

King George County
Economic Strategic Plan Narrative: 2018-2023
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Foreword

This plan was initiated following the announcement of two major transportation initiatives that are forecast to have a profound impact on the economic viability of King George County. These include the Harry Nice Bridge Replacement Project and the I-95 Construction Project. Both of these initiatives will lead to substantial changes in the County's traffic volume over the next five years.

The Nice bridge project is poised to replace the existing two-lane bridge with a modern four-lane structure. During its construction, the County expects to experience increased congestion along Route 301, one of the community's two major corridors. Following completion of the bridge in 2023, the Average Daily Traffic (ADT) along the Route 301 corridor is expected to nearly double, from 26,000 to 50,000.

The northern I-95 corridor has been identified as the most congested thoroughfare in the nation. In response, the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) announced its intent to widen the corridor north of Fredericksburg to Washington, D.C. With an expectation for this five-year project to virtually shut down the freeway, VDOT has already begun advertising Route 301 as an alternative means to travel from southern Virginia to northern Virginia and Washington, D.C. As a result, VDOT anticipates at least 1/3 of its 63,000 ADT will utilize the 301-corridor alternative.

In 2016, the King George County Board of Supervisors viewed these simultaneous transportation projects as both opportunities and threats to our community. For example, increased traffic provides opportunities for the County to capitalize on external spending (i.e., gas, shopping, eating, etc.). However, increased traffic also poses the possibility for congestion and an escalated degradation of the County's road infrastructure.

With this understanding, the Board recognized the need for a comprehensive strategy to proactively prepare for these and other external circumstances. Following a directive by the Board, the Administration began a process to produce the County's first Economic Development Strategic Plan since 1999.

Welcome to King George County

King George County has a rich history, which tells the story of early American cultural icons who helped sculpt the early United States. Nestled in the northeast corner of Virginia, King George County lies a short drive south of Washington, D.C. and east of Fredericksburg, VA.

Named after King George I of Britain in 1720, King George County was first explored by European settlers in 1608, when Captain John Smith led an expedition through the Northern Neck Peninsula. The earliest written records of the region described Native American (Powatan, Patowomeck, and Doeg) lands of abundance, with plentiful fish and fowl. Colonists moved into the region and developed the fertile lands, growing grains, tobacco, cotton, and other food crops.

Over the years, countless figures in American history have traversed this portion of the Northern Neck peninsula. In fact, James Madison, the fourth president of the United States, was born at Belle Grove plantation at Port Conway, north of the Rappahannock River.

The County also served as an iconic site during the Civil War, with the death of the first Union naval officer on June 27, 1861. In an effort to protect the Potomac River, the Confederate Army armed Mathias Point. During the battle, Union Commander James Harman Ward was killed, marking the beginning of a perilous time in U.S. history. Toward the end of the war, John Wilkes Booth, the Confederate spy who assassinated Abraham Lincoln, fled through the Northern Neck peninsula, hiding in a series of homes in the County on his way to Port Conway.

King George County has also played an essential role in the defense of the United States. The Naval Proving Grounds, located in Dahlgren (King George), was established in 1918. Named for Rear Admiral John A. Dahlgren, the facility is now called the United States Naval Support Facility (NSF) Dahlgren Division and is King George County's largest employer. NSF Dahlgren's preeminent researchers and theorists, including Edward Teller, Carl Norden and Albert Einstein, have performed research at the facility. NSF Dahlgren continues to play a substantial role in the development of cutting-edge defense technologies, creating an intellectual hub for innovation on the Northern Neck peninsula.

King George County offers visitors and residents access to unrivaled beauty and tranquility in the Northern Neck peninsula. With multiple points of entry on the Potomac and Rappahannock rivers, the County offers tourists access to recreational water activities and unrivaled scenery.

In addition to its natural beauty and resources, King George County serves as a technological and industrial hub in Virginia. The community serves as home to numerous federal government contractors, manufacturing facilities, and educational institutions. Whether one is a resident or developer, King George offers the perfect blend of quality of life in a business-friendly environment.

Demographics

Between 2010 and 2016, the population of King George County, VA grew from 23,584 to 25,260 (a 7.1% increase), with a median household income of \$84,342.

