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# DICKENSON COUNTY, VIRGINIA STRATEGIC ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PLAN

## Plan Success

## A NEW BEGINNING

**Adopted:** March 24, 2022 – Dickenson County Board of Supervisors  
March 28, 2022 – Dickenson County Industrial Development Authority

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## I. SINGULAR OBJECTIVE OF THE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PLAN

The overall objective of the proposed economic development plan is to create good paying jobs while wisely utilizing the County's abundant assets and resources. Good paying jobs in turn will create economic opportunity which will diversify and strengthen the County's economy. Good paying jobs will improve the lives of the citizens of Dickenson County through better educational opportunities, workforce training, increase household incomes, decrease the County's poverty rate, stabilize our population, decrease unemployment, increase personal income growth, protect and expand our local businesses and industry and improve the overall health and welfare of our citizens.

The County is blessed with many overwhelming opportunities. Opportunities which will enable the County to leverage the strengths, ingenuity and talent of the County's citizens.

## II. ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PLAN

Challenges and opportunities:

The purpose of this draft economic plan is to provide the Dickenson County Board of Supervisors and the Dickenson County Industrial Development Authority with an economic development plan to create a workable and sustainable economy. The County faces many difficult challenges but at the same time the County possesses many strengths and opportunities. Through proper planning and dedication of resources, the County and IDA can create new and exciting economic opportunities. If economic development has a chance of success in Dickenson County, the County must maximize its strengths and minimize or overcome its challenges.

In order for the economic plan to succeed, the County must have a unified and comprehensive approach to economic development. The Dickenson County Board of Supervisors and the Industrial Development Authority must strive to create an economic development plan which is simple but highly focused. The County with its many challenges cannot survive disunity or a lack of harmony. The County must project an image to the business world that the County is a destination location in which prospective business will be welcomed, supported and perpetuated. In other words the County must project to industrial and business prospects an image that the County is a good place for their businesses and families.

There are no silver economic development bullets. Economic development in Dickenson County will take patience, determination, persistence and hard work. There are no simple solutions to the challenges faced by Dickenson County. However, with the appropriate economic development plan focusing on measured goals and objectives, over time, the

Dickenson County Board of Supervisors and the Dickenson County Industrial Authority can develop and implement successful economic development strategies.

A successful economic development plan should include, but not limited to, the following factors and considerations:

1. Should the County engage a marketing consultant to help develop the economic plan;
2. Seek input from multiple sources;
3. Set both short term and long term measurable goals;
4. A commitment to success;
5. Have sufficient appropriations and workforce to implement the plan;
6. Adaptable to change and circumstances;
7. Willingness to take calculated risk;
8. The County must have grit and determination with a willingness not to give up on the overall objective to create economic opportunities for the County's citizens;
9. Ability of the County to develop and implement multiple economic development strategies.

To move forward with a new economic development plan, that has a chance of success, the County and the IDA should consider the following when developing a plan:

- I. The County and IDA must understand the historic challenges that the County faces in order to overcome those challenges but simultaneously extol and emphasize the County's many positive attributes;
- II. The County and IDA must set specific measurable economic development objectives and goals;

- III. It is essential to understand and determine the County's existing labor pool;
- IV. The County and IDA must initiate a strong workforce development plan by utilizing our Community Colleges and the Dickenson County School System;
- V. It is essential to integrate technology in the recruitment of prospective businesses and industry; deployment of high speed internet to all homes and businesses in Dickenson County;
- VI. Develop workforce recruitment strategies;
- VII. Determine what state, regional, local or County job recruitment incentives may be available;
- VIII. Is there a role for consultants in the recruitment of prospective businesses and industries?
- IX. The County and IDA must create a visible economic development profile and designate specific marketing anchors.
- X. Identify and catalog all existing and prospective industrial sites, including ownership, size, transportation system and utilities.
- XI. Revise and update the job description for the IDA Executive Director;
- XII. Create small business rental properties and incentives for both existing and new businesses;
- XIII. Develop tourism priorities and opportunities with an emphasis on developing the Breaks Park and the Flannagan Dam;
- XIV. Seek input from UVA and/or Virginia Tech and other sources to help develop a comprehensive economic development plan;

