

1. Introduction

1.1 Overview

In January 2003, the Campbell County Department of Community & Economic Development (now known as the Department of Economic Development, “DED”) retained a consultant team, Thomas Point Associates, Inc., to work with its staff and a Steering Committee to prepare a comprehensive economic development strategy (“CEDS”). This document summarizes the strategy, its findings, recommendations and implementation.

The following sections present analysis and recommendations:

Section 2. Goals: a statement of goals with related short-term and long-term strategies.

Section 3. Analysis of Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats.

Section 4. Agricultural Component: analysis of agricultural issues and recommendations for action.

Section 5. Town Redevelopment: findings and recommendations on the Towns of Altavista and Brookneal and the Village of Rustburg.

Section 6. Marketing Plan: recommendations for marketing the County and ways to communicate a new business-friendly image.

Section 7. Projects and Implementation: project and program recommendations with estimated costs, priorities and responsibilities.

Section 8. Conclusions: a summary of principal findings.

Appendices A and B provide background data on the County’s population, economy and infrastructure.

1.2 Economic Distress

Campbell County’s economy depends heavily on manufacturing, which accounts for nearly a third (32.5%) of all jobs in the County, a much higher proportion than in the Lynchburg region as a whole (24.8%). The County has experienced a major economic restructuring over the past decade. Since 1990, the total number of jobs in the County declined by 15 percent. Job losses in manufacturing subsectors represent the entire amount of the decline. Most of the losses can be attributed to changes in the furniture industry. Altogether, approximately 6,500 jobs were lost in manufacturing with most of these occurring in the leading furniture factories, Lane and Thomasville, in the Towns of Altavista and Brookneal.

The shift in the employment base helps explain the decline in household income in the County over the same period (relative to the United States and Virginia), and why earnings per worker have stagnated while there have been gains nationally and statewide.

While the County's economy is diverse, relatively strong and has made a significant comeback in the past several years, some of the impacts, particularly in Altavista and Brookneal, will take a long time to reverse. Overall, there is reason to expect continuing job losses in unskilled worker categories. This situation creates a challenge with respect to identifying growth opportunities while maintaining income and quality of life.

1.3 Priority Projects

The CEDS Steering Committee identified one of the County's top priority to be the improvement of vocational technical training. The development and implementation of improvements will require cooperation and coordination between the School Board, the Department of Economic Development and other parties.

The Committee gave high priorities to infrastructure, including completion of sewer service on Route 29, and the development of key industrial properties. There is also a significant emphasis on a new marketing strategy for the County, redevelopment of Towns and more effective tourism promotion.

Overall, the CEDS strategy encompasses a total of 19 recommended projects and programs representing a total value of approximately \$15-20 million. Since needs far exceed resources, it is essential that all interests in the County and the Towns work together to reach consensus on priorities.

1.4 Agriculture: Special Issues

The strategy also addresses changes in agriculture. Agricultural sales in the County are up significantly as compared to a decade ago. Although the tobacco industry has undergone tremendous changes, there is potential for tobacco and other farming on larger, more efficient farms able to compete in the marketplace. Smaller tobacco farmers will have to diversify, change crops or find other employment. Grants and loans are needed to spur the development of new products and provide capital for alternative and added-value agricultural ventures, as well as on-farm diversification into agricultural tourism, wineries and similar ventures. Education and technical assistance are also needed for farm specialization, strategic alliance opportunities, low-cost input options and more cost-effective methods of producing, marketing and purchasing products.

1.5 Conclusion

Campbell County has a strong and diverse economy, but it continues to suffer, particularly in Altavista and Brookneal, from the loss of manufacturing jobs. Implementation of this strategy is crucial in expediting recovery and adjusting to the new and changing economic environment of the United States. The theme of the strategy is that infrastructure investment benefits Campbell County's growth and its existing businesses and industries. All of the projects, priorities and programs identified reflect this perspective.