

# A REGIONAL STRATEGIC PLAN FOR SOUTHERN VIRGINIA

April 2015

## INVESTING IN:

### *Land*

*Natural resources*

*Infrastructure*

### *People*

*Skilled workforce*

*Superior public education*

### *Capital*

*Gap financing*

*Public/Private partnerships*

## Economic Development Priorities:

- Development of workforce training programs
- Leveraging of resources for infrastructure improvements
- Increased provision of freight service in support of industries that can benefit from rail
- Expand broadband communication networks for attracting new entrepreneurs and businesses to the region
- Effectively promoting the region

## EDUCATION: THE GATEWAY TO ECONOMIC SUCCESS

The current labor pool has respectable middle skills training, but it is also an aging workforce. Attracting, and keeping, young professionals and skilled labor continues to be challenging. Open positions are difficult to fill due to higher wages in Richmond, Raleigh/Durham and Lynchburg. Unemployment is lower than it's been since 2008, and the overall labor supply has increased indicating an availability of workers that were previously not seeking employment but developing a skilled workforce is a continuing effort.

The public school system has many dedicated professionals, but there are significant concerns regarding graduation rates, achievement scores, emphasizing workforce education as equal to a four year degree, and improving the aging infrastructure (i.e., investment in new school facilities). There is a general perception within the business community of not having a strong public education system, and there are limited private school options in the region. This hinders both the recruitment and retention of significant business sectors. The continued



Workforce Training at the Southern Virginia Higher Education Center

and effective development of workforce training programs is clearly the most important priority in the region. This will take commitment by the public school system, private schools, and various other post-secondary education centers in the area. Workforce education in Southern Virginia has the same weight as a college degree

in terms of earning power and career availability. This fact needs to be more effectively promoted and disseminated throughout secondary school systems. Federal and state mandates for educational requirements provide an additional challenge for workforce development programs in secondary schools.

## INFRASTRUCTURE IMPROVEMENTS

Southern Virginia has an abundance of natural resources and raw land, as well as targeted sites with infrastructure that are available. The natural resources are so abundant they attract tourism and provide excellent recreational and cultural amenities for communities as exemplified by the Tobacco Heritage Trail and

John H. Kerr Reservoir (Buggs Island Lake). More water and sewer infrastructure is needed, along with natural gas and better rail access to the Port of Virginia. The transportation system also needs to be maintained to continue to be an effective conduit to markets and for labor.



VISION

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

CAPITAL:  
CRITICAL TO BUSINESS SUCCESS

Gap financing – or the last 10-25% of a project known as the “Valley of Death” – is critical to business success. This gap represents the last research and development dollars needed to fully fund a project. Micro lending and Federal programs, such as the Small Business Innovative Research (SBIR) program, are critical initiatives for company startups. The Tobacco Commission has been the primary capital infusion for the region, in recent years, and that funding has done much to reinvigorate the local economy and strengthen the area’s infrastructure.



FREIGHT SERVICE

A remaining infrastructure challenge is the increased provision of freight service in support of advanced manufacturing and other industries that can benefit from rail. Many of the largest manufacturers have direct access to the lines through spurs into their industrial parks. Rail

lines in the area are operated by Norfolk Southern and multiple short-rail providers connect the region to destinations; however, more direct connections to the Ports of Richmond and Virginia are needed.



ENTERPRISE ZONES

The Virginia Enterprise Zone (VEZ) program is a partnership between state and local government that encourages job creation

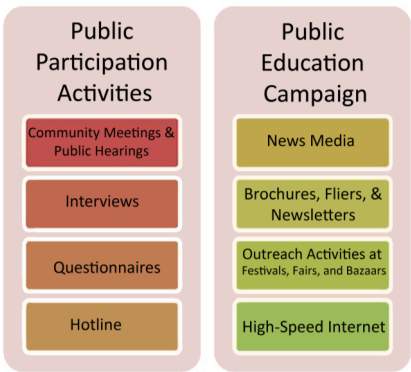
and private investment. VEZ accomplishes this by designating Enterprise Zones throughout the state and providing two grant-based incentives, the Job Creation

Grant (JCG) and the Real Property Investment Grant (RPIG), to qualified investors and job creators within those zones, while the locality provides local incentives.

| Zone # | Enterprise Zone Name   | Expiration               |
|--------|--|--------------------------|
| 32     | <u>Brunswick/Lawrenceville Regional Enterprise Zone</u>          | <u>December 31, 2015</u> |
| 38     | <u>Mecklenburg/South Hill/La Crosse Regional Enterprise Zone</u> | <u>December 31, 2015</u> |
| 56     | <u>Mecklenburg/Clarksville Regional Enterprise Zone</u>          | <u>December 31, 2020</u> |
| 15     | <u>Halifax/South Boston Enterprise Zone</u>                      | <u>December 31, 2027</u> |

# ECONOMIC RESILIENCY: ESSENTIAL FOR A HEALTHY ECONOMY

Economic resiliency is essential for a healthy, sustainable regional economy. Southern Virginia has experienced examples of major sector changes, manufacturing closures, and economic downturns. Environmental disasters can cause local and regional economic turmoil as well as disrupt significant infrastructure systems. Industry diversity is one component to having a resilient economy. Not putting “all your eggs in one basket”.



