

# *Executive Summary*

## **Overview: A Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy**

In January 2003, the Campbell County Department of Community & Economic Development (now known as the Department of Economic Development, “DED”) retained a consultant team to work with its staff and a Steering Committee to prepare a Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (“CEDS”).

## **Background Findings**

The first step of the CEDS process reviewed relevant trends and conditions:

### **Population**

- Campbell County experienced modest population growth during the 1990’s, and the 2000 US Census reported the population as 51,078.
- Growth included suburban expansion around Lynchburg and declines in Brookneal and Altavista.

### **Income**

- Campbell County’s median household income grew at a slower rate than the median household income for Virginia and the United States.
- Altavista experienced median household income growth.
- Brookneal experienced a decline in median household income.

### **Economy**

- Campbell County’s economy is strong and diverse. It consists of nearly three times the percentage of manufacturing jobs as the State in 2001, and a far greater proportion (32.5%) than the Lynchburg MSA as a whole (24.8%).
- This strength has been a point of vulnerability. Over the past decade, the total number of jobs in the County declined by 15 percent with all of the decline occurring in the durable and non-durable manufacturing sub-sectors.
- Campbell County experienced a growth in out-commuting to workplaces, as residents have taken available work in other jurisdictions.

### **Infrastructure**

- Campbell County contains a well-developing system of utility services and an extensive transportation network.
- Campbell County’s industrial centers are Brookneal, Altavista, the Mt Athos area and areas adjacent to Lynchburg. Six industrial parks offer 202 acres of industrial land.

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- Campbell County and the City of Lynchburg are planning a joint industrial park adjacent to Lynchburg Regional Airport, and the County is beginning to develop a Commerce Park on Route 29.
- There are good training programs at the County's Vo-Tech Center and Central Virginia Community College's off-site campuses in Altavista and Brookneal, as well as its main campus in Lynchburg.

### **The second step was a review of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats.**

The situation is complex, but Campbell County has more positives than negatives.

- **Strengths** include the workforce, perhaps its biggest plus, which received high marks from most employers. There is a pool of people ready to work.
- The County has **weaknesses** in its lack of industrial sites and modern buildings, its declining towns and scarcity of tourism and recreation attractions.
- It faces the same **threats** as most suburban/rural areas, especially with respect to global and national competition.
- However, Campbell County enjoys some significant **opportunities** and advantages, particularly in the great potential that development of the Route 29 Corridor offers.

### **We also surveyed businesses in the County to understand their views and priorities**

- Most companies foresee threats to their business, though most are optimistic about the future. Foreign competition and, for small firms, large companies, are the biggest near-term threats. Labor problems and business costs are important but secondary to competition.
- A majority of the firms expect to expand or relocate within the region.
- The positive features cited most often about doing business in Campbell County were the workforce, the location and the commitment of government to support businesses. The leading negative features were lack of incentives to businesses, lack of an interstate highway and a relatively unskilled work force.
- Respondents cited training in basic skills as the most important action that could be taken to improve overall worker quality. Most businesses agree that, as far as infrastructure is concerned, improving the road system, particularly Route 29, could yield the best benefit for the region.

### **The CEDS reflects the data and analysis discussed above. It has the following elements:**

- A set of goals with short-term and long-term implementation strategies.
- A marketing program to communicate the County's image.
- Analysis and recommendations on agricultural development.
- A plan approach that focuses on the towns and villages.
- An agenda of 19 prioritized projects with a total value of over \$15 million.

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### **Goals and Strategies**

The CEDS includes eleven goals with 35 short-term and 27 long-term implementation strategies. In addition to the implementation of the CEDS, the top goals are to retain and expand existing industries, and to attract new jobs.

### **Agricultural Development**

Campbell County's agricultural sector accounts for over \$214 million of investment in the economy and, altogether, represents some 1,750 full and part-time jobs. The prospects for agriculture are positive, despite the decline in tobacco, with the number of farms reaching 621 in 1997, some 140,671 acres of land involved (both representing increases over 5 years earlier) and steady increases in the cattle and calves inventory (up 17% from 1987). It is recommended that that an Agriculture Coordinating Committee be established to highlight the value of agriculture, provide advice to Cooperative Extension and DED and further integrate agricultural marketing and development into the County's economic development program.

### **Marketing the County: Business Retention**

Campbell County should maintain its support for the regional marketing program while developing its own focus on its unique locational advantages and industrial culture. The targets for growth and expansion are the traditional core industries; metal fabrication, industrial machinery and plastics. On a new economic development web site and other communications, the County should send the five critical messages that communicate technical features related to the County's identity. Ultimately, projecting the right image is the result of good strategic thinking and consensus-based planning. Successful implementation takes time, but can be a powerful marketing tool.

### **A Focus on the Towns/Village: Altavista, Brookneal and Rustburg**

Altavista, Brookneal and Rustburg all have modest historical, environmental and commercial attractions, but a need exists to re-focus existing resources, bring people from the highway and regional urban centers and attract shoppers and visitors from outer edges of the defined market area. Themes based on local assets—historic furniture production, antiques, the heritage of Patrick Henry, Charles Lynch and others--could galvanize the identities of these places and generate attention from a wide area and over a long time. This will require some thinking about uses that are not present in the area and some aggressive public-private partnerships to achieve them.

### **Project and Program Components**

Campbell County will have to address many issues and needs over the next 5-10 years, and perhaps longer. In fact, other priority needs will arise as the County makes progress on this strategy. The best plan can only provide a framework, and it will require continual adjustment as resources become available. At this point, the strategy presents 19 recommended projects and programs representing a total value of \$15 million. Exhibit 1 summarizes the recommended program.

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### **Conclusion**

Campbell County maintains a strong and diverse economy, but it continues to suffer, particularly in Altavista and Brookneal, from the loss of manufacturing jobs in the furniture and textile industries. The implementation of this strategy will expedite recovery and help the County adjust to the new and changing economic environment that the nation faces.

The theme of the strategy is retaining and growing businesses. The top priority is the improvement of vocational technical training and the overall effort to raise the level of technical skills. While there may be high costs associated with these and other projects, the continuing adaptation to a changing economy will require strategic action and cooperation on a broad front.