

FINAL DRAFT

Albemarle County Economic Development Strategic Plan



Prepared By

DecideSmart, LLC

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Albemarle County Board of Supervisors

Rick Randolph (Scottsville District)

Diantha H. McKeel (Jack Jouett District)

Liz A. Palmer (Samuel Miller District)

Brad L. Sheffield (Rio District)

Ann H. Mallek (White Hall District)

Norman G. Dill (Rivanna District)

County Executive Staff

Doug Walker, Interim County Executive

William M. Letteri, *Deputy County Executive*

Lee Catlin, *Assistant County Executive for Community Relations*

Economic Development Staff

Susan Stimart, Economic Development Facilitator

Beth Pizzichemi, Economic Development Coordinator

Albemarle County Economic Development Strategic Plan

The partners of DecideSmart would like to express our appreciation to Albemarle County for the opportunity to assist in the development of its Economic Development Strategic Plan. Everyone has been most helpful, forthcoming, and engaged during the process. Without a doubt, Albemarle County is one of the most beautiful areas of the Commonwealth. This natural beauty coupled with available resources, an enthusiastic and engaged staff, and a clear plan is certainly a recipe for economic development success.

The following is a summary of our review process. It includes our observations, thoughts, and considerations for moving forward.

- 1. Initial Meeting.** DecideSmart met with senior staff members to review the process and discuss initial thoughts and associated materials to assess. This meeting was very informative and forthright. A working group was identified and an activity schedule was established. The direction was to review materials, conduct interviews, meet with a selected group of senior staff, and prepare the outline of a draft Economic Development Plan that could be used as a starting point for the new County Executive and Director of Economic Development when hired. The plan should list updated key goals and objectives that can be further refined to include strategies and measurements. Communication and information were excellent.
- 2. Interviews.** We conducted 31 interviews with a list of stakeholders provided by the County. These stakeholders included elected officials, appointed officials, business community, education community, and staff. Each hour-long interview focused on the seven questions listed below to ensure consistency and focus. All participants were engaged and provided their honest viewpoints on economic development. Discussions were confidential and all information was aggregated into key points. We then reviewed recurring comments and trends. From this, themes emerged as noted (See Appendix 1—Interview Response Summary).

Interview Questions:

1. What is your role or connection to economic development in the County?
2. What is your definition of economic development for Albemarle?
3. What economic development opportunities do you see for the County and what barriers are there to realizing them?
4. The County developed an Economic Development Strategic Plan in 2010-2011 and later created a Department of Economic Development. What has happened?
5. What are your thoughts on regionalism? What is the County's role?
6. What are the roadblocks to economic development in Albemarle?
7. What are realistic short (<1yr.) and long-term goals?
8. Any other thoughts or comments?

Key Summary Points:

- The above questions elicited a wide variety of responses. See Appendix 1 for a complete listing and numerical reference to similar answers.
- *Economic Development Viewpoints.* There is a lack of consensus as to the definition of “development” versus “growth.”
- *Issues and Opportunities.* We have taken the liberty to translate concerns or trouble points as “Issues.” Positive suggestions and aspirations are listed as “Opportunities.”
- *Roadblocks.* These items represent policies, actions, culture, etc. that hinder enhanced development.
- *Regionalism.* This topic was uncovered in many conversations, often in indirect ways. It includes relationships—personal and institutional—as well as effective solutions.
- *Short and Long-Term Goals.* Numerous conversations referenced the need to articulate defined goals in a manner that clarifies both short and long-term expectations with priorities.

Emerging Themes:

- Albemarle County is a great place to live.
- The County needs a plan that identifies economic development direction as well as updated targets, strategies, and measurements. A majority (elected and appointed officials, staff, community) should agree upon this plan, and the Board of Supervisors and County leadership should be committed to it.
- There is support from all for a strong Economic Development Program to implement and sustain an approved plan.
- There should be enhanced communication with the community.

- 3. Material Review.** Materials included prior work completed on an Economic Development Plan, information leading to the creation of an Economic Development Office, previous presentations by staff, site information, previous site study by a consulting group, information from websites, and a review of the County website.

