

ECONOMIC STRATEGIC PLAN STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEW - 2015

1. Are you aware of the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) plan for the Southside Planning District (Counties of Brunswick, Halifax and Mecklenburg)?
 1. No
 2. Probably encountered it, but not really.
 3. PDC is a resource, but not the CEDS plan specifically.
 4. I am aware of it.
 5. I am, but the other companies may not be.
 6. Yes, from a generic standpoint.
 7. From being on a planning board, yes.
 8. Yes, they have to do it annually.
 9. No
 10. Yes. Haven't used it or referred to it much.
 11. Not really.
 12. Yes. Some employees have participated in it previously.
 13. No

2. How is the CEDS relevant to you as a business person and community stakeholder?
 1. Halifax IDA is most relevant economic development resource.
 2. Being able to attract business is important.
 3. It is very important to the well-being of the company. Not a daily tool though.
 4. It's not really.
 5. Helps determine eligibility for grant funding for projects. Infrastructure is important. Grant money help to locate business.
 6. It is not. Angie and Gail are the main supporters and contacts. President of the Chamber of Commerce are active in an effort to locate businesses in the area.
 7. It allowed me to express what I thought was a growth area. Critical to identify the needed infrastructure for businesses.
 8. The PDC compiles a strategic plan for the area it serves annually with input from the local areas. Used to identify the economic development priorities for the area. Has some relevance as it relates to projects localities pursue along with assistance from state and federal agencies.
 9. Not aware of it.
 10. Not very at this point. Haven't been involved in the process before now.
 11. PDC gave a good presentation this morning. Not relevant.
 12. The importance of broadband in the area needs to continue to be emphasized. Very important to economic development. MBC plays an economic development leadership role to an extent. Established a Silicon Valley office in California to recruit for Southside Virginia. Partnered with Regional 2000, Southern VA Regional Alliance, and others.
 13. Not very at this point. Aware of an economic plan, but that's about it. Increase employers, wages.

3. In your opinion, how should this economic region be defined?
 1. Southside is TMI AutoTech's reference.
 2. Southern Virginia. SET (Stronger Economies Together) wasn't an effective name.
 3. Tidewater is a whole separate animal. Emporia west to Danville/ Martinsville, south of Richmond.
 4. SOVA (Southern Virginia)
 5. Regional economic development marketing group (10 counties). Mecklenburg and Brunswick are very different from Halifax. More rural and less infrastructure. More conservative politically. Mecklenburg east and north. Virginia is what we call ourselves.
 6. VA/NC border, 1 ½ hours south of Richmond and 1 ½ hours north of Raleigh. Promote the proximity of the area and the quality of life. No labels.
 7. Tobacco is still king (and farming), but also manufacturing. Mecklenburg and Clarksville is most familiar. Tourism.
 8. Virginia Growth Alliance. Work with VEDP to identify the area's needs and opportunities.
 9. Southside region. South of Petersburg along 95 then west to the mountains (Danville).
 10. Reshaping using the best we are to improve the regional advanced manufacturing economy. Southern Virginia Regional Alliance is to the west (Halifax, Pitt, Henry, Patrick). Southern Virginia.
 11. Southern Virginia. Ranging from Emporia to Martinsville, below Lynchburg arcing to Emporia.
 12. Southern Virginia. Southside is too broad. You lose a lot in terms of definition. For example, Southern Virginia Technology park.
 13. Southern Virginia. Mecklenburg is more the Lake area.

4. What are a few benefits of operating a business in this region? (try to get 3)
 1. Low cost to operate. Cost of living is great. Good one-on-one access to the IDA. Virginia International Raceway (VIR) is a main locational factor.
 2. Lower cost of living, better quality of life, good family environment. South Hill seeks to find ways to accommodate businesses. More aggressive than the county. Convenient to major metropolitan areas. Transportation system.
 3. Not a highly regulated state. Readily available land. Localities welcome businesses. Easy to get going. Less NIMBY and permitting regulations.
 4. Rural area to hire motivated workforce. Lower cost overhead and wages.
 5. Have a diverse economy - IT, advanced manufacturing, small business, startup programs, good tax structure, open minded Board in working with businesses.
 6. 58/85, ports, airports, beach, mountains. Cost of living, work ethic, culture, safe trainable. We train our own people for the textiles industry. Need a HS degree and a good work ethic. Here is a labor pool now as opposed to five years ago.
 7. Great, friendly, people who learn quick. Provide good customer support. Recreational opportunities – the lake.
 8. Low cost of land compared to other areas. Quality of life is high. Proximity to major urban centers. Good transportation routes. Workforce has a strong work ethic, but need more preparation.
 9. Proximity to Norfolk. Transportation network – 58 (Port of Norfolk) 85/95. Land for mega industrial sites. Labor force – supply is good, but more skilled labor is needed.

