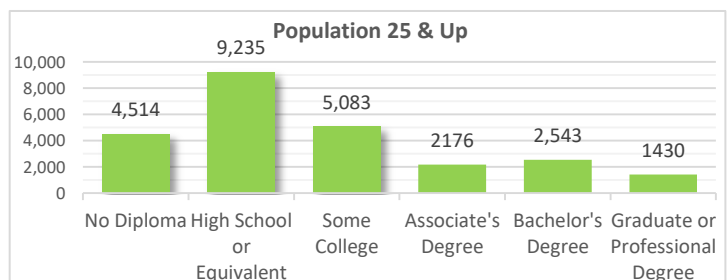
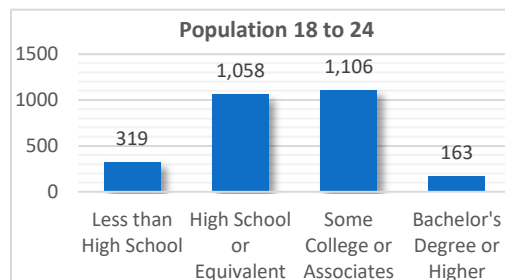
Housing (continued)



Employment & Industry

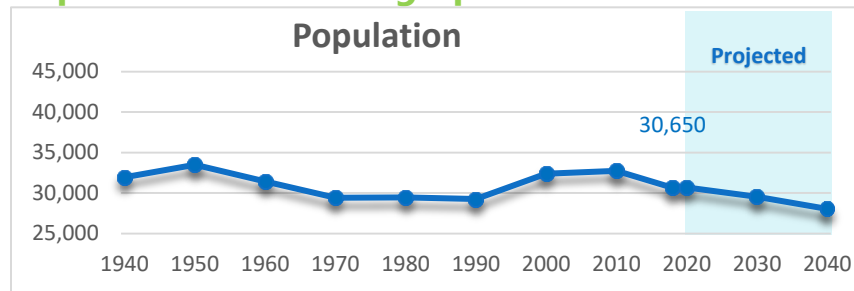


Educational Attainment



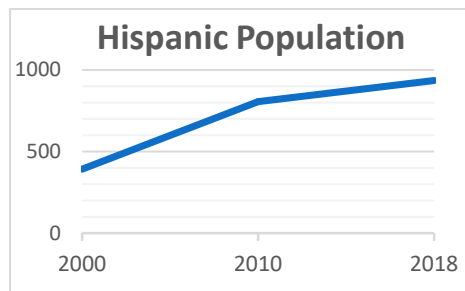
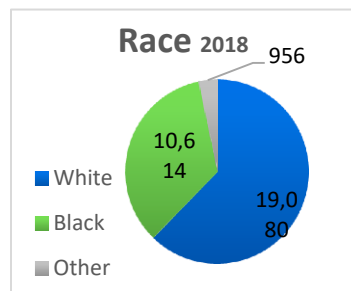
MECKLENBURG COUNTY

Population and Demographics

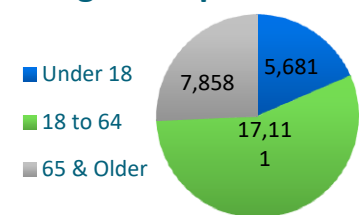


Population Facts

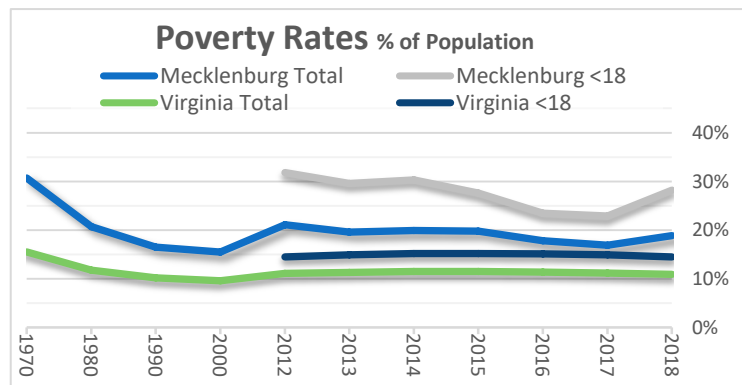
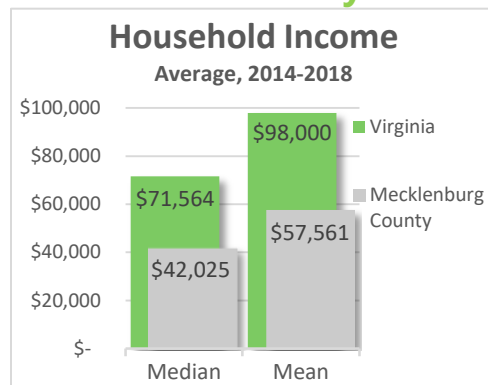
2018 Population Estimate: 30,650
2010 Population Census: 32,727
Growth Rate 2010-2018: -6.35%
2018 Median Age: 48.8
2010 Median Age: 45.8



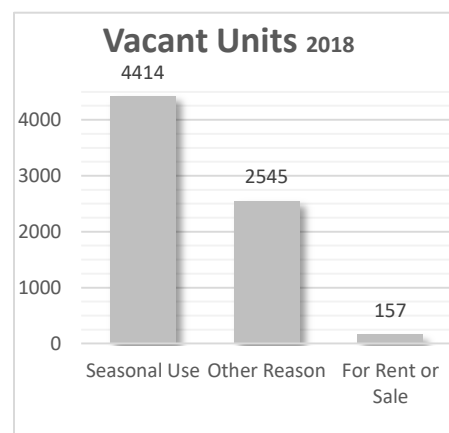
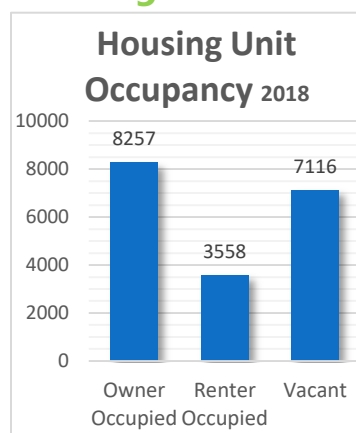
Age Groups 2018



