

*Live, Work & Thrive
in Southside*

**Southside Economic
Resiliency Plan**



Acknowledgements

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Cover Photo

Courtesy of Mecklenburg County Tourism



About the SPDC

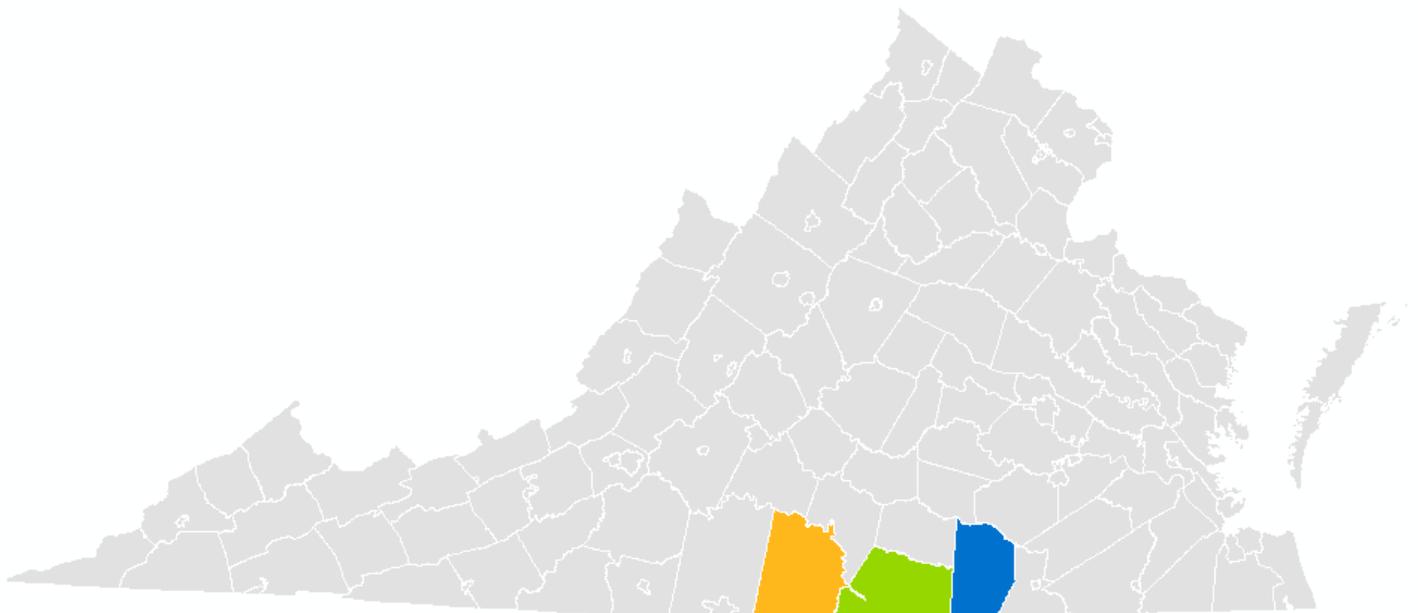
The Southside Planning District Commission (SPDC) serves the counties of Brunswick, Halifax, and Mecklenburg, and the 12 incorporated towns within them.

Mission

To promote orderly and efficient development of the physical, social, and economic elements of the region by assisting local governments in developing policies, programs, and projects which serve their individual needs and collective interests.

Services

The SPDC provides assistance to local governments and residents in the areas of community development, economic development, emergency planning, GIS and mapping, and transportation. With each area services provided can include: planning and technical assistance, grant writing and administration, identifying funding resources/opportunities, research and data collection, and GIS mapping.



Southside Planning District – By the Numbers



Total Population

80,190



Square Miles

2,078



Labor Force

33,806



Median Household Income

\$46,654



Poverty Rate

17.0%



Regional GDP

\$2,705,942,000



Table of Contents

Vision	1
Introduction	1
Resiliency Strategies	5
Planning Process	20
Resiliency Indicators.....	21
References	24

Vision

The Southside Planning District will have a resilient, diverse economic base, supported by a superior quality of life that can withstand or quickly recover from shocks while aggressively targeting, and implementing actions against, elements of economic stagnation.

Introduction

There are any number of disruptions or disasters that can negatively affect our economies and lives. These can range from severe weather events to the closure of a large employer. While we cannot prevent these types of events from occurring, we can work to address the severity and duration of these disruptions by planning for and implementing measures that increase our resilience.

“If you fail to plan, you are planning to fail.”

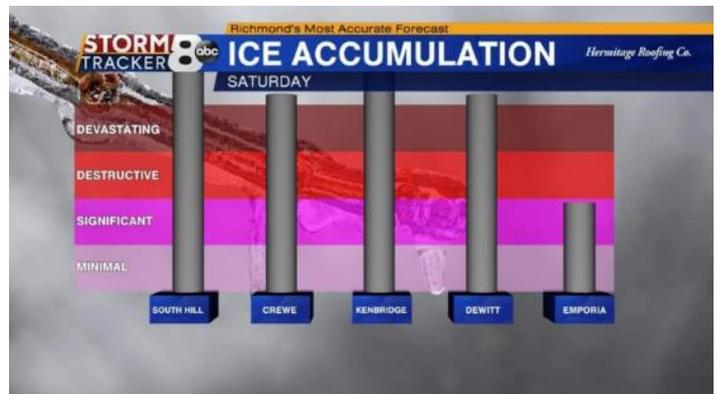
Benjamin Franklin

Like many other regions, the Southside Planning District has experienced the closing of numerous large businesses over the years resulting in negative consequences on the regional economy. Some of the larger closures include: Peebles corporate headquarters, Burlington, Russell Stover, and two state prisons.

Weather events have also caused disruptions over the years. Flooding has damaged numerous businesses, a recent ice storm resulted in extended power outages for many across the region, and severe storm events have inflicted significant damage to property and crops.



Flooding at 501/58 intersection in South Boston
Joe Chandler, Gazette-Virginian



TV graphic - Ice Accumulation beyond “Devastating” for South Hill

COVID-19 Pandemic

One of the most prominent examples of a recent major disruption is the COVID-19 pandemic. As of November 3, 2022, there have been over 631,000,000 million cases since the outbreak and more than 6.59 million deaths have been

