



# ECONOMY & EMPLOYMENT

## **GOAL**

Foster an environment that encourages growth and investment for existing businesses and new enterprises to create an inclusive, vibrant, healthy, resilient local economy while maintaining a high quality of life in Blacksburg.

## **Sustainability Goal**

Foster a sustainable economic system that operates within natural resource constraints, and manages these resources responsibly so they will not be depleted or degraded for future generations, while providing equitable access to employment and a living wage for all levels of Blacksburg's workforce.

## **Community Engagement**

Meaningful community engagement is key to the Town's ethic of governance. Community members play a vital role in supporting the local economy by shopping, dining, and using services locally. To foster an inclusive planning process, the Town should ensure that all community members feel welcome and empowered to participate. This can be achieved by providing a wide range of convenient opportunities, providing transparent and responsive communication, and applying innovative engagement methods. In addition, there are a number of standing committees, working groups, and partners that advise staff and Town Council on economic development topics. These committees, groups, and partners are detailed later in the chapter. Community members are also encouraged to attend Planning Commission and Town Council public hearings when economic development topics are being discussed.

## **OVERVIEW**

National demographic trends are constantly shifting and specific recent trends will be detailed through the data gathered with the completion of the 2020 U.S. Census. The local economy needs to remain nimble and address shifting demographic trends to remain healthy and resilient. The Blacksburg population has been aging and local services must shift to accommodate the needs of an aging population. However, with the presence of Virginia Tech, Blacksburg will continue to have a large proportion of young adults with different service needs. Young workers are increasingly considering place first when choosing employment. Meeting the needs of the whole community is essential in maintaining a healthy local economy.

Creating jobs in multiple sectors is one goal of local economic development, but building an inclusive and resilient economy also includes tourism, the arts, placemaking, and strong partnerships. This approach should plan for and create an environment that welcomes and supports businesses, research, and industries that generate local job opportunities.

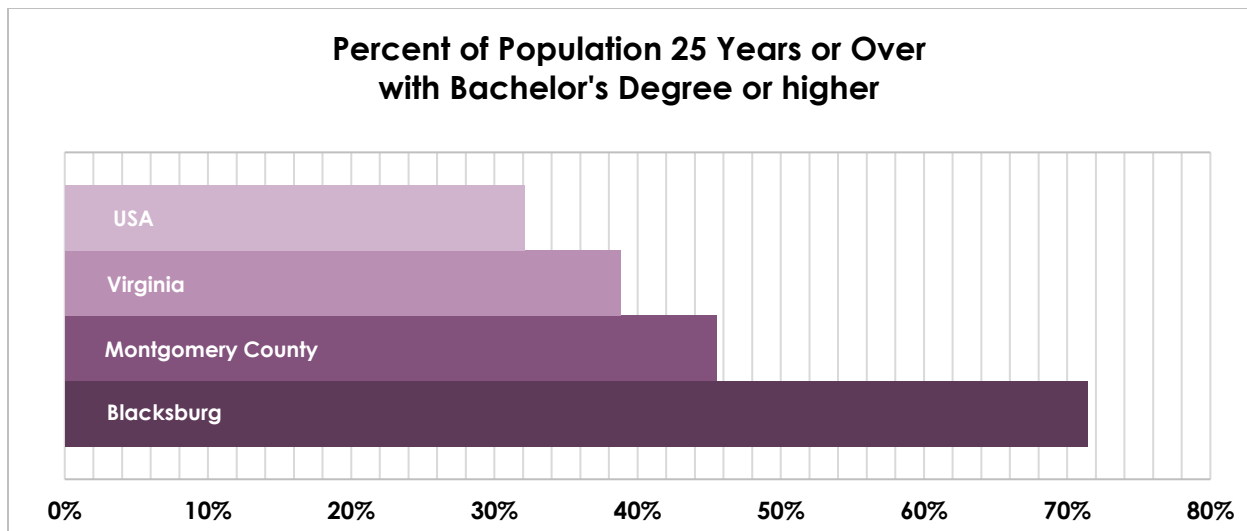
The chapter begins with a summary of the **Economic Development** components in Town including **Commercial, Research and Development, Industrial, Tourism, Arts and Culture, Public Spaces and Placemaking, Historic Preservation and the Economy, and Technology Infrastructure and the Economy**, and is followed by the Town's **Economic Development Planning and Partnerships**.