Income and Poverty



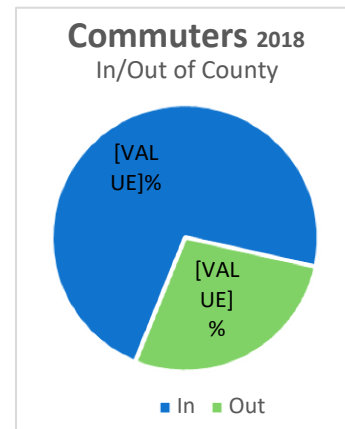
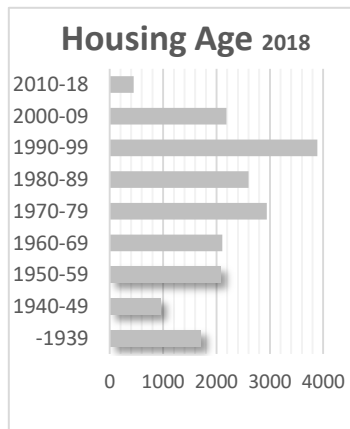
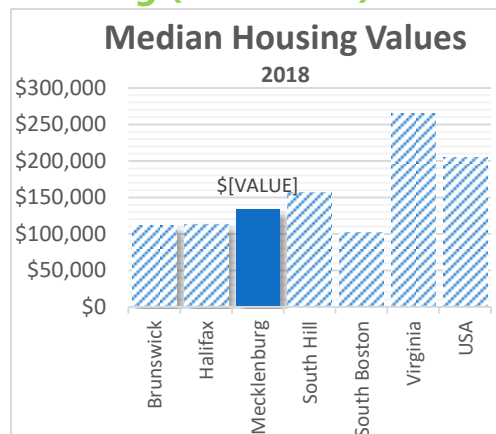
Housing



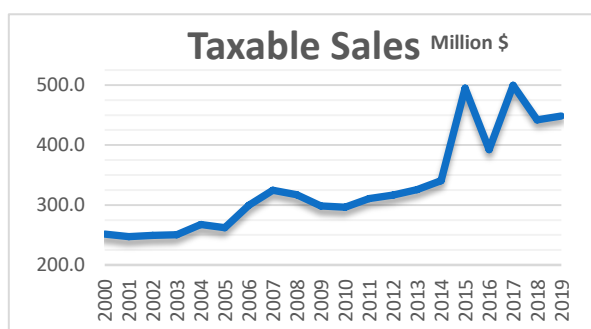
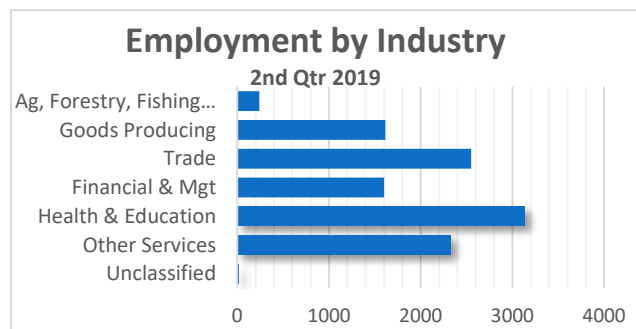
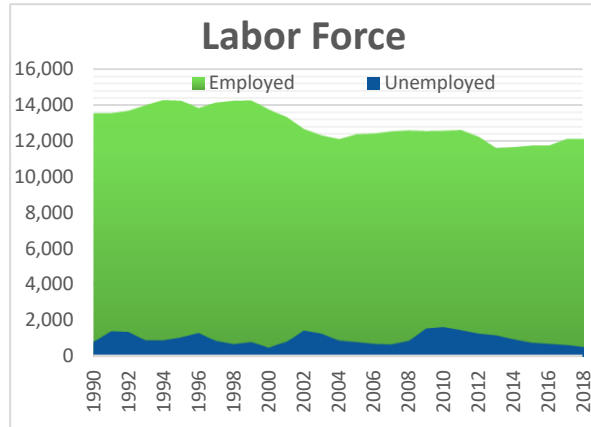
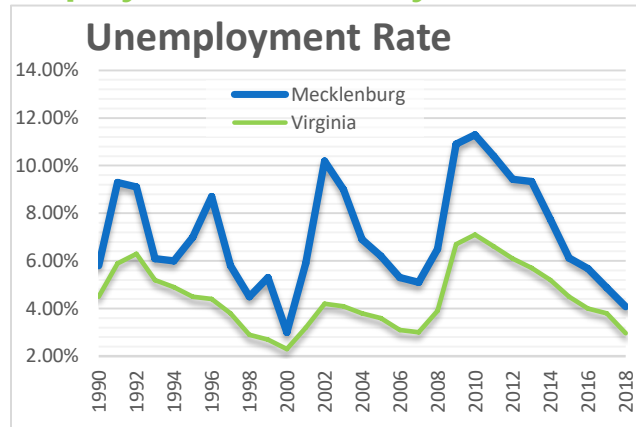
Housing Estimates 2018

Housing Units Estimate: 18,931
Median Household Value: \$133,200
Median Monthly Owner Cost:
 \$1,040 with mortgage
 \$363 without mortgage
Median Rent: \$644
Vacant Units / Occupied:
 4,174 / 14,025

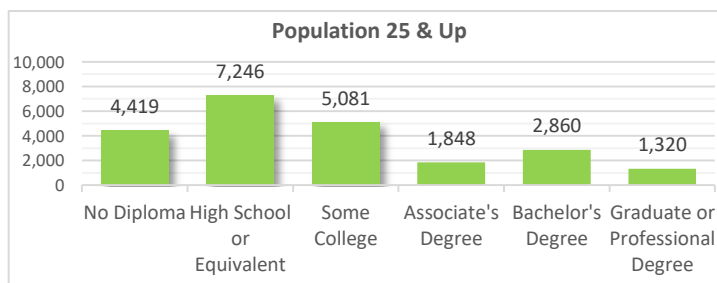
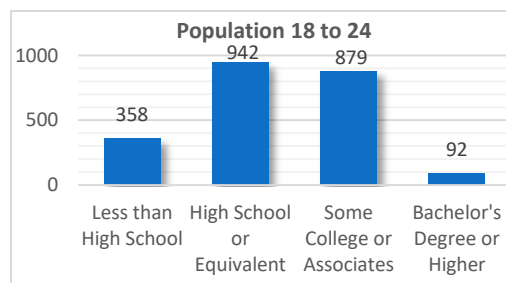
Housing (continued)