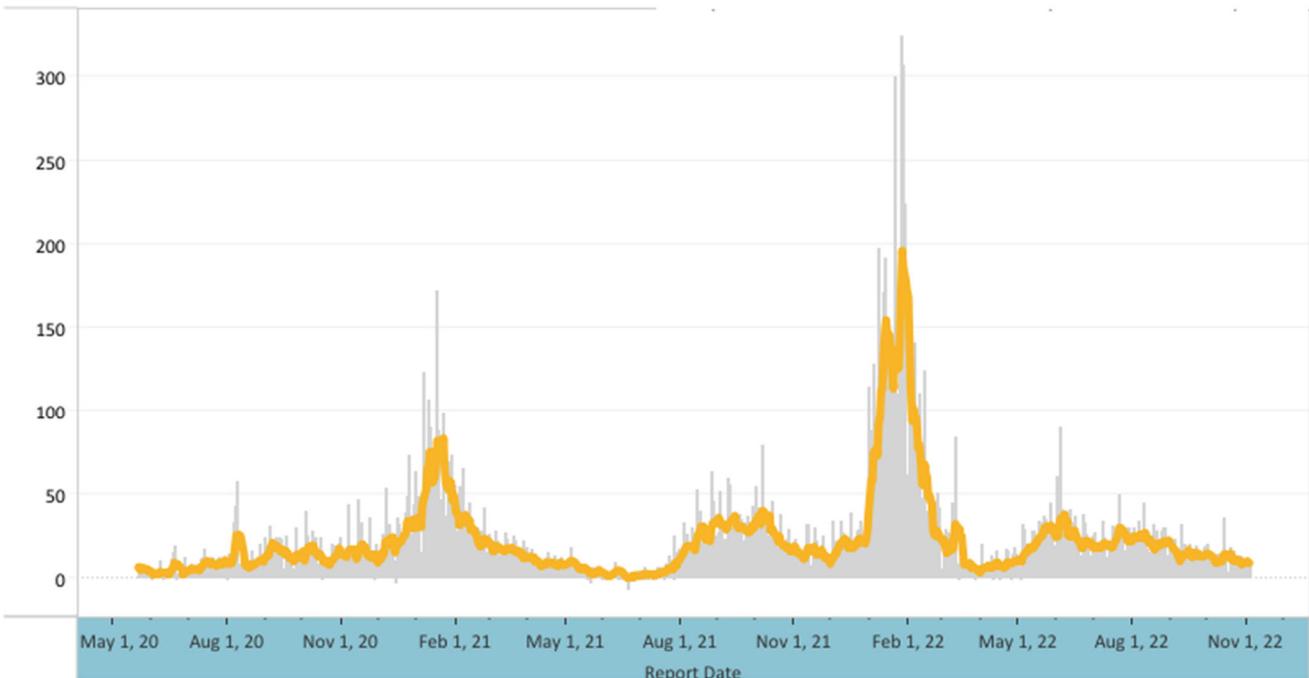
reported worldwide. During the same time frame the Southside Planning District has experienced 20,020 reported cases and 369 COVID-19 related deaths.

Number of Cases by Report Date for Southside District for All time

Number of cases by the date reported to VDH

■ New Cases

■ New Cases 7 Day Average



Source: VDH

To help combat the spread of COVID-19 numerous safety restrictions were implemented. These included, but were not limited to: social distancing, wearing a mask and other personal protective equipment (PPE), the installation of plexiglass dividers in places of business, an increased emphasis on handwashing, and the use of hand sanitizer.

There were also many new challenges that the pandemic created. Students, teachers, and parents had to adapt to a shift from in-person educational instruction to a virtual learning environment. Restaurants compensated for a lack of dining-in by offering curbside pickup to customers. Businesses struggled with staffing, a lack of foot-traffic, and supply-chain issues. Staffing issues were also a major concern for emergency services and utility providers. Government buildings placed restrictions on public access. Teleworking and video conferencing replaced the office and in-person meetings. Our new normal was constant change.



Resilience

The North American Development Organization (NADO) defines resilience as “the ability of a region or community to anticipate, withstand, and bounce back from any type of shock, disruption, or stressor.” Ideally, the region or community would bounce back into a better position than it started, as the previous makeup of the economic state may have been part of the reason for the failure. Those areas that are unable to recover from a shock after a moderate period of time are viewed as non-resilient or stagnant.

“Resilience is the ability of a region or community to anticipate, withstand, and bounce back from any type of shock, disruption, or stressor.”

North American Development Organization

Shocks & Stressors

Shocks and other disruptions can have an immediate impact to the regional economy. They may result from the closure or relocation of a major employer, natural disasters, man-made disasters, recessions, pandemics, or abrupt declines in key industries. Southside has seen numerous large employers close or relocate over the years; has recently dealt with numerous high winds events and a devastating ice storm; experienced a decline in the region’s traditional agriculture products and manufacturing; and like all other regions, experienced the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.



A regional economy can also experience prolonged periods of economic stagnation. This occurs when an economy is either in a state of decline, stagnation, or is experiencing growth at a very slow rate. While the inability to fully recover from a shock can place stress on a regional economy and ultimately lead to economic stagnation, economic stress can also result from a buildup of numerous other factors that hold back or limit a regions ability to develop, attract or retain businesses and talent.



Examples

Fire	Civil Unrest/Riots	Educational Attainment	Inequity
Terrorism	Health Emergency	Lack of Housing	Crime/violence
Tornado	Storms/Flooding	Lack of Transportation	Poor Health
Extreme Heat	Extreme Cold	Limited Access to Parks	Drought
Infrastructure Failure	Recession	Aging Infrastructure	Outdated Code
Employment Closure		Lack of Jobs	Labor Force
		Vacant Downtown	Broadband

No region or community is immune from economic shocks, disruptions, or stressors. There are also no short-cuts or magic bullets to address economic shocks or to revitalize a stagnating economy. Results will most likely come from the implantation of a series of strategies and seeing them through over the long-term. Resiliency planning can be integrated into local and regional documents, plans, programs, and investments. The more it becomes integrated into regular functions and decision-making processes, the more resilient the region can become. This will be especially true for decisions in planning, zoning, economic development, maintenance, and infrastructure investments.

“The world we have created today as a result of our thinking thus far has problems which cannot be solved by thinking the way we thought when we created them.”

Albert Einstein

Immediately following a shock there is actually very little that can be done. Marketing and promotional campaigns can get underway and the use of a localities’ rainy-day fund may need to occur to ensure public services remain operational. Infrastructure projects are often touted as an answer, and they can be, when utilized responsibly. Infrastructure projects should not be started just for the sake of building something, the project must have lasting value and be shovel-ready. Any new infrastructure that is built will require on-going maintenance and will eventually need to be replaced. Those future costs must be considered and accounted for before starting any new infrastructure project.

In the mid- to long-term, localities responding to shocks or addressing stagnation issues have more options available to them. They include, but are not limited to: Investing in human capital (education and workforce training), technical assistance programs, quality non-shovel ready infrastructure projects, amenity improvements, ensuring planning and zoning align with desired outcomes, and utilization of tax incentives (particularly at the state level).

Economic resiliency is also dependent upon a strong, diversified economy. The saying “don’t put all your eggs in one basket” is quite apt in this case. Regional economies that are heavily reliant upon one industry greatly reduce their overall resiliency. In that scenario one industry can crater the regional economy. Having a diversified economy, like a diversified investment portfolio, helps spread out the risk and limit negative impacts. Economic development efforts must continually be reassessed and have a coordinated strategy to stay current with the changing economic climate.