The population of King George County, VA is 73.8% White, 16.7% Black, and 4.44% Hispanic. A total of 3.89% of the people in King George County, VA speak a non-English language, and 98.9% are U.S. citizens. The median age for King George County is 38 years old.

The percentage of King George County population age 25+ who have obtained a high school diploma is 92.7% and the percentage of King George county population age 25+ who have earned a bachelor's degree or higher is 32.3%.

The median property value in King George County, VA is \$288,000, and the homeownership rate is 73.2%. The 2018 property tax rate is \$.70 per \$100.

King George County, VA is the 69th most populated County in Virginia and is bordered by Caroline County, Stafford County, and Westmoreland County. The economy of King George County, VA employs 12,354 people.

The largest industries in King George County, VA are Public Administration, Professional, Scientific, Tech & Services, and Retail. The highest paying industries are Utilities (\$98,138), Professional, Scientific, Tech Services (\$81,700), and Educational Services (\$45,972).

The unemployment rate in King George County is 3.9% lower than the extended labor market at 4.1% and the U.S. rate of 4%.

According to the Weldon Cooper Center for Public Service, King George County is expected to undergo significant population growth, with a projected population of 30,494 by 2030 and 34,955 by 2040.

County Governance

King George County is governed by a five-member Board of Supervisors. Supervisors are elected by voting districts and serve staggered four-year terms. Responsibilities of the Board of Supervisors include:

- establishing policies for the health and welfare of county residents
- adopting an annual budget for county government operations
- authorizing bond referenda
- enacting plans for County growth and development

The County Administrator serves the Board of Supervisors and is the County's Chief Administrative Officer. He is charged with the development and implementation of all programs and policies. Responsibilities include developing and administering the County's budget, serving as a liaison with regional cooperative efforts, monitoring the County's financial health, and providing staff support to the Board of Supervisors while overseeing the daily operations of County government.

Leadership

- Board of Supervisors
 - Richard A. Granger/Chairman (James Madison)
 - Jeffrey L. Bueche/Vice Chairman (James Monroe)
 - Ruby A. Brabo Member (At Large)
 - Cathy E. Binder Member (Shiloh)
 - John J. Jenkins Member (Dahlgren)
 - Cedell E. Brooks (Shiloh) – RETIRED
 - James B. Howard (Monroe) – RETIRED
- Administration
 - Neiman C. Young, PhD (County Administrator)

- Ryan A. Gandy (Director, Economic Development and Tourism)
- Annie C. Cupka (Economic Development Specialist, Economic Development and Tourism)
- Constitutional Officers
 - Clerk of the Circuit Court: Charles V. "Vic" Mason
 - Commissioner of the Revenue: Judy Hart
 - Commonwealth's Attorney: Keri A. Gusmann
 - Sheriff: Steve F. Dempsey
 - Treasurer: Randy Jones
- Representatives
 - Democrats Tim Kaine and Mark Warner in the U.S. Senate
 - Republicans Ryan T. McDougle and Richard H. Stuart in the Virginia Senate
 - Republican Margaret Bevans Ransone in the Virginia House of Delegates
 - Republican Robert J. "Rob" Wittman in the U.S. House of Representatives

Looking Ahead: 2018-2023

Given the external influences and inevitable shift in our county's horizon, the Board of Supervisors developed the following mission and vision for our community:

Mission Statement: From 2018 – 2023, King George County will maintain a comprehensive economic development program that encourages controlled development and diverse revenue streams in order to manage our inevitable growth while preserving the historical, cultural, and rural character of our community.

Vision: A vibrant and connected community that fosters diverse economic development and visionary growth while honoring its rural landscape.

Explanation of the Mission and Vision

Since 1992, the County has leveraged its landfill (in lieu of real estate taxes) to address the community's capital needs. However, this asset has a finite lifespan. Given the landfill's fixed life expectancy and a low public tolerance for increased property taxes, the County's reliance upon legacy revenue is unsustainable.

In addition, changing demographics and increasing traffic require us to recognize the inevitable growth in our community. To flourish, King George County must proactively reinvent itself in preparation for the future.

King George County must work deliberately to diversify its tax base through smart growth, defined as development that lessens our dependence upon consumer retail and legacy revenue. Smart growth is further defined as development that delicately balances our need for diversification while supporting our ability to maintain our community's rural character.