Employment & Industry

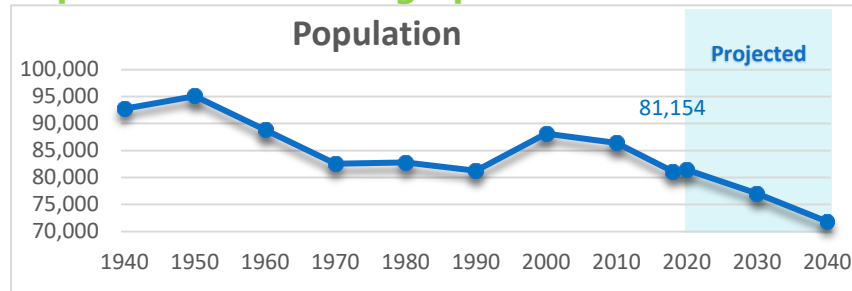


Educational Attainment



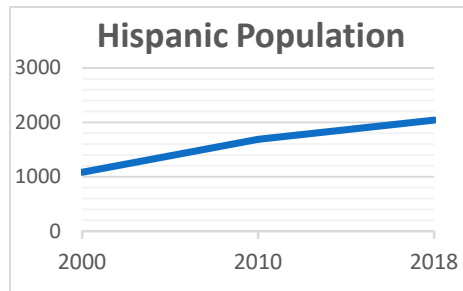
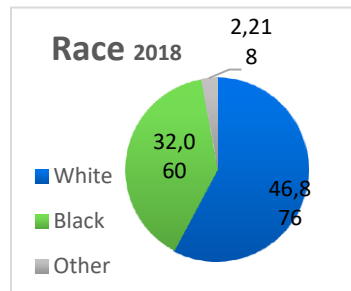
SOUTHSIDE PLANNING DISTRICT

Population and Demographics

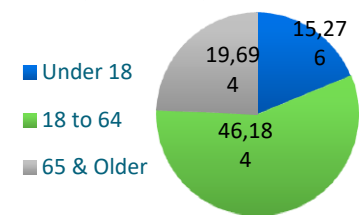


Population Facts

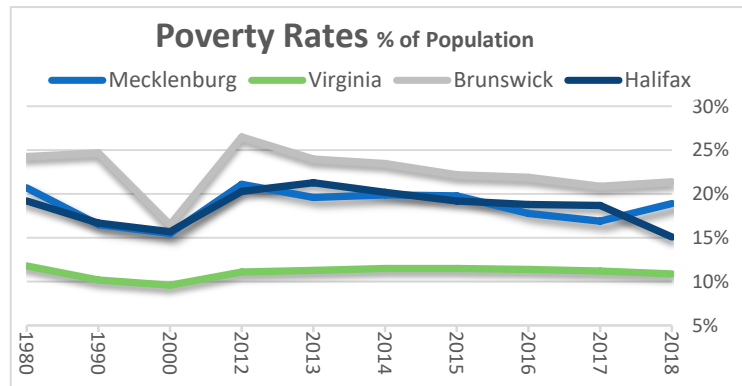
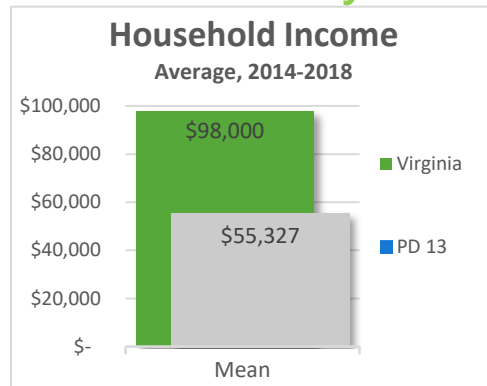
2018 Population Estimate: 81,154
2010 Population Census: 86,402
Growth Rate 2010-2018: -6.07%



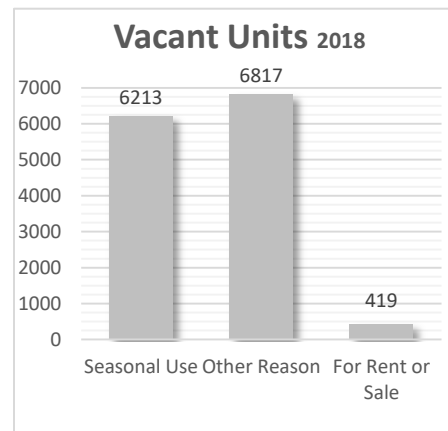
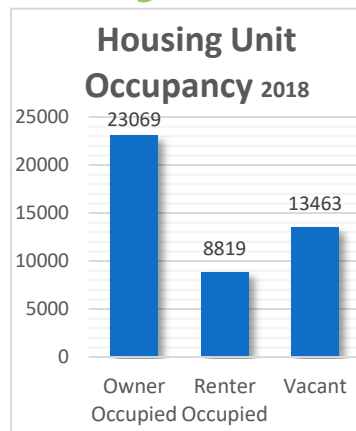
Age Groups 2018



Income and Poverty



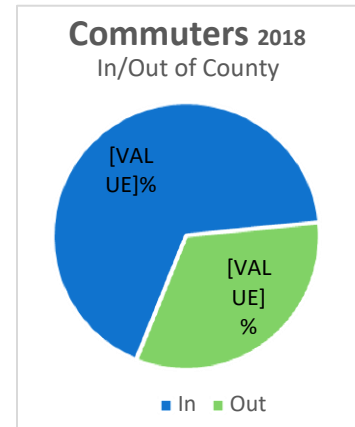
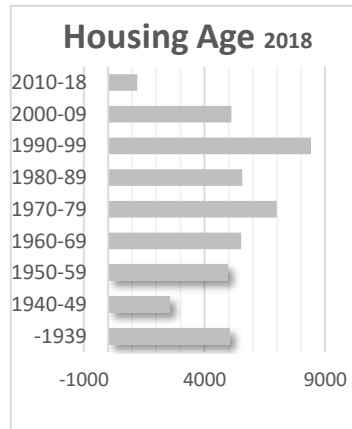
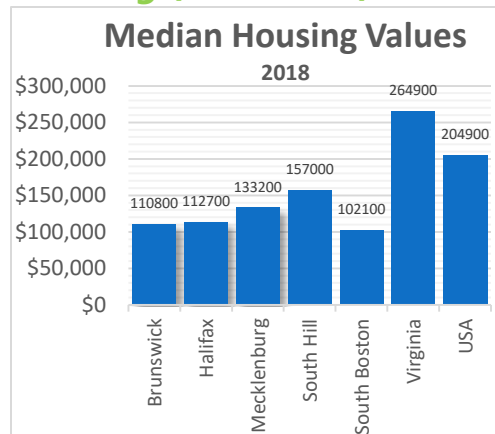
Housing