Purpose

This plan will provide guidance on increasing resiliency through a series of strategies to be implemented at the local and/or regional level. By increasing our collective resiliency, the Southside Planning District will be better positioned against future shocks and at addressing on-going stressors.

Why a Regional Approach?

- Localities within the District share many of the same risks, hazards, and elements of potential stagnation
- Disasters and disruptions do not respect jurisdictional lines
- Economies by nature are regional
- Communities tend to be interdependent
- We can accomplish more by working together

Resiliency Strategies

GOAL #1 - INVEST IN OURSELVES

Develop, retain, and attract a motivated labor force who possess the necessary skills to compete and adapt in today's constantly changing economic environment.

Ensure the region is well positioned for future health crises while improving the overall health and safety of our residents.

Have forward thinking leadership who embrace greater collaboration, new ideas, and meaningful policies that effect positive change in our communities.

Constantly improve our infrastructure networks and public services to ensure our residents and businesses receive the dependable, high-quality, and fiscally sustainable services they deserve.

Education Actions:

Investing in education is one of the best ways to increase a region's resiliency. Our future labor force needs to bring the necessary set of skills for their chosen area of employment and possess the ability to generate new and innovative ideas. It must be noted that this will be a long-term investment, as the future labor force will need to work their way through the education system.

1. STUDENTS NEED TO BE APPROPRIATELY EDUCATED BASED ON THEIR DESIRED CAREER PATH.

Based on information reviewed for this plan, investing in education is quite possibly the best method to increasing a region's resilience. With that in mind, our region will encourage students to obtain education beyond the high school level, be it through community college programs or pursuing degrees at 4-year colleges and universities.

- Educational attainment will be stressed to students to ensure a well-educated, skilled, and adaptive workforce is available in the future.
- Emphasis will be placed on available credential programs to create a talent pipeline for in-demand jobs offering good wages locally without students incurring large amounts of debt.
- Schools will pursue creative means to secure the teaching services for in-demand courses and programs our students need.

2. SCHOOL SYSTEMS SHOULD REMAIN ADAPTIVE.

- School systems should remain well positioned to educate students in-person, or remotely, as future conditions or events may warrant.

3. ESTABLISH LAB SCHOOLS THROUGHOUT THE REGION.

Southside Virginia Community College, Southern Virginia Higher Education Center, and Mecklenburg County Public Schools have all expressed interest in establishing lab school programs in our region. Lab schools provide increased access to hands-on learning to K-12 students in the areas of science and innovation.

4. SCHOOL FACILITIES NEED TO BE WELL-MAINTAINED AND SAFE.

Our students deserve to be educated in a safe, well-maintained learning environment. Schools that are unsafe or show a lack of general upkeep will also reflect poorly when attempting to attract or retain talent and future business investment.

- Elected officials shall ensure that sufficient funds are available for on-going maintenance, any required safety features, and for future capital expenditures for all our schools.

Workforce Development Actions:

A shorter-term solution to addressing resilience through educational means are workforce training programs. These programs do not require the same level of investment as K-12 and can be completed in a relatively short period of time, although resiliency benefits are slightly less when compared to investing in the overall education system.

5. EXPAND UPON EXISTING TALENT PIPELINES AND CREATE NEW ONES WHEN APPROPRIATE.

Local talent pipelines need to be created and/or expanded to meet existing and anticipated talent gaps. The FastForward Credential Program offered through community colleges state-wide, and specifically SVCC locally, helps address this issue by offering a variety of workforce training programs with courses lasting 6-12 weeks. Local programs include: Truck Driving, Diesel Technician, Nurse Aide, Power Line Worker, Phlebotomy, Welding, HVAC, Solar, Message Therapy, and Remote Pilot Airman. Another program of note is the Center for Information Technology Excellence (CITE) offered through the Lake Country Advanced Knowledge Center in South Hill. This program helps prepare students for IT careers, including the new jobs being created by the construction of numerous Microsoft data centers throughout Mecklenburg County.

- Engagement between educational institutions and employers is needed to build upon existing efforts and to create new training opportunities.

6. BETTER PROMOTE AND MARKET WORKFORCE TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES.

- Ensure that workforce training programs and opportunities are promoted through a variety of outreach efforts to increase the chances of connecting with different segments of the population.

Resiliency in Action!

gener8tor Skills Accelerator South Virginia

Offered through the SOVA Innovation Hub in South Boston, the gener8tor Skills Accelerator program addresses critical customer service and sales skills. It's a free 5-week training program that is virtual, self-paced, and provides one-on-one support. An interview component is also part of the curriculum. The gener8tor Skills Accelerator South Virginia program is made possible through a partnership including gener8tor Skills, Microsoft, and the SOVA Innovation Hub.



Health and Wellness Actions:

Healthy populations are more resilient populations. While there are a lot of exercise and outdoor recreation opportunities throughout the region, many require the use of a vehicle to access them due to how far away they are from residential areas. This obviously presents barriers to disadvantaged populations and those not old enough to drive. This isolation from recreation, coupled with poor diets, can contribute to any number of harmful health conditions.

In addition to regular health issues, the recent COVID-19 pandemic changed everything, including how we learned, worked, shopped, and gathered. However, we were resilient in that we still managed to adapt to what felt like a constantly changing environment. The lessons learned from 2020 will be especially important in dealing with future health crises or other similar disruptions.

7. ENSURE COUNTY EMERGENCY OPERATIONS PLANS ARE REVIEWED AND UPDATED ON A REGULAR BASIS.

Emergency Operation Plans (EOPs) need to be reviewed and updated on a regular basis to ensure an effective response to any emergency event.

- EOPs for each County will be reviewed in full and updated every 4 years.
- Updated departmental/agency contact information, as well as requested amendments, will be addressed on an annual basis.
- Emergency Service Coordinators will conduct EOP training and exercises as warranted.

8. PURSUE GRANT FUNDING FOR NEEDED SAFETY EQUIPMENT AND TRAINING FOR EMERGENCY SERVICES.

Emergency personnel need to have appropriate safety equipment to work with and have access to emergency training programs. Facilities utilized as emergency shelters need to be properly outfitted to accommodate residents during times of need.

- Grant funding will be pursued to address the needs of emergency service personnel and facilities.

9. COMPLETE ACTIONS IDENTIFIED IN THE REGIONAL HAZARD MITIGATION PLAN.

Updated in 2020, the Regional Hazard Mitigation Plan identifies actions that each locality can take to reduce or eliminate long-term risk to human life and property from various natural hazards. Localities provide status reports during annual meetings concerning successes or struggles as it relates to implementation of their identified hazard mitigation actions.

- Continue to encourage and support localities and the service authorities to complete actions identified in the Regional Hazard Mitigation Plan.

Resiliency in Action!