## **ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

Blacksburg's economy has been relatively stable and less susceptible to national economic shifts such as the housing crisis of 2008. Virginia Tech employs over 7,000 people, providing approximately one-third ( $\frac{1}{3}$ ) of Blacksburg's jobs, which may help insulate the community from these shifts. In addition to being the Town's largest employer, Virginia Tech provides opportunities for research and development firms, draws in visitors to conferences, athletics, and art events, and spurs development of food service establishments and University specific retail. However, the local economy was significantly impacted through loss of business revenue, employment, and tax revenue when the University and other employers limited operations during the global pandemic of 2020. In particular, the Town's revenue sources were substantially diminished since the Town relies more heavily on meals and lodging taxes as opposed to County governments, which typically rely more heavily on real estate and property taxes, which were not impacted.

Over the past decade, an already strong employment base in the government and service sectors has grown, providing additional employment opportunities as the manufacturing sector has declined nationwide, including in Montgomery County. While the University, other government entities, and the hospital are large employers, many Blacksburg businesses have significantly fewer employees.

One of the challenges of economic development planning for small localities is the lack of traditional data sources to measure existing conditions and future results. Many relevant data points are available on the national, state and regional level but do not accurately depict the local Blacksburg economy. Another factor is that in Virginia, data is often collected at the County and City level, but not at the Town level. However, some data sources like the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey (ACS) do provide valuable information on the nature of the community. One example is data that shows Blacksburg has a highly educated work force. According to the 2019 ACS, 71.4% of Blacksburg residents age 25 and over have a bachelor's degree or higher. This rate is significantly higher compared to 32.1% with a bachelor's degree or higher in the US, 38.8% in Virginia, and 45.5% in Montgomery County.



Source: 2019 Census American Community Survey 5-year estimates

To better understand the nature of Blacksburg’s economy, the Town needs to utilize less traditional economic data sources and combine it with qualitative information. For example, in some instances, the median income of the households that financially support Virginia Tech students can be factored into economic analysis when considering disposable income of the community.

National trends indicate that the nature of employment is changing, particularly where people choose to work. Understanding national trends and how they are or are not applicable in Blacksburg is a priority for the Town. To be competitive and attract a high caliber workforce, the Town must work to provide the types of places that employees are considering for their work environment. In Blacksburg, barriers to retaining and recruiting employees include lack of affordable childcare options, affordable housing options, and multimodal mobility options. These factors influence the livability of the community as employees choose where to work. The Town should support efforts to expand affordable options for working families to meet childcare needs. More information on addressing affordable housing and mobility options can be found in the [Housing](#) and [Transportation](#) chapters.

The Town should acknowledge emerging trends in employment that require new skills and support workforce development training opportunities for these sectors. The Town must support efforts in workforce training particularly in trades where there is a known shortage of skilled workers. Another component of a competitive economy is ensuring all sectors of the economy are supported with an able workforce sufficient to meet demand.

Virginia Tech, Radford University, and New River Community College (NRCC) provide opportunities for education and workforce development. The Town supports the NRCC Access to Community College Education (ACCE) program, which makes college available debt-free to high school graduates based on student need. As a region, the New River Valley should cultivate both skilled trades and higher education.