- XV. Set highway improvement priorities with an emphasis on constructing a four-lane highway from Pound to Clintwood on the existing Route 83 corridor within the Smart Scale Plan;
- XVI. Create additional affordable housing with an emphasis on building senior citizen and moderate income housing opportunities;
- XVII. Collect, tabulate and report economic development efforts, information and data to the IDA and the Board of Supervisors on a quarterly and annual basis.
- XVIII. Identify specific factors which will enable the County to be more effective in recruiting industry and business;
- XIX. ACCOUNTABILITY – Upon the receipt of the quarterly and annual assessment as provided by the economic development team, which includes the IDA Director, County Administrator, and any other economic development advisors to the Dickenson County Board of Supervisor or team members, the Dickenson County Board of Supervisors and the Dickenson County Industrial Development Authority shall jointly determine the status of each plan objective. The Dickenson County Board of Supervisors and the Dickenson County IDA shall make written findings regarding the development, implementation or finalization of plan objectives. The findings shall include, at a minimum, the following:
  - A. Status of each economic development plan objective;
  - B. Determine why the short range and long range plan objectives, if any, have not been fully developed, implemented or finalized;

- C. Determine what additional financial resources, if any, are needed to develop, implement or finalize the plan objective;
- D. Determine what additional resources, or personnel are needed to develop, implement or finalize the plan objectives;
- E. Determine if there is a need to make a change in the assignment of the duties and responsibilities to develop, implement or finalize the plan objectives;
- F. Determine if there is a need to make personnel changes, including but not limited to, reassignment of duties and responsibilities or dismissal, to accomplish the plan objectives;
- G. Provide specific written directions and guidance to all personnel regarding the development, implementation or finalization of plan objectives;
- H. Modify any of the economic development plan objectives, if any, necessary to assure the successful development, implementation and finalization of plan objectives.

Over the next several weeks, the specifics of the above components of the above economic development plan will be further developed and expanded.

The overall singular objective of the proposed economic development plan is to create good paying jobs which will improve the lives of the citizens of Dickenson County through better educational opportunities, workforce training, job opportunities, increased household income, decreased poverty rate, stabilize our population, decreased unemployment, increased personal income growth, protect and expanded our local businesses and industry, and improve the overall health and welfare of our citizens.



### III. CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Dickenson County must be fully aware of the challenges that it faces in creating a successful economic development climate, but at the same time find ways to overcome and mitigate its challenges.

Some of the challenges the County faces are as follows:

- No four-lane highway system;
- No two or four year colleges or universities located in the County;
- Historic loss of population;
- Large elderly population;
- Loss of working age population after they graduate from high school;
- Lack of affordable senior citizen housing and lack of affordable moderate income housing;
- Lack of sufficient BA, MA and Technical Degrees;
- High disability rate among working age population;
- High poverty rate for children;
- Median household income that is 59% of the state average;
- Drug dependence and drug overdose rates are higher than the state average;
- Fewer high school graduates than the state average;
- The County's health outcomes are at the bottom one-third of the state;
- Per capita income (personal income) is only one third of the state average;
- Mountainous terrain and the lack of publicly-owned fully-developed sites and buildings.

The major objective of this economic development plan is to overcome or mitigate the challenges facing Dickenson County and create economic opportunities for its citizens. The County has many positive attributes which should be the foundation of the County's economic development plan. The County should use these positive County attributes to create both short-term and long-term economic development objectives.