Riverdale Flood Mitigation Project

The Riverdale area of South Boston has experienced an average of 3 flood events per year since 1989, resulting in not only US 501 being closed numerous times, but the commercial properties along this corridor also sustaining flood damage. Due to the repetitive nature of the flooding events the Town of South Boston pursued and has been awarded grant funds to acquire the 14 commercial properties affected, demolish all improvements on the properties, and return the land to protected open space, thus limiting the negative impact of future flood events. Negotiations are currently underway with property owners to purchase the properties subject to flooding.



10. INCREASE ACCESS TO EXERCISE AND RECREATIONAL FACILITIES.

According to the County Health Rankings produced by the University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute, large segments of our regional population are lacking access to exercise opportunities, identify as being physically inactive, and have been deemed to be obese.

- Towns need to ensure that all residents are within easy walking distance (10-minute walk or less) to a park, trail, or other recreation facility. The routes to these facilities must also be safe.
- Counties that currently do not have a Parks and Recreation Department need to consider adding one and implementing a variety of programs for residents of all ages.

Resiliency in Action!

New Trails Open to the Public



With many businesses closing or greatly restricting access during the pandemic, people looked to outdoor recreation as a way to get out of the house and go do something. As timing would have it, the Tobacco Heritage Trail was able to open two new sections of multi-use trail during the pandemic. The South Boston area saw 1.3 miles of new trail opened in August of 2020. The trail begins at Cotton Mill Park and thanks to the new addition stretches nearly 4 miles to the west. The Town of Alberta opened its first trail segment to the public in the fall of 2021. This 0.6 mile trail connects Alberta School Park with the downtown area.

11. OUR COMMUNITIES NEED TO BECOME MORE WALKABLE AND BICYCLE FRIENDLY.

Walking is not only an excellent form of exercise, it represents our oldest and most basic form of transportation. Pedestrian infrastructure and safety needs must be prioritized to create more walkable communities. Riding a bicycle is another form of healthy transportation, unfortunately there are few actual bicycle accommodations throughout the region beyond off-road trails.

- Localities need to review and update their zoning and subdivision ordinances to require new development, and redevelopment, to include pedestrian facilities.
- Existing pedestrian facilities must be safe, well maintained, accommodating, and create a well-connected network.
- Identified bicycle routes on roadways of sufficient lane width should be reworked to accommodate bike lanes whenever possible. Such changes could easily be accomplished during scheduled repaving projects.
- Provide and/or encourage the placement of bike racks at public buildings, public parking lots, restaurants, retail shops, and other places of interest.

“Observing that few people bike in a place without a good bike network is like saying that you don’t need a bridge because nobody is swimming the river.”

Jeff Speck, Walkable City Rules

12. TOUT THE BENEFITS OF A HEALTHY DIET AND EXERCISE.

Efforts need to continue which encourage residents to make better choices when it comes to their diets and exercise. Even though past campaigns may not have been as successful as everyone would like, we need to collectively keep pushing the message.

- Health care providers and community stakeholders should coordinate to help expand outreach efforts on health messaging.

- Involvement by localities could include joining and/or utilizing resources from the Healthy Eating Active Living (HEAL) Cities & Towns Campaign, sharing materials from local health providers, or other similar initiatives.

13. ENCOURAGE HEALTH FACILITIES TO CREATE MEDICAL SUPPLY STOCKPILES.

One of the many challenges during the pandemic was the availability of in-demand medical supplies. To help protect against future supply-chain issues, or to at least buy additional time to secure needed supplies through alternative means, creating medical supply stockpiles is encouraged.

Resiliency in Action!

Virginia Quilting



Located in La Crosse, Virginia Quilting was able to successfully work with VCU Health Community Memorial Hospital during the COVID-19 Pandemic to make much needed masks for the hospital.

Resiliency in Action!

SPDC COVID-19 Information Hub

The SPDC created a [COVID-19 Information Hub](#) for use by the public during the pandemic. The hub includes data at the regional and county level on total cases, new cases within the last 14 days, deaths, percentage of population vaccinated, unemployment rates, new unemployment claims, and local sales tax revenue. Additionally, the hub provided an overview of COVID-19 symptoms, how to protect yourself and others, testing site locations, and other similar resources.



Leadership Actions:

Our region must have leaders who are forward thinking and work to effect positive change within all our communities. This can only be achieved by working together and embracing new ideas and opportunities.

14. ENGAGE WITH AND DEVELOP OUR NEXT GENERATION OF LEADERS.

Having programs that actively engage with and develop our next generation of local leaders is critical. Our region needs to not only keep our best and brightest, but we need to ensure that they are provided with the skills necessary to take on leadership roles within our communities. The Halifax County Chamber of Commerce has their HYPE (Halifax Young Professionals & Entrepreneurs) program that focuses on community service, networking, and mentorship opportunities. A similar organization in the eastern portion of the Southside Planning District is the Lake Country Young Professionals.

- Continue to support and market the opportunities available to young professionals.

15. MOVE AWAY FROM THE “WE’VE ALWAYS DONE IT THAT WAY” MENTALITY.

Have forward thinking leadership across the region that are open to new and creative ideas and that embrace change. The “we’ve always done it that way” mentality may be a contributing factor for existing economic resiliency issues.

Resiliency in Action!

Leadership Halifax County



Since 1989, the Halifax County Chamber of Commerce has graduated over 300 individuals from their Leadership Halifax County program. Participants develop their leadership skills through a series of training activities, tours, and conversations with local recognized leaders. These newfound skills can then be applied by the participants at their place of employment and on various community boards, commissions, or councils if they choose to serve in that capacity.

Infrastructure and Public Services

It is of great importance that the region has dependable, high-quality infrastructure and public services for our residents and businesses. High marks in these areas allow us to better position ourselves to compete in today's economic market. We also need to ensure that our infrastructure and public services remain functional during shocks and other events.

16. BUILD OUT BROADBAND

Realtors have remarked that broadband availability is the new number one question that they are now asked when meeting with clients. It has clearly shifted from an amenity to a necessity.

- Ensure broadband is built out to achieve universal coverage throughout the District.

Resiliency in Action!

Regional Universal Fiber Broadband Project

In 2021 the Southside Planning District Commission coordinated with the counties of Brunswick, Charlotte, Halifax, and Mecklenburg and EMPOWER Broadband on a VATI grant application through DHCD for universal fiber broadband coverage for the region. The project was awarded \$69,431,635 that was leveraged with \$84,677,555 in matching funds for a total project cost of \$154,109,190. Construction started in 2022, with 1,842 miles of new fiber to be installed with a reach of service 16,971 units, including businesses, community facilities, and homes.



17. DEVELOP AND ADOPT CONTINUITY OF OPERATIONS PLANS

The SPDC is currently working with the counties of Brunswick, Halifax, and Mecklenburg to draft Continuity of Operation Plans (COOP). These plans establish a hierarchy of leadership and prioritize which public services must be maintained or restored as soon as possible in the event of any shock or disruption through a tiered system.

- Localities are encouraged to develop and adopt a COOP.

