

2025 - 2030

Albemarle County

Economic Development Strategic Plan

A Blueprint to Lead Virginia's
Innovation Economy

resonance

Albemarle
COUNTY

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MISSION

The mission of the Albemarle County Economic Development Office is to strengthen and diversify the County's tax base, support business scale-up and redevelopment, and expand career-ladder job opportunities – ensuring a vibrant, innovative economy that delivers lasting prosperity for all residents.



VISION

Albemarle County – Rooted in Innovation. Open for Investment.

Where bold ideas take root, businesses scale, and partnerships thrive – leading the way in Virginia’s next innovation economy.

Executive Summary

Albemarle County is writing the next chapter of Virginia's innovation economy.

This five-year economic development strategy builds directly on the foundation established by the County's Comprehensive Plan, supporting its long-term vision for place-based opportunity. The plan works in concert with land use, housing, and infrastructure goals, and serves as the County's blueprint for advancing economic opportunity over the next five years.

Albemarle County stands out for its unique mix of institutional strength, rural beauty, urban amenities, and sector diversity. It is home to one of the most educated populations in the country, boasting a median household income over \$100,000. Anchors like the University of Virginia and Health System, Piedmont Virginia Community College, and Rivanna Station position the County at the intersection of research & development in engineering, digital technology, and life sciences, workforce development, and entrepreneurship. Yet only 11.3% of Albemarle's tax base

comes from commercial and industrial uses – among the lowest in the Commonwealth – and the share of prime working-age residents (25–44) trails peer regions. At the same time, infrastructure gaps, affordability pressures, and regulatory hurdles make it harder for businesses to expand and people to thrive.

That's the purpose of this strategy: to turn Albemarle's strengths and challenges into a focused, investable action plan for innovation-driven growth.

Over the course of nine months, the project team conducted a competitive benchmarking assessment, evaluated Albemarle's traded industry clusters, engaged more than 100 stakeholders, and heard directly from more than 250 community members. The findings are clear: Albemarle's economy is strong but underleveraged. Its institutions are powerful but disconnected. Its workforce is talented but not "sticky." And while its national security and life sciences sectors are surging, too many businesses still struggle to find space, talent, and/or capital to grow and scale.

This strategy outlines five goals and associated strategies to address those issues and drive investment, support employers, and build a more inclusive and resilient economy.

GOAL 1: LEAD IN INTELLIGENCE AND NATIONAL SECURITY

We will lead Virginia's intelligence and national security innovation economy. Albemarle is home to one of the state's most significant national security assets, Rivanna Station, and a highly skilled workforce. The County's investment in Rivanna Futures creates a generational opportunity to turn this quiet strength into a signature identity. Strategies focus on land readiness, talent pipelines, branding, and coordinated sector engagement.

GOAL 2: DISCOVER IN LIFE SCIENCES

We will grow into the Mid-Atlantic's premier destination for biotechnology and life sciences innovation.

Already a \$269 million industry in Albemarle, life sciences holds clear potential for expansion. This goal supports lab development, core laboratory facilities, specialized research service laboratories, capital access, and national marketing, in partnership with CvilleBioHub and UVA.

GOAL 3: GROW A MODERN AGRIBUSINESS ECONOMY

We will transform Albemarle's agricultural legacy into a modern agribusiness economy.

Agribusiness is an economic strength, but many farms and producers are at a transition point. Strategies address zoning, infrastructure, business planning, market access, and rural tourism to modernize and grow Albemarle's farming and food and beverage economy.

GOAL 4: EMPOWER TALENT

We will make Albemarle the place where talent and entrepreneurs stay, scale, and succeed.

Despite high educational attainment, the county struggles to retain young and mid-career workers. This goal aims to build student engagement, young professional networks, entrepreneurship, career pathways, and housing and childcare access.

GOAL 5: COMPETE FOR INVESTMENT

We will position Albemarle as Virginia's most investment-ready county—ready to compete, build, and lead.

Success will require faster permitting, smarter incentives, ready sites, stronger storytelling, and the infrastructure to support growth. This goal ensures the County has the tools, systems, and brand to compete for the next generation of investment.

This strategy is not just a plan—it's a platform for action. It is designed to work within Albemarle's existing planning framework while accelerating the County's ability to lead in innovation, greater opportunity, and long-term prosperity.

Albemarle County at a Glance

Albemarle is one of Virginia's fastest-growing counties, hosting a highly educated population, nationally significant institutions, and a thriving innovation economy. The data points below highlight the County's momentum, strengths, and areas of strategic opportunity as it plans for the future.

- **117,000 RESIDENTS AND GROWING:** The County's population increased 5% over the past five years, outpacing peer counties and the state average.
- **11% JOB GROWTH FROM 2018-2023** – nearly three times faster than the Virginia average.
- **\$102,617 MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME:** 13% above the Virginia average, with 12% growth over five years.
- **61% OF RESIDENTS HOLD A BACHELOR'S DEGREE OR HIGHER**, placing Albemarle among the most educated counties in the Commonwealth
- **33% GROWTH IN STEM EMPLOYMENT AND A SURGE IN CREATIVE-CLASS JOBS** reflect a strong innovation and knowledge economy.
- **TWO NATIONALLY SIGNIFICANT ANCHORS, THE UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA AND RIVANNA STATION**, drive biotech, national security, and entrepreneurial activity.
- **BIOTECH, AGRIBUSINESS, AND NATIONAL SECURITY** are leading traded clusters, together generating over \$650 million in GRP.
- **RESIDENTIAL PROPERTY TAXES ACCOUNT FOR 74% OF LOCAL REVENUE**, highlighting the need for a stronger commercial base.
- **MEDIAN HOME PRICE OF \$540,000**, and average rent of \$1,655 make housing affordability a growing challenge for some residents.



BIG PICTURE

Economic development isn't just about growing business – it's about shaping a community's future.

Albemarle County is where the next chapter of Virginia's innovation economy begins.

With a strategic location in the heart of the Mid-Atlantic, a highly educated population, and powerful institutional anchors, Albemarle County is positioned for innovation-driven growth.

But what makes the County distinctive isn't just geography or demographics; it's a shared commitment to lead with purpose, and the groundwork already laid to do so.

This strategy builds from a place of strength:

- **A UNITED PUBLIC-SECTOR COMMITMENT TO INNOVATION.**
The Board of Supervisors, Economic Development Authority, and County staff have coalesced around a shared vision to grow Albemarle's economy through strategic investment, industry partnerships, and long-term planning.
- **WORLD-CLASS HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS.**
The University of Virginia and Piedmont Virginia Community College serve as cornerstones of Albemarle's talent pipeline, supporting research commercialization, workforce development, and entrepreneurial activity.
- **STRATEGIC ACCESS TO REGIONAL AND NATIONAL MARKETS.**
Albemarle offers direct access to U.S. 29 and I-64, with proximity to Washington, D.C., Richmond, and the Southeastern innovation corridor, positioning the County for growth in traded sectors.
- **A BOLD INNOVATION PLATFORM.**
The Rivanna Futures campus and the emerging Central Virginia Innovation Corridor give Albemarle a signature opportunity to attract high-wage jobs in defense, secure technologies, and life sciences.
- **A MAGNETIC QUALITY OF LIFE.**
Albemarle's scenic landscapes, wineries, trail networks, and creative community are more than amenities – they're key attractors for entrepreneurs, remote workers, and talent at every stage of life.
- **AN INCREASINGLY EDUCATED AND DIVERSE POPULATION.**
New residents are choosing Albemarle for its schools, quality of place, and opportunity, contributing to a steadily growing, highly educated workforce.

These strengths offer a powerful platform for what's next.

Albemarle's economy is already home to sectors with strong momentum: a biotechnology and life sciences cluster with regional traction, a nationally significant intelligence and national security presence, a resilient food and agribusiness sector, and a growing community of entrepreneurs. Recent investments in sites (Rivanna Futures), key infrastructure (Commonwealth BioAccelerator, BEACON Commercial Kitchen), cluster scale-up (Wine Scaleup), and regional workforce development efforts (BioBridge, the Central Virginia Innovation Corridor) signal a shift from reactive to proactive growth.

At the same time, the County faces real choices. Albemarle's commercial and industrial tax base remains proportionally small, infrastructure improvements are needed to support emerging clusters, and development timelines can be complex. While these challenges are not unique, they underscore the importance of continued alignment and coordination to ensure that the County's public-sector goals and private-sector needs are moving in sync.

This strategy embraces a broader definition of economic development – one that connects business growth with workforce development, quality of place, and long-term resilience. It reflects a shift away from short-term wins and toward long-term competitiveness. That means making it easier for companies to grow in place. It means connecting students to jobs, entrepreneurs to capital, and farms to markets. It recognizes that Albemarle's landscapes and cultural assets are differentiators. And it means reimagining the county's economy as one dominated by government institutions to one where ideas take root and ideas grow into companies delivering innovative products and services and creating career-ladder opportunities for the community.

This is a strategy built from the ground up – shaped by local insight, driven by data, and aligned with Albemarle's unique identity and ambition. It reflects a county ready to lead with focus, alignment, and a clear commitment to turning potential into progress.



STRATEGY

How We Built this Plan

This strategy was built through a process grounded in data, shaped by local insight, and aligned with Albemarle County's long-term vision.

From the outset, this effort was designed to go beyond visioning. It was a strategy development process – one that would help Albemarle County compete more effectively in a fast-changing economy, while staying rooted in what makes the county distinct.

The approach combined rigorous quantitative analysis with deep community engagement to understand where Albemarle stands today, what challenges must be addressed, and where targeted investment can create the greatest impact.



To develop this strategy, the project team led a multi-phase process that included:

- **A COMPETITIVE BENCHMARKING ANALYSIS** comparing Albemarle County to a set of peer counties and regional innovation hubs. This included an evaluation of over 50 indicators across business vitality, talent development, infrastructure readiness, and quality of place – spotlighting where Albemarle leads, where it lags, and where it can lead the Commonwealth in the next economy. Peer counties included areas in Virginia and across the Mid-Atlantic with similar demographics, proximity to research institutions, and economic development goals.
- **A TARGET INDUSTRY AND CLUSTER ANALYSIS** to identify sectors where Albemarle has both a competitive advantage and long-term growth potential. Using employment specialization, wage data, job growth trends, and alignment with regional assets, this analysis helped focus the strategy on key clusters: intelligence and national security, biotechnology and life sciences, and value-added agribusiness. A complementary occupational analysis also highlighted high-demand roles, talent gaps, and workforce alignment opportunities with institutions like UVA and PVCC.
- **TWO COMMUNITY SURVEYS**, distributed by Albemarle County, provided insight into community perceptions, infrastructure constraints, workforce needs, and areas where the County can better support economic mobility.
- **WORKSHOPS WITH THE STAKEHOLDER COMMITTEE**, made up of local business leaders and key members of the community, to provide feedback and guidance on all elements of the project.
- **A COLLECTION OF ONE-ON-ONE INTERVIEWS** with leaders across sectors, including small business owners, developers, educators, economic development partners, and elected officials. These conversations offered unfiltered, on-the-ground perspectives about the strengths and friction points in Albemarle's current economic landscape.
- **A SERIES OF STAKEHOLDER ROUNDTABLES** organized around critical issues and sectors: intelligence and national security, life sciences and medical devices, agribusiness and rural development, entrepreneurship and talent, and business climate and infrastructure. These sessions served not only to shape and pressure-test the strategy but also to begin building the cross-sector relationships essential to successful implementation.
- **A REVIEW OF KEY PLANNING DOCUMENTS AND REGIONAL STRATEGIES**, including Albemarle County's Comprehensive Plan, housing strategy, innovation corridor efforts, and workforce initiatives and regional efforts, including the Thomas Jefferson Planning District Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy and the Regional Entrepreneurship Initiative study, among others. The strategy is designed to align with these existing frameworks and to complement—not duplicate—the County's broader planning ecosystem.

Throughout the process, the consulting team worked closely with County staff, the Board of Supervisors, Economic Development Authority, and local institutions to ensure this plan remained grounded in operational realities and reflective of Albemarle's unique position. Each goal and strategy in this plan is rooted in what we

heard, what we measured, and what we learned throughout the engagement.

In short, this plan reflects the best of what strategic economic development should be: collaborative, data-informed, opportunity-driven, and ready to be put into action.

Our Opportunity

Albemarle County is where the next chapter of Virginia's innovation economy begins.

Anchored by the University of Virginia and home to one of the fastest-growing economies in the Commonwealth, Albemarle is already a leader in biotech, national security, agribusiness, and entrepreneurship. With bold public investments like Rivanna Futures and a nationally competitive talent base, the County has the potential to become one of the state's premier hubs for inclusive, innovation-driven growth.