10. Low cost to operate. Labor costs are lower. Natural resources are more abundant (wood). Proximity to markets (1day drive). Area has a skilled workforce, good work ethic. Educational centers focused on the workforce (Danville Community College, Southside VA Community College, Southern VA Higher Ed Center – Work Force Training Center of Excellence - \$2M grant Tobacco Commission – 75 welders, 75 precision engineers, 75 certified mechatronics). Mid-Atlantic Broadband Communities Corporation (MBCVA.com) broadband is available and strong, good transportation system.
 11. Largest employer in Halifax (1300). 125 doctors (small industry). Virginia is a great state to live and work. Right to work state. Southern Virginia is close to DC, Richmond, Raleigh, good higher education, lower labor costs, low taxes, solid blue collar region. Smart, industrious work force. Quality of life, low crime, good people. Big piece of the puzzle instead of a small piece. Good transportation network.
 12. Beautiful area, moderate cost of living, good workforce. Rich history, cultural programs, natural environment. Education is getting better.
 13. None that are easily apparent. Labor is higher than other company locations in the south. Accessibility to the railroad was a major driver. Labor pool is available.
5. What are a few challenges of operating a business in this region? (try to get 3)
1. Skilled workforce is most difficult challenge – engineering, trades – welders, assembly technicians. Distance to work (hour +). Access to suppliers (nuts, bolts, more complex) – supply chain (90+ minutes to access). More likeminded businesses would draw the suppliers.
 2. Trying to recruit healthcare professionals that want to live and stay in a rural environment. Payer mix is a challenge (Medicare/Medicaid). Community colleges have been helpful to the extent they can. Education system (school board) needs to get their act together. Board of Supervisors will need to fund newer schools.
 3. Retention of labor. Material handler to technical maintenance to dispatch. Wide variety of positions. Percentage of population on public assistance are not a viable part of the labor force. Leakage of high school population to colleges and other areas. Labor pool is within a 30 mile radius.
 4. Limited skillset. Need more training in a skill. Welding, carpentry, electrician. Schools need those programs. Need an adjunct position to perform training at various high schools.
 5. Biggest challenge is a trained workforce. Laid off workers need a skill, but for what? Chicken and egg. Programs for welding, industrial maintenance, other programs for identified jobs that will be available. Need available buildings, have tons of land. Shell building with Tobacco money in joint industrial park with Brunswick County. Brunswick isn't happy about being a partner (\$\$).
 6. Attracting people willing to locate in the area. One-on-one contact is the most effective. Build a sense of trust and promote the area. Professional applicants are the toughest.
 7. Training. Need more technical skills. Need to have a good community – schools, housing, shopping.
 8. Workforce development. Limited infrastructure – water, sewer, natural gas. There aren't any other major disadvantages. Diversifying the economy.
 9. Need skilled positions at times and that is difficult to recruit within the area. How to attract someone to a rural area from an urban area? Drive time takes the better part of a day round trip for recruiting (Raleigh/Richmond).