18. INSTALL BACKUP POWER SOURCES AT ALL CRITICAL FACILITIES

All critical facilities within our District need to remain operational. This includes everything from hospitals, to emergency services facilities, to water/sewer infrastructure.

- Ensure critical facilities have backup power systems in place or are actively pursuing funds for them.

Resiliency Strategies

GOAL #2 - CREATE COMMUNITIES OF CHOICE

Tirelessly work to improve the region's quality of life through incremental change that results in the area becoming known as a premier place to live, work, and play.

Main Street and Downtown Actions:

People are attracted to vibrant, bustling, and engaging downtowns and main streets. The variety of shopping, dining, art, culture, housing, and unique places to gather or just experience, help create a sense of place that people like to seek out, be they tourists or residents. Great main streets and downtowns don't just happen, they must be properly planned for.

19. ACTIVATE THE PUBLIC REALM.

The public realm includes all publicly-owned sections of the built environment, including: streets, sidewalks, parks, town squares, open spaces, etc. These spaces should be designed in a manner that makes them accessible by everyone, allow for appropriate levels of activities and events, and be aesthetically pleasing so as to be places where people actively want to gather or frequent.

- Ensure the public realm is accessible to all, safe for pedestrian activity, well landscaped, contains appropriate street trees, and includes appropriate wayfinding signage.
- Public art should be actively pursued, examples could include working with local artists on a mural program and working with transportation officials to have traffic signal boxes wrapped with pre-approved art. The [traffic signal box art program utilized in Athens, OH](#) is a good starting point.
- Pursue grants funds to further enhance downtown revitalization efforts.
- Offer façade enhancement grants to Main Street and Downtown property owners, include signage that meets certain aesthetic criteria.
- Work with local historians or other interested parties to start guided downtown walking tours that highlight historic buildings, architectural features, and former residents, businesses, and stories of note.
- Construct pocket parks, or even parklets, to help create unique and interesting spaces for people to gather and enjoy.

20. PRIORITIZE PEOPLE OVER VEHICLES.

Main streets and downtowns need to prioritize people over vehicles if they want an active and vibrant atmosphere. Downtowns do not need car washes, vehicle dealerships, gas stations, auto service and repair shops, drive-thru options, or similar automobile-intensive uses. These land uses are more appropriate in other locations of the community. Removing these land uses from the zoning ordinance for downtown areas would still allow existing uses to continue operating as normal as legal non-conforming, thus grandfathering them in.

- Enhance existing crosswalks to increase visibility and safety for pedestrians.
- Remove automobile-oriented land uses and drive-thru options from the zoning ordinance for downtown areas.

21. ENSURE ZONING REGULATIONS ARE FORMING THE DOWNTOWN THE COMMUNITY WANTS.

Localities should review their zoning and subdivision regulations to ensure that the visions the community has created through the Comprehensive Plan process is achievable.

- Establish a maximum front setback line so that downtown buildings form a uniform look and feel.
- Require any off-street parking be provided behind buildings. Existing parking areas not behind buildings should be well landscaped along the perimeter to enhance aesthetics.
- Institute parking waivers, shared parking agreements, reducing existing parking requirements, or eliminating parking requirements.
- Ensure that an appropriate mix of commercial and residential uses are available.
- Encourage small-scale manufacturing in downtown areas that not only posse export potential, but that are also of local interest. Examples include: artisan studios, 3D printing, artisan food products, handcrafted merchandise, craft beer brewing, coffee roasters, etc.

22. IMPLEMENT EXISTING DOWNTOWN INITIATIVES, THEN CREATE MORE.

In many cases, recommendations and strategies have previously been identified for improvements to the main street and/or downtown areas.

- Implement existing recommendations and strategies from Comprehensive Plans, the 2020-2025 Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS), the Regional Downtown Development Strategy for Southside Virginia from 2018, the Halifax County Strategic Plan, and any other similar planning documents.
- Consider joining the Main Street program to learn additional ways to activate the main street and downtown areas.

23. INSTALL ELECTRIC VEHICLE CHARGING STATIONS IN DOWNTOWN PARKING AREAS.

Downtowns are walkable, contain a variety of local shops and restaurants, are full of historic and interesting architecture, and provide those unique experiences travelers are looking for while their vehicles are charging. This is an opportunity to pull tourists back to the downtown areas and away from the sprawling, unwalkable corridors, and easily forgettable interstate corridors.

- Work with electric providers and EV charging companies to properly site and install EV charging stations in downtown parking areas.

24. INVEST IN MORE CO-WORKING SPACES.

The response to the co-working space available in the SOVA Innovation Hub in South Boston has been incredible. Having similar co-working spaces throughout the region may prove beneficial for those looking for a turn-key experience to support their work requirements.

- Consider planning for and creating additional co-working spaces throughout the region.

Housing Actions:

Housing is an issue shared throughout the region. It is important to break away from the traditional suburban zoning regulations that are still prevalent in many zoning and subdivision ordinances today. These largely segregate housing types from each other and place unnecessary and arbitrary barriers in the way of productive, walkable, and much needed affordable housing developments. Examples of unproductive ordinances include zoning districts in which detached single-family homes are the only residential use permitted and those that relegate townhouses to a townhouse specific district only.

25. IMPLEMENT RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE SPDC REGIONAL HOUSING MARKET ANALYSIS.

The SPDC has partnered with the Virginia Center for Housing Research at Virginia Tech and Housing Forward Virginia to collect and analyze data, identify needs and opportunities, and develop strategies for local and regional implementation. While planning efforts for this initiative are still underway, it is of paramount importance that recommendations from the plan are implemented at the appropriate levels of government throughout the region.

- Upon its completion, begin implementing recommendations and strategies identified in the SPDC Regional Housing Market Analysis.

26. INCREASE ACCESS TO MORE HOUSING OPTIONS IN MORE ZONING DISTRICTS.

A diversity of housing options is needed by-right in more zoning districts. Increasing access to accessory dwelling units, duplexes, triplexes, townhouses, courtyard homes, condos, etc. can help us find the “missing middle” housing in our region. These housing types can provide a more acceptable “discreet density” throughout our communities.

- Each residential zoning district should be amended to allow for the next highest residential use by-right. For example, if a district only permits detached single-family dwellings amend it to also allow duplexes.
- Requiring special use permits that trigger public hearings is where needed housing developments go to die. Ensure residential uses are permitted by-right in appropriate zoning districts and keep special use permits for housing to a minimum.
- Create an Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU) ordinance. These units are flexible in nature, such as housing an elderly family member or even being rented out.

Recreation Actions:

While many recreational opportunities abound in our region, we need to ensure that we are continually reviewing what we have versus what our residents or future residents may be interested in. Many recreation programs and opportunities are not only beneficial from a physical standpoint to help improve our collective health, but many can also provide that social aspect that people are looking for as well.

27. “START A KICKBALL LEAGUE”.