There has been commendable work completed on developing economic information and detail to carry a plan forward. Examples include: the actions taken by the Board of Supervisors (BOS) and staff in developing an Economic Development Action Plan and establishing a department; the joint meeting of the BOS, Economic Development Authority (EDA), and Planning Commission (PC) on July 25, 2016 regarding “Creating a Road Map to Economic Prosperity”; the presentation by Economic Development to Community Development on October 12, 2016 entitled “Economic Development: Building Successful & Sustainable Communities”; and all of the site review information.

An observation: A portion of the background information supplied to the team included extensive materials related to Albemarle's economic development history. These items were helpful in clarifying the distinction between the County's economic growth plans/strategies and the establishment, or lack thereof, of similar plans for economic development. The team members found that the documents contained numerous "nuggets" that became especially useful in understanding and gaining perspective on the County's development policies and practices. They were, however, buried within substantial documents. It takes a "trained" eye to separate the "essential" from the "interesting to read."

- 4. Workshop with Economic Development Staff Team.** An all-day workshop was held with senior staff to review information, gather collective input, and to update current economic development trends/priorities in the County. This workshop was extremely productive. In addition to reviewing the accumulated information, the "10-Point Audit" (see Appendix 2) was discussed as to how it relates to the current economic development effort. The "10-Point Audit" components are all the key elements of a mature Economic Development Program. For Albemarle, there are components that fit and others that will hopefully be included later.

Background/Statement of Purpose

Throughout the steps described above, the DecideSmart team urged members of the County's staff to assume an assertive, engaged approach to the development of the Strategic Plan. Impressively, the Economic Development Steering Committee has undertaken the suggested active role.

One of the short-term actions that has been quite helpful from a community education/communications standpoint is that staff has summarized these documents into an easily understandable, user-friendly "primer" on Albemarle's economic development history.

Albemarle County's focus on economic development has developed significant momentum in recent years. The County has taken a very deliberate, thoughtful, and strategic approach that works within the framework of the community's vision as established in the Comprehensive Plan and other established policy items.

Significant Milestones Along the Way:

- **2008 - Updating the Economic Development Chapter of the Comprehensive Plan** - to reflect a more up-to-date strategic focus on desired industries.
- **2009 - Economic Opportunity Fund created** – for the first time, established a dedicated source of funding to support desirable economic development activities, used in several instances to match state grant funds for capital investment and above average wage jobs.

- **2010 - Economic Vitality Action Plan/Target Industry Study** – action plan adopted by the Board in 2010 with five specific goal areas; one of the most significant outcomes was a regional target industry study commissioned to identify industry groups with greatest chance of success given community assets and preferences – analyzed assets, workforce, existing industry clusters, etc.
- **2012 - Zoning ordinance modernized** – a complete modernization of the zoning ordinance to provide more flexibility and location options for businesses in target industry sectors.
- **2015 - Economic Development Office created** – hired the County’s first Economic Development Director.
- **2016 - Restructured Economic Development Authority (EDA)** – streamlined procedures that allow the EDA to operate as a more effective economic development partner.
- **2016 - Economic development identified as critical focus on Strategic Plan** – FY17-19 Strategic Plan adopted last year identifies redevelopment and revitalization of County’s urban areas, including focus on economic development, as top priorities.
- **2016/17 - Support for economic development in Two Year Plan and FY18 Annual Budget** – dedicated money to support initiatives that promote capital investment/quality jobs/economic vitality for urban areas.

The next critical step in advancing the County’s Economic Development Program involves a Strategic Plan that identifies the most immediate priorities and guides the hiring of a new Director of Economic Development. This draft plan evolved through active participation of the staff Economic Development review team and reflects both consensus and a positive direction. It provides background and a framework for consideration by the Board of Supervisors and the Economic Development Authority. Direction provided by these two bodies will advance the draft plan to the final step of development in July.

Contributing Policies/Documents:

Existing County policies and documents provide an overarching structure and parameters to help define priorities in the Economic Development Strategic Plan.

County’s Vision Statement:

Albemarle County envisions a community with...

- *Abundant natural, historic, and scenic resources*
- *Healthy ecosystems*
- *Active and vibrant development areas*
- *A physical environment that supports healthy lifestyles*
- *A thriving economy, and*
- *Exceptional educational opportunity*

...for present and future generations.