## **Commercial**

Blacksburg is part of the Christiansburg-Blacksburg retail trade area used when prospective retailers are performing market studies. Regional shopping centers and big-box users have located in

Christiansburg over the past few decades but serve the Christiansburg-Blacksburg retail trade area. Christiansburg has cultivated a retail corridor centered on the intersection of Peppers Ferry Road and North Franklin Street. The proximity of this commercial node to Blacksburg meets those types of retail needs of Town residents. Blacksburg has sought to find its own specialty, niche-marketing approach. Blacksburg has one of the highest concentrations of high-income households in the region. Blacksburg also has a large student population with retail and service needs. In general, this population has disposable income that matches the local offerings of many specialty shops. While seeking to diversify the Town's economic base, the Town is committed to supporting the specialty retail stores, many of which are independently owned and operated. The Town also seeks to grow the retail sector in proportion to the population including neighborhood scale businesses, pop-up businesses, and recruiting businesses to support residential expansion. While the Town wants to foster entrepreneurial efforts and retain local businesses, Blacksburg will also have national and regional chain establishments. Providing a wide variety of retail opportunities is part of a sustainable economy and the Town should develop programs and policies that support innovative approaches to retail. The Town is considering the creation of a retail incubator space in the Downtown to assist new retail businesses in starting up, before graduating to a non-shared space. A retail incubator would enable new businesses to incur lower risks such as occupying small retail spaces with lower costs, central management, and flexible leasing.

The Town of Blacksburg is committed to supporting existing office, commercial, and retail establishments located primarily in four core commercial areas: the Downtown, North Main Street, South Main Street, and University City Boulevard. Businesses in the Downtown area are organized as Downtown Blacksburg, Inc. (DBI) which works to make Downtown Blacksburg unique through downtown programming and events. The businesses within the North Main Street, South Main Street, and University City Boulevard commercial areas have organized and are represented by Main Street Connect, which strives to cultivate members' success through visibility, promotion, and support. North Main Street, South Main Street, and University City Boulevard commercial areas all have high visibility and easy vehicular access. Smaller pockets of commercial land are also located along Prices Fork Road and along South Main Street near the Town's southern corporate limits. The Town has a limited amount of commercially zoned land and recognizes the importance of redevelopment in order to best utilize this land.

### ***Downtown***

Blacksburg's Downtown extends from the roundabout at Prices Fork Road and Main Street to Eheart Street. The Downtown is qualitatively different from other commercial areas in that community identity is frequently tied to downtown areas. To reinforce the Downtown identity, the Town has developed a common palette of signal poles, lighting poles, benches, wayfinding signage and other amenities. Although there is a mix of retailers in Downtown, there is a perception that the area is mostly oriented towards University students. The Town is committed to a healthy, active downtown area that equally serves a growing permanent resident population as well as students and visitors. In addition to diverse retail stores, restaurants and services, special events and programming will supplement the vibrancy of Downtown. The Town has worked proactively to acquire land along Progress Street, which is currently used for surface parking but is designated as the location for a future parking garage. A parking garage in this portion of Downtown will support restaurant, retail,

and service establishments as well as facilitate redevelopment and the ability to meet the demand for office space in Downtown.



***Downtown Streetscape***

Permanent residences are another important part of a vibrant downtown and can be a particular challenge in Downtown. Many Downtown units are occupied on a part-time basis as second homes or game day residences. Further discussion of this topic is included in the [Housing chapter](#) and [Land Use chapter](#). The Town has made significant investments in placemaking in the Downtown area including College Avenue Promenade and Market Square Park. The importance of placemaking is discussed later in the chapter.

In Blacksburg, historic structures help establish small-town charm and a sense of place, as well as define Downtown. Within Downtown, some owners have invested in regular maintenance and upgrades to major building systems as needed. Other property owners have not financed similar investments and are allowing the buildings to decline. Vacancy and lack of building maintenance are significant challenges that Town government has a limited ability to affect. The Town should explore potential tools, such as new regulations and enforcement, that could address these challenges.

From 2010 to 2016, the Town had a Downtown Commercial Façade Program that offered applicants a matching grant for building façade improvements. Over the six year period, seven facades were successfully completed. To encourage property owner investment in older downtown buildings, the Town is restarting a façade improvement program.

The Town has adopted a residential density bonus in the Downtown to encourage reinvestment in historic buildings. The redevelopment project for the historic National Bank Building utilizing this incentive brings a long-standing vacant corner of Downtown back into active use. Other programs and incentives for historic properties are discussed in the [Land Use chapter](#).