But turning that potential into progress will require action—and alignment. Albemarle has one of the lowest commercial tax bases in the region, with only 11.3% of tax revenue coming from commercial and industrial uses – placing pressure on the residential tax base to fund critical public services. Much of the local economy remains tied to public-sector employment, while land constraints, infrastructure gaps, and fragmented systems limit

private-sector growth. At the same time, many residents still don't see themselves reflected in the County's next economy.

This strategy is Albemarle County's blueprint for what comes next—one that aligns public and private assets, leverages anchor institutions, strengthens infrastructure, and builds systems that connect more residents to opportunity. It is also a strategy rooted in place: Albemarle's landscapes, trail networks, wineries, and creative culture are more than lifestyle amenities—they're economic assets that make this region distinctive.

The following insights, shaped by data, benchmarking, and stakeholder engagement, outline how Albemarle County can lead with intention and build an economy that reflects its values, amplifies its strengths, and delivers impact for all. This strategy is grounded in extensive research, including competitive benchmarking, target sector analysis, and stakeholder input; full findings are included in the appendices and available upon request.

OPPORTUNITY 01

Albemarle County is thriving, and now is the moment to turn momentum into long-term impact.

Albemarle County is outperforming much of Virginia and stands at a pivotal moment to shape what comes next.

With 11% job growth over the past five years—nearly triple the state average—and a median household income above \$102,000, Albemarle County’s top-line metrics reflect real strength. More than 60% of residents hold a bachelor’s degree or higher, and STEM employment has surged by 33%, signaling momentum in knowledge-based sectors. The county is also growing more diverse, with a 20% increase in non-white residents and rising interest from entrepreneurs, employers, and investors alike.

These signals point to a community on the rise, but realizing Albemarle’s full potential will require deliberate

action. The County’s commercial tax base remains limited, with 73% of property tax revenue coming from residential sources—placing increasing pressure on public services. Private-sector growth is constrained by limited development-ready land, infrastructure gaps, and convoluted timelines.

As one stakeholder put it, *“Albemarle County has everything it needs to lead; now is the time to connect the dots and build the future we want to see.”*

Albemarle’s opportunity is clear: by aligning its assets, addressing structural barriers, and investing in the systems that support inclusive growth, the County can secure long-term prosperity—and lead Virginia’s next chapter of innovation.

| ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT METRICS | PEER RANK* | RAW DATA |
|-------------------------------------------------|------------|----------------|
| Median household income | 1 | \$102,617 |
| Residents with a BA degree and above (LQ) | 2 | 60.6% (LQ 1.7) |
| STEM job growth (% over 5 years) | 1 | 32.8% |
| Job growth (% over 5 years) | 3 | 11% |
| Growth in non-white population (% over 5 years) | 4 | 20.3% |

* Note: Rank among 10 peer communities.

OPPORTUNITY 02

A stronger commercial sector will strengthen Albemarle's economy and balance its tax base.

Albemarle's economic growth is real, but a stronger commercial foundation will make it more sustainable, resilient, and dynamic.

Today, over 73% of the County's property tax revenue comes from residential sources, while just 11.3% comes from commercial and industrial uses. That imbalance limits the County's fiscal flexibility and places disproportionate pressure on homeowners to fund services and infrastructure. With population and job growth accelerating, this dynamic is increasingly unsustainable.

Stakeholders pointed to specific challenges: a shortage of development-ready sites, limited availability of Class A office and light industrial space, and infrastructure

bottlenecks that slow business attraction and expansion. A complex and lengthy permitting process adds further friction, particularly for growing firms.

Peer communities are investing in site readiness, infrastructure, and commercial corridors to attract employers and diversify their tax base. Albemarle County has the same opportunity. By unlocking strategic land for development, modernizing permitting processes, and actively supporting employer growth, the County can grow its commercial base and expand opportunities for businesses and residents alike.

"A stronger commercial base means more opportunity, more jobs, and a more balanced path to the future."



OPPORTUNITY 03

Biotechnology and life sciences are taking root and ready to grow with the right investments.

Biotech and life sciences are already driving Albemarle's innovation economy, making the County well-positioned to become a regional leader in this high-growth field.

This cluster contributes \$269 million to Albemarle's gross regional product—the highest of any traded industry—and has grown by over 50% in the past five years. With a location quotient of 1.76, the County demonstrates strong specialization, and the sector demonstrates both resilience and inclusivity: only 11% of jobs are at risk of automation, and the workforce is majority-female (54.7%).

Proximity to the University of Virginia and assets like North Fork Discovery Park give Albemarle a clear

research and talent edge. Yet fast-growing firms face a recurring challenge: there isn't enough space to scale. Stakeholders pointed to a shortage of lab-ready facilities, limited wet lab capacity, and a lack of growth-stage capital as key risks. Without near-term investment in the spaces and systems these firms need, the region could lose the very companies it helped launch.

The runway is built. Albemarle now has the chance to clear it—ensuring that the county not only incubates bioscience innovation but captures its long-term economic returns.

"We've got the brains and the research—what we don't have is the space to grow the companies that come out of it."

| BIOTECHNOLOGY AND LIFE SCIENCES METRICS | | RAW DATA |
|-----------------------------------------|--|---------------|
| LQ | | 1.76 |
| Gross Regional Product (GRP) | | \$269 Million |
| GRP growth (2019-2024 %) | | 50.8% |
| Female share of workers | | 54.7% |
| Automation risk | | 10.6% |

OPPORTUNITY 04

Rivanna Futures is Albemarle County's big investment, positioning it as an intelligence and national security innovation hub.

Albemarle County is home to one of Virginia's most unique and underrecognized assets: a nationally significant intelligence and national security sector.

Anchored by Rivanna Station and located within reach of Washington, D.C., this cluster contributes \$191 million in gross regional product annually and has a location quotient of 1.4, indicating strong regional specialization. Over 60% of workers in the sector hold at least a bachelor's degree, and 76% of supply chain spending remains within the region, demonstrating high local integration.

Despite its scale and strategic relevance, the sector remains largely invisible in the County's public narrative. Stakeholders noted that while Albemarle County

plays a critical national role, it lacks a clear platform and shared narrative to elevate that work and build a broader innovation ecosystem around it.

That's what makes Rivanna Futures so important. With the right investments in secure space, workforce training, and federal partnerships, Albemarle can elevate this sector by seeding new opportunities in cybersecurity, analytics, and advanced systems development. The potential is not just to strengthen what exists, but to grow what comes next.

"We're doing national-level work, but the rest of the world doesn't see it, and neither do most people here."

| INTELLIGENCE AND NATIONAL SECURITY METRICS | | RAW DATA |
|--------------------------------------------|--|---------------|
| LQ | | 1.40 |
| Gross Regional Product (GRP) | | \$191 Million |
| GRP per worker | | \$203,967 |
| Supply chain met in-region | | 76.2% |
| Share of workforce age 55+ | | 26.0% |

OPPORTUNITY 05

Albemarle County's food and agribusiness sector has deep roots and real potential to grow with the right tools.

Food processing and agribusiness are part of Albemarle's economic identity and strong sources of future growth.

With a location quotient of 2.33, the sector is more than twice as concentrated as the national average. It employs over 2,100 workers and contributes \$197 million annually to Albemarle's economy. Over 80% of its output is exported, illustrating robust market demand and regional reach. The workforce is notably diverse, with 23% of employees identifying as non-white.

This is a sector that blends heritage and innovation from long-established farms to artisan food producers to specialty manufacturers. But to fully realize its economic

potential, Albemarle must modernize the infrastructure that underpins it. Stakeholders cited cold storage gaps, outdated utilities, and inefficient loading facilities as constraints that limit scalability and force producers to look outside the County for expansion.

The opportunity is immediate: with targeted investment in facilities, broadband, land use planning, and shared-use infrastructure, Albemarle can position this sector for the future—building jobs, expanding exports, and reinforcing the County's leadership in value-added agriculture.

"We've got deep roots here—and real room to grow with the right support."

| AGRIBUSINESS METRICS | RAW DATA |
|-------------------------------------------|---------------|
| LQ | 2.33 |
| Gross Regional Product (GRP) | \$197 Million |
| GRP growth (2019-2024 %) | 49.9% |
| Share of sales exported outside of County | 82.7% |
| Share of non-white workers | 23.3% |

OPPORTUNITY 06

Albemarle County's next economy is held back by outdated infrastructure and land planning.

Albemarle County's economy is growing but development-ready land, utilities, and permitting processes are not keeping up.

Per the Comprehensive Plan, 5% of land in Albemarle County is designated for development and much of that land is either built out, constrained by sensitive features, or have challenging-to-serve infrastructure gaps. Stakeholders cited water and sewer infrastructure, outdated zoning codes, and protracted permitting timelines as top barriers to growth—particularly for key clusters like biotech, clean tech, and food processing, which require specialized facilities and utility-ready sites.

Lack of reliable broadband and cellular access continues to impact rural areas and limits digital infrastructure for small businesses and remote workers. Meanwhile, cold

storage shortages and ready lab space deficits are not just inconvenient; they are preventing entire sectors from scaling locally.

Several peer counties have addressed similar constraints through site-readiness strategies, utility partnerships, and targeted capital improvements. Albemarle has the opportunity to do the same and must act decisively if it wants to retain and attract the next generation of firms.

The County's economic vision can't be realized without modern infrastructure to support it. Growth doesn't happen on its own; it must be built from the ground up.

"We've got the ideas and the interest. What we don't have is enough space with the right infrastructure to bring them to life."



OPPORTUNITY 07

Entrepreneurship is alive in Albemarle County and ready to scale with targeted support.

From UVA spinouts to local food ventures, Albemarle's entrepreneurial ecosystem is growing, but many founders are struggling to move beyond the startup stage.

Entrepreneurship is on the rise, fueled by a well-educated population, strong regional pride, and early-stage support organizations. Stakeholders praised a "visible energy" around new ventures in biotech, creative industries, and food. But they also highlighted a clear gap in the middle; once businesses move past the launch phase, they often lack access to capital, affordable space, or support to scale.

The County lacks a true innovation district or a robust business accelerator that offers space, mentorship, and wraparound services beyond the startup stage.

Growth-stage capital is limited, particularly for non-tech firms. Zoning and permitting barriers add friction at a time when momentum should be building.

With targeted investment in mid-stage support—co-working and lab spaces, small business grants, and growth programming—Albemarle County can retain and grow the businesses already taking root. Entrepreneurs don't just need help starting; they need a clear runway to thrive.

"Small businesses are taking root here—now we need to give them room to grow."



OPPORTUNITY 08

Albemarle has the talent it needs to grow; now it must become a place where that talent stays.

Albemarle County boasts one of the most educated populations in Virginia, with over 60% of residents holding a bachelor's degree or higher and a strong talent pipeline from the University of Virginia and Piedmont Virginia Community College. This depth of knowledge and skill is a major competitive advantage, especially for innovation-driven clusters like biotech, clean tech, and national security.

But while the talent is here, retention is an increasing concern. Only 26% of residents are in their prime working years (25-44), labor force participation lags at 62%, and the County's median age is approaching 40. Stakeholders pointed to rising housing costs—a \$540,000 median home price and \$1,655 average rent—as a major barrier for mid-skill workers and young families who may be weighing employment opportunities in areas of the Commonwealth and the country with a better mix of prevailing salaries and

cost of living. Growth stage companies have identified a lack of mid-career workers both in specialized roles but also in general administrative roles (i.e., finance, marketing, HR, and other management roles). In an environment of many early-stage companies, career advancement pathways also remain unclear for many residents, especially outside of large institutions.

The opportunity is clear: Albemarle can position itself as a magnet for talent by investing in housing affordability, expanding mid-skill career options, and building stronger professional networks for early- and mid-career workers. A thriving innovation economy depends not just on attracting talent, but on keeping it.

“People come for school or a job—but we need to give them more reasons to stay and build a life here.”

| TALENT METRICS | PEER RANK* | RAW DATA |
|---------------------------------|------------|-----------------|
| Full employment | 8 | 3.3% |
| Labor force participation rate | 9 | 62.2% |
| Prime working-age talent (LQ) | 8 | 25.9% (LQ 0.95) |
| Median Age | 8 | 39.4 |
| Median home price | 10 | \$540,038 |
| Median rent | 8 | \$1,655 |
| Home value to income ratio (LQ) | 8 | 5.5 (LQ 1.2) |

* Note: Rank among 10 peer communities.

OPPORTUNITY 09

UVA and PVCC are powerful anchors that can drive greater impact through deeper collaboration.

Albemarle County is home to two extraordinary institutions—UVA and PVCC—that are driving research, talent development, and innovation. But stronger alignment with the County's economic strategy can turn these assets into even greater engines of growth.

UVA fuels cutting-edge research, produces top-tier graduates, and supports a growing portfolio of startups. PVCC offers workforce training in fields like healthcare and advanced manufacturing, and has demonstrated success connecting residents to job opportunities. Yet many stakeholders noted these institutions often operate in parallel to the County's broader efforts, missing opportunities for collaboration, shared investment, and long-term alignment.