10. Aging workforce. Quality of life issues to attract young professionals. Workforce education needs to be emphasized as equal to a four year degree. Manufacturing is no longer the Four D's (Dark, Dirty, Dangerous, Deadend). Educating emerging workforce in the opportunities and value of the work.
 11. Trained, trainable workforce. Capable workforce. Availability of natural resources and infrastructure (water, timber, transportation, fiber). Population base and product to market. Cost of business. Cultural activities, education important to recruiting.
 12. Education system is a continuing challenge. Funding cuts. There is a movement toward workforce training education programs. Microsoft is a major influence with their data center. Community colleges are responding to need for worker training. Education and training.
 13. Availability of employment at higher wages. Many people commute long distances for higher wages. Open positions are difficult to fill due to higher wages in Raleigh/Durham and Lynchburg.
6. What are some key trends affecting the regional economy?
1. Workforce affects many industries. Example, engineers are needed with no training program within a 100 mile radius. Attract from out of state to fill positions. Across positions – accountants, machinists, mechanical engineers, welders, fabricators, sales/marketing.
 2. Positive indications. Microsoft. VCU affiliation will increase high paying, skilled jobs.
 3. Cultural entitlements. The economy is rebuilding slowly. Unemployment is still high. Need more jobs.
 4. Microsoft, VCU hospital, community colleges.
 5. Folks are coming out of being scared of making big moves. Regional economic development groups (Southern Virginia Regional Alliance, Gateway Region, Region 2000, Virginia's Growth Alliance) have more money and a larger voice to attract industries to the area. Community hospital has partnered with VCU to build a larger hospital. Microsoft in Mecklenburg, Dominion in Brunswick – major employers.
 6. VCU Community Memorial Hospital will have a huge impact on the local economy and quality of life. Break ground in July (open in 2 years). Microsoft is located in Boydton. Great PR. Doesn't help local people with jobs though (up to 120 people). School system is good and no worse than most other places. Quality of teaching is good.
 7. High speed internet is now available. Lack of good jobs for college graduates forces youth to leave the area.
 8. Microsoft and Dominion Power. Transition from agricultural to a more industrial/business economy. Any locality has to continue to bring in new commercial and industrial activity.
 9. Utilization of DSL lines for data center. Dominion Power in Brunswick good for infrastructure.
 10. Losing younger workforce (decline in population with an increase in age), aging transportation infrastructure needs to be maintained, water and sewer infrastructure should be maintained and expanded (targeted expansion), unfunded mandates increase local costs and decrease competitiveness.
 11. Perception of not having a "world class" K-12 system is a challenge. Limited private school options in region. In recruiting, promote the advantages over the disadvantages. Brain drain. Great place to raise family, but hard to keep children in area.

12. The whole area has lagged behind since the recession in income levels and employment. Economic development is a difficult area to focus on due to the length of time it takes to make an impact. Infrastructure development seems to be stagnant or holding steady, but not expanding as it should. The tobacco money did make an impact, but now it has leveled off.
13. Wage inequity. Lack of technical competencies.

7. What should be the vision for the region?

1. Halifax/South Boston area. Likeminded businesses to grow the automotive cluster. Strengthen the supply chains.
2. We should help grow it. Re-attract the industries that used to be in the area.
3. Attract sustainable industries to build housing and other infrastructure to improve quality of life and retain workforce and prevent population leakage. Service jobs are not sustainable alone.
4. Focus on the younger generation – geared toward education. Developing a skillset.
5. Keep the business base diverse for sustainability. Advanced manufacturing, IT and spin-offs of data centers.
6. We have to stand out among the other counties in Virginia.
7. Lot of growth potential in the technology sector. High speed will draw in new business. Tourism is another great opportunity – the lake.
8. Diversifying the economy.
9. Joint vision on recruiting businesses. Collaboration, then competition. Get the businesses interested in the area and then fight over it.
10. We should be the location of choice for advanced manufacturers, and a young and skilled workforce.
11. Create an environment in the region to attract progressive industry and commerce to locate and build a business.
12. Match the needs of the companies with the area's workforce, cluster and gap analysis, and areas that can drive growth. Healthcare, manufacturing, food service, technology are major employers. Mini-research triangle park for biomed. Building a foundation for the next generation.
13. Bring in more businesses, jobs, and higher wages.