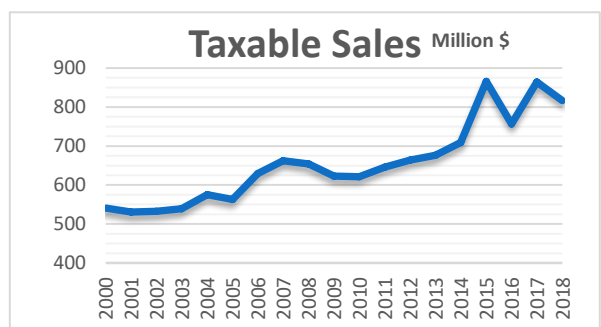
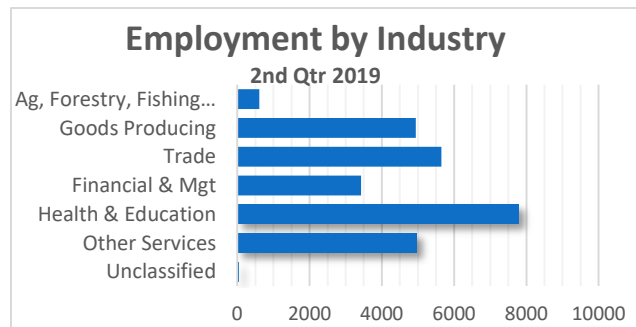
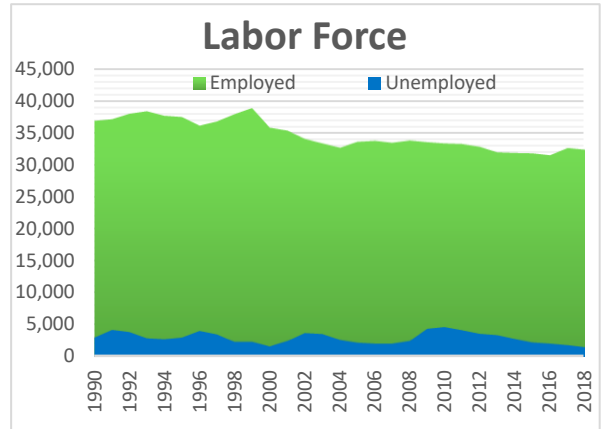
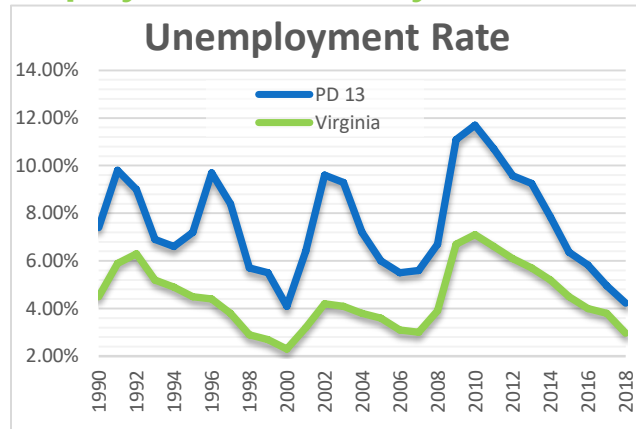
Housing Estimates 2018

Housing Units Estimate: 45,351
Vacant Units / Occupied:
 13,463 / 31,888

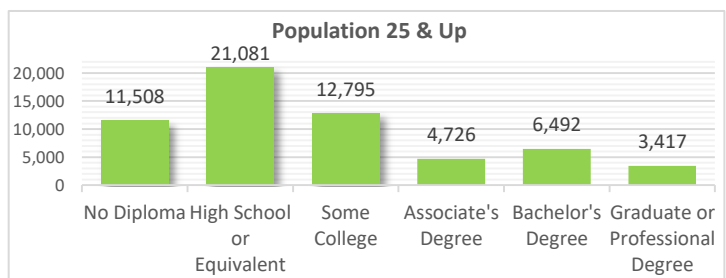
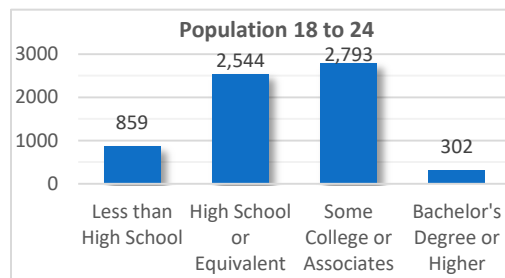
Housing (continued)



Employment & Industry



Educational Attainment



S.W.O.T. ANALYSIS

A key component of the CEDS process is the input of the CEDS Committee. A Community Input Session was held by the SPDC on December 17, 2019 to conduct the SWOT analysis. Participants included the CEDS Committee, in addition to leaders representing various economic sectors throughout the District. A total of 28 persons attended representing private industry, Virginia career institutions, healthcare facilities, workforce development centers, utility companies, economic development offices, and local government entities. The Berkley Group, a local government consulting firm, facilitated the event. After a directional presentation, participants were divided into small groups to perform the SWOT exercise. Each of the groups was provided a questionnaire to be completed and then compiled by SPDC staff for inclusion in the CEDS. The SWOT analysis shapes the vision, goals, objectives, and performance measures inclusive of the CEDS.

STRENGTHS

Competitive Advantages

- ◊ Workforce Training - Strong, ongoing effort
- ◊ Business Friendly
- ◊ Business Cost, Land Cost, & Tax Structure
- ◊ Education - New High School Buildings
- ◊ Digital Infrastructure-Strong, ongoing effort
- ◊ Outdoor Recreation Assets
- ◊ Historical/Cultural Tourism
- ◊ Healthcare-New hospital facility
- ◊ Diverse Region
- ◊ Proximity to Seaports, Airports, & Hwys
- ◊ Open Land/Natural Resources
- ◊ Infrastructure, Water, Sewer, Fiber & Rail
- ◊ Easy Partnership with Local Government

WEAKNESSES

Competitive Disadvantages

- ◊ Education - School System improvement
- ◊ Rural Broadband - Last Mile deployment
- ◊ Public Transportation System
- ◊ Lack of childcare facilities
- ◊ Attraction of Young Professionals
- ◊ Skilled Workforce - More workers, training
- ◊ Lack of Capital & Entrepreneurship
- ◊ Perception of Rural Areas
- ◊ Outmigration of youth

OPPORTUNITIES

Regional Improvement or Progress

- ◊ Technology/Microsoft
- ◊ Healthcare
- ◊ Advanced Manufacturing & Distribution
- ◊ Agriculture/Forestry
- ◊ Retail
- ◊ Cultural/Recreational Opportunities

THREATS

Negative Impacts

- ◊ Lack of Skilled Workforce
- ◊ Rural Perception
- ◊ Lack of Educational Training
- ◊ Lack of Workforce Training
- ◊ Strong Gaps in Healthcare
- ◊ Lack of Grant Incentives
- ◊ Inability to attract industry to Region

STRATEGIC DIRECTION

Vision Statement

The Region should be the location of choice for tourists, young families, trained workers, investors, advanced manufacturers, and entrepreneurs. The area stands out due to its natural beauty, friendly people, affordable cost of living, and access to two-thirds of the nation's population within a day's drive. In recent years, manufacturing activity has rebounded, and service-related industries have prospered. With vast woodlands, a plentiful water supply, and easy accessibility to metro areas in all directions, the Region offers extensive economic development opportunities. The current workforce consists seasoned, middle skilled workers with a potential labor pool of students eager for training and new opportunities. Economic development efforts should target commercial, technological, and industrial activities compatible with the surrounding communities.