Startups emerging from UVA often scale elsewhere due to space and funding constraints. PVCC's programs are not always tightly connected to in-demand employer needs. By deepening partnerships, co-investing in facilities and training, and creating more visible on-ramps between education and employment, Albemarle can turn these institutions into strategic accelerators of regional prosperity.

"UVA and PVCC are doing amazing work—we just need to connect the dots to make the whole system stronger."



OPPORTUNITY 10

Albemarle County's workforce system is full of strong players—now is the time to bring them together.

Albemarle County has the ingredients of a strong workforce system: motivated employers, training providers, career centers, and community organizations. But those pieces often operate in silos, making it harder for residents to navigate career pathways and for employers to find the talent they need.

Employers in manufacturing, logistics, and healthcare shared concerns about filling mid-skill roles. Meanwhile, jobseekers described difficulty understanding available programs, inconsistent wraparound support, and limited coordination between agencies. Even when programs are working well, they're not always connected to each other or even aligned to priority sectors.

The opportunity is to build a more strategic, sector-driven workforce system that brings clarity and cohesion. By aligning programs to employer needs, investing in career navigation, and strengthening wraparound services, Albemarle can improve outcomes for both workers and businesses—and ensure more residents benefit from the region's growth.

“The programs are there—we just need a clearer path and stronger connections between them.”



OPPORTUNITY 11

Albemarle County can't grow inclusively without expanding access and closing opportunity gaps.

Albemarle County's top-line economic indicators are strong, but deeper data reveals disparities in who participates in, and benefits from, that growth.

Only 9.6% of businesses in Albemarle are minority-owned, and just 22.7% are women-owned: both figures well below state and national averages. Women in Albemarle earn 18% less than men, and racial income gaps exceed \$25,000. These aren't just social gaps; they're lost economic potential.

Stakeholders emphasized the barriers faced by under-represented entrepreneurs and workers: limited access to capital, informal networks that exclude new entrants,

and unclear pathways into high-growth industries like biotech and national security. Several noted that even when resources exist, they're hard to find—or not designed with inclusion in mind.

The opportunity for Albemarle County is to lead with opportunity—not just as a value, but as a growth strategy. By expanding capital access, supporting minority- and women-owned businesses, and designing workforce pathways that are truly accessible, the County can unlock the full potential of its population—and build an innovation economy that reflects the diversity of its community.

"We can't compete at the highest level if half our community is sitting on the sidelines."

| OPPORTUNITY METRICS | PEER RANK* | RAW DATA |
|---------------------------------------------|------------|----------|
| Share of minority-owned businesses | 9 | 9.6% |
| Share of women-owned businesses | 5 | 22.7% |
| Gender pay gap | 6 | 18.4% |
| Disparity in median income by race | 10 | \$25,054 |
| Disparity in educational attainment by race | 10 | 18.7% |

* Note: Rank among 10 peer communities.

OPPORTUNITY 12

Albemarle has a strong foundation but needs a bolder story to compete.

Albemarle County is doing the work, but too often, the story of that work is lost in the noise.

Stakeholders across sectors described a “crisis of identity” when it comes to how Albemarle positions itself. The county’s strengths are real—research institutions, secure federal infrastructure, a thriving food economy—but they’re not always visible. Even local employers struggle to articulate what Albemarle stands for economically, especially in relation to the City of Charlottesville.

Meanwhile, peer regions are getting louder and more coordinated. Places like Montgomery County, MD and

Durham, NC are actively branding their innovation corridors and aligning public and private voices behind a shared message. Albemarle has the assets to do the same.

The next step is to define and promote a unifying identity—one that captures Albemarle’s role in Virginia’s innovation economy, its commitment to inclusion, and its distinctive quality of place. Economic development today is as much about storytelling as it is about site planning. Albemarle has a story worth telling—and the time to tell it is now.

“We have the pieces. What we need is a message that pulls them together—and puts us on the map.”



OPPORTUNITY 13

Albemarle County's future depends on growing together with focus, alignment, and shared value.

Albemarle County doesn't need to become something entirely new. Its future lies in growing what's already here with clarity, coordination, and a commitment to shared prosperity.

The County has extraordinary assets: top-tier research institutions, a specialized workforce, high-value industry clusters, and a quality of life that draws people from across the country. But to compete and to grow inclusively, it must bring its systems into alignment. That means linking education to employment, infrastructure to industry, and narrative to strategy.

Stakeholders are ready. Across sectors, they called for a strategy that sets priorities, picks smart bets, and invests in infrastructure and equity with equal force. They also emphasized the importance of staying true to Albemarle's character—valuing place, preserving identity, and ensuring that growth benefits all.

Albemarle's next chapter doesn't write itself. But with clear focus and collaborative action, the County can build a future that reflects its values, amplifies its strengths, and delivers impact for generations.

"We're not trying to be everywhere, or everything; we just want to grow with purpose and stay true to who we are."





Economic Development Strategy

Albemarle County can gain significant advantages by implementing this strategy through coordinated leadership, cross-sector collaboration, and long-term alignment.

A transformative approach will involve using this strategy to guide the work of the Economic Development Office, other County departments, the Board of Supervisors and the EDA, and institutional partners around shared goals – rather than isolated programs or departmental silos. It also invites closer coordination with land use, infrastructure, workforce, and higher education systems to support innovation-led growth.

This shift has the potential to unify efforts, energize community and institutional stakeholders, and amplify Albemarle County's ability to lead Virginia's next innovation economy.

MISSION

The mission of the Albemarle County Economic Development Office is to strengthen and diversify the County's tax base, support business scale-up and redevelopment, and expand career-ladder job opportunities, ensuring a vibrant, innovative economy that delivers lasting prosperity for all residents.

ELEMENTS OF A STRATEGY

Albemarle County's strategy is grounded in what we heard, what we measured, and what we imagined—together.

The insights are clear: the county is growing, and its economy is evolving. But turning momentum into meaningful progress will take more than energy alone – it will take clarity, commitment, and action.

The vision statement and five goals that follow mark Albemarle County's next chapter. Each one is rooted in community priorities, shaped by data, and built to reflect the county's values. Together, they offer a focused, forward-looking framework for a more innovative and resilient economy.

This plan provides a focused strategy for guiding economic development in Albemarle County. It sits beneath and in alignment with the County's 20-year Comprehensive Plan and alongside other guiding frameworks such as the housing plan, climate action plan, and biodiversity action plan—ensuring strategic alignment across County priorities.

The EDSP is structured as a five-year roadmap (2025–2030), with a suggested formal midpoint check-in to assess progress, adjust priorities, and ensure continued relevance in a changing environment.

VISION

Albemarle County – Rooted in Innovation. Open for Investment.

Where bold ideas take root, businesses scale, and partnerships thrive – leading the way in Virginia's next innovation economy.

GOALS

This five-year plan is flexible. Albemarle's economic development priorities will evolve as the County grows and the economy changes. Community leaders should examine the strategy at least annually to identify deficiencies and opportunities to address changing needs with updates as needed.

Building for the Future Albemarle County

- **Goal 1: Lead in Intelligence and National Security.**
We will lead Virginia's intelligence and national security innovation economy.
- **Goal 2: Discover in Life Sciences.**
We will grow into the Mid-Atlantic's premier destination for biotechnology and life sciences innovation.
- **Goal 3: Grow a Modern Agribusiness Economy.**
We will transform Albemarle's agricultural legacy into a modern agribusiness economy.
- **Goal 4: Empower Talent.**
We will make Albemarle the place where talent and entrepreneurs stay, scale, and succeed.
- **Goal 5: Compete for Investment.**
We will position Albemarle as Virginia's most investment-ready county – ready to compete, build, and lead.

TARGET SECTORS GUIDING STRATEGY

This strategy is built around three sectors that reflect Albemarle County's competitive advantages, institutional assets, and future growth potential. Identified through data analysis, industry benchmarking, and extensive stakeholder engagement, these sectors combine economic strength with resilience, specialization, and alignment with local values.

Each one plays a distinct role in Albemarle County's future and together, they anchor the County's transition into a more innovation-driven, inclusive economy.

- **Intelligence and National Security**

Albemarle County's proximity to Washington, D.C. and its role as home to Rivanna Station give it unique strategic value in the national security landscape. With a location quotient of 1.4 and the highest rate of regional supply chain retention (76%), this sector is both highly specialized and deeply embedded locally. High educational attainment and access to UVA's cyber and security-related programs support talent development, while opportunities remain to expand infrastructure, visibility, and private-sector innovation around this core strength.

- **Biotechnology and Life Sciences**

The County's most economically impactful cluster, biotechnology and life sciences generate \$269 million in gross regional product and have nearly doubled over the past decade. With strong regional specialization (LQ 1.76), a highly diverse talent pool, and access to UVA's research enterprise and North Fork Discovery Park, Albemarle County is well-positioned to compete for national bioscience investment. Continued investment in lab space, commercialization, and talent alignment will help this sector scale.

- **Food Processing and Agribusiness**

Albemarle County's most specialized and export-oriented cluster (LQ 2.33), food processing and agribusiness employ over 2,100 workers

and generate more than \$197 million in GRP. Anchored by agricultural heritage and a growing network of artisan and value-added producers, this sector is a key part of Albemarle County's identity and economy. With 83% of goods exported and strong rural-urban linkages, targeted investments in cold storage, logistics, and processing capacity can help this sector reach new markets and sustain momentum.

MEASURING RESULTS

This strategy is designed to deliver results. To ensure accountability and impact, Albemarle County will track progress using clear, high-level indicators tied to the goals of this plan. These metrics will help measure business expansion, talent retention, and fiscal health—and guide adaptive decision-making over the five-year horizon.

Key Areas of Measurement:

- **Business Growth and Investment:**

Track job creation, business expansion, and capital investment across innovation sectors—especially in biotech, agribusiness, and national security.

- **Talent Retention and Attraction:**

Monitor growth in the County's working-age population (particularly ages 25–44) and evaluate whether talent is staying, returning, or choosing Albemarle County to build careers.

- **Commercial Tax Base Strength:**

Measure growth in the commercial share of the property tax base as a signal of fiscal resilience and reduced overreliance on residential property taxes.

These benchmarks provide a shared understanding of what success looks like and verify Albemarle County's strategy is not only visionary, but measurable.

GOAL 1: LEAD IN INTELLIGENCE & NATIONAL SECURITY.

We will lead Virginia's intelligence and national security innovation economy.

GOAL 1

We will lead Virginia's intelligence and national security innovation economy.

Why it Matters?

One of Albemarle's biggest economic investments is Rivanna Futures. This effort builds on Albemarle's unique strengths, including its proximity to Washington, D.C., the research leadership of the University of Virginia, and an emerging local ecosystem of secure technology and intelligence firms. By leading this sector's growth, Albemarle will create new career pathways, diversify its commercial economy, and strengthen its role in driving Virginia's future prosperity. Investing in this opportunity is essential to building long-term economic resilience and securing Albemarle's place at the forefront of intelligence and national security innovation.

The Evidence

- Albemarle is home to Rivanna Station, one of the region's principal national security installations, and sits just a couple hours from Washington, D.C. These geographic and institutional advantages position the County as a strategic location for attracting mission-aligned companies. Throughout stakeholder engagements, many noted that with thoughtful site planning and branding, the County could harness this foundation to draw new firms and secure job growth.
- Private firms in the intelligence and national security sector generate over \$190 million in annual economic output, making this one of Albemarle's most valuable clusters. More than 75% of their supply chain purchases are sourced locally, reinforcing the strength of the County's business ecosystem in this field.
- The existing workforce supporting national security firms is highly experienced and deeply embedded in the region. The sector's location quotient of 1.4 indicates a 40% higher concentration of employment in this field than the national average – highlighting both specialization and expertise. However, employers report growing challenges in attracting new cleared talent, especially mid-career professionals, due to limited industry visibility and logistical challenges to clearance attainment.
- Stakeholders consistently described the sector as a "hidden strength": a critical industry disconnected from the region's identity. While the work being done is nationally significant, the region lacks the storytelling, branding, and partnerships needed to define itself as a hub for national security.

The following metrics should be tracked to assess impact:

- **JOB CREATION IN INTELLIGENCE AND NATIONAL SECURITY SECTORS**
Tracking new jobs created in Albemarle's intelligence, defense, and secure innovation economy, as well as inclusive workforce participation.
- **COMPANY FORMATION AND GROWTH**
Counting new companies formed, scaled, or relocated within Albemarle's secure technology and intelligence ecosystem.
- **WORKFORCE PIPELINE DEVELOPMENT**
Tracking new education and training programs in intelligence and national security, and enrollment in aligned career pathways across UVA, PVCC, and K-12.
- **EMPLOYER AND AGENCY ENGAGEMENT**
Tracking partnerships, roundtables, and joint initiatives with intelligence and national security companies, federal agencies, and research institutions.
- **REGIONAL BRAND AWARENESS**
Measuring engagement with Albemarle's intelligence and national security marketing efforts, including inquiries, website traffic, and media placements.