Comprehensive Plan Economic Development Policy:

The purpose of this Economic Development policy is, first and foremost, to provide the local citizenry an improved standard of living and enhanced quality of life. Economic growth and vitality are required to sustain and enhance the human economic, cultural, and natural characteristics of our community. By creating and sustaining a high quality, diversified economic environment, citizens will enjoy improved job opportunities, competitive wages, work force development opportunities, and the community will enjoy a growing and diversified tax base.

Economic Vitality Action Plan Preamble:

The Economic Development Policy of the County's Comprehensive Plan has a stated purpose to "provide the local citizenry an improved standard of living and enhanced quality of life." This Action Plan is intended to translate the purpose and goals of the Economic Development Policy into concrete and measureable actions, being very mindful of the need to adhere to already established growth management objectives and natural resource protections. While this Plan is focused on accomplishing specific action items within the next three years, the County recognizes the need for a long-term commitment to economic vitality. This Plan is intended to establish a sustainable pathway for the long-term health of our local economy.

Target Industry Study:

The Central Virginia Partnership for Economic Development directed consultant work on a Target Industry Study for its member jurisdictions, including Albemarle County, which was completed in April 2012. This study identifies types of industries that have the strongest potential to succeed and offer the best prospects for "good jobs," meaning jobs that offer a higher quality of life (security, higher wages, opportunities for advancement, training, flexibility), both in our larger region and specifically in Albemarle County. The Board of Supervisors endorsed the targets recommended for Albemarle County in May 2012.

The list of target sectors is a list of optimal targets and should not be considered to exclude related sectors. It is critical to emphasize that the Target Industry Study supports the cultivation and nurturing of existing businesses and considers employment of current residents as its most important outcome. The targets were selected based on available workforce, alignment with community preferences, and growth potential as well as strong multiplier effects that create jobs across a broad spectrum of skill sets.

The recommended target industries are:

- Bioscience and Medical Devices*
- Business & Financial Services*
- Information Technology and Defense & Security*
- Agribusiness and Food Processing*

Complementary targets are:

- *Health Services*
- *Arts, Design and Sports & Media*

Draft Economic Development Mission and Guiding Principles:

Draft Albemarle County Economic Development Mission:

To foster and encourage responsible economic development activities that enhance the County's competitive position and result in quality job creation and career employment opportunities, increased tax base, and an improved quality of life for all citizens while respecting Albemarle County's natural resources and unique character.

Draft Albemarle County Economic Development Guiding Principles:

- **Economic Diversity:** Provide a diverse and vibrant economy that offers a broad range of job opportunities across the full spectrum of skill levels while supporting the delivery of high quality government services to our residents.
- **Respect for Heritage and Environment:** Promote a quality of life that embraces our heritage, preserves the environment, and effectively manages and protects resources based on guidance provided by the Comprehensive Plan.
- **Organizational Collaboration:** Collaborate on all levels (local, regional, and state) to maximize the economic opportunities for the area in a cost-effective manner, including close partnerships with the City of Charlottesville and the University of Virginia.
- **Entrepreneurship:** Create an environment that encourages, values, and supports entrepreneurship and fosters collaboration and a vibrant, creative community.
- **Organic Growth:** Build value from within by supporting those businesses or assets who have been a contributor to our community, with special focus on valuing existing businesses that anchor our economy, including the defense industry.
- **Build Awareness of Local Opportunities:** Build a strong level of awareness amongst students and young adults of the availability of local career and economic opportunities that keep young people here in our community and support efforts that build a skilled and talented workforce.
- **Educational Achievement and Partnership:** Recognize and support the strength of our local educational institutions and promote lifelong learning opportunities.
- **Leverage Intellectual Capital:** Strengthen and diversify Albemarle's economy by leveraging our intellectual capital to promote expansion of business interests to attract investment and enhance the livability of our community (and not detract from it).
- **Support Critical Infrastructure:** Support social infrastructure through business offerings that recognize family, educational, and cultural needs and that help

people be successful, productive employees and encourage physical infrastructure that supports the County's desired economic development activity.