Historic Boyd Tavern in Boynton.

Vision Statement

"A sustainable, diverse economy that promotes a skilled workforce for 21st Century employment sectors including advanced manufacturing, modern agriculture, healthcare, and entrepreneurship, while celebrating its natural heritage through tourism."

Stepping away from its agrarian past, 21st Century industries are the focus of the Region's economy. Today's advanced manufacturing is safer, cleaner, and better paying than ever. Information Technology (IT) is a robust sector that can take advantage of the existing strong broadband infrastructure. High quality, innovative healthcare has been strengthened by affiliations with Sentara Halifax Regional Hospital and VCU Health Community Memorial Hospital. Finally, outdoor recreation and the tourism industry promote the area while imparting a positive impact to the quality of life of its residents.



Annin plant in South Boston, Americas "premier flag manufacturer".



Goals and Objectives

Planning efforts related to the local and regional economy have been undertaken across the Region for many years. Some plans have focused on specific subject matter, such as workforce development, while others have been more general in nature. Each plan brought together the public sector,

subject matter experts, business stakeholders, and local officials to identify and develop potential solutions to economic challenges. One of the most significant and impactful of these plans is the 2019 GO Virginia [Growth and Diversification Plan](#) (G&D Plan). It involved input from over 250 regional stakeholders resulting in comprehensive, non-theoretical directives. The identification of four priority business sectors will guide regional economic development efforts. By utilizing data from the G&D Plan, additional regional studies, stakeholder input, and the SWOT analysis, the SPDC tailored a set of Goals and Objectives for the District. Each of the four Goals are of equal importance.

GO Virginia Region 3 Growth & Diversification Plan: Priority Business Sectors

- 1) *Advanced Manufacturing*
- 2) *High Value Wood Products*
- 3) *Cyber Infrastructure*
- 4) *Talent Development and Recruitment*

SPDC Goals & Objectives

- 1) *Business, Industry, & Jobs*
- 2) *Infrastructure & Transportation*
- 3) *Community Development & Quality of Life*
- 4) *Education & Workforce Training*

Goal 1: Business, Industry, and Job Creation: Increase employment opportunities for the Region through the creation of an environment attractive to new businesses and expanding industries utilizing improved economic programs and services. Objectives:

- 1) Develop a business and industry database populated with contact information, services/products provided, employment numbers, years in business, etc. to serve as primary source for grant and program delivery

especially during emergency pandemic conditions (lack of this data presented as a challenge in response efforts to COVID-19 pandemic).

- 2) Actively promote, market, and utilize [Enterprise](#) and [Opportunity Zones](#) located throughout the Region to encourage economic growth and activity.
- 3) Provide “at risk” financing to encourage industrial/small business expansions and new start-ups throughout the Region.
- 4) Create a “shared workspace” to facilitate remote workers encoring migration of urban residents seeking to relocate away from congested cities.
- 5) Encourage localities to develop shovel-ready sites in their communities per VEDP’s [Virginia Business Ready Sites Program](#) with Tier 5 characterization being the optimal goal.
- 6) Identify underutilized industrial sites and buildings, perform an assessment, and develop a clean-up and redevelopment plan.



Groundbreaking for an industrial site in Halifax County.

Goal 2: Infrastructure and Transportation Improvements: Improve and expand existing infrastructure, provide a safe, efficient transportation network, and promote reliable broadband access to encourage economic growth and expansion across the Region. Objectives:

- 1) Promote the continued improvement and development of the critical infrastructure needed to support business and industry such as water, sewer, natural gas, electric power, and broadband capability through partnerships with funding organizations.
- 2) Support programs and policies to plan, coordinate, rehabilitate, and maintain road improvements throughout the Region to ensure an efficient and safe intermodal transportation system.
- 3) Utilize GIS mapping to support all economic development initiatives and public emergency systems.
- 4) Utilize Geographic Information System (GIS) mapping and perform updates to the SPDC's [Rural Long-Range Transportation Plan](#).
- 5) Encourage provision of sufficient parking in downtowns and new developments.
- 6) Encourage establishment of railroad improvements such as high-speed passenger and freight rail service throughout the Region.
- 7) Support improvements to the physical facilities and air service capabilities of all area airports to capture that economic development potential.



SPDC staff GIS field work.

Goal 3: Community Development and Quality of Life Initiatives: Promote community development and enhance quality of life by increasing the availability of affordable housing and childcare, revitalizing downtowns, and preserving the Region's historic and natural resources, while promoting the area to tourists.

Objectives:

- 1) Encourage and stimulate downtown redevelopment and business retention within the central business districts including mixed-use development to support diversity and create a unique "sense of place".
- 2) Support the development of healthcare clinics and expanded healthcare services to adequately provide accessible healthcare to residents.
- 3) Work with non-profits, entrepreneurs, small businesses, and other organizations to fill long-term vacant spaces in the downtowns.
- 4) Expand quality childcare opportunities.
- 5) Encourage regional marketing initiatives and strategies for promoting the downtowns as a business and tourism destination.
- 6) Encourage and promote Southern Virginia tourism initiatives by supporting the [Southern Virginia Blueway](#), [Tobacco Heritage Trail](#), [The Civil Rights in Education Heritage Trail](#), and other recreational opportunities as a tool for diversifying and expanding the local and regional economies.
- 7) Utilize tourism assets, along with GIS, to develop a tourism plan that will protect and preserve open space, historic sites, and key natural attractions.



South Boston Town Hall.

- 8) Implement a planning study to measure affordable/adequate housing throughout the Region and continue to seek funding opportunities for the improvement of existing housing stock to enhance quality of life and improve living conditions.
- 9) Develop a Hazard Mitigation Plan for the Region.
- 10) Consolidate County bike and pedestrian plans into one regional plan and encourage inclusion of pedestrian and biking facilities in new developments and in redevelopment projects.
- 11) Expand and develop new greenway and sidewalk connections in the downtowns to enhance pedestrian linkages between neighborhoods, businesses, and community services.
- 12) Encourage localities to make improvements to entrance “gateways” by investing in updated signage, landscaping, and cleanup.
- 13) Improve public access to area lakes.
- 14) Maintain and enhance the water quality of waterways for the purpose of water supply and recreation.