8. What are three goals that could help achieve that vision?

1. Marketing by the IDA/others to promote the industry. Drop territory among Chambers, IDA, other entities to unify the message. Market what resources are available to existing industries.
2. Infrastructure is critical. Communications is vital. Transportation exists. Need better access to rail. Developing a viable workforce so you have a base to train.
3. PDC helps to support infrastructure. Roanoke River Service Authority (water supply). Area needs to bid for businesses. What infrastructure is needed for a particular business? Incentives work to reduce a company's capital investment. Available land, setbacks, raw materials supply, and close to consumer market.
4. Need to expand the diversity within the high school and offer more programs. Community colleges need more programs (have truck driving, but not HVAC for example). Workforce development needs to continue to strengthen and extend into the high schools. Need to be able to provide technical experience to develop the workforce.

5. Work with schools to prepare them for post-secondary education. Advanced manufacturing with training programs to focus on that industry. Better direct marketing efforts to targeted industries. Tourism industry has great potential. Quality of life and economic impacts.
 6. Number of contacts made are important (land 2 out of 100 for example). Need to be in front with businesses, political figures, relevant agencies. Video of South Hill is at the Welcome Center at the state line. Need to identify who the masses are that need to be targeted to promote the area (90 seconds to wet the appetite). Businesses in Pulaski and Wytheville seem to have a pipeline.
 7. Need to advertise lake amenities better, have a swimming area, increase the infrastructure. With technology you need the skilled labor force. Need to advertise more. Promote the area to tech companies and tourism.
 8. Attract technological industries. Keep up with technological advancements and trends. Power plant uses new technologies for example. Workforce that is trained in the needed technologies. Identify the industrial activities that might be a good fit for the area. Match industries to existing job skills.
 9. Each locality needs to work with one entity to help recruit and then it can hand off to individual localities. Target whole industry segments (technology-based companies, data, manufacturing, agriculture based, etc.). Compete at national, state, and regional for industries (e.g., Mexican firm growing tomatoes in SW for example. Why not Southside)?
 10. Land (infrastructure and available sites), labor (middle skilled workers), capital (fed, state, local targeted toward attracting workforce – should be locality driven). 10-25% gap in financing is common (Valley of Death – last R & D dollars needed). SBIR program 2% mandate for company startups (\$150k awards ph1, \$1M ph2). One year gap between phases experience a gap in financing to continue. Financing that gap would strengthen the success of the program.
 11. Culture of success and progressive attitude. Can be our own worst enemy in terms of perception. Winning attitude. Continue to focus on K-12 and vocational education along with higher education. Ensure the region is competitive in terms of the number and quality of workforce. More regional approach to economic development. Attract industry to the region collaboratively rather than individually. Southern Virginia working as one emphasizes the strengths for businesses of the area.
 12. Public incentives. Target specific industries. Expand infrastructure to support the key industries. Recruit new companies and retain the young workforce.
 13. Not sure.
9. Are there local regulations that you have had issues with in the past (or currently)?
1. Not in the region.
 2. No, but business capital tax (machinery & tools) is an issue. Other ways are more effective. County response was immediately no – we need that tax. Staff is the main barrier.
 3. Brunswick is a little bit slow. Sussex County is difficult. Other places are overly regulated. Localities need a punch list of items that will be needed to streamline the process.
 4. No.
 5. No.

6. No. In 12 years, only two cases of potential expansion in joint cooperation with the County and the Town. High marks for their support of businesses. Very aggressive in attracting businesses (50 jobs). Politics between the Town and the County are unnecessary at times. Better when they cooperate.
 7. Pay town and county taxes is burdensome.
 8. No. Very progressive and hands on.
 9. No, not really.
 10. Not local, but federal such as the Army Corps of Engineers (5-10 years). Local political trends is not always helpful.
 11. No. One of our advantages. Politics fluctuate, but no more than elsewhere. Good regulatory environment.
 12. Nothing with any impact. Most of work is within rights-of-way (VDOT and major utilities).
 13. No.
10. Are there observations that have been made by other businesses that you are aware of where the County (locality) could be more accommodating?
1. No.
 2. Be more open minded. Good job with fiber and other infrastructure.
 3. Not recently. In past years, the Economic Development Office wasn't a good facilitator. Everything was up to the Board. Counties should be more accommodating.
 4. No.
 5. No.
 6. Absolutely not.
 7. Not really.
 8. No.
 9. Not that I'm aware of, no.
 10. No. Internationally based businesses are more used to an integrated public-private workforce training continuum. ABB makes transformers and are an example of this success.
 11. No. One of the advantages of the area. Competitive and cooperative.
 12. No. The County is very accommodating. Exploring the feasibility of a datacenter and working with the IDA.
 13. No.
11. How else can the region be more competitive?
1. Unified approach to promote a skilled workforce supply and supply chain.
 2. Get out more and do some innovative recruiting. Hospital offered to pay for the ED people to go to a manufacturing conference. "Can't do that." Need to be more open and willing. You are competing against the nation.
 3. Need to be more aggressive in seeking commerce. Southern Virginia is competing with the rest of the country.
 4. Workforce developed and tourism as backdrop. Basic infrastructure is in place for what is needed.
 5. Take a few more risks to entice businesses to the area.

