CEDS Update Process Begins; Economic Development Takes Off in Region

Each year, West Piedmont Planning District Commission (WPPDC) staff updates the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) document, which serves as the economic development blueprint for the region in partnership with the U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA). Chapters within the document encompass a regional development strategy, an overview of the region, a summary of the economy of the region, an implementation plan, a comprehensive listing of priority projects within each locality, as well as various appendices.

On Thursday, November 1, the WPPDC hosted an input session at New College Institute (NCI) to solicit input from localities with respect to development of the 2019 CEDS document. Facilitated by Doug Jackson of the Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development, about 30 stakeholders were in attendance as well as representatives of other state and federal agencies. Part of the CEDS input process involves soliciting information from attendees regarding issues identified throughout the region. Two primary areas of concern continue to be the need for greater transportation resources in the region, as well as affordable child care. Both of these issues are still significant barriers to employment.

A CEDS Working Committee met on November 13 to review information obtained at the input session; recommendations were noted for various sections of the document. The next meeting is planned to be held in late January. The WPPDC continues to seek input into the CEDS, and asks that localities provide the WPPDC a list of priority projects to include within the updated document. The final document is anticipated to be adopted in March 2019.

The following significant economic development announcements took place in the region recently and will be incorporated into the CEDS:

- In September, Monogram Foods announced it would increase its Henry County workforce by 300 as part of a $30 million expansion of its facility, located at Patriot Centre Industrial Park. This expansion of Monogram marks the fifth since the company established operations in the County in 2009, and will enable Monogram to introduce new products. On average, the new jobs will be pay $16 per hour.

- At the end of July, Press Glass, a Poland-based manufacturer of flat glass, announced an investment of $43.55 million to be the first firm to locate in the Commonwealth Crossing Business Centre in southern Henry County. This investment will involve the construction of a 280,000 square-foot facility which will employ 212 workers. Products which Press Glass manufactures include glass for use in doors, windows, solar panels, and other applications.

- In December, Essel Propack, which manufactures personal care and cosmetic items such as toothpaste tubes, announced a $31.2 million expansion at its Airside Industrial Park facility in the City of Danville. The expansion will result in an increase of 45 jobs over three years as well as innovative technology enabling the company to double production at the facility. Danville successfully competed against Argentina and Brazil for this investment. Essel Propack currently employs 252 at its Danville facility.

- In November, Harlow Group Ltd., a United Kingdom-based firm which specializes in the manufacture of 3D printed additive materials, announced an $8 million investment to establish a sheet metal manufacturing facility at the Cyber Park in Danville. The new facility, to be known as Harlow Fastech, will create 49 jobs. In addition to the new jobs, Harlow Group Ltd. will set up a U.S. Training Center of Excellence where additive manufacturing instruction will occur. This Center will also be located at the Cyber Park.

- In October, BGF Industries, Inc., which specializes in the manufacture of high-performance technical fiber components, announced it will relocate its headquarters, as well as its research and development division, from Greensboro, NC to the Cyber Park located in the City of Danville. The $7 million investment will result in the construction of a 25,000 square-foot facility at the Cyber Park, in addition to 65 jobs.
WPPDC Helps Pittsylvania County Obtain Grant to Improve, Preserve Wayside Park

In December, the Pittsylvania County Department of Parks and Recreation was awarded a Forest CORE Fund (Forest and Community Opportunities for Restoration and Enhancement) grant, via the Virginia Outdoors Foundation (VOF). The intent of this grant is to remediate the effects of the Mountain Valley Pipeline on forested areas of Virginia which are in reasonable proximity to the pipeline, being constructed across West Virginia as well as within six counties in Virginia—including Pittsylvania County.

Once it is operational, the Mountain Valley Pipeline will convey natural gas southeastward from West Virginia into Pittsylvania County, serving as a natural energy source. An environmental impact statement regarding the pipeline prompted an agreement between the Commonwealth of Virginia and Mountain Valley Pipeline, LLC which resulted in $15 million in grants to be made available to offset forest fragmentation, a deep concern for impacts resulting from the project.

The Pittsylvania County Department of Parks and Recreation chose to apply for this grant funding as a means to improve the Wayside Park facility in Hurt, while also solidifying the facility as a forested landscape to offset deforestation activities associated with the pipeline. Upon request by the County, West Piedmont Planning District Commission (WPPDC) staff assisted with the narrative for the application, technical assistance along with mapping, and other assistance.

Wayside Park, comprising 50 acres, was created by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in the 1930s and was deeded to the County in 1983. The park consists mostly (about 40 acres) of forested land. Some features include Sycamore Creek, which meanders through the park and is spanned by a stone bridge; a picnic shelter; a baseball field; and open areas. The park really comprises two sections providing two distinct functions. The first section (and that which is most closely associated with its name) serves as a wayside recreational/rest facility along U.S. Route 29 Business (Main Street) designated for vehicles to temporarily stop; picnic tables are also present in this area. The adjoining section serves as more of a community park facility. Arguably one of the greatest assets of Wayside Park is the facility’s trail system which, at present, consists of about 1,500 linear feet of a basic trail created by local Boy Scouts, and an accompanying 3,780 linear foot maintenance road.

The grant award totals $106,460 and is matched with $72,000 in County funds this year. Next year, it is anticipated that the County will budget a similar amount of funding for park improvements—bringing the total to about $250,000. Funding will allow for two key activities to improve Wayside Park while preserving the facility’s forested features. One component is the upgrading and combining of the existing trail and maintenance road into one approximately mile-long, 10 foot wide seamless trail facility, with a crushed stone surface. The other activity will be the creation of a deed restriction intended to prohibit any timber harvesting activities at the facility.