Many of the positive attributes of the County are as follows:

- An excellent existing workforce which is both trainable and re-trainable;
- A workforce that is hardworking and dedicated to their employers;
- A workforce that is willing to engage new skills, knowledge and technology;
- A workforce that is dependable and conscientious;
- The County has an excellent quality of life;
- Low tax rate;
- Favorable economic climate;
- Favorable management-labor climate;
- State of Virginia is a right to work state;
- Favorable regulatory climate;
- Local government committed to economic development and which has sound fiscal budget structure;
- The County is ideally located to serve business and industry in the mid-west and south;
- High speed redundant internet services are presently available at the existing industrial park and will be available at the Red Onion Park upon completion of construction;
- The County has high speed internet trunk lines that run through the County. Within a short time frame every County household, business and industry will have high speed internet services available. Funding is currently available to install high speed internet to all County's households, businesses and industry;
- Land/real estate cost are relatively low as compared to other localities in the Commonwealth and surrounding states;
- The County has affordable and reliable natural gas services;
- The County is located close to two community colleges which will develop and implement specific and specialized workforce development training for each business or industry;
- The County is served by three four year colleges including VA Tech and UVA at Wise and University of Virginia in Charlottesville;

- Dickenson County has exceptional public education facilities. The County has a new state of the art high school, middle school and vocational-technical center. The County is currently constructing a state of the art elementary school. The school facilities are fully funded and paid for;
- The County and IDA have existing economic development sites of 550 acres with water, sewer, redundant broadband and natural gas;
- Availability of a world-class broadband system;
- The County and IDA have multiple local, regional, state and federal job training incentives for new businesses and industries;
- The County and IDA are participating in developing clean solar energy projects;
- Dickenson County and IDA are members of numerous regional economic development organizations with regional partnerships;
- Dickenson County and the Industrial Development Authority have available local, regional, state and federal economic development job incentives;
- Abundant, reliable low cost electrical power services;
- Low cost of living;
- Competitive labor costs;
- Daycare center;
- Excellent medical facilities and services consisting of a hospital, national renowned Health Wagon Clinic and Dickenson Medical Center.

#### IV. ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ANCHORS

For industrial and business recruitment and marketing, the County and IDA should create and vigorously implement seven overarching economic development anchors. The economic development anchors should focus on, spotlight, and showcase the key components and strengths of the County's economy. The economic development anchors once developed and implemented, need to be emphasized and reemphasized over and over on a day to day basis when recruiting businesses and industry. The anchors should serve as a foundation of the economic development plan and be used as the major focus for recruiting industry and businesses. The economic development anchors should serve as the County's and IDA's economic development signature profile.

The anchors are:

- I. The County has an excellent trainable and retrainable workforce which is depicted as hardworking with a willingness to engage new skills, knowledge and technology;
- II. In conjunction with Southwest Virginia Community College, Mountain Empire Community College, and the Dickenson County Public Schools, the County and IDA has developed or will develop workforce development and training programs to specifically meet the unique needs of each business or industry;
- III. The County and IDA are in the final stages of developing a seven hundred acre industrial park with water, sewer, natural gas, redundant broadband services with specific site development to fit unique needs of each prospective business or industry;
- IV. The County has a diverse and rich quality of life that will facilitate the success of business, industry and their employees;
- V. The County has an exceptional public education system which compliments a new state of the art high school, middle school, elementary school and vocational-technical center;

- VI. Dickenson County and the IDA have a multitude of local, regional, state and federal economic development grants, incentives and assistance which can be specifically tailored to the needs and expectations of new businesses and industry;
- VII. Economic development and recruitment of businesses and industry will focus on recruiting small to medium size business and industry. Specific and focused marketing and recruitment will concentrate on the following economic sectors:
  - A. Manufacturing;
  - B. Energy;
  - C. Information Technology;
  - D. Small business development;
  - E. Value added timber manufacturing;
  - F. Expansion of existing businesses and industry;
  - G. Surface mining reclamation;
  - H. Solar power;
  - I. Breaks Interstate Park – Flannagan Dam master plan development;
  - J. Health care.

## V. SHORT TERM AND LONG TERM GOALS

In order to implement a successful economic development plan, specific focused and measured goals will be set and achieved, either partially or totally as factors may dictate. Each goal will be identified along with a designated code of the estimated time needed to partially or totally complete the goal.