The Town hired the firm Development Strategies to study the challenges and opportunities for the area and develop recommendations for how to ensure Downtown becomes a dynamic, active, and accessible neighborhood with a diverse economic base. Rooted in community input and analysis, the *2019 Downtown Strategic Plan* provides a blueprint for action through policy, capital improvements, and development that advance community priorities. Downtown is broken into six distinct districts in the Plan. Each district's assets and opportunities have been evaluated and a unique vision for each is illustrated in the Plan. Implementation of the Plan is underway and will address the six districts over the next 10-15 years.



***Illustrative vision for Central Downtown, 2019 Downtown Strategic Plan***

### ***North Main Street***

The North Main Street commercial area includes a wide variety of uses including retail, research and development, auto-oriented and service businesses, residential and offices. The businesses within this commercial area have organized as part of Main Street Connect. Businesses along North Main Street have been impacted by road widening and many commercial parcels are shallow in depth. This shallow depth combined with multiple owners can make redevelopment challenging. This area is well-served by transit but does present challenges for bicycle and pedestrian travel with limited dedicated facilities and only one designated crossing north of the Progress Street intersection. This commercial area serves a large population of nearby residents as well as commuters and visitors coming from the U.S. Route 460 Bypass. The Town envisions North Main Street as an attractive walkable commercial corridor. To further this vision, Development Strategies completed *North Main Street: A Strategy for Redevelopment*, which summarizes the challenges and opportunities for the corridor. The report identifies strategies for street design, connectivity, land use, policy, and creation of new districts to enable a vibrant mixed-use pedestrian- and bicycle-friendly corridor.

### ***South Main Street***

The South Main Street commercial area includes a mix of older and newer businesses and buildings. The businesses within this commercial area have organized as part of Main Street Connect. This area has seen redevelopment over the last decade with the development of First and Main. The

organization is working on branding the area as a commercial restaurant, shopping, entertainment and destination district within the region. This area has been previously impacted by road widening and some commercial parcels remain limited in depth. This area is a gateway into Town for commuters and visitors entering from the U.S. Route 460 Bypass. The area is well served by transit and provides ample opportunities for bicycle and pedestrian crossings but has limited bicycle facilities. This area is earmarked for further study for street design, connectivity, land use, redevelopment opportunities, and policy.

### ***University City Boulevard***

The University City Boulevard commercial area includes a mix of retail, restaurant, office, and service businesses. The businesses within this commercial area have organized as part of Main Street Connect. The area is adjacent to the Virginia Tech campus and has University uses including the Math Emporium. The area includes a mix of older businesses as well as more recent redevelopment. The area is well served by transit and commercial establishments are walkable from campus as well as adjacent residential development but has limited bicycle facilities. The Town recognizes the importance of working with the University and the Virginia Tech Foundation on the future of this area, particularly since a portion of the University Mall will transfer to the VT Foundation's ownership in 2023. This area is earmarked for further study for street design, connectivity, land use, redevelopment opportunities, and policy.

### **Research and Development**

Research and development industries are an increasing component of the Town's economic base. There are a wide variety of research and development uses and many can occur in an office-like environment. The primary location has been at the Virginia Tech Corporate Research Center (CRC) adjacent to the Virginia Tech Campus. Created in July 1985, its first building was completed in 1988. As of 2020, the research park houses over 200 technology, research and support companies that employ over 3,300 people in 36 buildings totaling over a million square feet on 230 acres of land. Phase II total build-out is planned to be 15 buildings totaling 600,000 square feet allowing for 2500 additional employees over the next decade. The CRC is a for-profit, wholly-owned, private subsidiary of the Virginia Tech Foundation, and is, therefore, not a state entity and must meet Town Code requirements.



***Office building in the Virginia Tech Corporate Research Center***

The CRC provides a campus environment that can accommodate multiple business sizes and configurations. The Town has also seen increasing demand for office space in the Downtown for research and development employers that wish to be more walkable to Downtown amenities. In the past several years, the Town has seen growth in the office square footage provided in smaller uses in the Downtown.