6. Face-to-face contact is more effective than general communication. Some common comments are Starbucks, Dicks, a shopping mall, movie theater, but those things come with major employers and more population. Rail may be an area to explore, but not a major point of emphasis.
 7. Frisco, TX is a good example of regional cooperation that has been successful.
 8. Looking at solar technologies as an example. We are very creative and use every tool in the toolbox. Very progressive.
 9. Accentuate the positives – quality of life, activities, education. Shine where we can.
 10. Land, labor and capital.
 11. Tobacco Commission has been helpful. High speed fiber (\$100M) was good. It's about choices. Emphasize strengths-land, buildings, education, training, transportation, infrastructure. Whole package to compete.
 12. Education, healthcare, culture.
 13. Bringing younger people into the county and the region.
12. How can the County (locality) best help businesses?
1. IDA has helped support and past grants. The Halifax Chamber of Commerce could be more involved. Their orientation seems to be more social than business.
 2. Need to work on maintaining the Enterprise Zones. Keep land costs lower. Being proactive and looking for incentives that work or haven't been thought of before (temp waiver of the M & T Tax.
 3. Be ready, willing and able. Not prepared up front for the walk-in company to locate. Need more incentives. That's where Southern Virginia is missing the boat.
 4. Mecklenburg has a pretty activated tourism developer which helps bring people into the area. Seems like a good trend.
 5. Be a little less averse. Do a good job now though. Very supportive. Businesses seem happy with County support.
 6. They visit annually and do a good job of support. They are there if you need them.
 7. The county and town had a partnership built a shell building and then it was lease purchased for 10 years with an option to purchase. Great incentive. Very helpful.
 8. One of the most important things is making sure the infrastructure is in place. Water, sewer, natural gas. Major effort to expand natural gas infrastructure. Lateral from the TransCo line to the Dominion plant should help Mecklenburg, and Brunswick Counties (Tobacco Commission funds).
 9. Provide funding information to companies so that if a company is expanding or training a workforce, then they are aware of those opportunities.
 10. All localities should bear in mind that the business tax structure offsets the property tax structure. Expanding the business base helps keep services for all citizens. A diverse and vibrant business community make the difference.
 11. Generally functional government. Current politics can be a barrier. Urban areas are Halifax and South Boston, but many residents are rural and own land and taxes are an issue to improving community infrastructure, education, etc. Land rich but cash poor so higher taxes are an issue. Economic development can help diffuse that tax burden from the property owners.
 12. Incentives that are partnership based, not giveaways. Identify who the other regional competitors are. Marketing the region. Follow through on contacts. Gosova.com
 13. No sure. Board should permit more businesses. Vacant industrial land (off of 58).

13. Do you have any other economic development related issues?
 1. No. Similar small business challenges – access to banking/capital is a challenge. Company is foreign owned and chose Southside VA over staying in Canada or other locations.
 2. No.
 3. No. The PDC does a really good job at moving the ball forward once they are involved. The smaller offices – ED, building permitting, planning – are less prepared.
 4. No.
 5. No.
 6. Welcome the outsiders, aggressive, accept challenges. Culture of support and openness. In same industrial park off 58.
 7. No.
 8. No.
 9. No.
 10. As a follow-up to the CEDS draft. Not now.
 11. Rural communities with a more progressive economic development approach have an advantage. Once you fall behind, it is difficult to catch, Southern Virginia is competitive.
 12. Covered a lot of information.
 13. No.