If the region is serious about keeping young folks in the area or becoming a more attractive place to recruit talent to, then kickball leagues and other similar activities need to be considered by local governments and/or their Parks and Recreation Departments. These are the fun and socially interactive programs people are looking for and want to participate in.

- Start new recreation opportunities that appeal to all age groups, but specifically to the 25-44 age group.
- Establish or further empower Parks and Recreation Departments to organize public events, sports leagues, and other community activities.

28. CAPITALIZE ON OUTDOOR RECREATION.

Our region is home to an abundance of outdoor activities, ranging from trails, to water features, to ball fields. As these are considered strengths, we need to ensure we are capitalizing on their economic potential for our region.

- Increase investments in tourism departments to allow for greater advertising efforts in known markets that generate positive ROI.

- Ensure zoning regulations allow for businesses that capitalize on outdoor activities and reduce their barriers to entry. Examples include: outfitters, bike shops, camping, etc.

29. CONNECT THE TOBACCO HERITAGE TRAIL.

The Tobacco Heritage Trail is a mostly off-road multi-use trail that runs the full length of the Southside Planning District and through two counties outside our District. Numerous sections of the trail have been developed over the years but they are mostly short segments that lack connectivity.

- Continue expanding the Tobacco Heritage Trail to increase connectivity between towns and other trail networks.

Resiliency in Action!

The Tobacco Heritage Trail is a “Priority Trail”



During 2022 the Commonwealth Transportation Board identified five trail networks across the state as “Priority Trails.” The Tobacco Heritage Trail was selected as one of the five, meaning that it will receive up to \$1 million work of pre-scoping services for future trail projects. The results of the pre-scoping services will be provided to the CTB for consideration of further allocations for right-of-way acquisition and/or construction. At the very least, these new documents will prove helpful when pursuing future grant funding for trail expansion.

Community and Economic Development Actions:

As a region, we need to put our best foot forward when it comes to how our communities look, the amenities and experiences we provide, and the stories that we share with the world. After all, if we are unwilling to make needed investments in our region, why should anyone else?

30. ACTIVELY ADDRESS DERELICT PROPERTIES.

Like other regions, ours is home to numerous properties and structures that have become derelict. This not only includes abandoned buildings but also properties that have become overgrown with vegetation or have become a collection point for inoperable vehicles and other junk.

- Adopt ordinances and establish programs to actively address derelict properties and structures.

Resiliency in Action!

Chase City Takes Steps to Address Derelict Properties

The Town of Chase City recently took steps to address derelict properties within their community. In the Town’s 2021-22 budget \$20,000 has been allocated for the demolition of dilapidated and abandoned buildings. They have further amended their code to require that all land be kept free of junk, trash, debris, or more than one inoperative vehicle. Failure to do so can lead to its removal, after proper notification, with the property owner being billed for the work.

31. DO THE BIGGEST LITTLE THING TO IMPROVE THE COMMUNITY, THEN DO IT AGAIN THE NEXT DAY.

If grass and weeds are tall, mow them. If the sidewalk is cracked, fix it. If there is trash on the sidewalk or road, pick it up. If signs are placed illegally along a roadway, on telephone poles, or in medians, remove them. If the

crosswalk is faded, repaint it. Addressing items such as these do not need to be debated or require special approval, they are things that should be addressed through daily operations.

- Address maintenance and/or code issues as they are identified and set the tone for the rest of the community by keeping publicly maintained areas in pristine condition.

32. UTILIZE EXISTING COMMUNITY PROGRAMS AND CREATE NEW ONES TO FILL ANY GAPS.

There are numerous community focused programs throughout the region (ChangeX, Dan River Region Community Foundation, Better Block, façade enhancement grants, etc.) that should be utilized to effort positive change in our region. When gaps are identified in programming efforts, create new ones.

- Maximize existing community programs for the benefit of the community, create new ones to address any gaps (i.e. start or expand a community foundation to benefit the counties of Brunswick and Mecklenburg).

33. SOLVE THE DAY CARE ISSUE.

The region is in need of affordable day care options. This will be key in helping attract and/or retain talent in the 25-44 age group.

- Partnerships and collaborations between localities, non-profit organizations, and businesses are needed to help provide more affordable day care opportunities throughout the region.

34. CONTINUE TO PROMOTE AND EXPAND OPPORTUNITIES FOR ARTS AND CULTURAL EXPERIENCES.

The region is full of talented artisans and rich in culture, additional opportunities to share these talents and experiences with the public is needed.

- Find additional opportunities for arts and cultural experiences through existing facilities and programs while actively working to create new ones (i.e. Artisan Trail).

35. BECOME BETTER STORYTELLERS.

Our region has much to celebrate and be proud of, we need to ensure that these positive stories of success are being shared within our region and beyond.

- Share more positive stories of change and accomplishment.

Resiliency in Action!

Chambers in Action



To help support local businesses during the COVID-19 pandemic, the Chambers in Action program was created through collaboration between the Mecklenburg County Tourism Office, South Hill Chamber of Commerce, Chase City Chamber of Commerce, and the Clarksville Chamber of Commerce. The program utilized a special gift card that matched purchases dollar-for-dollar, making it a great deal for those purchasing a gift card, but more importantly it helped provide much needed revenue for the local businesses during their time of need. In total, over \$1 million went out to help local businesses in Mecklenburg County.

Resiliency Strategies

GOAL #3 – GROW SMARTER AND MORE SUSTAINABLE.

Reduce barriers faced by new businesses and developments through incremental change.

Prioritize and encourage development that utilizes our existing infrastructure networks over projects that require costly infrastructure extensions.

Have localities develop and utilize a cost benefit analysis model to learn which types of developments are the best investments for their taxpayers over the long-term.

Land Use Actions:

We need to move away from arbitrary and unproductive land uses and towards a more productive and sustainable model. For example, every locality has businesses or other facilities with large parking lots that are never full. Unfortunately, all those unused parking spaces exist simply because they are required by the zoning ordinance, not because the business or land use actually needs that many spaces. These extra spaces then add unnecessary upfront costs to the developer, create more stormwater that must be addressed, provide far less in tax revenue than literally any other use, become a long-term liability to the property owner through on-going maintenance costs, and they occupy valuable land that could be put to far more productive use.

36. EVERY HOUSING UNIT HAS THE POTENTIAL TO BE A BUSINESS.

Amend zoning ordinances to allow home based businesses to operate by-right anywhere a residential use is permitted. This is a great way to help new businesses get started with minimal upfront investment. The locality benefits directly through an increase in business license fees collected, the creation of new jobs, and the potential for those businesses to not only grow in the future, but to remain local, fill a storefront, and hire local people.

- Amend zoning ordinances to allow home-based businesses in all residential units by-right.