Each goal will have a designated code estimating the time needed to partially or fully complete the goal. The designated time code for the completion of the goal will be as follows:

- A designation of (1) adjacent to the stated goal will signify that it will take approximately one to six months to complete the goal;
- A designation of (2) adjacent to the stated goal will signify that it will take approximately six months to one year to complete the goal;
- A designation of (3) adjacent to the stated goal will signify that it will take approximately two to three years to complete the goal;
- A designation of (4) adjacent to the stated goal will signify that it will take approximately three to six years to complete the goal.

As a plan is implemented or priorities change the estimated completion code may be updated, changed or reprioritized for each goal.

Specific measurable goals to meet the stated objective of creating jobs are as follows:

1. In conjunction with Southwest Virginia Community College, Mountain Empire Community College and the Dickenson County Public Schools, the County and IDA will

- develop a workforce development and training program to specifically meet the unique needs of each business, industry or students; (2)
2. In conjunction with the Breaks Interstate Park and Corps of Engineers create a master plan for the potential development of the Flannagan Dam and the Breaks Park; (2)
  3. Develop a five minute PowerPoint or video for distribution to prospective business and industry focusing on the key economic development anchors; (1)
  4. Update the County's website to incorporate components of the economic development plan; (1)
  5. Update the IDA's website to incorporate various components of the economic development plan; (1)
  6. Increase the high school graduation rate for the County high school; (3)
  7. Increase the number of individuals with Associate Degree, BA Degree, MA Degree and Technical Degree; (4)
  8. In collaboration with the Dickenson County School Board create a first class and expanded vocational-technical program which will result in highly skilled and relevant workers and include adult training; (2)
  9. Increase the population of Dickenson County; (4)
  10. Decrease the poverty rate for children; (4)
  11. Increase the percentage of Dickenson County's population actively employed in private and public sectors; (3)
  12. Reduce drug addiction by providing the appropriate education and treatment facilities; (3)

13. Increase the overall health of the citizens of Dickenson County; (4)
14. Create programs and incentives to stabilize or expand existing small businesses and startup businesses; (2)
15. Identify and catalog all existing and prospective industrial sites, including ownership, size, transportation system and utilities; (1)
16. Prioritize the County's transportation needs with an emphasis on construction a four-lane highway on the existing corridor from Pound to the Red Onion industrial site. The goal is to get the route 83 corridor from Pound to the Red Onion industrial site in the Virginia Department of Transportation Smart Scale Plan; (2)
17. Develop a plan, in conjunction with the Virginia Department of Energy, by conducting a feasibility study to identify the location and suitability of surface mine lands for industrial site development; (1)
18. Develop a defined job recruitment and marketing strategies including local, state, regional and federal entities; (1)
19. Perform a housing survey to determine the housing needs of senior citizens and moderate income families and determine the availability of state, federal and non-profit funding; (2)
20. Identify sites after housing need determination; (2)
21. Develop workforce recruitment strategies; (1)
22. Revise or change the IDA Executive Director's job duties and or responsibilities; (1)
23. Increase the per capita income of county citizens; (4)
24. Utilize technology as an economic development tool to recruit business and industry; (2)



25. Engage marketing firm(s) to recruit small to medium size business from the states of Tennessee, North Carolina, Virginia and Ohio; (1)
26. Develop work strategies for workers who want to work from home or other centralized locations using high speed internet when it is not available; (1)
27. Deploy high speed internet services to virtually every home and business located in Dickenson County; (3)
28. Determine what local, regional, state and federal incentives, funding and grants may be available for job creation; (1)
29. Create small business rental properties for business startups, new business and existing small businesses; (3)
30. Explore the creation of business incentives that the County may be able to provide for startups, existing and new businesses; (1)
31. Develop a comprehensive recruitment and marketing strategy; (1)
32. Utilize grant writers when and where appropriate; (1)
33. Transfer all IDA financial services to the Dickenson County Board of Supervisors; (1)
34. Develop an economic development strategy to attract solar energy production; (1)
35. Develop additional marketable sites with or without buildings or “virtual shell buildings”; (2)
36. Develop a marketing logo/slogan that captures the essence of Dickenson County; (1)
37. Reexplore and reevaluate to determine if the rail line servicing the Red Onion Industrial site can be repaired, salvaged and acquired with state grant funding and/or Virginia Transportation rail fund; (1)