South Boston's "gateway".

Goal 4: Education and Workforce Training Programs: Expand educational opportunities for youth and provide a versatile workforce training network, including advanced technical skill certifications, to strengthen the Region's overall workforce skillset and promote wage growth.

Objectives:

- 1) Expand the number of programs offered in technical/vocational training areas such as healthcare, welding, electrical, machining, and other labor segments.
- 2) Encourage investment in public school systems to improve the learning environment and equip students with state-of-the-art programs/curriculum to achieve a pool of skilled workers that can be employed and retained within the Region.
- 3) Pursue Certified Work Ready Community designations for each County to help the Region attract new businesses and jobs.
- 4) Promote greater citizen achievement of a high school diploma, two-year college degree, and a bachelor's degree by emphasizing “Degrees Matter” and other pro-degree initiatives.
- 5) Promote and support direct entrepreneurship education, mentorship, and internship efforts.



Presentation on GO-TEC Training Program at the GO Virginia Region 3 All Hands Meeting.

Implementation

The CEDS document was created by the SPDC to assess, define, and accomplish the economic development goals of the Region. The CEDS outlines the goals, objectives, and strategies needed to achieve a resilient, growing economy. This is accomplished through regional meetings, SWOT analysis, review of previous CEDS and other local/regional strategic plans, and one-on-one discussion with stakeholders. The Action Steps will implement Action Plan strategies in a manner that will achieve the four identified Goals. Time frames are categorized as follows: Short-1 to 2 Years, Medium-3 to 4 Years, and Long-5 to 7 Years. The Action Plan is detailed in the chart below.

Action Steps	Strategic Partners	Time Frame
Goal 1: Industrial/Business Development and Job Creation		
Request an inventory of industrial sites throughout the Region to determine the assigned VEDP tier level and encourage an application to the Virginia Business Ready Sites Program for sites below Level 4.	VGA, SVRA, SPDC, Local Governments	Short
Coordinate with Virginia Community Capital to host an Opportunity Zone workshop in the Region to promote and encourage utilization of the Zones.	VCC, SPDC, Local Governments	Short
Provide each County with an Opportunity Zone Marketing Prospectus through DHCD's grant program to provide County Economic Developers with the tools needed to effectively market the Zones.	SPDC, VGA, SVRA, EDO, Local Governments	Short
Maintain ACT Work Ready Community status for each County in the Region.	EDO	Short
Facilitate the hiring of downtown business managers to work with non-profits, entrepreneurs, and small businesses to fill vacant spaces in the Region's downtowns.	Local Governments	Short
Develop a business and industry spreadsheet for the Region to include contact information, service or product provided, employment numbers, owner demographics, years in business, etc. to better serve and contact businesses with economic opportunities.	SPCD, Local Governments, GO VA	Short
Create "at risk" financing loan pools to support industrial/small business expansions and/or start-ups.	LCDC, SPDC, SBDC, VGA	Short
Develop project to create a "shared workspace" to facilitate remote workers.	SPDC, SVCC, GOVA, Local Governments	Long
Goal 2: Infrastructure and Transportation Improvements		
Solicit grant and local funds to rehabilitate and maintain road improvements throughout the Region.	SPDC, VDOT, Funding Agencies, Local Governments	Medium
Improve the Region's airport facilities and air service capabilities.	Local Governments, Airport Commission, SPDC	Long

Inventory the current landscape of broadband planning, deployment, and partnerships in the GO Virginia Region 3 footprint to ensure effective investment decisions are made on project applications.	GO VA Region 3, SPDC, DHCD	Short
Update the Rural Long-Range Transportation Plan and GIS mapping accordingly.	SPDC, VDOT, Local Governments	Short
Complete the consolidation of County bike and pedestrian plans into one regional Plan.	SPDC, VDOT, Local Governments	Medium
Create new parking spaces in the downtowns.	EDO, Local Governments, VDOT	Medium
Expand high-speed passenger and freight services throughout the Region.	Local Governments, VDOT, SPDC	Long
Goal 3: Community Development and Quality of Life Initiatives		
Develop a Regional Tourism Plan.	Local Governments, SPDC	Medium
Establish local incentive programs to encourage downtown business owners to invest in building façade and/or interior improvements.	Local Governments	Short
Complete a clean-up/redevelopment plan to address underutilized industrial sites and downtown buildings.	EDO, Local Governments, VGA, SVRA, SPDC	Medium
Market SPDC GIS technical services to support community and economic development initiatives and public emergency systems.	SPDC, EDO, VGA, SVRA, Local Governments	Short
Complete a regional housing study to measure affordable/adequate housing in the Region.	SPDC, Local Governments, SOG	Short
Seek grant funds to increase childcare facilities in the Region.	SPDC, Local Governments	Medium
Solicit grant funds to improve existing housing stock.	SPDC, Local Governments, Funding Agencies	Short
Perform a windshield survey of town entrance gateways throughout the Region and inventory those needing improvements. Meet with town officials to create a plan-of-action.	SPDC, Local Governments	Short
Support operating Farmers Markets and encourage towns without Farmers Markets to consider the benefits and provide support.	SPDC, Local Governments	Short
Solicit revitalization grant funds to improve sidewalk/greenway connections in the downtown.	SPDC, Local Governments	Short
Secure grant/loan funds for the development of healthcare clinics and expanded healthcare services, with emphasis on primary care and geriatric practitioners.	SPDC, Healthcare Institutions, VDH	Medium

Seek grant funds to improve the Southern Virginia Blueway, Tobacco Heritage Trail, and Civil Rights in Education Trail.	Local Governments, Funding Agencies, SPDC	Short
Promote the Region's downtowns as a business and tourism destination.	Local Governments & Chambers of Commerce	Short
Pursue funds for the adaptive reuse of historic and/or architecturally significant structures.	Local Governments, SPDC	Short
Develop digital mapping (GIS) of significant tourism assets in the Region.	SPDC, Local Governments	Medium
Goal 4: Education and Workforce Training Programs		
Expand technical/vocational training programs.	Higher Education Centers	Medium
Construct and/or renovate public school facilities in the Region.	Local Schools and Governments	Long
Seek programs that will provide extensive job training for the Region's workforce including high school students, job seekers, and incumbent workforce to create higher-paying jobs.	Higher Education Centers, GO Virginia Region 3	Short
Develop marketing initiatives that promote the importance of education, i.e. "Degrees Matter".	Higher Education Centers, Local Governments	Short
Implement mentorship and internship programs and provide support to entrepreneurs.	Go Virginia Region 3, SPDC	Short

EVALUATION FRAMEWORK

Performance Measures

Performance measures should be aimed at achieving clearly identified outcomes. Outcomes are not what the program does but are the end results of the program. Performance measures provide a mechanism for evaluating and updating the regional CEDS based on progress, challenges, or unanticipated circumstances. This table will be updated periodically as we proceed toward the five-year goal.