37. REDUCE OR ELIMINATE MINIMUM PARKING REQUIREMENTS.

30 parking spaces for a liquor store. 4 parking spaces for each car wash self-service wash bay plus 1 space per employee. Parking needs to be brought back down to a reasonable level to help stimulate economic investment. Developers and business owners are keenly aware of what level of parking is needed for their project to be successful; more so than the completely arbitrary parking standards found in typical zoning ordinances. Other options to consider include downtown parking waivers, shared parking agreements, or switching from parking minimums to parking maximums.

- Review and amend zoning ordinances to reduce, eliminate, or provide flexibility as it relates to minimum parking requirements.

38. DO THE MATH ON ALL DEVELOPMENT PROPOSALS TO DETERMINE FISCAL SUSTAINABILITY.

Localities should conduct a cost-benefit analysis on all development proposals. This would allow localities to better gauge not only anticipated revenues, but to also factor in new costs and obligations that the development is creating for the locality. This could include on-going maintenance (and eventual replacement) of roads, sidewalks, stormwater structures, and water/sewer infrastructure (pipes, fire hydrants, pump stations, etc.), as well as consideration of the services being extended or made available to the new development (police, trash collection, schools, etc.). An example to serve as a starting point is the [fiscal analysis model](#) used by the City of Fate, TX.

- Create and implement cost-benefit analysis on development proposals to determine if they will provide the locality with fiscal sustainability or if they will be a financial burden to taxpayers over the long-term.

Economic Development Actions:

As our region moves forward, we need to keep building upon the strong working relationships we have in place and ensure that economic development efforts are supporting community building efforts.

39. SUPPORT CLUSTERING OF BUSINESSES, ESPECIALLY THOSE UNIQUE TO OUR REGION.

An example of clustering unique to our region would be the auto racing related businesses at the Virginia Motorsports Technology Park and VIR. Policies that help with the grouping of interconnected businesses in geographic proximity to one another that have export potential can yield positive results.

- Support clustering policies for complementary and interconnected businesses.

40. INCENTIVIZE DEVELOPMENT IN AREAS WHERE INFRASTRUCTURE ALREADY EXISTS.

Infrastructure is expensive to build, maintain, and eventually replace. Efforts should be made to better utilize the infrastructure we have already built before building new infrastructure and expanding on the edges of our communities.

- Find ways to better utilize our existing infrastructure networks to accommodate development before adding new and costly roads and pipes at the edges of our communities.

41. MICROBUSINESSES CAN MAKE A BIG DIFFERENCE WHEN YOU ADD THEM UP.

With universal broadband being installed throughout the District, more residents than ever will have opportunities to pursue a microbusiness. Microbusinesses generally consist of less than 10 employees and maintain an active website. Research suggests that adding one microbusiness per 100 people adds \$485 to household income and reduces the unemployment rate by 0.05%. These are the businesses that not only showed resilience during the pandemic, but in many cases thrived.

- Support microbusinesses through increased access to broadband, skills training, and access to capital.

42. MAXIMIZE COLLABORATIONS AND PARTNERSHIPS.

We can accomplish more together, especially when faced with limited staff and funds. Taking advantage of regional collaborations and partnerships is key to effecting positive economic change in our District.

- Continue to support, participate in, and effect positive economic change through regional partnerships, including: GO Virginia, Southern Virginia Regional Alliance, Virginia's Growth Alliance, Virginia Economic Development Partnership, our local IDA's, Longwood Small Business Development Center, and the Lake Country Development Corporation.

43. ACTIVELY ENCOURAGE BUSINESSES TO UTILIZE TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

Ensure that those looking to start a business or those already in operation have access to technical assistance that meets their needs. This could range from developing a business plan, to enhancing digital and online skills, to the creation of a succession plan. These are opt-in services, meaning that we need to get the business interested in the services and the realized benefit will largely be based on how much effort the business puts into the various areas of assistance provided to them.

- Encourage businesses to take advantage of any and all technical assistance programs, especially those offered by the Small Business Development Center and the RISE Collaborative.

44. MAKE SURE THE USE OF LOCAL INCENTIVES MAKES SENSE.

The most important thing is getting the new business to locate within the region, not which locality within the region lands it. Any undercutting by one locality against another through local tax incentives only serves to hurt the regional economy at that point. It cannot be forgotten that local taxes are the cost of doing business for everyone. They pay for our infrastructure, law enforcement, schools, parks, and many other things that residents, businesses, and employees will all utilize. When infrastructure isn't properly maintained or programs are cut due to a lack of funding, our overall quality of life is lessened.

“Tax incentives offered by a local government will have an effect on regional business activity only if they result in attracting business activity to the region that would not otherwise have located there.”

Wolman, Harold, et al. *Coping with Adversity: Regional Economic Resilience and Public Policy*

- Ensure local incentives are only utilized when it makes sense and that they will not negatively impact a locality's ability to provide services or maintain infrastructure.

Infrastructure and Public Service Actions:

We need to be mindful that our localities are not going into “soft default”. Unlike traditional default, soft default is where maintenance or replacement of public infrastructure and facilities is continually deferred because we simply can't afford to maintain or replace what we already have. A good article outlining this concept is [“The More We Grow, the Poorer We Become”](#) by Charles Marohn.

To help combat soft default, we need to strive for increased efficiencies throughout services offered and ensure fiscal sustainability in user fees and tax rates. This is not a call for higher user fees or higher taxes, its simply pointing out that we need to establish the right user fees and tax rates to achieve fiscal sustainability.

45. CREATE EFFICIENCIES AND ADDRESS FISCAL SUSTAINABILITY WITHIN PUBLIC SERVICES.

Localities and service authorities are encouraged to continuously find efficiencies within their systems and to ensure that appropriate rate structures are in place to provide for long-term fiscal sustainability.