38. When appropriate partner with local county, regional and state economic development organizations, as well as, non-profits to create a regional approach to economic development; (2)
39. Develop an economic development assessment tool to assess the following: (1)
- a. Current economic business prospects;
  - b. Marketing efforts;
  - c. Project update;
  - d. Status of existing projects;
  - e. Funding requests;
  - f. Site visits;
  - g. Conferences and trade shows attended;
  - h. Industry and business inquiries;
  - i. Status of marketing firm(s) efforts to attract new businesses and industries;
  - j. Attract local state agencies and/or state facilities to the County;
  - k. Create a team to quickly evaluate prospective projects;
40. The Board of Supervisors and the Industrial Development Authority shall jointly on a periodic and as needed basis, after completing or finalizing previously selected plan goals, designate additional short-term and long-term goals to be pursued by the Board of Supervisors, IDA and Vetting Committee.

## **VI. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PLAN**

The completion of the stated measurable goals is the most important component of the economic development plan. The goals as outlined in the plan are the foundation of a strong and diversified county economy. The ultimate objective is to create good paying jobs while creating a diverse and vibrant economy. A strong and diverse economy will result in a robust standard of living and quality of life.

The implementation of the stated plan objectives will require patience, vision and hard work along with additional resources. The economic development plan will require both short-term and long-term commitments to be successful.

Therefore, both the Dickenson County Board of Supervisors and the Dickenson County IDA will need to evaluate and determine if they have the necessary expertise within County resources or will need to retain proficient, skillful and knowledgeable personnel to develop and implement the economic development plan. The key personnel will be required to have a four year degree with multiple skills, talents and experience to implement the many objectives and goals of the plan. To state it a different way the key personnel selected by the IDA and the Board of Supervisors will determine the success or failure of the ambitious and needed diversification of the county's economy. Without the key personnel in place to help lead the economic resurgence of the county, the county's economic status quo will prevail leaving the county's economic future in doubt.

## **VII. POST SCRIPT**

There are those who have given up on an economic future and economic potential of Dickenson County. They have fallen prey to negative rhetoric and a sense of hopelessness. Some would even say that we have too many challenges and hurdles to become a vibrant and diverse economy. Those individuals have failed to look for and recognize the many good and positive attributes of the county. The county has a unique history, culture, music, food, craftsmanship and most importantly its citizens who have the ingenuity and talent to create a strong and diverse economy. The county's future is squarely in the hands of these talented and hardy citizens. With their help, the County can overcome the many real challenges which exist to create a vibrant economy and quality of life. The true believers in the future of Dickenson County will never, never give up and will strive to create economic opportunities for all its citizens.

## VIII. POLICY

## ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PROJECT VETTING COMMITTEE

When the County's economic development plan is sufficiently implemented, it is anticipated that the County and IDA will receive additional business, industry and locally initiated projects. An orderly and thoughtful process to evaluate the viability of each and every project is necessary. The evaluation process should be fact driven and job driven. In order to properly evaluate and analyze the potential of each economic development project, each project shall be vetted by a vetting committee.

Prior to any action, commitment or consideration of any business, industry or local project, each business, industry and local project shall be vetted by a vetting committee consisting of the following members:

1. County Administrator;
2. IDA Legal Counsel;
3. County Engineer;
4. IDA Executive Director and/or Economic Advisor to the Board of Supervisors;
5. Chairman of the Dickenson County Board of Supervisors or designee;
6. Chairman of the Dickenson County IDA or designee.