STRATEGY 1.1

Activate Rivanna Futures as a next-generation intelligence and national security innovation campus. A plan to position Rivanna Futures through targeted land use, infrastructure, and business development strategies.

WHY IT MATTERS

Rivanna Futures represents Albemarle County's commitment to intelligence and national security innovation targeting national security, cybersecurity, AI/ML, and secure technology. Building on the federal investment in Rivanna Station and the region's experienced workforce in intelligence and national security, Rivanna Futures can become a magnet for high-wage employers, talent, and investment, with projections of future employment capacity of more than 5,000 jobs located in up to 1 million square feet of light industrial and/or office space. With targeted infrastructure, land use alignment, and strategic partnerships, Albemarle County can scale this district into a nationally recognized hub for intelligence and national security innovation and economic growth.



WHAT'S NEEDED



Develop and implement a Rivanna Futures Innovation Hub plan to align land use, infrastructure, and development priorities with targeted business attraction and expansion efforts to bring the potential of Rivanna Futures as a major employment hub to fruition.



Establishes a framework to grow Albemarle County's intelligence and national security cluster.



Launch a business attraction campaign targeting national security, defense, and secure technology employers.



Positions Rivanna Futures as a destination for high-quality employers and jobs.



Continue advocating for targeted infrastructure upgrades, including utilities, fiber, and transportation access.



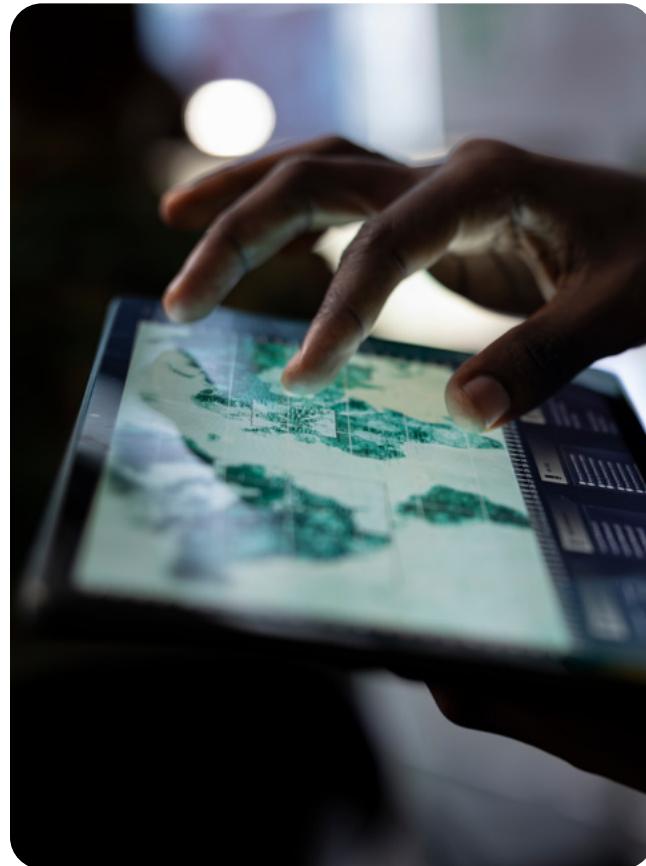
Ensures Rivanna Futures can accommodate new tenants and sustain long-term growth.

STRATEGY 1.2

Strengthen regional partnerships to build the Central Virginia Innovation Corridor's national security cluster. A partnership strategy aligning regional assets around national security commercialization, workforce, and industry growth.

WHY IT MATTERS

Albemarle County sits at the heart of the Central Virginia Innovation Corridor, with key assets like Rivanna Station, the National Security Data and Policy Institute, UVA, and PVCC driving regional innovation. By supporting and advancing the Corridor's Strategic Roadmap, Albemarle can help align regional resources around intelligence and national security growth. Active participation in this partnership will position the County as a central player in the Corridor's evolution, amplify workforce development and commercialization efforts, and attract targeted investment into Albemarle' County's innovation ecosystem.



WHAT'S NEEDED



Continue active participation in the Central Virginia Innovation Corridor initiative.

→ Ensures Albemarle's voice shapes regional innovation strategies and attracts investment.



Support the Innovation Corridor Strategic Roadmap supported by the GO Virginia grant.

→ The Roadmap will provide actionable recommendations to strengthen regional growth in national security, digital technologies, and other innovation sectors.



Partner with regional stakeholders to implement recommendations from the Corridor's Strategic Roadmap.

→ Aligns resources and priorities across jurisdictions to build a unified, high-impact innovation corridor.



Leverage regional partners, such as AFCEA Central Virginia, Defense Affairs Committee, and others in the intelligence and national security sector.

→ Builds strategic connections that enhance Albemarle's role in high-value, defense-aligned innovation sectors.

STRATEGY 1.3

Expand intelligence and national security career pathways through UVA, PVCC, and K-12 alignment. A strategy connecting K-12, PVCC, and UVA to national security employers and research institutions.

WHY IT MATTERS

The county has a strong pool of talent and is home to two powerful educational anchors: the University of Virginia and Piedmont Virginia Community College. More talent is seeded here than ever before, but employers still face challenges retaining this workforce, particularly at mid-career levels. To keep local talent from leaving and to expand pathways for other County residents, Albemarle County must align education and industry through sector partnerships and targeted workforce initiatives. By creating seamless transitions from classroom to career, the County can turn potential into staying power—building a secure, innovative economy that benefits all.



WHAT'S NEEDED



Strengthen the sector partnership to align K-12 and higher education systems with intelligence and national security employer needs.



Builds a talent pipeline responsive to industry demands and anchored in collaboration.



Consider developing new work-based learning models, such as internships, apprenticeships, and career academies.



Provides real-world experience and strengthens transitions from education to employment.



Host regular employer-educator convenings to review curriculum and training updates.



Ensures pathways remain relevant and aligned with workforce evolution.

STRATEGY 1.4

Launch intelligence and national security partnerships among the federal, private, and academic sectors to address workforce needs and advocacy efforts across Albemarle's intelligence and national security sector.

WHY IT MATTERS

This sector partnership centers around one of Albemarle County's most significant economic development investments: positioning the County as a hub for intelligence and national security innovation. By formally bringing together employers, federal agencies, and educational institutions, Albemarle County can align strategies, address workforce gaps, and drive shared investment in the infrastructure and policies needed to sustain growth. This collaboration will create high-quality jobs, support business expansion, and strengthen the County's standing in Virginia's next innovation economy.



WHAT'S NEEDED



Establish a formal intelligence and national security sector partnership, bringing together employers, agencies, and educators.



Builds a unified platform to coordinate growth, share resources, and drive innovation across the sector.



Develop a sector-specific workforce strategy, aligned with the needs of employers and regional workforce development goals.



Addresses critical talent gaps and supports job growth in key roles.



Launch advocacy efforts to support sector infrastructure and policy needs.



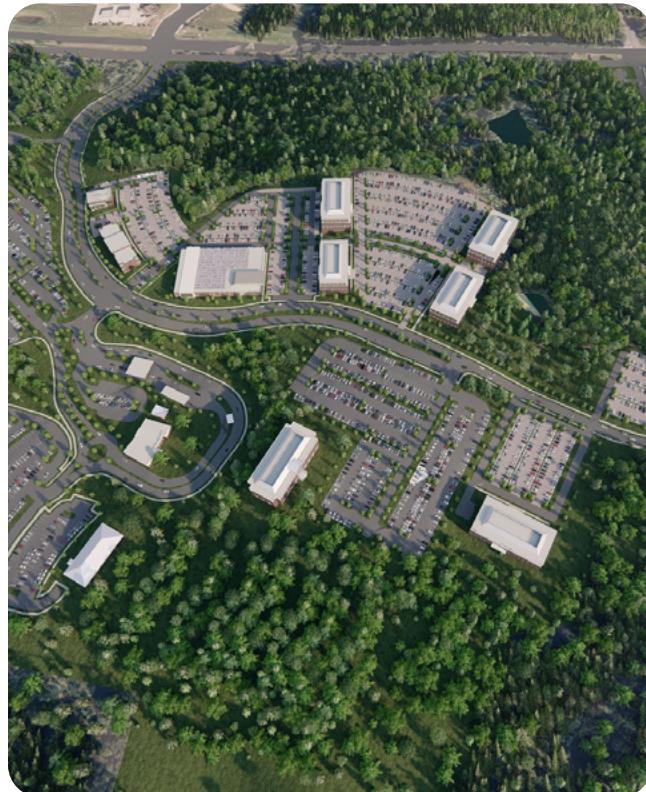
Ensures Albemarle County's voice is heard in regional, state, and federal decision-making.

STRATEGY 1.5

Build Albemarle's intelligence and national security innovation brand. A marketing campaign positioning Albemarle as Virginia's hub for secure intelligence and national security innovation.

WHY IT MATTERS

Albemarle County's leadership in intelligence and national security is anchored by Rivanna Futures and supported by regional collaboration through the Innovation Corridor. Yet this story is not widely known. With a bold, proactive brand and a clear narrative, the County can amplify its assets and leadership role in the national security and secure innovation economy. This positioning will not only attract high-quality employers and federal investment but will also strengthen relationships with federal agencies, site selectors, and decision-makers. Telling this story—backed by data and a compelling vision—is key to Albemarle County's long-term economic resilience and growth.



WHAT'S NEEDED



Develop a compelling brand identity and narrative around Albemarle County's intelligence and national security assets, in partnership with regional Innovation Corridor partners.



→ Positions Albemarle County as a leading hub in the national intelligence and security economy.



Create a proactive marketing and business attraction campaign targeting federal agency decision-makers, site selectors, and industry leaders.



→ Raises awareness and builds connections that attract employers and investment.



Leverage partnerships with regional stakeholders to amplify Albemarle County's brand story and align messaging across jurisdictions.



→ Ensures a unified, high-impact presence in the national innovation landscape.

GOAL 2: DISCOVER IN LIFE SCIENCES

We will grow into the Mid-Atlantic's premier destination for biotechnology and life sciences innovation.

GOAL 2

We will grow into the Mid-Atlantic's premier destination for biotechnology and life sciences innovation.

Why it Matters?

Albemarle's biotechnology and life sciences sector is poised for breakout growth. With research strengths at UVA, a strong base of emerging companies, and national momentum in biotech and health innovation, Albemarle has a rare opportunity to lead. The region ranks among the top ten nationally for per capita seed funding raised, and Albemarle's biotechnology and life sciences cluster already outperforms the national average, boasting a location quotient of 1.76. But early-stage success will not automatically translate into a full-scale innovation economy. By investing now, Albemarle can anchor a new generation of life sciences growth—creating resilient jobs, diversifying the economy, and establishing itself as the Mid-Atlantic's premier destination for life sciences innovation.

The Evidence

- The University of Virginia (UVA) is a powerful engine for life sciences growth, anchoring a research ecosystem that includes startup incubators, clinical research centers, and commercialization offices. Stakeholders also highlighted proximity to the multi-state I-64 Innovation Corridor as a key geographic advantage.
- Albemarle's life sciences cluster is the largest and one of the most specialized among its target sectors. It produces over \$269 million in annual economic output and calculates out to a location quotient of 1.76, meaning employment in the sector is 76% more concentrated than the national average.
- Life sciences output in the County surged nearly 50% from 2019 to 2024, and the region now ranks among the top 10 U.S. metros in per capita seed funding. But that momentum is at risk: early-stage firms face a shortage of wet lab space, growth capital, and post-incubator facilities, making it difficult to stay and scale.
- The current workforce is highly educated – more than 55% hold a bachelor's degree or higher – and includes a slight female majority. The cluster also boasts one of the highest average wages among target sectors and faces very low automation risk, making it not only resilient but also a strong contributor to economic equity with strong potential for long-term employment.

The following metrics should be tracked to assess impact:

- **NEW LIFE SCIENCES SPACE DELIVERED**
Tracking the development and absorption of new lab space, wet labs, and light industrial facilities supporting life sciences and medical device growth.
- **CLUSTER GROWTH THROUGH COMPANY EXPANSION AND ATTRACTION**
Measuring the growth of Albemarle's life sciences and medical devices cluster by tracking the scaling of existing companies (jobs and revenue) and the attraction of new companies, including foreign direct investment (FDI).
- **CAPITAL RAISED BY LIFE SCIENCES COMPANIES**
Measuring the amount of VC and growth capital secured by Albemarle-based life sciences and medical device companies.
- **TALENT PIPELINE DEVELOPMENT**
Tracking new enrollments and completions in life science-related programs at PVCC, K-12, and UVA, aligned with life sciences career pathways, as well as inclusive workforce participation.
- **EMPLOYER AND ECOSYSTEM ENGAGEMENT**
Tracking partnerships, convenings, and joint initiatives with life sciences companies, educational institutions, workforce partners, and regional collaborators.