The Downtown Strategic Plan has identified several areas for redevelopment including the Baptist Church property. While there are not many vacant parcels available, the Midtown development is an opportunity for new construction in the Downtown. Several businesses have indicated an increasing willingness to locate Downtown after completion of the planned Progress Street parking garage that could lease spaces to employers.

## **Industrial**

Blacksburg's primary area for industry, the Blacksburg Industrial Park, provides quality jobs and access to the interstate for light industrial and manufacturing corporations. As of 2020, there are approximately 75 acres available for development in Blacksburg's industrially zoned land, with limited opportunities elsewhere in Town for industrial development. Based on historical absorption patterns, the Town may have less than a 15-20 year supply of privately owned land capable of supporting industrial development in the Town. However, the nature of manufacturing has changed, new forms of industry exist where manufacturing can occur in an office-like environment and this land bank supply may be adequate for large-scale industry. Some form of manufacturing will always occur in Town, but these manufacturing industries are often supporting larger industries internationally and in the New River Valley, such as the Volvo Plant in Dublin. Many industrial uses in Town provide crucial links in manufacturing supply chains and others complement research and development businesses in the CRC. The presence of research institutions like Virginia Tech Transportation Institute have spurred the growth of emerging industries such as autonomous vehicle technology in the Industrial Park.

## **Tourism**

Traditionally, Blacksburg has been considered a destination for University related tourism, particularly associated with athletic events. However, opportunities for tourism are emerging related to the arts and the outdoors and the Town can play an active role in regional partnerships that advance these opportunities. In addition to partnering with regional entities for tourism, the Town has invested in wayfinding and infrastructure to strengthen the sense of community and place. In the Comprehensive Plan Survey, mountain location was the top answer for what respondents like most about Blacksburg. The Town also has the potential to become a base camp for outdoor enthusiasts who want to take advantage of the great natural resources of the region such as sight-seeing on the Blue Ridge Parkway, boating and paddling on the New River, and hiking and bird watching on the Appalachian Trail. Investment in outdoor related tourism, such as the Huckleberry Trail extension, the Mountain Bike Skills Park, and the Brush Mountain Trail System, will help to realize this potential. The Town should explore creating a unified outdoor recreation strategy with regional partners. In addition to the beautiful natural setting, Blacksburg hosts many well-established events and festivals, making it an attractive destination within the New River Valley region and greater Southwest Virginia.



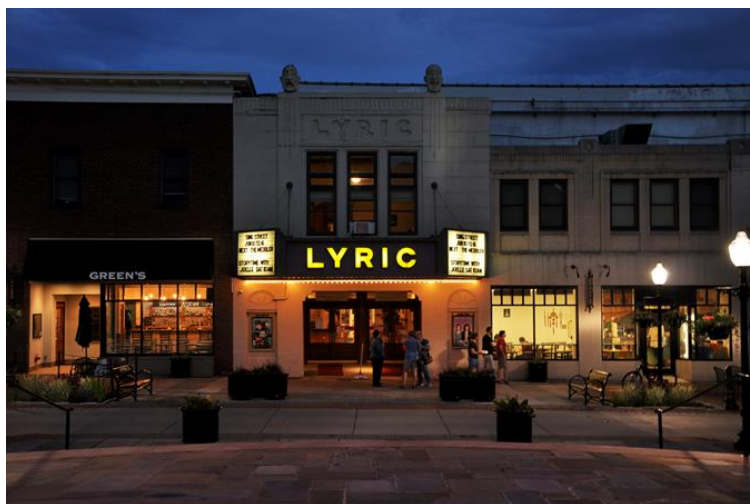


**Aerial View of Mountain Bike Skills Park**

Visitor and alumni weekends associated with university special and athletic events also draw people to the Town. Continuing to partner with the University, to support and facilitate positive tourism experiences, is a priority for the Town. For example, the Town plans to continue providing transit services for special events to accommodate the large influx of visitors to the University. Tourism for University events as well as outdoor recreation has significant impacts on the Town's economy, particularly for restaurants, retail shops, and lodging.