The Vetting Committee shall perform a comprehensive due diligence analysis and review of each project. In performing its due diligence analysis the Vetting Committee shall consider the following factors but not limited thereto:

- A. Estimated cost of fully implement project;

- B. Funding sources from local, state, regional or national sources;
- C. Job creation both direct and indirect;
- D. Viability of the project and i.e., will the project work and be successful;
- E. Allocation of County and IDA resources;
- F. Size and scope of the project; in other words will the project work within the parameters of the economic development plan;
- G. Analysis of the financial stability of the business, industry or project. A financial history of the economic development prospect and likelihood of success based on this analysis;
- H. A ranking of each project as prioritized by and in conjunction with the Dickenson County Board of Supervisors and Dickenson County IDA;
- I. Prepare a written statement regarding its findings and analysis and any recommendations;
- J. For each proposed economic development project submitted by a locally initiated project or business over \$50,000 to the Vetting Committee the proponent of the project shall submit the following but not limited to the following:
  - 1. A business plan;
  - 2. Their intent to obtain a planning grant for the project;
  - 3. After receiving a planning grant, their intent to retain qualified professionals to assist in the project including for example engineers, architects, planners, designers and all required permits including environmental from state and federal agencies;
- K. File a funding application request with the Vetting Committee;
- L. Sign a contract agreement with the Dickenson County IDA upon the award of funding if the application is successful;

M. The Vetting Committee by its own initiative or at the request of the Dickenson County Board of Supervisors and/or Dickenson County IDA, after submitting its preliminary written analysis of the project, re-vet the project upon the receipt of additional information, facts, data or any information which may adversely or positively affect the proposed project.

## PROCEDURES AND PROCESS FOR SELECTING ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS

The Economic Development Plan (Plan) as approved by the Dickenson County Board of Supervisors and the Dickenson County Industrial Development Authority, is a common blueprint with shared goals and objectives. As such, a specific process and procedure to implement economic development projects is essential for the Plan's success.

The process and procedure for selecting economic development projects is as follows:

1. Either members of the Dickenson County Board of Supervisors or Dickenson County IDA may submit economic development projects to the Vetting Committee for consideration;
2. The Director of Economic Development may submit economic development projects to the Vetting Committee for consideration;
3. An individual, business, industry, commission, regional authorities and the Commonwealth of Virginia may submit economic development projects or business through either the Dickenson County Board of Supervisors or the Dickenson County IDA.

## SELECTION OF PLAN OBJECTIVE AND GOALS FOR IMPLEMENTATION

The County Administrator and the Director of Economic Development, after consultation with Dickenson County Board of Supervisors and the Dickenson County IDA, shall jointly select specific short term and long term goals from the Plan for implementation and completion. As a guiding principle of the Plan, the selection of short-term and long-term goals shall be predicated on first selecting foundational building blocks of goals for a successful economic development strategy. Once the building block goals have been selected and completed, the Dickenson County Board of Supervisors and the Industrial Development Authority shall use the above referenced format for selecting additional short-term and long-term goals for implementation.

As needed, the County Administrator and the Economic Development Director, after consultation with the Dickenson County Board of Supervisors and the Dickenson County IDA may reprioritize and or select new goals and objectives to meet the specific economic development needs of the County.

Once the plan goals are selected for implementation, it shall be the responsibility of the County Administrator, Director of Economic Development and or designee to successfully complete and implement, if feasible, the goals identified under the process and procedure outlined above. It is the responsibility of the County Administrator and the Director of Economic Development to routinely or as needed to keep the Dickenson County Board of Supervisors and the Dickenson County Industrial Development Authority apprised and updated of the status of the implementation of the Plan's objectives and goals. It is essential that the County Administrator and the Director of Economic Development, at least on a monthly basis, either by email or direct individual contact or board meetings fulfill this mission to ensure that both Boards are fully cognizant of the County's efforts to implement the Economic Development Plan.



## VETTING COMMITTEE REVIEW OF JOB APPLICATIONS FOR DIRECTOR OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

The County Administrator, upon the receipt of solicited job applications for the Director of Economic Development position, shall forward all solicited applications to the Vetting Committee for their review, ranking and recommendations. Upon the Vetting Committee's completion of their review, ranking and recommendation, the Vetting Committee shall forward in writing to Dickenson County Administrator their top five (5) prospective candidates for the Director position. Their recommendations are not binding upon the Dickenson County Board of Supervisors, but their recommendations shall be fully considered and vetted by the Dickenson County Board of Supervisors.