



NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PLAN

2015-2021
Updated in 2020

Prepared by the
Northumberland County
Economic Development Commission

NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PLAN—2015-2021

I. Overview of Northumberland County.

Northumberland County is located in the eastern portion of Virginia at the northeastern tip of the Northern Neck peninsula. This 223 square mile county is bounded on the north by the Potomac River and the east by the Chesapeake Bay and, with its many rivers, creeks and streams, has over 888 miles of shoreline. The county is positioned on the Chesapeake Bay, halfway between the Washington, D.C., and Hampton Roads metropolitan areas. Northumberland County is 70 miles northeast of Richmond and 112 miles southeast of Washington, D.C. While there are no incorporated cities in the County, there are eight villages that serve as hubs for business and services.

Demographics. Based on the 2010 census, the Northumberland County population is 12,330 with 51.2% female and 48.7% male. The largest population group is those 60+ years of age or 40% of the population. The 65+ age group comprises 30.1%. The front edge of the boomer population is apparent since almost half (19.9%) of all persons above age 60 are in the 60-70 year old age cohort. By contrast, the 40-59 age group comprises 26.8% of the population; those 20 to 39 comprise 14.8%; and those under age 20 represent 18.4%. By race or ethnicity, the County is 71.3% Caucasian; 25.3% African American; and 3.1% Hispanic. (Based on the 2019 census estimates the county population is 12,095 with 51% female and 49% male with those 60+ years of age now at 37.5%)

Employment. Annual unemployment rates in the County over the last decade have ranged from the low of 4.3% in 2019 to a high of 9.0% in 2011. Winter months typically see an increase in unemployment due to seasonal lay-offs among key industries in the area. The long term impact from the COVID-19 pandemic is yet to be seen and the time required to recover the jobs lost is unknown. The median household income is \$51,911. Approximately 9.3% of the population lives below the poverty level. More than half (61%) of the traditional workforce age population (18-64) are age 45 or older. Over 45 % of workers commute outside the County for employment.

Education. According to the Census Bureau's American Community Survey, 85% of those 18+ years of age in the County completed high school or the equivalent. More than half (51%) attended college with 26% completing an associate degree or higher. In the 25-44 age group, 94% completed high school or the equivalent and nearly half (49%) attended college. Among the total population, 20% have a bachelors or graduate degree.

Businesses. There are over 600 businesses operating in the County. The key industries are construction, trade, manufacturing, services and government. Omega Protein is the largest private employer with 250+ employees and in 2019 moved its corporate headquarters to the Reedville campus. Most of the other larger businesses employ less than fifty people. The vast majority of the

businesses have less than ten employees. Financial services are provided by the four banks in the County. Northumberland has eight designated Enterprise zones associated with its key villages.

II. Challenges to Economic Development

As with any community, Northumberland County has a number of challenges that impact the development of business and industries or influence the types of businesses and industries that can be accommodated.

- ❖ Geographic Location. Northumberland County is somewhat isolated lacking proximity to a major highway or metropolitan area.
- ❖ Lack of Physical and Technology Infrastructure. Several villages in the County lack the physical infrastructure—water and sewer systems—to support the development of businesses or industrial areas. Likewise, areas of the County lack the technology infrastructure—Broadband and consistent mobile telephone service—for business development.
- ❖ Limited Health Care. The County does not have a hospital and has a limited number of medical facilities and health care professionals.
- ❖ Lack of Transportation. There are no easily accessible freight rail, railroad, air transport, or airline services, or seaports, and only one fixed route bus service.
- ❖ Workforce. While educational attainment is improving among the younger age group, the workforce still has a low percentage of post-secondary credentials and lacks employment skills.
- ❖ Lack of Supportive Services for Tourism. There are only two motels in the County and a few Bed & Breakfast accommodations. There are a limited number of restaurants that are open year round; most close for some time period in the winter.
- ❖ Lack of an industrial or technology park.
- ❖ A desire by many local residents to keep things the same, hence a resistance to innovation or change.

III. Current and Emerging Economic Development Opportunities

Northumberland is recognized as the “Mother County” of the Northern Neck and is rooted in a rich genealogical and political history, an extensive cultural heritage, and an abundance of natural resources. While maintaining its rural nature, it is these very characteristics that offer opportunities for economic development and expansion at this point in time.