- **Results Orientation:** Focus on being proactive and results-oriented, with special emphasis on seeking productive solutions and building positive relationships with state, local, and community stakeholders.
- **Measurements/Metrics:** As the County moves forward in the development and implementation of the Strategic Plan, it is essential that the objectives and strategies be defined with sufficient precision so that results can be measured, tracked, and reported. This also allows for periodic review to determine if objectives and strategies need to be adjusted.

Proposed Focus Areas to Set Direction for Final Goal/Objective Development:

These broad areas of focus have been developed based on data analysis, review of materials, and comments from the stakeholder's interviews. The next phase is to present this proposed document to the Board of Supervisors in July. Following their deliberation, it becomes essential to translate the "Focus Areas" into specific, measureable "Goals, Objectives, and Strategies."

- **Strengthen Existing Business Retention/Expansion and Improve Business Climate.**
 - Create active business visitation program that uses ombudsman/community ambassadors together with County staff to increase ongoing contact with and assistance to existing business base with goal of keeping local businesses in the community through their various stages of growth.
 - Modernize the County's zoning code and continue to evaluate and improve other regulatory processes to remove barriers, streamline operations, and keep pace with a rapidly changing business environment while not compromising established standards.
 - Maintain ongoing dialogue with business community using a variety of tools, including customer service surveys for those who have engaged with County, general surveys to identify larger business community issues/trends, and an existing business council/advisory group that can be used for existing business outreach and prospect recruitment.
- **Support Start Up/Entrepreneurial Culture.**
 - Develop focused partnership with UVA, including entities like the School of Engineering and iLab, PVCC, and CATEC to leverage technology transfer/commercialization possibilities and build the entrepreneurial ecosystem.

- Develop proactive approach to help businesses take advantage of grant programs and state and federal financing opportunities available to startups.
- Develop options to support incubator/shared workspaces, training opportunities, and other strategies to nurture and grow homegrown talent.
- **Improve Readiness.**
 - Reassess and more clearly define target industries, including site, building and related infrastructure needs (consider sustainability industries and other opportunities provided by emerging economic dynamics) – these target sectors include start-ups and existing businesses as well as appropriate business relocation possibilities. Particular focus on supporting existing and future Department of Defense installations.
 - Ensure that appropriate product – building and sites – are at a high level of readiness and available for desired target industries and other basic industry with an immediate focus on redevelopment opportunities that support small area planning and strategic planning goals and also on longer term greenfield options that will require significant time/resources to develop.
 - Develop incentives/strategic assets toolbox that provides a variety of options to support desirable business opportunities that advance the County’s economic development goals, including consideration of specialized zones, financial incentives, taxing structure, expedited regulatory review, etc.
 - Work with partners to create a trained and skilled workforce that supports target industries, including support for economically disadvantaged or dislocated workers that allows them to be competitive for jobs that ensure self sufficiency.
- **Maximize Strategic Partnerships.**
 - Explore options to create public-private partnerships that advance County’s strategic and economic development goals, including land and building possibilities, infrastructure improvements, etc.
 - Cultivate relationships with state and regional partners like VEDP, CVPED, City of Charlottesville, Charlottesville Business Innovation Council, and Chamber of Commerce, among others, to build the regional economy and leverage opportunities like GO Virginia and other grant/funding programs.
 - Work with the Economic Development Authority to develop a strong partnership that takes advantage of the skills, expertise, and authority of that group to support desired economic development activities.
 - Work collaboratively with the University of Virginia as a partner in supporting existing business expansion and attraction of new target

industries that provide benefit to both the University and County communities.

- Work with CACVB and other regional partners like arts and cultural entities to maximize tourism opportunities for the region.
- **Increase Economic Development Visibility/Communication.**
 - Create a community education/outreach program that communicates the purpose and desired outcomes of the County's Economic Development Program to provide facts and build community support.
 - Define and develop a marketing campaign that communicates the County's unique economic development "brand," value proposition, strategic assets, etc., to differentiate the community as a desirable location for target industries, both existing and new.
 - Launch a new website that provides increased functionality (e.g., interactive building and site locator, permitting and licensing processes, and other tools) that will help businesses find information and assistance more quickly and easily.
 - Track and publish regular reporting/analytics and share with Board, EDA, business community, and other stakeholders to keep them informed about progress in key benchmark areas.