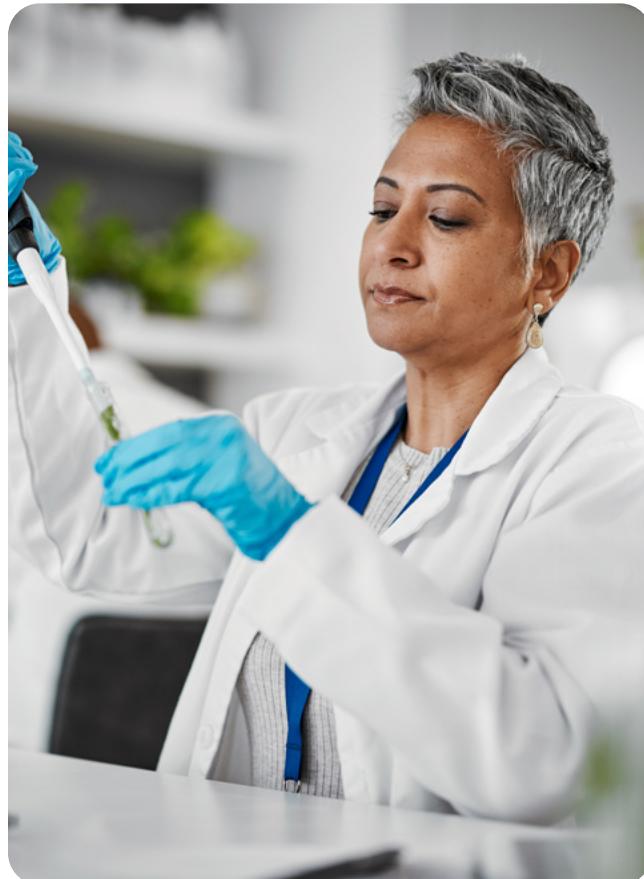


STRATEGY 2.1

Expand Albemarle's biotechnology and life sciences infrastructure to support scale-up and commercialization. A coordinated plan to deliver lab space, wet labs, and specialized small-scale manufacturing facilities.

WHY IT MATTERS

Albemarle County has built a strong foundation in life sciences through incubation efforts and partnerships with CvilleBioHub, the University of Virginia, and others. However, scaling this sector requires targeted investment in specialized infrastructure. Many local companies face bottlenecks accessing wet lab space, small-scale manufacturing capacity, and advanced research and development (R&D) facilities. Without this infrastructure, firms consider expanding elsewhere. By investing in facilities that support scale-up and commercialization, the County can retain growing companies, attract new investment, and establish itself as a bold leader in the life sciences economy.



WHAT'S NEEDED



Develop and implement a coordinated life sciences infrastructure plan that delivers specialized wet labs, R&D facilities, and small-scale manufacturing space.



Provides the physical resources needed for companies to scale and commercialize in Albemarle County.



Partner with CvilleBioHub and regional stakeholders to identify specific infrastructure gaps and investment priorities.



Ensures infrastructure aligns with actual sector needs and supports long-term growth.



Consider permitting policies to support rapid deployment of life sciences facilities.



Reduces delays and encourages firms to expand locally rather than seeking space elsewhere.

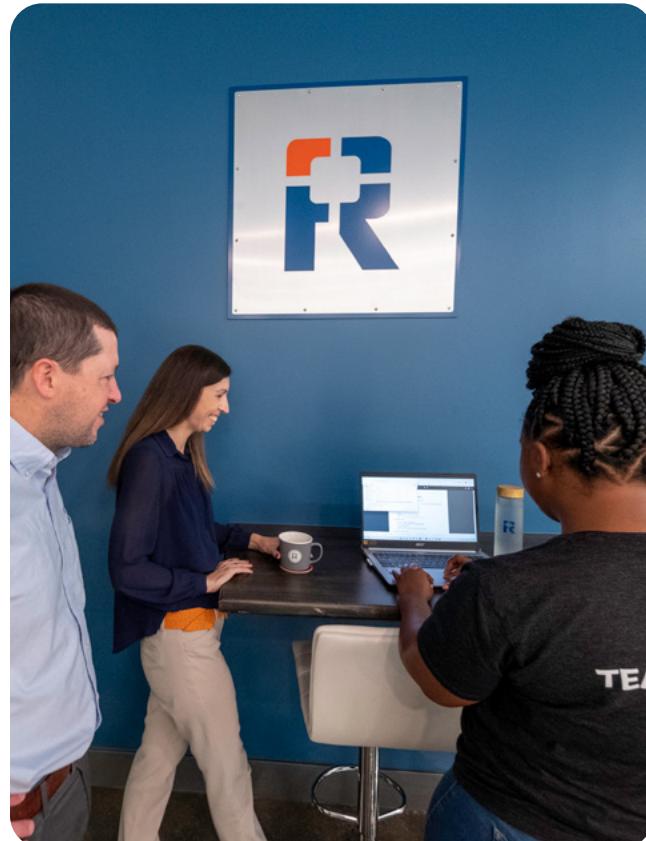
STRATEGY 2.2

Position Albemarle as a leading hub for biotechnology and life sciences innovation through the Central Virginia Innovation Corridor.

A network to improve commercialization pathways, cluster identity, and access to growth capital.

WHY IT MATTERS

Albemarle County's life sciences sector is poised for breakout growth, fueled by world-class research from the University of Virginia, CvilleBioHub's grassroots leadership, and regional momentum through the Central Virginia Innovation Corridor. But early-stage success will not automatically translate into a full-scale innovation economy. Many companies face challenges accessing Series A and growth-stage capital, securing lab space, and navigating the complex pathways from research to market. Strengthening commercialization and cluster coordination will help bridge these gaps, align regional assets, and ensure Albemarle County's life sciences firms can stay and scale locally.



WHAT'S NEEDED



Continue active participation in the Central Virginia Innovation Corridor and complete the Strategic Roadmap.



Provides a shared regional framework for commercialization and growth across life sciences and digital sectors.



Consider the creation of a regional commercialization support network with incubators, accelerators, core laboratory space and other specialized research facilities, and grant-writing assistance.



Helps startups and scale-ups access critical resources and stay in Albemarle County.

STRATEGY 2.3

Leverage CvilleBioHub to lead a life sciences workforce and sector partnership.

Build on existing employment connection efforts through a convening hub connecting employers, K-12, PVCC, and UVA partners to build workforce pipelines and address policy needs.

WHY IT MATTERS

Albemarle County's life sciences companies cite talent as both their greatest asset and biggest constraint. While early-stage workforce development is strong, there is no formal mechanism to bring employers together with educators and training partners to shape a coordinated talent pipeline. CvilleBioHub is already positioned as a trusted convener and can anchor a sector partnership that aligns efforts across K-12, Piedmont Virginia Community College, and the University of Virginia. In addition to driving workforce collaboration, this partnership can also shape regional and state policy, inform funding priorities, and advocate for investments that support the County's life sciences growth.



WHAT'S NEEDED



Leverage CvilleBioHub's BioBridge project to establish a life sciences sector partnership, in collaboration with Albemarle County and key education and workforce partners.



Establishes an ongoing forum to align talent development, training, and employer needs.



Partner to implement the findings of the BioBridge project.



Positions the county as an active partner in supporting the needs of life sciences companies.



Convene regular roundtables between employers, K-12, PVCC, and UVA to coordinate curriculum, internships, and hiring pathways.



Strengthens student pipelines and ensures educational programs are aligned with sector demand.

STRATEGY 2.4

Establish a national business attraction initiative for biotechnology and life sciences.

A targeted recruitment strategy using site selection, trade shows, conferences, and international/ FDI outreach.

WHY IT MATTERS

Albemarle County's life sciences cluster is growing, but its full potential depends on a robust network of supporting firms: contract manufacturers, specialized suppliers, and R&D services. These businesses bring essential capacity to scale production, create new jobs, and embed companies deeper into the local economy. A coordinated national attraction strategy will help fill critical gaps in the life sciences supply chain and strengthen Albemarle County's position as a complete, competitive destination for bioscience and medical device firms. This effort should also boost the County's visibility among site selectors, investors, and global companies evaluating the Mid-Atlantic region.



WHAT'S NEEDED



Design and execute a targeted business attraction campaign focused on life sciences and medical device supply chain companies—using national site selector outreach, trade shows, inbound visits, and international FDI efforts.



Brings critical support firms to the region, enhances cluster resilience, and raises Albemarle County's visibility.



Coordinate with regional economic development partners and CvilleBioHub to align messaging, leads, and follow-up.



Ensures seamless engagement and maximizes collective impact.



Integrate brand and marketing efforts from Strategy 1.5 to promote Albemarle County as a destination for intelligence and national security innovation and life sciences, including dual-use technologies.



Reinforces the County's identity and boosts visibility across key sectors.

STRATEGY 2.5

Partner to expand access to growth capital for Albemarle's biotechnology and life sciences companies.

A targeted recruitment strategy using site selection, trade shows, conferences, and international/ FDI outreach.

WHY IT MATTERS

For Albemarle County's life sciences companies, access to capital is often the deciding factor in whether they stay and scale locally or relocate to more capital-rich ecosystems. While early-stage funding exists, many firms struggle to secure Series A and growth-stage investment—particularly those in the “valley of death” between R&D and commercialization. By partnering with CvilleBioHub and regional funders, Albemarle County can build the financial infrastructure needed to retain and grow its bioscience firms, while also enhancing competitiveness for federal and state innovation grants.



WHAT'S NEEDED



Partner with CvilleBioHub and regional funders to create stronger connections between local firms and venture, angel, and growth-stage capital.



Helps scale companies locally and builds a stronger investment ecosystem.



Develop a capital readiness initiative offering pitch coaching, grant writing support, and investor matchmaking for life sciences companies.



Improves deal flow and helps firms compete for public and private funding.



Continue to coordinate efforts to pursue large-scale federal and state innovation grants.



Secures catalytic capital for cluster infrastructure and company growth.

GOAL 3: GROW A MODERN AGROBUSINESS ECONOMY

We will transform Albemarle's agricultural legacy into a modern agribusiness economy.

GOAL 3

We will transform Albemarle's agricultural legacy into a modern agribusiness economy.

Why it Matters?

From legacy farming and award-winning wineries to value-added agricultural innovation, the County's food economy already outperforms national averages with a location quotient above 2.3. Yet much of Albemarle's agricultural economy sits at a transition point: legacy businesses aging out, transitional farms seeking new models, and emerging entrepreneurs ready to lead. Without modern infrastructure, access to growth capital, and stronger business supports, producers will struggle to scale—and the County risks missing a national wave of rural innovation, where value-added agriculture is one of the fastest-growing sectors. By treating agribusiness as a core economic driver and targeting strategic investment in rural Albemarle, the County can unlock a new era of entrepreneurship, reinvention, and sustainable growth.

The Evidence

- Albemarle's food and agriculture brand is one of its most visible economic assets—supported by artisan producers, wineries, and a legacy of farming. Roughly 83% of the cluster's sales – nearly \$400 million – are exported outside the region, signaling both strong external demand and opportunity for expanded value-added production.
- The Food Processing and Agribusiness cluster is the County's most specialized sector, with a location quotient of 2.33 and more than 2,100 jobs. It is also one of the highest performing clusters economically, contributing \$197 million in annual output.
- While the cluster is positioned to scale, limited infrastructure – particularly for water, sewer, broadband, and cold storage – remains a barrier to growth for producers and processors. Businesses described aging or undersized facilities and difficulty accessing utility-ready sites suited to agribusiness needs.
- Stakeholders noted that current land use regulations and permitting processes can make it difficult to expand or diversify agribusiness operations. As the sector evolves to include value-added processing, agritourism, and hybrid production models, outdated zoning and lengthy approval timelines often create uncertainty and slow growth.

The following metrics should be tracked to assess impact:

- **NEW RURAL INFRASTRUCTURE DELIVERED**
Tracking square footage added and the number of new cold storage, food processing, broadband, and small-scale manufacturing facilities
- **BUSINESS ENGAGEMENT WITH SUPPORT RESOURCES**
Tracking the number of agribusinesses accessing business planning resources
- **EXPANSION OF WHOLESALE AND SCALABLE MARKET ACCESS**
Counting the number of Albemarle-based producers securing new wholesale contracts, regional distribution agreements, or institutional buyers.
- **EMPLOYER AND ECOSYSTEM ENGAGEMENT**
Tracking partnerships, convenings, and joint initiatives with agribusiness entrepreneurs, rural businesses, workforce partners, and regional collaborators, as well as inclusive workforce participation.
- **GROWTH OF AGRITOURISM BUSINESSES AND RURAL VISITOR ECONOMY**
Tracking the number of new or expanded agritourism experiences.