Extensive Shoreline & Recreation

With over 888 miles of shoreline, Northumberland County offers residents and visitors numerous opportunities for water related activities. Sandy beaches along the Potomac River and Chesapeake Bay provide ideal locations for swimming, sunbathing, kayaking and canoeing. The innumerable creeks, bays, rivers and inlets offer unlimited waterways for boating, crabbing, and salt-water fishing. At many locations throughout the county, skilled fishing guides and boats are available for hire. During the summer season, cruise ships at several locations in the county are operated along the Potomac River and the Chesapeake Bay. Three wildlife areas are also located in the county, which are designed for observing wild life, hiking and/or biking. The natural beauty and array of available outdoor activities are key factors in drawing increased tourism.

Ecotourism.

Ecotourism is often a small scale alternative to standard commercial (mass) tourism. Its purpose may be to educate the traveler, benefit economic development of the community, reduce the impact of tourism on natural environments, and/or foster respect for different heritages or cultures. A number of opportunities in ecotourism are evolving in Northumberland County and the region.

- Heritage Industries. Northumberland is recognized for its historical industries of fishing, agriculture and forestry. The Northern Neck Tourism Commission is working with the U.S. Park Service to designate the Northern Neck as a National Heritage Area emphasizing the region's history and heritage industries. Initial efforts are focused on waterman and include a logo and website focus, along with guided tours offered by waterman themselves, some of whom are residents of Northumberland County. Opportunities will continue to grow for enhanced tourism and income generating activities as this initiative evolves in the next few years.
- Wine Trail is well underway with 9 wineries in the region and 2 of those are located in Northumberland County. The Wineries offer tourists the opportunity of wine tasting and visiting the facilities. This attraction serves as a resource for bringing more tourists to the area who likely contribute financially to the broader community through overnight accommodations, meals and shopping.
- Oyster Trail is a state tourism effort run by a newly established non-profit organization to promote the Virginia oyster industry, tourism opportunities, and associated businesses. The Northern Neck is a key focus for places to visit and experience oysters. Virginia has been declared the Oyster Capital of the East Coast under a gubernatorial initiative to enhance tourism and connect local producers with seafood restaurants and raw bars. There are currently several businesses within the county that are highlighted on the Oyster Trail website and trip planning tools. Many oyster farmers reside in the County.

- Water Trail is a newly established tourism focus established by the Rural Virginia Coastal Alliance to promote outdoor opportunities associated with paddling and fishing activities. The Water Trail and Oyster Trail website and trip planning tools are closely linked to assist visitors in maximizing the trip planning within the Northern Neck and surrounding regions.
- Artisans Trail focuses on improving the economic outcomes for artisans; increasing visibility of artisan studios, venues and galleries; and promoting the local artisan culture. Northumberland County has many artisans, including members of four heritage artisan guilds affiliated with Rice’s Hotel/Hughlett’s Tavern.
- Shopping Trail. Northumberland County has numerous consignment, thrift, gift, and antiques shops that attract local and regional shoppers. Most of the shops are members of an organized “shopping trail” that has been branded and is broadly promoted.

Northumberland County: Retirement Destination

Northumberland County has 3,713 residents age 65+ or 30.1% of the population, an increase of nearly 4% since the 2000 census according to 2010 census. Many of the new full-time residents arrived as retirees—lured by the quality of life; lower cost of living; affordable housing; clean and safe environment; rural and small towns; accessibility to urban areas and family; and the history, culture and heritage of the community. Many current retirees originally bought “second homes” to enjoy the area’s recreational opportunities, but came to appreciate the Northumberland as a great retirement area.

The benefits of re-locating retirees and second-home owners far outweigh any additional costs. Seniors place relatively little demand on schools or police services. They are an economic asset to the County, depositing financial resources in local banks, building homes, purchasing goods, and by increasing spending in the county, spurring growth in jobs and tax revenue. The civic contribution and volunteerism among this population is well recognized and valued.

Aging-In-Place

The 2019 census estimate lists 37.5% of the population as age 60+ up from the estimated 30.1% in the 2010 census. Lancaster County is estimated to have 36.7 % in this age group. However, Lancaster County has specialized senior housing complexes, continuing care retirement communities, and assisted living facilities. The lack of similar facilities in Northumberland means that its older population resides at home and may require services in the home or community, or, when residential care is required, its seniors may be forced to move to Lancaster County or other locations.

In recent years, Northumberland has begun to see an increase in the availability of in-home services with the establishment of private businesses to provide assistance with activities of daily living and instrumental activities of daily living to more frail older persons. A broader array of

services need to be available for all seniors—focusing on home maintenance, home repair, home modification for aging-at-home, lawn care, falls prevention assessment, and more.