Stakeholder Meetings

The King George County Board of Supervisors embarked on a multi-stakeholder process to analyze the resources and position of the County. The hallmark of this approach was a series of stakeholder meetings focused on gathering input from all those invested in the community. These stakeholders included the King George County Board of Supervisors, the King George County Economic Development Authority, the King George County Staff, the King George County Chamber of Commerce, the King George Tourism Advisory Committee, NSF Dahlgren, University of Mary Washington – Dahlgren, King George County Citizens, the Fredericksburg Regional Alliance, the George Washington Regional Commission, and Rappahannock Community College.

During this series of engagements, our stakeholders provided input that resulted in the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) analysis captured in Appendix A.

Analysis

After completing the SWOT analysis, the stakeholder input was turned over to the staff for analysis. During this review, the Administration was able to summarize our stakeholders' concerns in six priorities that will assist us in achieving our new economic mission and vision:

- Commercial & Industrial
 - Identify and provide access to services that meet the needs and expectations of our changing community. Create a comprehensive and long-term approach that attracts investors to meet the public's expectations and allows the County to develop and maintain a strong financial position.
- Tourism, Recreation & County Promotion
 - Facilitate the development of an environment that fosters an improved quality of life for our residents while increasing our ability to recruit and retain a competitive workforce.
- Infrastructure
 - Plan, prioritize, and commit to the capital improvements needed to attract economic investment, protect assets, and improve efficiency.
- Housing Accessibility
 - Facilitate development of affordable housing options that are more accessible to our telecommuting workforce.
- Strategic Relationships
 - Leverage the relationships with our strategic partners to promote the County's interests locally and regionally.
- Healthcare
 - Facilitate improved access to healthcare for our current residents and our future aging population.

PRIORITY#1: Commercial and Industrial

As King George County looks forward to expanding its economic diversity and strength, it is important to pay special attention to its business development climate. The community's economic viability will depend on its ability to attract new business investment while nurturing existing industry. New, expanding, and thriving businesses positively influence the quality of life for the local workforce. They also help insulate the community from the impact of greater fluctuations in the global marketplace.

Businesses looking to locate, expand, and thrive in King George County will rely on a business environment that is helpful and responsive through all phases of their life cycle. The County recognizes the need to decrease the barriers to entry for conducting business in King George County. Actions to address this issue will include simplifying its planning and zoning process and bolstering its Economic Development team, as this department will remain essential to bringing new development online.

OBJECTIVE #1: Promotion of Business-Friendly Environment

ACTIONS:

1. Foster commercial growth through attractive property/business taxes
2. Pursue Public/Private Partnerships (PPP) to address public needs
3. Continue to develop & refine business incentive packages
4. Leverage Mixed Use Development (MUD) to accommodate amenities and housing for young professionals and public servants

OBJECTIVE #2: Address Anti-Growth Perception among the Public and the Administration

ACTIONS:

1. Educate policymakers and the public on the pressing need for diversification
2. Train and mentor County staff to pursue and facilitate investments in the community
3. Revamp Zoning Ordinance to capture best practices utilized across the Commonwealth
4. Update the Comprehensive Plan to reflect the reality of a rapidly changing community

DESIRED END STATE: The County possesses an attractive incentive package that allows our community to compete for and win new business. Our community is able to stunt telecommuting and keep Dahlgren employees and their purchasing power in King George County. The King George County administration and leadership are better positioned to recruit and facilitate new investments in the community.

PRIORITY #2: Tourism & Recreation

Rural communities like King George have a unique charm and provide respite from a frantic-paced urban lifestyle. King George County has a unique opportunity to pursue tourism initiatives based around its natural resources, outdoor sports and recreation, agricultural resources, and historical assets. In addition to the economic boost of tourism, these projects can serve as a cornerstone to preserve valued rural landscapes and the quality of life associated with them.

Second, tourism offers many advantages to the County. It places less of a cost-burden on the local economy when compared to building entirely new industries and it is not necessarily dependent on investment support from outside the community. Tourism also provides a boost to travel-oriented businesses and those not directly related to tourism, such as gas stations or grocery stores. Moreover, increased tourism-focused projects can prove to be a sustainable means of economic development, bringing a potential year-round flow of income to the community.