### **Arts and Culture**

Arts and culture can positively affect the Town's economy, be a driver of tourism, and contribute to community wellbeing. This is a growing focus in the community and the Town plans to build on this momentum to expand participation and ensure that arts and culture are accessible for everyone. At the edge of campus abutting Main Street, Virginia Tech Moss Arts Center anchors the University's new Creativity and Innovation District (CID), which is being developed adjacent to Downtown. The CID will serve academic programs in science, humanities, business, and technology and includes residences for students in design, technology, and the visual and performing arts. The Moss Arts Center and the historic Lyric Theatre serve as the main performance spaces within the community.



**The Historic Lyric Theatre**

St. Luke and Odd Fellows Hall and the Blacksburg Museum and Cultural Foundation, located in the renovated Alexander Black House, promote the cultural history of the Town. The Blacksburg Partnership facilitated discussion amongst local artists – visual artists, writers, musicians, and performers – to understand the needs of local artists, to promote local art and artists, and to increase public awareness of community art. Based on these Artist Coffeehouse discussions, additional performance space to meet local demand is recognized as a need within the Town. Also active is the Blacksburg Regional Art Association comprised of local artists, many of whom participate in the Round the Mountain Artisan Trail. Downtown Blacksburg, Inc. is increasingly sponsoring special events that highlight the arts in Downtown Blacksburg. The Crooked Road connects regional music venues in southwest Virginia to promote the region’s rich heritage of traditional music. Market Square Park hosts the Market Square Jam for local musicians as an affiliated venue of the Crooked Road trail. While there are several arts and culture focused organizations in the Town and region, there is a need for additional organizations that support and enhance arts and culture within the Town.



**Market Square Park Electrical Box Art titled “Dancing With Vegetables” by Nikki Pynn**

The Town recognizes public art, both visual and performing arts, as a way to enhance public spaces. The Town is taking a leadership role to form a public art committee, which can further the arts in many forms within the Town. The recent 16 Frogs public art project is an example of how to enhance public spaces through public art. This particular project, which is discussed in the [Sustainability chapter](#), reflects the Town’s ties to the historic 16 squares of Blacksburg’s original plat as well as calling attention to the freshwater that flows under and around the streets of Town. With the assistance of the Downtown Revitalization Committee, several community pianos are now located in Downtown providing opportunities for impromptu performing arts accessible to the whole community. Busking, formally called the Sidewalk Stage in Blacksburg, is welcomed throughout the Downtown public spaces and allows for informal performances as well. With development and redevelopment, private entities can support public art through creation of spaces designed for visual and performing arts. The Town also plans to pursue several strategies to support arts and culture in the community by providing creative branding and marketing opportunities, supporting public transportation to events, and continuing to work on wayfinding signage.

## Public Spaces and Placemaking

Quality of place is a community investment. As the workforce becomes increasingly mobile, emphasis on quality of place is vital for a thriving local economy. The Town has invested significantly in enhancing the quality of public spaces through improvements including the College Avenue Promenade, Market Square Park, the North Main Street streetscape project, hanging baskets, and benches. In addition to physical improvements, planning for active programming in these spaces creates a sense of vibrancy. While this attentiveness to quality of place can be expensive, the investment can make an enormous impact on how people feel about the community. The Comprehensive Plan Survey identified “small town feel” and “sense of community” as two of the top four things respondents like most about Blacksburg. “Safety of the community,” which can also contribute to quality of place, was identified as number three on the survey.

The Town recognizes many opportunities to continue transforming public spaces into vibrant places including further utilizing Wong Park with its close proximity to Downtown, improved gateway entries into Blacksburg, and increased wayfinding signage for pedestrians and vehicles. Creating vibrant public spaces where people want to gather will improve the quality of life in Blacksburg. Design elements, regardless of size, such as small pollinator gardens and medians, consistent streetscaping, and small public art pieces can also help contribute to placemaking. Well-designed public spaces and parks should foster inclusivity, incorporate equity, and offer access for everyone.