Observations Made by DecideSmart

Each of these five Focus Areas have been designed and defined in such a manner that they can be readily transformed into targeted "Goals." From that point, the County leadership can describe the five or so key "Objectives" required to achieve each "Goal." In turn, each "Objective" will contain several "Strategies" necessary to achieve the objective. It is here that measurement becomes essential. The measures are the transparent device by which all of the necessary participants/stakeholders are in a position to determine progress and completion.

Summary

Americans are now experiencing a time of extreme differences between the country's hundred-year industrial/manufacturing economy and the new "information age" economy. One of the most significant of these is the speed with which change takes place. In previous times, governments had sufficient time to understand, react, and adapt to change. Some fortunate communities have sufficient attractive attributes that enable them to continue with past traditions—at least for now.

In today's economic condition, the successful governments are those that anticipate, project, and prepare for their desired future. They are proactive, nimble, and publicly articulate about their desired future. No longer analyzing probabilities, they engage in and embrace possibilities. That means that they proactively assess and modify economic development policies, procedures, and practices in constructive anticipation of their desired outcomes. They understand that they cannot predict, but they can prepare. They establish a public transparent framework aimed at inclusion, participation, engagement, and attention to long-term goals. They know that attaining the desired future requires comprehensive and collaborative solutions rather than "governmental" action.

In recognition of the two realities described above, this Draft Strategic Plan is not a prescribed "Roadmap." Rather, it is a comprehensive framework and guide for Albemarle officials and leaders as they set out to define, embrace, and engage a desired future for the County's citizens. The "Albemarle approach" cannot be a restatement from some other jurisdiction or recommendations from professional consultants. The substantive content of this plan must arise from and be tailored to this community.

APPENDIX 1, Interview Response Summary

Albemarle County—04/06-07/2017 Combined Interview Response Summary

I. Economic Development Viewpoints

1. UVA - partner, resource, driver - 14
2. Growth needs to be thoughtful, deliberate, cautious, small steps - 7
3. Should provide additional tax base to sustain and grow County - 5
4. Should complement the area needs. Existing business, new business, and tourism - 5
5. Should support and sustain County's vision - 3
6. Should bring in career level jobs - 3

II. Issues and Opportunities (internal and external)

1. Communication - 12
2. Project concerns - courts project, 29 bypass failure, Deschutes - (10 interviewees mentioned the Deschutes project is a perfect example of how far the County has to go to pursue economic development vs. waiting for desired growth) - 11
3. Tourism - important and should be a part of economic development - 10
4. Zoning / growth - understanding by BOS and community. Some groups and influential individuals want no growth; shortage of available property; build a County research park - 9
5. 95% rural, 5% business needs to be reevaluated - 8
6. Education - public supports. Community College viewed favorably - 8
7. Approval time - sending the right message; small business, existing business, projects, regulatory process - 7
8. Workforce - trades, recruiting and keeping educated workforce - 5
9. Housing - new, affordable - 5
10. Revitalization - residential and commercial - 5
11. Transit and Transportation - 5
12. Quality of Life - culture, arts, etc. is important - 4
13. Tourism - 4
14. Low unemployment is good but a drawback to economic development

III. Roadblocks (movable and immovable)

1. Commitment of County and staff to economic development? Is the County prepared to staff and organize the department in order to move forward? - 13
2. County, EDA, and community need to be on the same page. What is the economic development mindset? - 12
3. Political will of BOS - 10
4. Planning Commission - perception is no growth; not business friendly - 8
5. Rural land development is "holy grail" (immovable roadblock) - 5
6. Engaged community can be both helpful and harmful

IV. Regionalism

1. Central VA Partnership - positive - 8, (negative - 1 - too many silos)
2. Need better relationship with the city – 5
3. Branding
4. Go Virginia could be an opportunity
5. City views economic development more favorably than County

V. Short and Long-Term Goals (reachable and stretch)

1. Create goals, Objectives, Targets (embraceable, identified, realistic) - 14
2. Communication of plan (Business, general public, staff) – 14
3. Build trust in community – 8
4. Need of “ready to go” sites for targets – 6
5. Tours / Visits by BOS (“Fam Tours”) to areas of the County and to competing localities - 4
6. Prepare for the future - proactive zoning; where will be the next land to develop? - 2
7. Media engagement - success stories, new plan - 3
8. Create a Technology Zone
9. Streamline small business development process
10. Growth - Create sustainable growth; better management of growth area
11. EDA to be more of a resource to the County