OBJECTIVE #1: Development and Promotion of Historical/Recreational Assets

ACTIONS:

1. Leverage historical and recreational assets as alternative revenue streams
2. Create and sustain a formal historical tour
3. Establish partnership with the Dahlgren Railroad Heritage Trail
4. Pursue a formal relationship with Caledon State Park and create programs that leverage the Park's water access points
5. Foster the continued expansion of all of the County's museums

OBJECTIVE #2: Promote the County's Quality of Life

ACTIONS:

1. Promote County's low cost of living, recreational opportunities, low crime rates, and high quality schools
2. Partner with County's major employers (i.e., KGC Schools, Wal-Mart, and Waste Management) to include County brochure in new hire orientation packet
3. Foster the continued expansion of all of the County's museums

OBJECTIVE #3: Leverage County's Access to Two Rivers

ACTIONS:

1. Promote existing access points to rivers and explore new partnerships as a resource to promote tourism and economic development
2. Develop and promote Wilmont Landing, a County-owned water access point
3. Nurture the growth of the County's public marinas (Machodoc Creek and Fairview Beach)

OBJECTIVE #4: Improved Entertainment and Dining Options

ACTIONS:

1. Encourage investors and developers to pursue mixed-use development in the community
2. Categorize available commercial space and develop a marketing plan

3. Leverage VA Scan as a means to market the county's commercial properties
4. Increase collaboration with commercial storefront owners to pursue more cost-efficient leases

DESIRED END STATE: The County gains a reputation as a tourism hub based on history, outdoor and marine recreation, and a high quality of life. The County's relationship with the commercial community is strengthened and the community gains more dining options for its citizens and visitors.

PRIORITY #3: Infrastructure

Infrastructure investment is critical to King George County's continued economic success. Improvements to infrastructure provide businesses, both large and small, an environment where they can successfully grow and operate. Targeted investments in infrastructure can increase long-term economic growth, productivity, and land values, while also providing significant positive spillovers to areas such as economic development, energy efficiency, public health and manufacturing.

OBJECTIVE #1: Public Transportation

ACTIONS:

1. Partner with private transportation companies to offer options for citizens to access regional services and attractions
2. Pursue publicly-owned transportation network to circulate patrons to commercial and government hubs in the County

OBJECTIVE #2: Route 3 Development

ACTIONS:

1. Encourage developers to pursue a planned downtown area
2. Establish a main boulevard concept along the Route 3 corridor
3. Steer growth toward the Route 3/301 intersection

OBJECTIVE #3: EDA and County Owned Land

ACTIONS:

1. Bring sites to "shovel ready" status for potential investors
2. Collaborate with strategic partners to realize opportunities and ensure that publicly-owned land is available
3. Pursue aggressive marketing campaign for publicly-owned land

OBJECTIVE #4: Utility Preparation

ACTIONS:

1. Incentivize small business development by lobbying the King George County Service Authority (KGCSA) to offset water and connection fees
2. Extend natural gas to the Industrial Park through partnerships and other

opportunities

3. Explore partnerships or other options for providing natural gas to the Industrial Park, such as the emerging Liquid Natural Gas (LNG) market
4. Partner with utility companies to construct a “virtual pipeline” utilizing existing infrastructure

OBJECTIVE #5: Improve Broadband Access

ACTIONS:

1. Work with ISPs to improve broadband access in underserved communities
2. Support local effort to provide broadband to the County’s last-mile areas
3. Enact broadband-friendly policies

DESIRED END STATE: Industrial Park and designated growth areas see increased business development, including a boost in employment and discretionary income in the community. The County realizes improved access to private goods/services for residents, and a loyal customer base for businesses. Reliable Internet service is afforded to our last-mile citizens.

PRIORITY #4: Housing Accessibility

Housing costs in the County are prohibitive for some residents. The central role of housing in shaping the character of a community makes housing as crucial to the County as the road network or utility system. However, many factors in King George County make affordable housing increasingly difficult to obtain.

The people who make the County work—the teachers, waiters, first responders, NSF Dahlgren employees, service members, and young professionals—find it increasingly difficult to afford housing in the County. As a result, much of the County’s economic power and young talent is exported to our neighboring localities.

Housing growth is a very sensitive topic in the community. Rooftops drive business investment, but residential growth actually costs the County money. The County will have to intelligently address residential development to ensure that our community’s needs are addressed without overburdening the government or infrastructure.