The Blacksburg Farmers Market, located in Market Square Park, complements Downtown retail while furthering the Town’s sustainability efforts. The Market offers an outlet for locally grown agricultural products, serves as a site for a growing number of special events throughout the year, and supports the Town’s commitment to placemaking. The Market also provides a multitude of opportunities for the Town to partner with other entities for these events.

## Investing in Place

“Talented entrepreneurs and workers are attracted to communities with a strong sense of local identity and a high quality of life. Investing in place starts with identifying a vision.... Strategic investments in infrastructure and the public realm can improve quality of life by making it convenient and attractive for small business owners and workers to walk, bike, or take public transportation to/from work and by improving access to parks and other public open spaces. Similarly, investments in streetscape improvements, public art, and special events can help reinforce local character and foster a sense of community.”

Source: American Planning Association Planning Advisory Service. “Planning to Support Small Businesses.” QuickNotes No. 60. February 2016.



**Market Square Jam at Market Square Park**

### **Historic Preservation and the Economy**

The benefits of historic preservation for local economies are well documented throughout the nation. Economic benefits include job creation, expanded heritage tourism, and increased property values. Historic preservation can foster civic pride, define neighborhood character, and contribute to small-town charm. Preserving and promoting the history of Blacksburg enhances the Town's cultural identity and supports economic vitality in the Town. Preservation efforts should be inclusive and diverse, reflecting the history and culture of the whole community. The Town recognizes that an inherent tension can exist between historic preservation and new development or redevelopment. However, thoughtful modern construction combined with historic rehabilitation can express Blacksburg's rich history as well the Town's commitment to the future. Additional information regarding historic preservation can be found in the [Land Use chapter](#).

### **Historic Preservation and Community Identity**

"Preservation of buildings also helps communities retain a distinct sense of identity, ultimately creating an authentic sense of "place" that is difficult, if not impossible, to replicate with new construction."

Source: Frey, Patrice and Rachel Bowdon. "Historic Preservation: Expanding the Planner's Toolbox." *American Planning Association Planning Advisory Service Memo*. September/ October 2012.

### **Technology Infrastructure and the Economy**

Innovative and efficient technology infrastructure is vital to connect businesses with customers and vice versa. The global pandemic of 2020 has reinforced the importance of access to reliable technology infrastructure for businesses and employees alike. The Town can facilitate technology infrastructure by lowering barriers for the delivery of creative broadband services; seeking better methods of service delivery; providing transparency of operations; clearly demonstrating the value of technology to the community; and adjusting technology goals as the community evolves and service demands change. These concepts are encompassed within the umbrella of Smart Cities. According to the American Planning Association, Smart Cities use information and technology to engage the community, deliver city services, and enhance urban systems. The Town supports the Smart Cities concept and recognizes the importance of technology infrastructure in a resilient, sustainable economy. Goals and policies are

needed to provide guidance for the implementation of this infrastructure similar to how polices are developed for more traditional utilities such as water and sewer. This is discussed further in the Utilities chapter.

## **ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PLANNING**

The Town's commitment to growing and maintaining the economy starts in the Town Manager's Office with a focus on local businesses, start-ups, and regional partners. Town Council established the Business Relations Committee in 2017 to liaise between Town government and the local business community. The *2013 Economic Development Strategy Update* was adopted to provide a unified plan for the entire Town. This plan capitalizes on the success of the past decade while planning for the next phase of sustainable economic development growth in Blacksburg. The Town has also completed several specific studies including the Downtown Housing Study, 2019 Downtown Strategic Plan, and the North Main Street Study, to further assess the local economy and plan for the future.

## **PARTNERSHIPS**

An important element of economic development is forming partnerships. The Town works with many partners to support and grow the local economy. These partners focus on a diverse range of topics including:

- Tourism
- Marketing
- Small business assistance
- Historic preservation
- Networking
- Business incubation
- Workforce development/training
- Events
- Business recruitment
- Placemaking

These organizations are listed in the Town Government Collaboration chapter.