DRAFT

ECONOMIC RESILIENCE

Economic resiliency is essential for a healthy, sustainable regional economy. Southern Virginia has experienced major sector changes, manufacturing closures, and economic downturns over the last three decades. Industrial diversity is one component to a resilient economy. Not putting “all your eggs in one basket”, such as agriculture or manufacturing, is crucial to achieving a resilient, diverse economy. Attracting new industry and employment sectors to the Region remains one of the most concerted efforts. Diversity prevents one industry from experiencing downturn and causing employment scarcity which can quickly result in a stagnant economy. Stagnation is a situation that occurs within an economy when total output is either declining, flat, or growing slowly. Stagnation results in flat job growth and no wage increases. A diverse economy prevents stagnancy.

Planning and Implementing Resilience

Natural Disasters

Many disasters, particularly natural disasters, cannot be prevented. Fallout from these events can cause local and regional turmoil, disrupt significant infrastructure systems, and even result in the loss of life. To strengthen resiliency throughout the Region, all localities should proactively take steps to help mitigate the effects that such disasters can bring.

[The Regional Hazard Mitigation Plan](#) (2020) was recently updated through a cooperative effort between the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), Virginia Department of Emergency Management (VDEM), the SPDC, local governments, and the public. The Plan’s purpose is to identify goals and develop specific mitigation actions that a community intends to pursue to help reduce vulnerability and exposure to future hazard events.

Mitigation Assessment Areas

- 1) Administrative & Technical
- 2) Planning & Regulatory
- 3) Financial
- 4) Education & Outreach

The Plan contains several sections of note. Hazard identification includes a profile of each hazard that is believed to have a realistic chance of negatively impacting the Region. These profiles include a look at the areas which are most likely to be impacted, classify the various hazard events by strength, review previous occurrences within the Region, and state the likelihood that future events may occur. During the process, community assets and critical facilities were inventoried. The inventoried assets and facilities were then reviewed to determine what natural hazards pose the greatest threat to them. Loss estimations were conducted by utilizing FEMA’s Hazus software for various flooding and hurricane scenarios. Finally, a public survey was conducted to gather residents’ input on what they see as the greatest risk for their jurisdiction.



Flooding in Halifax County.

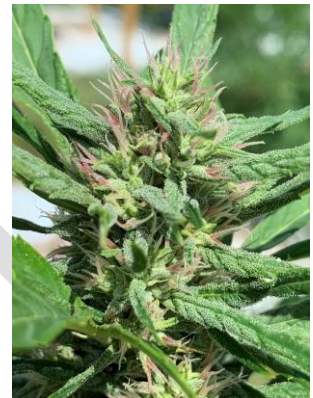
To gain a better understanding of what each jurisdiction’s capabilities are, as it relates to implementing mitigation actions, a capability assessment was conducted. The mitigation assessment focused on four main areas. Regional goals and compiled data were reviewed. Mitigation Actions were developed by each jurisdiction to address their own unique areas of need. Several Mitigation Actions from the Regional Hazard Mitigation Plan can be found in CEDS 2020 Project List.

Diversified Economy

Diversification makes the local economy less vulnerable to adverse conditions or unexpected developments occurring in only one sector. Economic development efforts must continually be reassessed and have a coordinated strategy to stay current with the changing world economy. The District's economic development strategy needs to strengthen existing industry clusters and target new growing employment sectors.

Marketing efforts need to continue to highlight the quality of life and significant infrastructure in the Region. Incentive efforts have been bolstered by the designation of three [Opportunity Zones](#) (OZ) in 2018. Opportunity Zones are a federal economic and community development tax benefit that supports investors with capital gains designed to encourage long-term private investment in low-income and rural areas. Each of the three Counties in the District has a designated OZ. These efforts increase resiliency and mitigate economic vulnerability experienced by the Region in the past with the downfall of the tobacco industry and exodus of manufacturers.

With the downfall of the tobacco industry, the agriculture sector has been searching for alternative crops. Virginia's industrial hemp industry received a boost in 2020 with the [announcement](#) of its first large scale processing plant in Halifax County. Secretary of Agriculture and Forestry Bettina Ring said, "There has been tremendous growth in Virginia's industrial hemp industry, creating new opportunities for rural communities to thrive." This project was a collaborative effort of private business, local and state government, and grant agencies.



Hemp flower grown in the Brunswick County.

Downtown Vibrancy

The wide variety of businesses found in downtowns contributes to local resiliency. Restaurants featuring locally grown goodness, inviting hair salons and barber shops, home décor and interior designers, stylish clothing retailers, and gift shops featuring personalized items are just a few stops along the diversified downtown streets. Revitalization efforts continue to support projects that will enhance the experiences of visitors and locals alike. Efforts to support the remodel and reuse of downtown buildings are underway in several District towns. Additional downtown improvement projects focusing on sidewalks, lighting, and façade are being developed. Small towns are the heartbeat of rural America while the downtowns are its soul. Their importance to the sustainability of the Region has driven revitalization efforts throughout the three counties. The [Department of Housing and Community Development](#) (DHCD) programs such as Community Development Block Grants and the Industrial Revitalization Fund have been instrumental in these efforts. With DHCD backing, area downtowns have been able to make improvements to infrastructure, add parking, and increase pedestrian access to local businesses. Additionally, large scale projects such as the renovation of a historic county courthouse and the remodeling of blighted structures to create mixed-use facilities has breathed life back into many of these sites.



South Boston is a Virginia Main Street Community.

South Boston is the home of quaint shops, restaurants, theatres, and many small businesses. It is an accredited [Virginia Main Street Community](#) which is part of [Main Street America](#), a national organization seeking to "revitalize older and historic commercial districts to build vibrant neighborhoods and

thriving economies". The Virginia DHCD is a coordinating partner with this program. South Hill is a Main Street Affiliate with recent infrastructure improvements, including streetscaping, to make the downtown more inviting and visitor friendly. It has experienced downtown growth with the development of the [Southern Virginia Food Hub](#), a small farmer and food artisan economic development project, as well as, the addition of retail shops, and restaurants.



Ribbon cutting for Southern Virginia Food Hub & Makers Market.