STRATEGY 3.1

Explore land use and zoning policies that enable agribusiness innovation.

Updated tools to support flexible agribusiness operations, value-added production, and agricultural technology enterprises, while also expanding opportunities for diverse revenue streams – including lodging, agritourism, and onsite food service.

WHY IT MATTERS

Albemarle County's agribusiness economy is in transition, facing generational turnover, new market demands, and rising interest in value-added agriculture. Many producers want to diversify their revenue through food and beverage offerings, on-farm lodging, and agritourism, but outdated land use frameworks obstruct this evolution. At the same time, growth is constrained by infrastructure gaps like limited cold storage, food processing capacity, and broadband access in rural areas. By modernizing policies and investing in core infrastructure, the county can unlock new models of rural entrepreneurship, preserve working lands, and support the long-term viability of its agricultural economy.



WHAT'S NEEDED



Consider a rural zoning and land use review to identify and remove regulatory barriers to value-added production, lodging, and agritourism.



Creates clearer pathways for diversified agribusiness development.



Engage producers and stakeholders to inform updated zoning tools that support flexible, mixed-use operations.



Ensures alignment with real business models while maintaining rural character.



Pursue funding to deliver shared-use infrastructure that supports small and mid-sized agribusinesses.



Reduces barriers to scale and strengthens the competitiveness of rural enterprises.

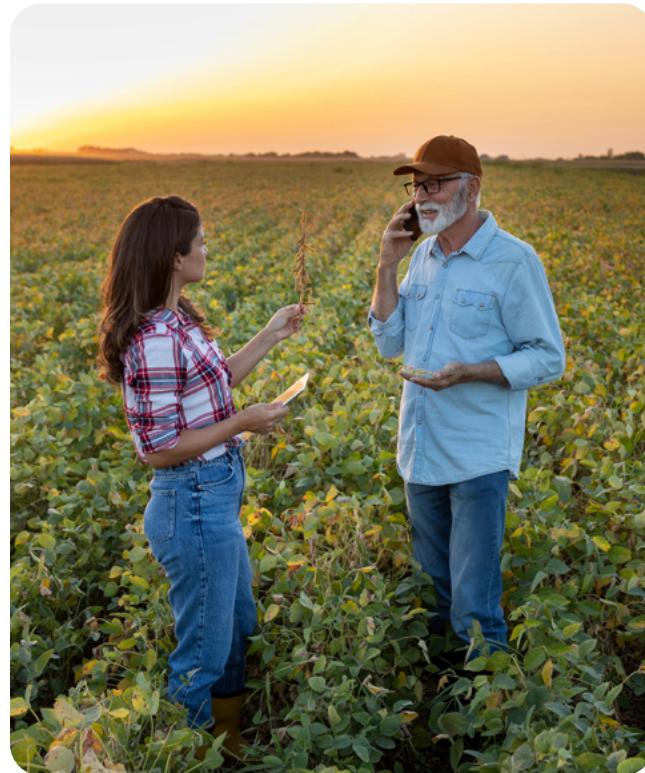
STRATEGY 3.2

Consider critical infrastructure to support modern agribusiness growth.

Assess the needs for expanded small-scale cold storage, processing and packing, broadband, and rural manufacturing capacity.

WHY IT MATTERS

Albemarle County's agribusiness sector is shifting toward more diversified and value-added models, but that growth depends on access to appropriate infrastructure. Many rural producers lack cold storage, processing and packing, high-speed broadband, or access to shared processing space—making it difficult to scale operations or pursue new revenue streams. These infrastructure gaps have already forced some businesses to seek facilities outside the county. A focused assessment of infrastructure needs will help the county prioritize rural investment, support local business growth, and align with emerging opportunities in food innovation, agtech, and small-scale rural manufacturing.



WHAT'S NEEDED



Conduct a rural infrastructure needs assessment focused on the lack of specialized storage, high-speed broadband, or access to shared processing and packing space.



Identifies critical gaps and builds a roadmap for investment.



Engage agribusiness stakeholders to ground-truth infrastructure challenges and co-develop investment priorities.



Ensures real-world relevance and local buy-in.



Evaluate opportunities for shared-use or cooperative infrastructure models, especially for small-scale production and packing capacity.



Increases access and affordability while supporting scalable rural business models.

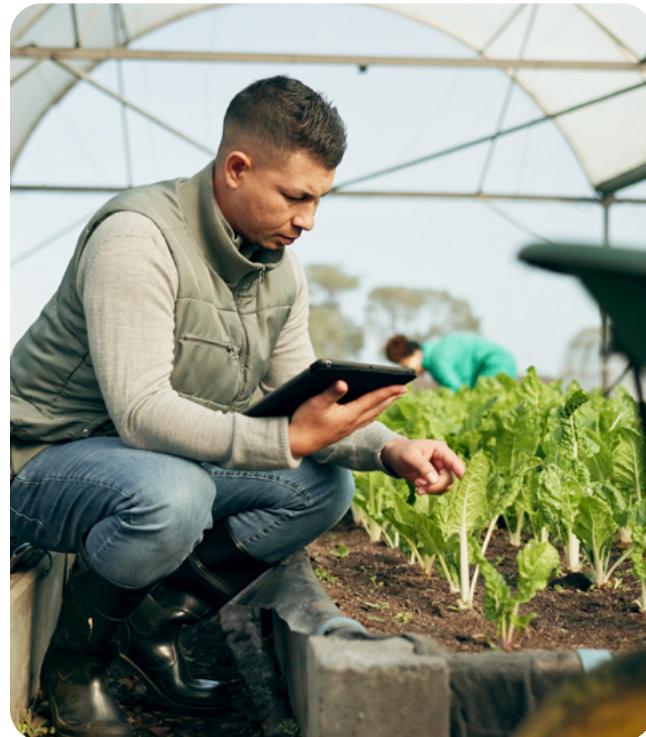
STRATEGY 3.3

Create a rural business resource hub for agribusiness growth, succession, and capital access.

A platform providing business planning, growth strategies, succession support, and financing pathways.

WHY IT MATTERS

Many of Albemarle County's agricultural businesses are at a turning point, facing generational transitions, shifting markets and environmental conditions, and rising interest in value-added production. Yet most lack access to the kind of business services that small urban firms take for granted: help with financial planning, growth strategies, capital readiness, and succession. Without these supports, emerging producers may stall out, and legacy businesses may disappear. A rural business resource hub can close this gap, helping farmers and agribusinesses develop long-term plans, navigate ownership transitions, and tap into funding sources to grow and adapt.



WHAT'S NEEDED



Coordinate with existing partners to establish business support services and programming tailored for rural and agricultural entrepreneurs - including capital access, grant navigation, loan readiness, investor matchmaking, and succession planning to support farm transitions.

- Offers targeted help with planning, growth, and succession—close to where businesses operate.
- Avoids duplication and builds on trusted local relationships.
- Ensures economic continuity and preserves working farms and businesses.



Partner to develop any missing programming around capital access, including grant navigation, loan readiness, and investor matchmaking.



Helps rural businesses tap new sources of funding for modernization and expansion

STRATEGY 3.4

Build new wholesale and scalable market pathways for Albemarle producers.

An initiative connecting local producers with wholesale buyers, regional distributors, and scalable markets.

WHY IT MATTERS

Albemarle County's producers are skilled, innovative, and increasingly interested in growing beyond direct-to-consumer sales. Yet many lack access to wholesale channels, institutional buyers, and regional distributors that would allow them to scale. Without these market pathways, local producers face stagnant revenue and limited growth potential. By helping them connect to larger buyers and higher-volume markets, the county can boost rural income, reduce business churn, and strengthen the long-term viability of its food and beverage economy.



WHAT'S NEEDED



Partner to develop a producer matchmaking and distribution strategy, potentially in partnership with food hubs, cooperatives, or regional logistics providers.



Solves logistical barriers and helps small producers meet wholesale requirements.



Support training and technical assistance for producers to meet volume, packaging, and compliance standards for wholesale markets.



Prepares businesses to grow without compromising quality or operations.

STRATEGY 3.5

Establish a rural entrepreneurship and agribusiness sector partnership.

A partnership connecting agribusiness entrepreneurs, workforce partners, and county leaders for coordinated growth.

WHY IT MATTERS

Albemarle County's rural economy includes a diverse mix of traditional farmers, food entrepreneurs, ag-tech startups, and small-scale manufacturers. But these businesses often operate in silos with limited opportunities to shape shared priorities, access workforce resources, share resources and identify shared challenges for resilience planning, or advocate for their needs. A formal sector partnership can create space for collaboration, elevate rural voices in economic planning, and ensure county strategies reflect on-the-ground realities. By bringing together entrepreneurs, workforce partners, and local institutions, this partnership can drive innovation, expand opportunity, and build a more connected rural business ecosystem.



WHAT'S NEEDED



Launch a formal sector partnership focused on agribusiness and rural entrepreneurship, co-convened by the county and key industry partners that can serve to connect the ecosystem.



Includes regular convenings, working groups, and collaboration with workforce organizations like PVCC and Cooperative Extension to align on workforce, infrastructure, and business needs.



Use the partnership as a strategic feedback loop for county programs and policies affecting the rural economy.



Ensures ongoing coordination, responsiveness, and accountability in economic development efforts.

STRATEGY 3.6

Support the growth of Albemarle County's wine industry.

An approach to strengthen a signature rural industry through investment, training, sustainability and resilience, and expanded market access.

WHY IT MATTERS

Albemarle County is at the heart of Virginia's growing wine industry, anchoring regional tourism, generating high-quality jobs, and positioning local producers for national and international export. As climate resilience, workforce challenges, and global market opportunities reshape the sector, the county has a chance to lead in sustainable, innovative wine production.



WHAT'S NEEDED



Partner with PVCC and industry groups to develop viticulture and enology training pathways.



Fills critical labor gaps and supports long-term sector growth.



Pursue funding and partnerships to expand sustainable practices—like irrigation, pest control, and renewable energy.



Enhances resilience and positions Albemarle as a leader in climate-smart wine production.



Support marketing, branding, and export readiness in collaboration with the Virginia Wine Board and others



Expands visibility and unlocks access to new markets.



Offer incentives and reduce regulatory barriers for vineyard expansion, winemaking equipment, and tasting room development.



Encourages business investment and enables scale across the value chain.

STRATEGY 3.7

Expand the agritourism economy through partnership with Charlottesville-Albemarle Convention and Visitors Bureau.

A strategy to grow rural tourism by expanding lodging, events, and farm-based food and beverage experiences.

WHY IT MATTERS

Agritourism is already a core strength of Albemarle County's economy, anchored by its wineries, scenic landscapes, and vibrant local food scene. But many producers face barriers to expanding into lodging, events, or year-round experiences that generate sustained revenue. With targeted support and deeper collaboration between the county and Visit Charlottesville, Albemarle can scale its rural tourism economy, draw new visitor segments, and strengthen the financial sustainability of its agribusinesses. Agritourism is not just a lifestyle asset—it's a growing economic driver that connects rural vitality with broader regional appeal.



WHAT'S NEEDED



Continue to expand destination marketing and visitor experience development focused on rural assets.



Elevates agritourism offerings and draws new tourism demand into rural parts of the county.



Support producers and rural entrepreneurs in expanding lodging, food and beverage, and event-based tourism.



Unlocks new business models and adds year-round economic value to working lands.



Identify and address regulatory or permitting barriers that limit the growth of agritourism operations.



Makes it easier for producers to scale visitor-facing services.