The County Parks & Recreation Department is working other regional grantors to secure additional funding to perform more comprehensive improvements at Wayside Park to include landscaping, new playground equipment, the relocation of an existing amphitheater, new picnic tables and shelters, and the possible establishment of campsites with fire rings, to name a few.

The timber harvesting deed restriction along with the other improvements will reinforce Wayside Park as an intact wooded land in the northern section of Pittsylvania County, serving to remedy fragmentation caused by the Mountain Valley Pipeline. But these activities will also solidify the park as an invaluable community asset to promote health, wellness, recreation, and enjoyment by this and future generations of Pittsylvania County residents as well as visitors.
**Southside Business Technology Center, Inc. Gets Cash Infusion to Promote Entrepreneurship**

In December, the Economic Development Administration (EDA) - a branch of the U.S. Department of Commerce—awarded the Southside Business Technology Center, Inc. in Danville $300,000 to reinforce its seed fund program as part of “The Launch Place Seed Fund 2 to Support Rural Entrepreneurship.” The role of The Launch Place, a non-profit organization, is to encourage entrepreneurship to diversify the Dan River Region’s economy, and the specific intent of this project is to promote entrepreneurship within the region as the area’s economy shifts to one that cultivates start-ups and business expansions.

Over a three-year period, the funding is anticipated to generate at least $3 million in salaries by promoting investment in 18 companies within the region with the expectation that a minimum of 60 jobs will be created that pay at least $50,000 each annually. This new funding is likely to further promote an infusion of innovation and talent in the Dan River Region, as the region—with the River District as its epicenter—continues to attract national attention.

**RIDE Solutions Expands into West Piedmont Planning District, Outreach Begins**

Beginning July 1, the West Piedmont Planning District Commission assumed management of the RIDE Solutions program in the West Piedmont Region. The RIDE Solutions program matches individuals who drive to those who do not have access to a vehicle and who commute to similar geographic areas. An online database of participants, maintained by program administrators, enables those interested in getting involved with a carpool to be easily matched with another participant who is traveling in a similar direction.

A significant role West Piedmont Planning District Commission staff is playing with regard to RIDE Solutions is outreach to various entities to promote this program. To date, staff has reached out to chambers of commerce, local economic development organizations, and some business outreach. Additionally, the program has been advertised on two billboards along U.S. Route 58 between Danville and Martinsville. These activities are just the beginning of the outreach process. Significant business outreach will begin in early 2019.

Beginning in 2019, carpooling will become far more attractive and signing up will become more intuitive, as RIDE Solutions partners with a nationally-recognized carpool matching service known as NuRide. NuRide maintains a sophisticated database which enables users to match with other drivers by attributes such as corridor (route), mode (carpool, bike, vanpool, etc.), gender, smoking preference, and more! Furthermore, each time a participant utilizes a green travel mode such as carpooling, that participant will accrue points toward coupons offering discounts at specified restaurants and attractions. Additionally, participants can be eligible to win monthly raffle drawings such as gift cards. You can learn more about NuRide by visiting https://nuride.com/.

As noted herein, RIDE Solutions will make an aggressive outreach effort to businesses throughout the region beginning in 2019, taking place in earnest once the NuRide platform is integrated within our organization. While many workers own vehicles and while transit serves the more populated areas of the region, there are some residents who do not have access to reliable transportation and, consequently, employers may struggle to find qualified workers with reliable transportation. Furthermore, when employees choose to carpool, they can save a significant amount of money in the form of gas and vehicle wear-and-tear, and can have more personal time. It has been estimated that an employee who carpools routinely can save about $3,000 per year. RIDE Solutions, therefore, is well-positioned to address needs of both employers and employees. Even now, prior to the integration of NuRide, our existing database can match those who need a ride with those who drive. If, as a local official, staff member, or economic developer/chamber representative, you are aware of employers who struggle to find qualified employees or residents who are willing to work but cannot find meaningful employment due to lack of transportation options, we urge you to reach out to RIDE Solutions. You can contact Joe Bonanno at Jbonanno@wppdc.org or (276) 638-3987 for additional details about the program.

For additional information about the RIDE Solutions program, please visit www.ridesolutions.org.
In December, the U.S. Census Bureau released the 2013—2017 American Community Survey (ACS), a five-year estimate of population and housing characteristics, published annually. The Decennial Census serves as a full count of population and housing and is conducted every ten years for the purpose of determining U.S. House of Representatives representation by state and disbursement of federal funding to localities. By contrast, the ACS is based on a sample count and therefore, provides a demographic snapshot for the years between each Decennial Census, shedding light on demographic trends at the local, state, and national levels.

The table above shows that from 2010 to 2017, the West Piedmont Planning District experienced a population decline, while Franklin County was the only locality with a population increase. Median household income increased in all localities within the region over the same time frame, though the localities which exhibited the greatest gains in this metric included Franklin County, Pittsylvania County, and the City of Danville. The median age of the region increased from 44.2 years to 45.6 years, however an interesting dynamic becomes evident when examining the data. While the median age increased for each of the counties within the Planning District, this figure actually declined in both the cities of Danville and Martinsville—from 42.6 years to 40.6 years and from 43.6 years to 41.5 years, respectively. Further investigation revealed that the share of the 20—39 age cohort increased from 22.7 percent in 2010 to 25.2 percent in 2017 in Danville, while it increased more modestly from 21.5 percent to 22.7 percent in Martinsville over the same period. This shows that individuals who are of younger working age—millennials—represent a larger share of those populations in 2017 than they did in 2010. Another interesting observation is that the older populations of each of those cities (age 60 and above) increased over the time period, while the those of the later working age (40—59) declined.

Interested in receiving this flyer by e-mail? Contact us at the following:

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