IV. Northumberland County Economic Development: Vision 2020

Northumberland Sign: “Entering a No Hassel Zone”

Vision 2020 for Northumberland County is that of a Community that:

- Is dedicated to maintaining its strong rural and waterfront natural environment in perpetuity for children, grandchildren and visitors.
- Encourages growth of existing businesses and welcomes entrepreneurship consistent with county needs.
- Has at least two well established “destination” tourist attractions.
- Has a strong reputation for bayside fishing, Eco-Tours, wildlife trails, pleasing accommodations, excellent seafood, and a variety of engaging “Trails” for the whole family.
- Has an excellent school system augmented with a STEM thrust and buttressed by a local branch of a university and a regional community college.
- Provides opportunities and supports for an active volunteer/retirement population.
- Has at least 3 villages with strong individual “personalities” appealing to businesses, residents and tourists.
- Has employment opportunities for all, including recent graduates.

V. Statement of Goals

The Goals reflect the key areas of activity for the Commission and staff. While Goals 2, 3, & 4 all relate to expanding business in the county, they are articulated as discrete components to ensure all are equitably examined and addressed.

Goals

1. Continue to evolve a business friendly environment through infrastructure development and creating business areas that attract businesses, consumers, and tourists.
2. Promote and support the expansion & increased revenues of existing businesses.
3. Attract and support the development of new, diversified businesses.
4. Promote and encourage tourism and the businesses serving it.
5. Enhance the capacity of the workforce through the provision of education & training programs for new or existing businesses and support for public/private education initiatives.
6. Develop financial support for Economic Development Commission initiatives.
7. Enhance visibility of the County, Commission, businesses, and residential and tourism opportunities through enhanced education, marketing, and a web presence.
8. Maintain strong working relationships with national, state, regional, and local governmental officials, economic development-related organizations, and educational institutions to ensure collaboration, coordination, and synergy in the development and implementation of initiatives.

V. Goals & Related Objectives

The listed objectives are drawn from the input from Commission Members, staff and county personnel; the Northern Neck Regional Planning District Commission's SET Initiative; the Regional Tourism Plan; previous Northumberland County economic development plans; interviews with several businesses; a review of selected economic development plans of other rural counties; and other literature.

Goal 1. Continue to evolve a business friendly environment through infrastructure development and creating business areas that attract businesses, consumers & tourists.

Objectives

- A. Explore the viability of renovating the historic United Methodist Church by the old Courthouse as a location on the Historical Registry for businesses and/or a cultural center.
- B. In cooperation with the Northern Neck Regional Planning District Commission and Callao business owners, complete the ongoing Business District Revitalization Project for Callao.
- C. Continue to administer the Incentive (Beautification) Grant Program.
- D. Revisit the development of sanitation systems in additional county villages should financial resources to support such an effort become available.

Goal 2. Promote and support the expansion & increased revenues of existing businesses.

Objectives:

- A. Coordinate and market the "Shopping Trail" of Consignment, Thrift, Gift, and Antique shops.
- B. Organize a Northumberland County "Shop Local" website for local business participation.
- C. Support expansion of the heritage industries: fishing, oystering, crabbing; farming; forestry.
- D. Continue to conduct the Mini-Loan Program.

Goal 3. Attract and support the development of new, diversified businesses.

Objectives:

- A. Maintain an inventory of key existing businesses, county resources and assets, and non-profit organizations related to economic and business development/opportunities.
- B. Promote existing and encourage new waterside seafood parks/markets for sale of fresh seafood—Port of Reedville, Buzzards Point.
- C. Foster development and promote Aging-in-Place Services for the retiree population (i.e., trash pick-up, regular yard & gutter cleaning, certified aging-in-place contractors

for home modification, concierge services, expanded menu of home care options, light housekeeping, meal preparation, in-home fall risk assessment; etc.). Collaborate with Bay Aging as appropriate.

- D. Encourage development of an assisted living facility in the county, preferably in Callao.
- E. Support James Madison University’s research and expansion of educational opportunities and emerging programs at Bluff Point.
- F. Assist businesses that might qualify for incentives under the County’s Enterprise Zones.
- G. Support local Business Incubator initiatives.
- H. Foster development of Cockrell’s Creek and Harbor.
- I. Promote STEM technologies to foster high paying jobs.

Goal 4. Promote and encourage tourism and the businesses serving it.

