

Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) – 2018 -2022

Mount Rogers Planning District Commission

Public Comment Request

The Mount Rogers Planning District Commission is requesting public comments and feedback from the public for the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy. The Mount Rogers region includes Bland, Carroll, Grayson, Smyth, Washington, and Wythe Counties, as well as the Cities of Bristol and Galax. Over the last year, a committee of leaders from across the region have worked together to develop this strategy and create goals for the region to work towards over the next five years. Please provide your comments and suggestions, as we work together to create a better region. We appreciate your time and feedback. If you have any questions, please contact Lori Deel with the Mount Rogers Planning District Commission by email ldeel@mrpdc.org.

A SWOT analysis was conducted to determine the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats in the region. The information from the analysis was used to establish goals to help the region move forward.

Strengths:

- I-81 and I-77
- Rural area
- Main Street push, number of certified Main Street communities
- Passionate Leadership
- Access to higher education—including continuing education for working adults
- Cultural resources
- Career and Technical Education Programs (students need more exposure to CTE)
- Diversified economy—not solely reliant on one industry (strong manufacturing & agriculture base)
- Resource Rich
- United Way of SWVA (coordination of resources)
- Flexibility of region
- Increased collaboration/communication (between organizations but not with public)
- Friendly communities
- Tourism Destination for outdoor recreation

Weaknesses:

- Leary of newcomers/outside—unwelcome to/fear of change
- Lack of diversity (people/cultural)
- School systems (old school buildings and no new curriculum for upcoming changes in workforce as related to technology, etc.
- Out migration/lack of new families coming in, particularly young families
- Work ethic
- Lack of awareness/communication with general public
- MENTAL HEALTH—Drugs/addiction/hopelessness → scarcity mindset – 2 generations removed from Great Depression
- Not Metropolitan Statistical Area (4 media markets – Winston Salem, Tri Cities, Bluefield, Roanoke)
- “Old mindsets”
- Engaging local elected officials to implement plans made by groups in region



Weaknesses (continued):

- No foresight in local government (won't raise taxes)
- Public ignorance/disconnect – need to engage Public Relations
- Risk adverse, particularly in local government
- Lack of data analytics (need for consolidated data resources)

Opportunities:

- Employers create a better culture for staff to reduce turnover. (Example: great culture at Scholle IPN in Chilhowie and Blue Ridge Knives in Marion)
- Rehab for addiction
- Engaging local elected officials (planning, raising taxes, forward thinking)
- Storytelling – need for public understanding– **Define the message!!—Need a PR strategy!! Tell the story!!**
 - Develop new ways to engage community
 - Livability Study
 - Use the “off-years” of CEDS for public engagement
 - Embrace changes and sell them – Example: Marion as mini-Asheville
- Communicate with businesses about needs (United Way/Chambers of Commerce)
- Reach out to other cultures
- Mentorships for young people interested in becoming entrepreneurs
- Utilize new technologies – wireless vs. broadband
- Affordable! Internet
- Reach out to high school and college students
 - What would it take to KEEP them?
 - What do they want?
 - What is a livable standard?

Threats:

- Drugs/Addiction
- Funding streams (ex: ARC on chopping block)
- Leadership succession plans in both public and private sector
- Lack of faith in ourselves on a community level – self-fulfilling prophecy
- Our current story (in mainstream media)
- Advancement in technology
- Underdeveloped infrastructure – last mile broadband/wireless—are we providing suitable last mile for 10-15 years from now?
- Demographic trends—aging population, young professionals moving out of the region.



Based on the information from the SWOT Analysis and the discussion among the committee, the following goals were established to help move the region forward. Tourism, Manufacturing and Agriculture are the strengths of the region. The committee focused on those three sectors, as well as developing a community enhancement sector to develop more ways to support the communities in our region, as well as develop a better way to communicate with the region as a whole.

GOALS (for the next five years)

TOURISM:

- **GOAL 1:** Collectively deploy the shared SWVA brand.
- **GOAL 2:** Implement a hospitality training program to create a high standard of service and to project Southwest Virginia as a region of choice.
- **GOAL 3:** Secure funding to grow and attract new tourism businesses for visitors and investment.
- **GOAL 4:** Increase local business sourcing by aligning local resources with regional tourism cluster needs.
- **GOAL 5:** Create focus on the exclusivity of the Mount Rogers Region.

AGRIBUSINESS:

- **GOAL 1:** Advance economic opportunities in agriculture, food, and natural resources.
- **GOAL 2:** Equip the region's youth and adults for employment in the agribusiness industry.
- **GOAL 3:** Develop an Agribusiness Trail.

MANUFACTURING:

- **GOAL 1:** Create accessible high quality regional data for Mount Rogers.
- **GOAL 2:** Develop a coordinated, regionally funded marketing strategy to attract new manufacturers.
- **GOAL 3:** Cultivate regional linkages between workforce initiatives.
- **GOAL 4:** Coordinate effective plan to address workforce turnover/retention in manufacturing for Mount Rogers Region.
- **GOAL 5:** Create more awareness for the existing Career and Technical Education programs in the school systems to create a stronger workforce with the necessary skills.

COMMUNITY ENHANCEMENT:

GOAL 1: Develop a public relations strategy to keep the public informed about the region and empower them to help "tell the story" of the region.

GOAL 2: Enhance the overall health and wellness –mental and physical– of the community, with a focus on support and opportunities for those struggling with addiction.

GOAL 3: Build partnerships with local governments and other agencies to ensure the proper infrastructure is in place to support current needs and future growth for the region.

Thank you for taking time to review the CEDS for the Mount Rogers region. Please provide your feedback and comments via email to Lori Deel at ldeel@mrpdc.org. Your input is valuable and appreciated.