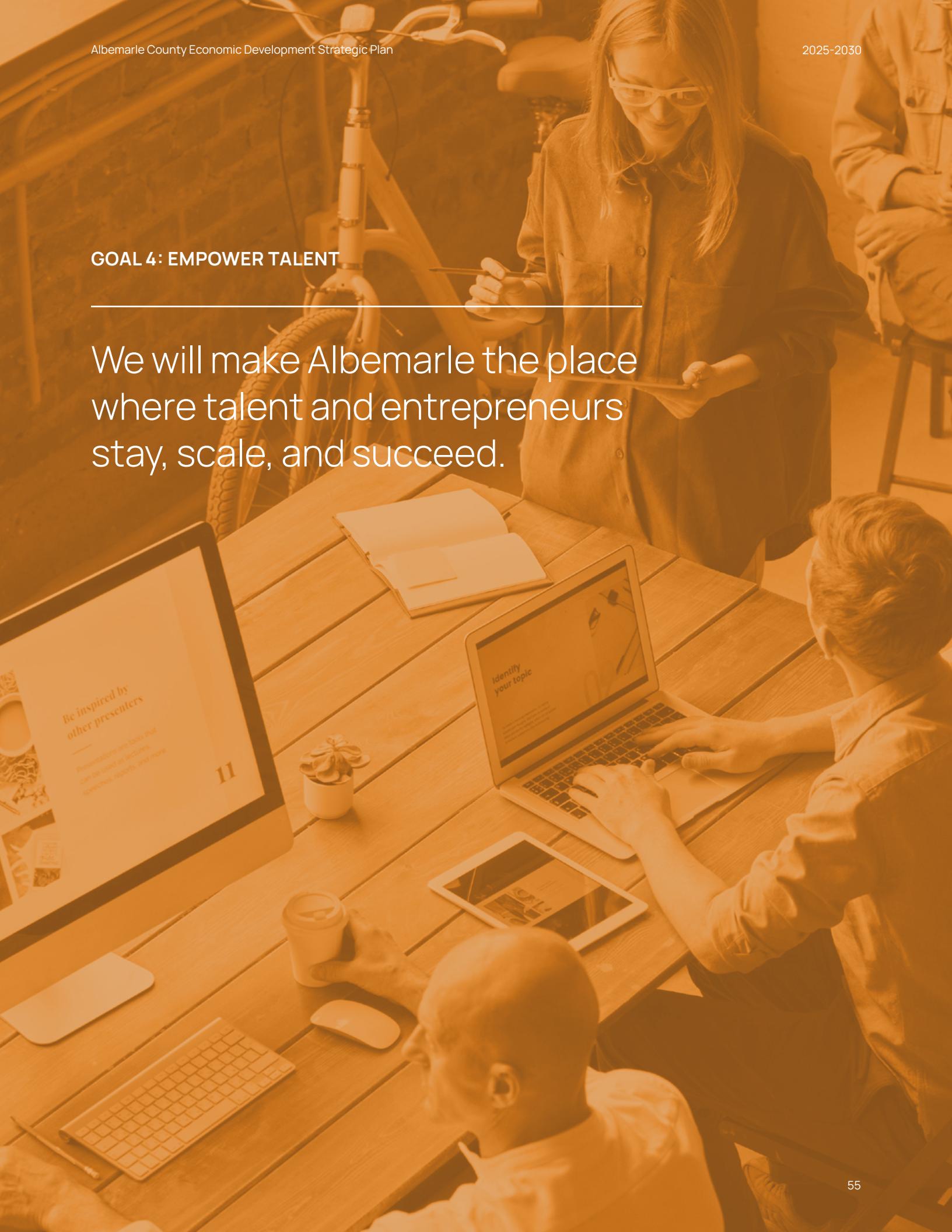
Promote cross-sector tourism experiences that connect agribusiness with arts, outdoor recreation, and cultural heritage.



Builds more holistic and compelling visitor itineraries across the county.

GOAL 4: EMPOWER TALENT

We will make Albemarle the place where talent and entrepreneurs stay, scale, and succeed.



GOAL 4

We will make Albemarle the place where talent and entrepreneurs stay, scale, and succeed.

Why it Matters?

Albemarle's ability to lead Virginia's innovation economy depends on retaining and growing the people who drive it. With nationally ranked institutions like the University of Virginia and Piedmont Virginia Community College, a strong quality of life, and a vibrant startup culture, Albemarle has powerful assets, but it struggles to retain mid-career talent, connect students to careers, and scale homegrown businesses. Albemarle's 25–44 working-age population is already shrinking compared to peer counties, and without clear pathways to careers, capital, and leadership, the county risks losing the very people who power its future. Building an economy of staying power is essential to turning Albemarle's potential into long-term innovation leadership.

The Evidence

- Proximity to UVA and PVCC anchors a highly educated and innovation-ready workforce. Over 60% of residents hold a bachelor's degree or higher, and 30% work in creative class occupations—a share that grew 42% over the past 5 years, outpacing all peers.
- Albemarle's workforce skews older than peer regions. The county's median age is 39.4, and just 25% of residents fall within the prime working-age group of 25-44: well below benchmark averages.
- Despite strong entrepreneurial activity, stakeholders noted Albemarle lacks the infrastructure to support startup scale. While the region performs well in early-stage investment, stakeholders cited limited access to flexible space, second-stage funding, and mentorship networks, factors that contribute to startup attrition.
- Young professionals value Albemarle's quality of life, but many stakeholders noted opportunities to improve culture and connection. Stakeholders emphasized interest in more destination dining, entertainment, and experiential retail to help retain early-career talent and build a sense of community.

The following metrics should be tracked to assess impact:

- **GROWTH OF ALBEMARLE'S 25-44-YEAR-OLD WORKING-AGE POPULATION**
Measuring growth in the number and share of residents aged 25-44.
- **PARTICIPATION AND LEADERSHIP PLACEMENT THROUGH AMP**
Tracking young professionals engaged through AMP and placed in board, commission, and nonprofit leadership roles.
- **EXPANSION OF ENTREPRENEURSHIP CONNECTIONS AND ECOSYSTEM USE**
Tracking entrepreneurs utilizing Albemarle's coordinated entrepreneurial platform and support network.
- **ATTRACTION OF DESTINATION RESTAURANTS, ENTERTAINMENT, AND EXPERIENTIAL RETAIL**
Counting new destination restaurants, entertainment venues, and experiential retail businesses.



STRATEGY 4.1

Align workforce and economic development systems to build career pathways.

A unified plan connecting education, training, and placement strategies to Albemarle's target sectors.

WHY IT MATTERS

Albemarle County's workforce development ecosystem is strong but often fragmented. Stakeholders noted that education and training providers, economic development leaders, and employers are not always aligned around shared sector priorities. As a result, students and job-seekers face unclear pathways into key industries like national security innovation, life sciences, agribusiness, and healthcare. A unified workforce–economic development strategy can close this gap, helping the county better anticipate talent needs, invest in high-impact programs, and connect residents to upwardly mobile careers in Albemarle's priority sectors.



WHAT'S NEEDED



Convene a cross-sector workforce and economic development alignment team, including PVCC, K-12, employers, and regional partners.



Builds a shared understanding of sector needs and training gaps.



Map existing education and training programs to target clusters, identifying duplication and areas of opportunity.



Creates clarity and highlights where new investments are needed.



Support program development and curriculum alignment for in-demand, middle-skill careers in Albemarle's innovation economy through sector partnerships.



Ensures residents are prepared for high-quality jobs in growing fields.

STRATEGY 4.2

Map and coordinate Albemarle's entrepreneurial ecosystem through a unified platform.

An initiative to connect resources, close service gaps, and support startup-to-scale growth.

WHY IT MATTERS

Albemarle County is home to a range of entrepreneurial support organizations, from incubators and capital providers to technical assistance programs. But for many founders, the system feels fragmented and hard to navigate. Startups often miss opportunities, duplicate efforts, or fail to progress from early-stage ideas to growth-ready businesses. A unified platform that maps the ecosystem, streamlines access, and coordinates partner efforts will help more entrepreneurs find what they need, when they need it, encouraging them to stay in the county as they grow.



WHAT'S NEEDED



Conduct a comprehensive mapping of the county's entrepreneurial support ecosystem, including services, funding, and facilities.



Clarifies what's available and where gaps exist.



Develop a public-facing platform or resource guide that organizes services by stage, sector, and need.



Makes it easier for founders and small business owners to navigate and access support.



Coordinate ecosystem partners through regular convenings or a shared strategy framework.



Reduces duplication and improves alignment across providers.



Promote success stories and pipeline outcomes to build visibility, pride, and momentum within the entrepreneurial community.



Reinforces Albemarle County as a place where businesses start and grow.

STRATEGY 4.3

Partner to launch Next Gen Albemarle to connect and retain UVA and PVCC student talent and entrepreneurs.

A talent initiative creating clear pathways from campus to local careers, startups, and leadership opportunities.

WHY IT MATTERS

Albemarle County benefits from proximity to two major talent generators: the University of Virginia and Piedmont Virginia Community College. Yet each year, too many students leave the region after graduation, taking their skills, ideas, and entrepreneurial potential with them. Local employers cite increasing difficulty hiring for early-career roles, and the startup ecosystem struggles to engage student founders in long-term growth. Next Gen Albemarle will bridge this gap, helping students plug into local opportunities, connect with the entrepreneurial ecosystem, and imagine a future rooted in the county.



WHAT'S NEEDED



Explore best practices from other university-linked talent retention programs (e.g. Campus Philly, Launch Detroit, Hello Utah) to inform the design of Next Gen Albemarle.



Ensures the initiative reflects proven strategies tailored to local conditions.



Partner with CVPED, UVA, PVCC, K-12, and regional employers to co-design internships, apprenticeships, fellowships, startup pipelines, and service-learning opportunities.



Aligns student pathways with real opportunities in Albemarle County.



Launch a visible "Next Gen Albemarle" brand and leverage CVPED's Techlink platform that connects students and those competing for college and credentials to jobs, networks, mentors, and startup support.



Creates a sense of belonging and identity for emerging talent.

STRATEGY 4.4

Collaborate to grow the region's Young Professional Network to build belonging, leadership, and civic connection.

A network supporting career development, civic engagement, and board leadership placement for young professionals.

WHY IT MATTERS

Young professionals are essential to Albemarle County's economic future but retaining them post-grad requires more than jobs; it requires community. Employers, especially in growth sectors like life sciences and secure innovation, consistently cite difficulty keeping early-career talent in the region. Many young professionals report feeling disconnected from civic life and unaware of pathways into leadership. A vibrant, visible Young Professional Network—rooted in best practices from cities like Tulsa (TYPROS) and Charlotte—can provide that missing infrastructure. It can help young leaders build careers, connect with peers, and see a future for themselves in the county.



WHAT'S NEEDED



Evaluate existing young professional programs and networks in Albemarle County to identify what's working and where gaps exist.



Provides a foundation for smart investment and targeted expansion.



Collaborate with employers, nonprofits, and regional partners to grow a unified, county-supported Young Professional Network.



Builds a welcoming space for networking, development, and civic engagement.



Support leadership development and board placement pathways that connect young professionals to commissions, nonprofits, and civic institutions.



Strengthens retention and brings new energy into county decision-making.

STRATEGY 4.5

Expand destination restaurant, entertainment, and retail experiences to strengthen Albemarle's lifestyle advantage.

A plan to bring restaurants, experiential retail, and entertainment options to the county and redevelop aging retail centers.

WHY IT MATTERS

Albemarle County's appeal to talent and residents depends in part on the vibrancy of its activity centers. While nearby Charlottesville offers strong amenities, many parts of the county are missing some lifestyle offerings—especially destination restaurants, entertainment venues, and retail experiences. At the same time, aging shopping centers and underutilized commercial corridors present clear opportunities for reinvestment. A focused retail and hospitality attraction strategy—supported by proactive site selection, developer partnerships, and brand alignment—can position the county to meet rising demand, attract new spending, and enhance quality of place.



WHAT'S NEEDED



Partner with commercial brokers, site selectors, and developers to attract appropriate, experience-driven retail and entertainment concepts.



Brings new energy to the county's activity hubs and expands lifestyle offerings.



Coordinate with planning and permitting teams to streamline review processes for projects that align with county planning documents.



Speeds delivery and reduces uncertainty regarding commercial investment.

STRATEGY 4.6

Support housing development and childcare initiatives.

A collaborative effort to expand affordable housing and childcare options for workers and entrepreneurs.

WHY IT MATTERS

A growing economy depends on access to both housing and childcare, especially for mid-wage workers, entrepreneurs, and young families. In Albemarle County, housing costs are rising faster than incomes, and access to childcare remains limited and expensive. These pressures make it harder to retain talent, attract new workers, and support inclusive economic growth. By expanding housing options and helping new childcare providers launch and scale, the county can strengthen its talent pipeline and improve quality of life for working households.



WHAT'S NEEDED



Support local and regional efforts to reach the county's housing development goals.

→ Increases the supply of affordable and market-rate housing aligned with workforce needs.



Provide small business support services for entrepreneurs interested in starting or expanding childcare operations.

→ Helps close the supply gap and strengthens the early childhood care economy.



Explore public-private partnerships and funding tools to scale access to quality, affordable childcare in underserved areas.

→ Supports household stability and broadens workforce participation.

GOAL 5: COMPETE FOR INVESTMENT

We will position Albemarle as Virginia's most investment-ready county – ready to compete, build, and lead.

GOAL 5

We will position Albemarle as Virginia's most investment-ready county – ready to compete, build, and lead.

Why it Matters?