Objectives:

- A. Foster the establishment of “destination tourist sites” and “destination shopping areas” by strengthening the “personalities” of the county’s Villages, through actions such as enhancing accessible parking, packaging the strengths and activities in a village, encouraging tours, supporting special events, and promotion of the villages.
- B. Promote biking, kayaking, canoeing, and bird watching & wild life trails.
- C. Foster further development of the Chesapeake Bay Maritime Heritage trail and provide additional training opportunities for waterman on ecotourism opportunities.
- D. Foster further development of the Farming Heritage via promoting “working vacations” with farmers, visitations to the 17 Century farms (been in the family over 100 years), and the farm museum, and encouraging new tourism opportunities with llama/alpaca farms.
- E. Support the expansion and promote the Artisan Trail and related outlets for sale of artisans’ products.
- F. Promote the Chesapeake Bay Wine Trail including winerys, breweries and distilleries.
- G. Support further development of the Oyster Trail and eco-tourism.
- H. Support ongoing development of the Water Trail and increased participation by local watermen and marine businesses.
- I. Support development of a Northern Neck Food Trail.

Goal 5. Enhance the capacity of the workforce through the provision of education, training and technical assistance for new or existing businesses and support for public/private education and housing initiatives.

Objectives:

- A. Collaborate with Rappahannock Community College and the University of Mary Washington in the design of adult education for business development and/or expansion.
- B. Conduct educational programs for residents on topics to enhance business/entrepreneurial acumen and/or to expand opportunities in business development in the heritage industries— aqua-farming, agriculture, and forestry.
- C. Offer linkages to experts for 1:1 consultation and technical assistance for businesses.
- D. Encourage the development of workforce housing to provide attractive and affordable housing for service workers, such as teachers, nurses, police officers, and emergency personnel, in close proximity to their jobs.

Goal 6. Develop financial support for Economic Development Commission initiatives.

Objectives:

- A. Secure resources for the implementation of the “shopping trail” for consignment, thrift and antiques shops.
- B. Conduct session on how to access and use Enterprise Zone financial supports and tax options.
- C. Secure funding for planning and for revitalization of Callao.

Goal 7. Enhance visibility of the County, Commission, businesses, and residential and tourism opportunities through enhanced marketing, outreach and public relations.

Objectives:

- A. Design a comprehensive, long range, multimedia marketing and public relations plan.
- B. Expand use of the County’s website to enhance business and tourism using strategies such as: YouTube videos on the county, links to local businesses, “shop local” page for businesses to participate, calendar of upcoming events, shopping trail coupons & events, links to economic and business development resources, announcements of trainings, and posting of news articles, magazine articles, videos or other promotional materials on local businesses.
- C. Develop a Fact Sheets or brochures on the Economic Development Commission, tourism opportunities, and businesses in the county.

Goal 8. Maintain strong working relationships with national, state, regional, and local governmental officials, economic development-related organizations, and educational institutions to ensure collaboration, coordination, and synergy in the development and implementation of initiatives.

Objectives:

- A. Maintain strong, mutually-beneficial working relationships with the full range of organizations involved in economic development such as: Northern Neck Regional Planning Commission, Northern Neck Chesapeake Bay Partnership, Northern Neck Tourism Commission, Virginia Employment Commission, Virginia Department of Economic Partnerships, Small Business Development Center-University of Mary Washington, and Center for Innovative Technology,.
- B. Develop stronger relationships with existing local businesses. Develop articles on businesses and offer assistance.
- C. Strengthen relationships with Chamber of Commerce.
- D. Develop an action plan for regular communication with elected and appointed governmental officials at all levels.

Northumberland County Economic Development Commission

Commissioners

District 1

Lee Allain, Vice-Chair

(804) 529-5491

Email: leeallain7@gmail.com

District 2

Theresa Lambert, Chair

(703) 472-4015

Email: tlambert.ecodev@gmail.com

District 3

Melissa Bunns-Carter, Secretary

(804) 436-3509

Email: Melissa.Bunns-Carter@SunTrust.com

District 4

Ron Herring

(804) 761-7047

Email: thehomecrafter@live.com

District 5

Richard P. Saxer

(804) 453-3156

Email: rpsaxer@gmail.com

Executive Director

Jim Blue

(703) 895-0106

Email: jblue@co.northumberland.va.us

County Administrator

E. Luttrell Tadlock

(804) 580-7666

Email: ltadlock@co.northumberland.va.us