APPENDIX 2, 10-Point Audit

10-Point Economic Development Audit

1. Strategic Plan
 - a. Vision
 - b. Mission
 - c. Core Values
 - d. Goals (tied to locality plan)
 - e. Objectives
 - f. Strategies
 - g. Measurements
2. Organizational Focus
 - a. Existing Business - Retention, Sustainability, Expansion
 - b. New Business - Targets, Product
 - c. Revitalization / Redevelopment
 - d. Tourism - "Placemaking"
 - e. Workforce
3. Budget - preparation, control, monitoring, flexibility
4. Web-based activities - information, marketing, performance analytics
5. Economic Development Authority (EDA) - structure, talent diversity
6. Incentive Plan for both existing and new business
7. Communication - officials update & involvement, public relations, speeches, media
8. Leadership Support - county/city manager, elected officials
9. Inter-Departmental Coordination – economic development priority focus, resources, customer service
10. Community Engagement - chambers, business organizations, prospect team, advisory committee, ambassadors

Appendix 3, DecideSmart Team

DecideSmart, LLC was formed in 2009 by a group of experienced public service colleagues from different fields. They recognized that both public and private organizations had specific needs that could be met through the management of smart information, and they understood how they could be a factor in achieving positive results. They continue to honor the memory of one of the founding partners, Dr. Bill Bosher, for his leadership and many contributions to education throughout the Commonwealth of Virginia.

The strength of DecideSmart is the result of the overall management experience of the partners and their collective expertise in their respective fields. Each partner is knowledgeable about all projects undertaken. All partners have in-depth experience of the Commonwealth and understand both local and state processes. The partners in DecideSmart have over 100 years of combined executive experience with major organizations in state government, local governments, economic development, public safety, public schools, and higher education.

Meet The Team

Mr. Will Davis, Managing Partner. Will is the team lead for economic development projects. Prior to joining DecideSmart, Will was the Director of Economic Development for Chesterfield County, Virginia. During his tenure, Chesterfield County experienced its most expansive period of growth with record setting economic development announcements. Before joining Chesterfield County, he directed the economic development program of American Electric Power for Virginia and Tennessee. Prior to AEP, he served as the Director of International Marketing for the Governor's Office, Virginia Department of Economic Development.

Dr. Bob Holsworth, Managing Partner. Bob is the team lead for higher education and civic engagement projects. Prior to joining the firm, he was the Founding Director of the Center for Public Policy and the L. Douglas Wilder School of Government and Public Affairs at Virginia Commonwealth University. He also served as Dean of the College of Humanities and Sciences – the largest unit of the 31,000-student university.

Mr. Bill Leighty, Managing Partner. Bill is the team lead for state government based projects. Prior to joining the firm, he served as Chief of Staff to Governors Mark Warner and Tim Kaine of Virginia. As Chief of Staff, Bill essentially served as Chief Operating Officer of the Commonwealth of Virginia where he instituted a statewide performance management system for all agencies. In 2005 and again in 2007

Dr. John Thomas, Managing Partner. John is the team lead on civic renewal, non-profit, and facilitation projects. Prior to joining DecideSmart, John served for over two decades as the Director of the Weldon Cooper Center for Public Service at the University of Virginia. Previous professional assignments have included service as

Executive Director of: the National Association of Counties, the American Society of Public Administration, and the Florida Association of Counties. Earlier in his career he directed the Toledo Metropolitan Area Council of Governments in Ohio. John began his public service as a teacher and administrator in the Toledo public schools.

Mr. Lane Ramsey, Managing Partner. Lane is the team lead for local government-based projects. Prior to joining the firm, Lane was the County Administrator for more than 20 years of Chesterfield County, a jurisdiction with over 300,000 residents and an annual budget of more than \$2 billion. Prior to this position, he managed finance operations for Chesterfield County for 15 years. During his tenure, Chesterfield acquired a AAA bond rating from all three national bond rating agencies. The County also received numerous awards at the state and national level.