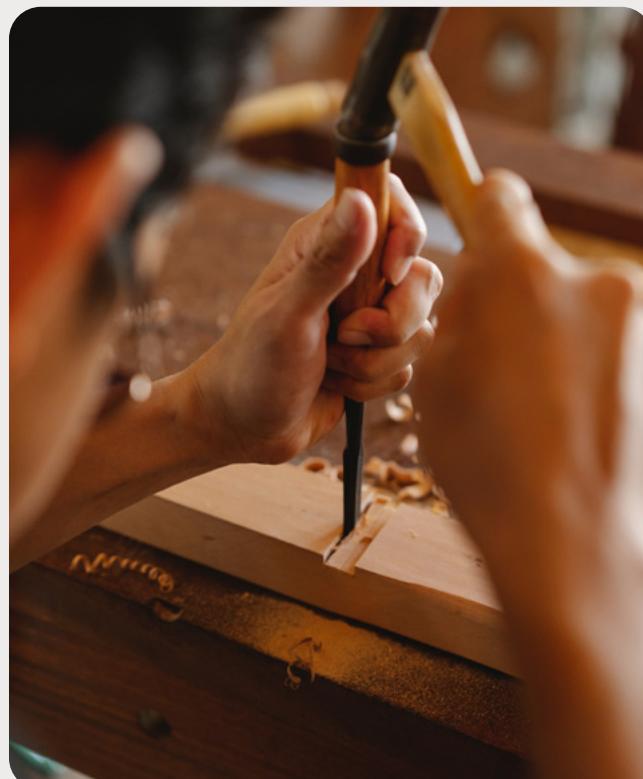
Innovation-driven growth demands investment-ready communities. Albemarle's ability to lead Virginia's next economy depends on a business environment that can compete nationally: sites ready for development, infrastructure that meets modern needs, and streamlined processes that build speed and certainty. With limited commercial land and rising competition for innovation-sector investment, Albemarle must act decisively to prepare sites, modernize policies, and tell a stronger investment story. Communities that win the next economy will be those that are fast, smart, and strategic, and Albemarle County must be ready to lead.

The Evidence

- Albemarle offers a compelling value proposition to innovation-sector investors. The county is home to major research and defense assets like UVA and Rivanna Station, a high-skilled workforce, and access to growing regional markets, positioning it to compete for technology, bioscience, and national security investment.
- Stakeholders emphasized the need for more investment-ready sites and infrastructure upgrades to meet modern business needs. Gaps in road access, broadband, water, and sewer have limited the competitiveness of otherwise promising sites, particularly for advanced manufacturing, logistics, and food processing.
- Albemarle's development process is more complex and time-intensive than neighboring localities. Businesses and developers cited a lack of clarity in requirements and longer permitting timelines as top challenges, especially for firms trying to move quickly on expansions.
- The region's assets are strong, but its economic identity remains diffuse. While Albemarle boasts a nationally ranked university, cutting-edge defense installations, and a vibrant entrepreneurial culture, stakeholders noted the need for a more cohesive investment and innovation brand and clearer messaging to external audiences.

The following metrics should be tracked to assess impact:

- **PERMITTING AND DEVELOPMENT PROCESS IMPROVEMENTS**
Tracking reductions in permitting timelines and improvements in development process efficiency.
- **STRATEGIC SITE AND INFRASTRUCTURE DELIVERY**
Tracking the number of investment-ready sites and infrastructure projects aligned with innovation sectors.
- **BUSINESS RETENTION AND EXPANSION (BRE) ENGAGEMENT**
Tracking the number of business visits.
- **INNOVATION BRAND VISIBILITY AND ENGAGEMENT**
Measuring engagement with Albemarle's investment marketing efforts, including inquiries, website traffic, conference participation, and media placements.



STRATEGY 5.1

Modernize permitting and development processes and zoning code.

A streamlined framework and simplified zoning code that reduces uncertainty, accelerates project timelines, and aligns with sector needs.

WHY IT MATTERS

Albemarle County's development review processes and highly prescriptive zoning code are slowing investment and increasing risk for businesses and developers. Site plan reviews often exceed 18–24 months—well beyond the business cycle—and require layers of legislative approvals that add cost and complexity. These delays have already caused some firms to walk away or choose to expand elsewhere. Streamlining and modernizing permitting processes will reduce barriers to development, enable the county to compete for high-quality investment, and better support the innovation-driven sectors it seeks to grow.



WHAT'S NEEDED



Hire a qualified consulting firm to support zoning modernization and permitting reform, bringing national expertise and real-world implementation strategies.



Provides capacity and objectivity to deliver a best-in-class regulatory framework.



Redesign the permitting and site review process to reduce timelines, improve transparency, and coordinate across divisions, departments, and partner agencies.



Speeds up development while improving predictability for applicants.



Engage employers, developers, and site selectors to test reforms and ensure proposed changes reflect market realities.



Builds confidence among stakeholders and improves adoption.

STRATEGY 5.2

Launch a developer sector partnership.

A sector partnership with developers and utility providers to improve market readiness and accelerate growth.

WHY IT MATTERS

Albemarle County's success in growing innovation-driven sectors will depend on its ability to offer development-ready sites with aligned infrastructure. But currently, too many high-potential areas lack critical utilities, and developers cite uncertainty in the planning process. A formal sector partnership will give the county a structured way to work with developers, utility providers, and site selectors to identify barriers, share information, and prioritize investment. It will also help coordinate long-range infrastructure planning and ensure public and private sector goals are aligned.



WHAT'S NEEDED



Launch a regular developer and infrastructure roundtable that includes commercial and industrial developers, utility providers, planners, and economic and community development staff.

→ Builds trust, improves information flow, and surfaces site-readiness barriers early.



Use the partnership to inform zoning and permitting reform efforts underway in Strategy 5.1.

→ Ensures that policy reforms reflect real-world needs.

STRATEGY 5.3

Expand business retention and expansion (BRE) through a formal visitation program.

A proactive outreach program to strengthen employer relationships and identify expansion opportunities.

WHY IT MATTERS

Retaining and growing existing businesses is one of the most cost-effective economic development strategies—and Albemarle County already has relevant momentum. The county's one-on-one outreach efforts have provided valuable insights into employer needs, but these efforts remain informal and limited in reach. A structured BRE program can deepen relationships, flag expansion risks or opportunities earlier, and build a stronger data foundation for investment and policy decisions. It also sends a clear message to employers: Albemarle is a committed long-term partner.



WHAT'S NEEDED



Formalize and scale the existing one-on-one visitation program into a structured BRE initiative.

→ Expands outreach across sectors and tracks trends over time.



Develop a standardized intake tool to capture employer feedback on workforce, infrastructure, real estate, and regulatory issues.

→ Creates actionable data to inform county decision-making.



Establish annual BRE goals and priority sectors aligned with Albemarle's strategic plan.

→ Ensures resources are focused on high-impact industries.



Coordinate follow-up and referrals with workforce, infrastructure, and planning partners.

→ Converts insights into support and strengthens employer confidence.

STRATEGY 5.4

Leverage the EDA and public-private partnerships to drive strategic investment.

A framework to mobilize Albemarle's EDA and private sector partners to accelerate infrastructure investments that fuel innovation.

WHY IT MATTERS

Delivering this economic strategy will require more than plans; it will take investment. Albemarle County's Economic Development Authority (EDA) and private sector partners have a critical role to play in turning strategy into action, especially in funding infrastructure that enables business growth. Whether it's site readiness or filling infrastructure and asset gaps for target sectors, these investments will shape where and how the county grows. A clear framework for collaboration and co-investment will help Albemarle move from planning to implementation and unlock the full potential of its public assets.



WHAT'S NEEDED



Define the EDA's strategic investment priorities based on the goals of this economic development plan.

→ Aligns tools and resources with long-term county goals.



Identify priority infrastructure projects where EDA investment or facilitation can unlock business growth or private co-investment.

→ Catalyzes near-term action and future-ready development.



Consider flexible public-private financing tools

→ Helps close gaps that delay or prevent innovation-sector development.



Establish additional defined incentives to support business expansion and business attraction in target sectors.

→ Makes Albemarle more competitive for the jobs and industries we want to grow.



Establish clear metrics and oversight to ensure EDA investments deliver community and economic returns, with consideration for forecasting and measuring return on investment.

→ Builds accountability and trust in public investment decisions.

STRATEGY 5.5

Maintain a pipeline of buildings and sites aligned with cluster needs.

An active inventory of development-ready sites and buildings that support growth in target sectors.

WHY IT MATTERS

To attract and retain innovative companies, Albemarle County must be able to offer ready-to-develop sites and suitable building space that align with the needs of its key industries. Yet stakeholders noted that prospective employers often struggle to find sites with the right infrastructure, zoning, or timeline for delivery. Without a proactive pipeline strategy, the county risks losing high-value opportunities to faster-moving peers. Maintaining a real-time inventory of sites—coordinated with infrastructure planning, marketing, and cluster needs—will help Albemarle stay competitive and responsive.



WHAT'S NEEDED



Build and regularly update a site and building inventory aligned with life sciences, national security, agribusiness, and entrepreneurial growth needs.



Enables faster responses to prospective inquiries and expansion opportunities.



Coordinate with developers, brokers, and utilities to assess site readiness and identify gaps in zoning, permitting, or infrastructure.



Ensures identified sites are viable and investment-ready.

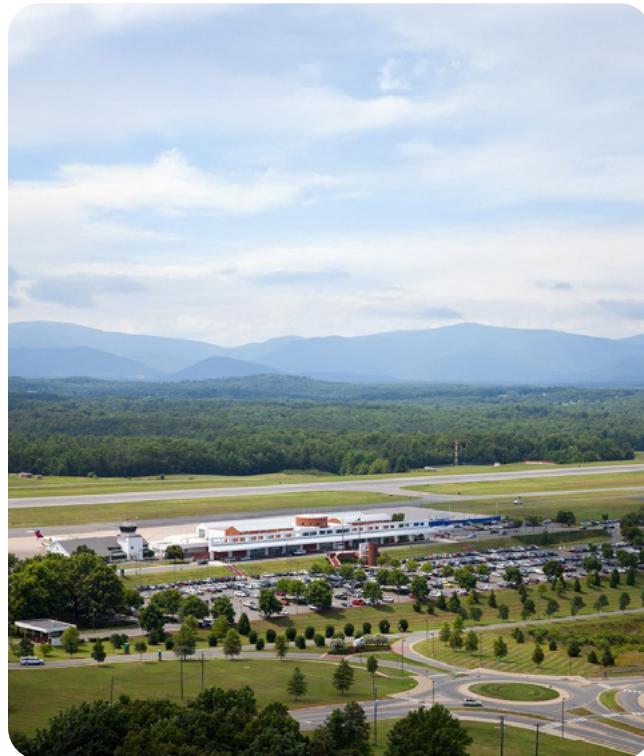
STRATEGY 5.6

Partner with utilities and the Charlottesville Albemarle Airport to deliver infrastructure for industrial growth.

A coordinated effort to expand air service, water, sewer, energy, and broadband capacity.

WHY IT MATTERS

Infrastructure gaps can be significant barriers to economic growth in Albemarle County. Stakeholders consistently pointed to limited broadband coverage, aging industrial utilities, and water and sewer constraints as obstacles to business attraction and expansion. In parallel, improving air service and logistics connectivity is key to serving national security, life sciences, and advanced manufacturing sectors. By working closely with utility providers and the Charlottesville Albemarle Airport, the county can address these chokepoints and prepare high-potential areas for the next wave of growth.



WHAT'S NEEDED



Coordinate with utility providers to assess and upgrade service capacity in priority development zones.



Ensures water, sewer, energy, and broadband infrastructure aligns with target cluster needs.



Partner with the Charlottesville Albemarle Airport to explore air service expansion and improved logistics connections.



Supports talent mobility, business travel, and industry-specific freight needs.

STRATEGY 5.7

Tell Albemarle's innovation story with a bold investment brand.

A marketing strategy to position Albemarle as Virginia's next hub for innovation-driven growth.

WHY IT MATTERS

Albemarle County is making strategic, forward-looking investments to grow its innovation economy, through Rivanna Futures, university partnerships, and targeted support for key sectors like national security, life sciences, and agribusiness. But without a compelling narrative, those investments may go unnoticed in a competitive national landscape. A bold, coordinated brand will help the county define its value proposition, communicate clearly with site selectors and business leaders, and give local partners a shared story to tell. It's not just about promotion; it's about shaping perception and positioning Albemarle as Virginia's next hub for innovation-driven growth.



WHAT'S NEEDED



Develop a county-wide investment and innovation brand, building on the themes in this strategy.



Creates a unified message across all business sectors and partners.



Activate the brand through marketing materials and digital platforms. Target outreach to business leaders, site selectors, and media.



Expands awareness and positions Albemarle in key decision-maker networks.



Collaborate with regional and state partners to ensure the brand aligns with broader efforts while telling Albemarle's distinct story.



Increases visibility without duplication and builds coherence.



Equip employers, institutions, and ecosystem partners to carry the brand in talent recruitment, investment outreach, and storytelling.



Makes the message go further through distributed advocacy.

Acknowledgments

Acknowledgements

For more information, a technical appendix containing the research that Resonance conducted to support the development of this report is available and includes the Competitive Benchmarking Assessment (Appendix A), the Target Cluster Analysis (Appendix B), the Stakeholder Engagement Summary (Appendix C), and members of the Stakeholder Committee (Appendix D).

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resonance

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COUNTY