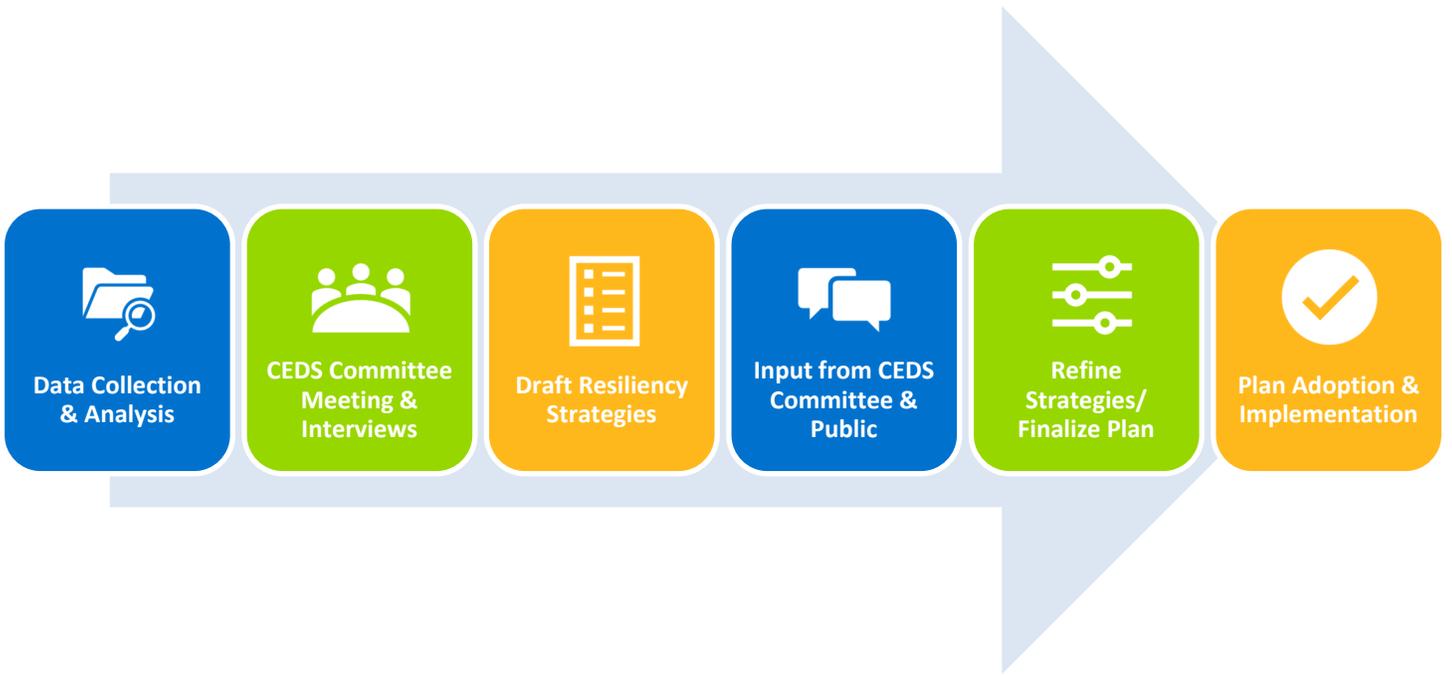
- Explore and take steps to increase efficiencies within public services. This could include converting from manual read water meters to Smart Meters, providing online permitting, leveraging GIS to address zoning questions, etc.
- Review existing water/sewer rates to ensure adequate funding is being generated to address future capital projects (water tanks, pump stations, pipe relining/replacement, generators, etc.) and that large volume users are not receiving a discounted rate that is effectively subsidized by the low volume users.
- Review existing tax rates to ensure adequate funding is being generated to address future capital projects, provide quality public services, and to properly maintain publicly owned facilities.

Resiliency in Action!

Smart Meters

The Town of Chase City recently invested in Smart Meters, replacing all their old water meters that had to be manually read. The software accompanying the meters can automatically flag water usage outside of normal usage ranges or the constant flow of water, both of which help with early leak detection. In the past leaks could have gone for up to a month undetected, resulting in not only increased water loss but damage to structures. The change has been dramatic, as Town used to spend around 4 ½ days manually reading meters, entering the handwritten readings into computer software, and generating and mailing water bills. With the new Smart Meters they have been able to cut that time down to 1 day. Staff can now allocate that saved time to other projects and tasks throughout the Town.

Planning Process



Resiliency Indicators

In order to plan for resiliency and monitor how actions or other investments impact the region going forward, numerous data points need to be collected and analyzed. In reviewing studies and literature on the matter, there doesn't appear to be a definitive list nor agreement on how significant each element is to a region's resiliency. Because of this, the following data points were chosen as they are the most relatable and pertinent for this region. The tables are not intended to show if the region is resilient or not, rather if the data is trending towards or away from resiliency.



Demographics & Mobility

Variable	Measure	10-Year Snapshot	Notes
Total Population 	Total population of the District	-7.2%	Larger populations represent more opportunities for new ideas.
Age 25-44 	% of population age 25-44	-3.7%	This age group is more flexible in employment/career shifts.
Age 65+ 	% of population 65 and +	+27.8%	This age group is largely out of the labor force.
Net-Migration 	% of net-migration (net-migration/total population)	+0.1%	Resources and knowledge enter or leave the District.
Highly Educated 	% of population with a bachelors degree or higher	+37.7%	Greater opportunity to generate new ideas.
Limited English Proficiency 	% of population that is linguistically isolated	-13.2%	Harder to interact with or engage with those who struggle with English.



Community & Health

Variable	Measure	10-Year Snapshot	Notes
Health 	County health rankings (Avg. ranking of SPDC counties)	-0.3%	Healthy populations are better able to deal with shocks, disruptions, stressors.
Place Attachment 	% of houses that are owner occupied	-0.9%	Residents that have a stronger connection to the community are likely to rebound quicker
Social Capital 	Number of 501(c)(3) organizations per capita	1 per 167.4 more data needed	More opportunities to provide assistance to those in need
Income Inequality 	County GINI Index	-1.3%	Makes it more difficult to respond to a shock, less funds available during times of crisis
Community Erosion 	Violent crime incidents	-5.6%	Detrimental to attracting new business and keeping or attracting new residents
Child/Elder Care 	Number of child / adult care facilities	26 / 1 more data needed	Needed to support the working population, especially the 25-44 age group.
No Vehicle Available 	% of housing units with no vehicle available	-17.0%	With no vehicle, this group can become isolated from the community
Poverty 	% of poverty for all ages	-23.4% 9-yr trend	Poverty greatly affects resiliency, no emergency fund to utilize when needed
Opioid Deaths 	# of opioid deaths from overdoses	171.4% 5-yr trend	Opioid abuse can destroy lives, families, and communities.



Industry & Economy

Photo: Miranda Baines, Gazette-Virginian

Variable	Measure	10-Year Snapshot	Notes
 Labor Force	Labor force	-9.1%	Higher rate of participation increases resilience.
 Unemployment Rate	Unemployment rate	-46.8%	High rate of unemployment decreases resilience.
 Economic Growth	# of new start-ups	-19.9% 4-yr trend	High number of new start-ups increases resilience.
 Reliance on Nat. Resource Sectors	% or workers employed in ag, forestry, fishing, mining	-12.5%	Reliance on natural resources decreases resilience.
 Economic Hardship	% of households spending 30% or more on housing	-26.3%	Less money to spend on other purchases or save for future needs.
 Transportation Hardship	Measure of transportation costs as % of household income	33% 1-yr total	Limits spending power and ability to save. 15% or less is considered affordable.
 Innovation Potential	Number of patents filed over 5-year periods (2006-2015)	100%	Patents can indicate innovation potential, increasing resilience.
 Manufacturing	% employment in manufacturing	4.2%	Negative effect on resilience, closure/relocation create shocks.
 Regional GDP	% growth in GDP of District	-3.1%	Higher GDP rate indicates more resilient region.
 Microbusinesses	# of microbusinesses (<10 employees, discrete domain, active website).	1,049 1-yr total	Higher number of microbusinesses can increase resilience.
 Per Capita Income	Measure of per capita income	45.1%	Rising income increases funds for use and savings.

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