OBJECTIVE #1: Pursue Affordable Housing

ACTIONS:

1. Counter community’s anti-growth perception through education and the encouragement of mixed-use development
2. Pursue PPP relationships to convert vacant County property into reasonably priced housing
3. Leverage MUD ordinance to stimulate creative housing options
4. Encourage developers to pursue “green options” for new development

DESIRED END STATE: Publicly owned property and private investment delivers more housing options to the community. The County is able to stunt the telecommuting to NSF Dahlgren from our surrounding localities.

PRIORITY #5: Strategic Relationship Management

King George County's future is dependent on its ability work in tandem with the private sector, civil society, and individuals to address pressing issues that impact the community. Large scale and complex challenges require cross-sector solutions and collaboration that leverages the full range of talent, ingenuity, and commitment to action through creative partnerships.

The County recognizes the importance of these relationships and has prioritized enhancing its ability to build and sustain partnerships to address our most pressing problems. These partnerships will help the County do more with less, build on the capabilities of others, leverage collective action, broaden investments to achieve policy goals, and improve performance. As the County seeks to more effectively utilize its resources, the use of partnerships as an instrument for achieving the government's objectives will become increasingly important.

OBJECTIVE #1: University of Mary Washington Dahlgren

ACTIONS:

1. Nurture internships w/King George County
2. Develop curricula that are relevant to non-military citizens

OBJECTIVE #2: NSF Dahlgren

ACTIONS:

1. Deter development that doesn't support the base's needs
2. Pursue Intergovernmental Service Agreements
3. Work closely w/NSF Dahlgren command team to address space issues on base

OBJECTIVE #3: Rappahannock Community College (RCC)

ACTIONS:

1. Identify opportunities to increase RCC's footprint in the County
2. Pursue Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) to provide RCC assistance for vocational education grants
3. Establish a work-for-training agreement to offer Vocational and Technical Education (VTE) students

DESIRED END STATE: The County's relationships with its strategic partners are strengthened. King George County and its partners have a comprehensive plan to address the community's priorities.

PRIORITY #6: Healthcare

Adequate healthcare is a critical vulnerability to our community. Our current lack of medical infrastructure places a burden on our emergency services department. Each time one of the three staffed ambulances transports a patient to a hospital (> 25 miles away), that platform is removed from the network for at least three hours. This weakness jeopardizes our ability to respond to local emergency calls and places citizen lives at risk.

Even more concerning is the fact that the demand on the local emergency services network is only projected to increase. The Weldon Cooper Center for Public Policy has forecast an expectation for the County's population to not only grow, but age as well. It is critical to build a medical infrastructure that is prepared to accommodate this aging population.

OBJECTIVE #1: Healthcare

ACTIONS:

1. Pursue urgent care center from regional medical groups
2. Aggressively support existing care providers within the County
3. Explore telemedicine grant opportunities

DESIRED END STATE: King George County realizes a robust medical infrastructure that is capable of servicing the needs of both our present and future citizens.

Implementation and Status Monitoring

Implementation of this Plan will consist of tracking tangible outputs that are benchmarked and measured. Resources that will provide useful data include community surveys, labor statistics, retail sales tax revenue changes, commercial occupancy rates, property and rent values, and the total number of new business licenses. This information will allow for the County and the business community to better understand the effectiveness of the proposed economic development strategy.

Conclusion

While King George County remains a rural community at heart, its population growth and economic transformation in the last 10 years have been tremendous. This ongoing vitalization is exhibited through new investments like Wal-Mart, CVS, Tractor Supply, and Dunkin' Donuts. This demonstrates our County's attractiveness to big business. These examples also tell a story of citizen empowerment, job creation, and a lessened dependence on real estate tax revenue.

While this transformation has been astounding, areas of concern still exist, such as the lack of reliable broadband service, a meager healthcare system, and the housing deficiency that forces telecommuters and their dollars out of King George. These are but a few of the problems that we must creatively address in the next five years, and this strategy is our community's first step in achieving that goal.

From updating ordinances and plans to revamping our administration to redefining our culture, there are many opportunities for King George County to implement fiscal, administrative, and regulatory policies to stimulate increased investments in the County. Addressing these priorities will financially secure the community and allow us to seriously compete in the regional and state markets.