Establishing Information Networks: Regional Partnerships

Regional partnerships and diversification make the local economy less vulnerable to adverse conditions or unexpected developments occurring in only one sector. The SPDC, in partnership with its localities, has played a significant role in development of the Southern Virginia economy which extends well beyond Brunswick, Halifax, and Mecklenburg Counties. This CEDS reflects values regarding the importance of partnering with one another within the District, as well as, neighboring localities, to have a larger footprint and a more compelling regional message which promotes Southern Virginia as a diverse destination for the 21st Century.

GO Virginia

GO VA Region 3: Targeted Business Sectors

- 1) Business Services/IT Data Centers
- 2) Advanced Manufacturing and Materials
(Aerospace, Automotive, Production Technologies, Biopharmaceutical, Lighting & Electrical Equipment)
- 3) High Value Natural Resource Products
- 4) Health Care

[GO Virginia](#) (GO VA) is a bi-partisan business-led initiative authorized by the General Assembly in December of 2016 to help diversity in the Commonwealth's economy and reflect the variation in regional economies. GO VA supports programs to create higher paying jobs through incentivized collaboration between business, education, and government stakeholders to diversify and strengthen the economy in every region of the Commonwealth.

Nine regions across the Commonwealth were formed with SPDC becoming part of [GO Region 3](#). GO Region 3 consists of two cities - Danville and Martinsville and 13 counties - Amelia, Brunswick, Buckingham, Charlotte, Cumberland, Halifax, Henry, Lunenburg, Mecklenburg, Nottoway, Patrick, Pittsylvania, and Prince Edward. With 15 independent local units of government, Region 3 is geographically the largest of the GO Regions. The SPDC serves as the Region 3 Support Organization and Fiscal Agent. In this roll, SPDC staff provide fiduciary oversight and administrative services for projects and activities for Region 3.

With public and private input, each GO VA Region develops a [Growth and Diversification \(G&D\) Plan](#) which is updated every two years. This plan serves as a framework to identify which business sectors to target and articulates how it intends to invest state, regional, and local resources. "Areas of Critical Need" are also identified to further guide investment strategy within these targeted sectors. Region 3 Areas of Critical Need are 1) Workforce Talent Development and Recruitment and 2) Cyber Infrastructure. This G&D Plan was paramount in the development of the SPDC CEDS Goals and Objectives.

Southern Virginia Regional Alliance



Southern Virginia Technology Park in Halifax County.

[Southern Virginia Regional Alliance](#) (SVRA) is a marketing and economic development venture by six localities, including Halifax County, a SPDC member locality. These localities work together to market their area to prospective industries. The SVRA has 17 shovel-ready sites to market ranging in size from 8 to 36 pad acres and a multitude of existing buildings including a 105,000 square foot shell building with 30' clear ceilings. It also features one of the largest industrial mega-sites on the east coast at its Berry Hill location.

Virginia's Growth Alliance

[Virginia's Growth Alliance](#) (VGA) is a regional economic development organization with eleven member localities, including Brunswick and Mecklenburg, SPDC member localities. VGA functions as a regional business recruitment organization and is a major partner in workforce development, entrepreneurship, and tourism functions in the area. They offer a Micro-Lending Program called the Pack Fund, which is a pool of money intended to assist small businesses by providing non-traditional, low-interest financing for start-ups and expansions. These funds are provided through VGA's partners at DHCD, Longwood Small Business Development Center, and Lake Country Development Corporation. Current loan terms and conditions are provided in the appendix.

County Industrial Development Authorities



Brunswick County IDA groundbreaking on industrial site.

The SPDC has several commerce parks, as well as, private Greenfield sites. The economic development offices in each County and the [Virginia Economic Development Partnership](#) (VEDP) maintain a database of available property and land use characteristics to be used in the site selection process. All three Counties, along with VGA and the SVRA, utilize the internet to market available buildings and sites. The inventory is housed on a statewide database; [Virginia Business Ready Sites Program](#) (VBRSP) created by VEDP and is updated locally as availability changes. Additional partners include the [Brunswick County IDA](#), [Halifax County IDA](#), and the [Mecklenburg County IDA](#).

Longwood Small Business Development Center

The experienced staff at [The Longwood Small Business Development Center](#) (LSBDC) provides a wide range of services free of charge to local business owners. They are a non-profit entity that has been assisting area small businesses for over 30 years. They offer business planning for existing and startup businesses, development of financial statements, sales and marketing advice, and many other essential business advisory needs. The LSBDC works closely with the SPDC and all its partners to ensure small business prosperity in the Region.

Lake Country Development Corporation



New business in Lawrenceville.

Lake Country Development Corporation (LCDC) was formed in 1981 as a private, non-profit 501(c) (3) corporation responsible for the administration of Revolving Loan Funds (RLF) and Micro-Lending Pools. RLF's are made for the establishment of new industries, to assist existing local businesses, or to support innovative, job-creating economic activities. In some instances, loan funds can assist with gap financing, which is the last 10-25% of a project also known as the "Valley of Death". The Micro-Lending Pool is intended to assist small businesses and entrepreneurs by providing non-traditional financing for business start-ups and expansions. These loans often fill a void in the existing local financial market to support "at risk" local businesses. LCDC is sometimes a lender of last resort, casting lifelines to local small businesses from one of its three existing loan pools. LCDC loan funding is made possible through partnerships with the Economic

Development Administration and USDA Rural Development. Current available loans, along with their terms and conditions, are included in the appendix.

Other Partners

The availability of financing is essential to economic development activities. In addition to traditional commercial lending, federal, state, and local funding sources are available through DHCD- Community Development Block Grants (CDBG), USDA- Rural Development grants/low interest loans, Virginia Tobacco Revitalization Commission, and the Department of Commerce- Economic Development Administration (EDA). This assistance is critical to complete project funding allowing for business success.

Incentive Programs



South Boston "Start-Up" entrepreneur contest. Image by Swanson Photo.

The Virginia Enterprise Zone (VEZ) program is a partnership between state and local government that encourages job creation and private investment. VEZ accomplishes this by designating zones throughout the state and providing two grant-based incentives, the Job Creation Grant and the Real Property Investment Grant. These programs encourage capital investments from qualified businesses and job creators within those zones, while the locality provides additional local incentives. Currently, the SPDC is home to the Mecklenburg-Brunswick County Regional Enterprise Zone and the Halifax-South Boston Enterprise Zone. Opportunity Zones are a federal economic and community

development tax benefit established as part of the 2017 Tax Cuts and Jobs Act. It is available to investors with capital gains designed to encourage long-term private investment in low-income urban, suburban, and rural census tracts. The Region had three areas established as OZ in 2018, one within each County of the District.

The CEDS will be reviewed annually for updates and the evaluation of performance measures. New trends and completed new projects will be captured. It is our hope that this document will be visited often and serve as a resource to our communities, stakeholders, and partners.