The regional Hazard Mitigation Plan is another component that can help strengthen the economy by addressing how to handle various envi-

ronmental disasters. The Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy and Hazard Mitigation Plan have not been discussed in a symbiotic manner previously. Education and implementation are essential to a plan’s success and viability. Understanding the importance of resiliency and investing in strategies to enhance and strengthen the region will define its success or failure in an event.

## COMMERCE, INDUSTRIAL, AND TECHNOLOGY PARKS

Planned industrial zones and commerce parks contain concentrated areas of land to accommodate manufacturing and business services. The economic development offices in each county and the Virginia Economic Development Partnership maintain a database of available property and land use characteristics to be used in the site

selection process. A properly developed industrial park allows various industries to produce goods in a flexible environment, which is very important to the manufacturing community in terms of efficient production. The effectiveness of an industrial or business park is dependent on infrastructure and land space.



## REGIONAL CONDITIONS

The Southside Planning District in Southern Virginia is located along the North Carolina border and encompasses more than 2,000 square miles and three counties—Brunswick, Halifax and Mecklenburg. The counties are close to large regional markets and have an out-

standing transportation system, which includes an Interstate,



U.S. highways, rail access, and one regional airport. The region has an abundance of resources including educational facilities, industrial and residential sites, medical services, outdoor recreational facilities and seven lakes. These resources enhance the area’s competitive advantage as an attractor of people and business.

*Collaboration is the new competition and the key to innovation and success.*



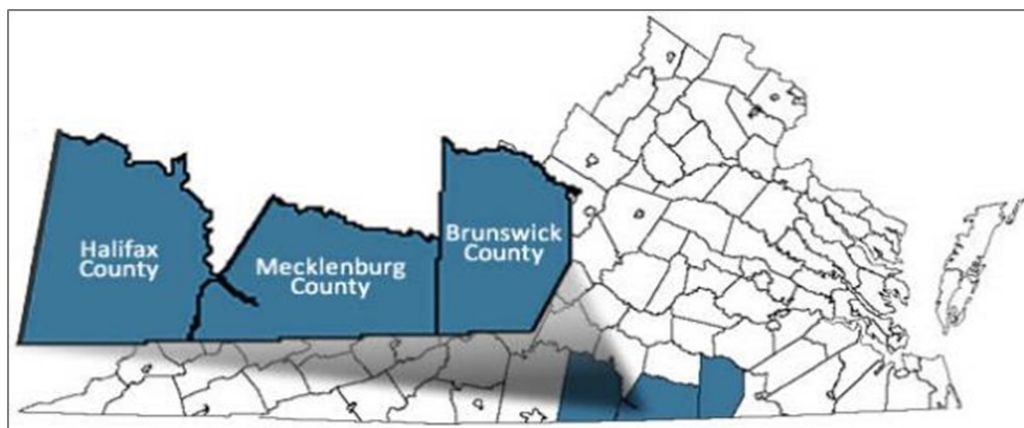
### Southside Planning District Commission

200 S. Mecklenburg Avenue  
South Hill, Virginia 23970  
[www.southsidepdc.org](http://www.southsidepdc.org)

(434) 447-7101



The Southside Planning District Commission (SPDC) was chartered on September 15, 1969, and it became the seventh organized Planning District of the Commonwealth. The District is comprised of three counties and twelve towns and is a designated Economic Development District (EDD) by the U.S. Department of Commerce, Economic Development Administration. For over forty-five years, the SPDC has provided assistance to local governments and their citizens in regard to economic development, land use planning, transportation, hazard mitigation, water and wastewater, water quality planning, community development and housing.



### Implementation Focus Areas:

#### Recruitment & Retention



Training



Investing



## REGIONAL STRATEGIC PLAN GOALS

### ♦ Land

Build on and improve the fixed assets of the region – water, sewer, natural gas, broadband, transportation, downtowns, industrial sites, and natural assets - to attract and support business and industry growth and provide for a high quality of life throughout the region.

### ♦ People

Invest in and develop the human capital of the region – the youth, the workforce, and the disenfranchised - to effectively provide the education and training needed for a workforce ready for a wide variety of careers such as advanced manufacturing, healthcare, modern agriculture, and entrepreneurship.

### ♦ Capital

Pursue a wide range of financing opportunities to improve public school infrastructure, utilities, transportation, industrial parks, brownfields, recreational amenities, and capital for start-up companies.