# ECONOMY & EMPLOYMENT

## Objectives and Policies

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### ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

- EE.1. Focus Town efforts on recruiting and retaining businesses to expand the Blacksburg economy.
- EE.2. Support local efforts to grow businesses including start-ups and other entrepreneurial initiatives in Blacksburg.
  - EE.2.1. Consider programs and incentives to help locally owned and locally based businesses grow.
- EE.3. Help promote employment opportunities for a variety of different skill sets and education levels creating access to jobs for the whole community.
- EE.4. Encourage all employers to adopt policies and practices that provide a living wage to employees and benefits that support the needs of workers.
- EE.5. Review Town regulations to be more responsive to the changing nature of employment and to consider barriers to the economic viability of businesses.
- EE.6. Foster a resilient local economy that allows for creativity and flexibility to remain responsive to technology innovations and unforeseen challenges.
  - EE.6.1. Use pilot projects and temporary programs in response to unexpected and changing economic conditions.
- EE.7. Manage growth to meet the expectations of the community, with respect to quality and diversity of businesses, while maintaining Blacksburg's highly valued small-town feel.
- EE.8. Support local and regional workforce education and training efforts, such as the Access to Community College Education (ACCE) program, to meet the needs of businesses.
- EE.9. Support prospective and new business operators with a proactive approach to explain and facilitate the regulatory review process and other requirements to start a business in the Town.
- EE.10. Continue efforts to improve the development review process.
  - EE.10.1. Continue investments in technology to make information more accessible to the public and the development community.
  - EE.10.2. Monitor customer feedback to look for ways to improve the process.
  - EE.10.3. Continue to use the Business Relations Committee as a sounding board on business climate issues.
- EE.11. Retain and recruit environmentally-conscious businesses/industries that support Blacksburg's sustainability goal.

- EE.12. Encourage participation in efforts to establish and brand Blacksburg as an economy that values sustainable development and practices.
- EE.13. Implement recycling programs for Downtown businesses and residents.
- EE.14. Keep core government services for the community in the Downtown, such as municipal government offices, the police department, and the public library.
- EE.15. Increase Blacksburg's competitiveness as an employment destination by addressing identified needs including more affordable housing, childcare, and multi-modal transportation, which are barriers to recruitment and retention. See Housing and Transportation chapters.
  - EE.15.1. Support efforts to expand affordable options for working families to meet childcare needs.
- EE.16. Expand opportunities for community engagement and leadership through Town programs such as the Citizens Institute or regional programs such as the Chamber of Commerce's NRV Leadership program.

### **Commercial**

- EE.17. Continue to support local commercial business groups such as Main Street Connect and Downtown Blacksburg, Inc.
- EE.18. Conduct corridor studies for South Main Street and University City Boulevard.
- EE.19. Support the local business groups to counter loss of business due to online retail competition and create more specialty and niche retail opportunities.

### **Research and Development**

- EE.20. Foster and encourage an environment of entrepreneurship in the community and in the government through research and development and technology advancements.

### **Industrial**

- EE.21. Support the build-out of the Blacksburg Industrial Park with industrial and manufacturing uses to increase local employment opportunities.

### **Tourism**

- EE.22. Maximize the use of Blacksburg Transit in supporting economic development and tourism.
- EE.23. Continue economic incentives in the Downtown Tourism District and adjacent Arts and Cultural District.

### **Arts and Culture**

- EE.24. Finalize the creation of a Town public art committee.
  - EE.24.1. Incorporate public art into placemaking activities.

## **Public Spaces and Placemaking**

- EE.25. Continue Town initiatives in placemaking to create active vibrant public gathering places.
- EE.26. Focus on improving gateway corridors into Town to enhance the appearance of Blacksburg for the South Main Street area near the Town boundary, the North Main Street/460 Bypass area, and Prices Fork Road.
- EE.27. Support Downtown event planning, and, in particular, coordinate with Virginia Tech, DBI and other entities for programming on the College Avenue Promenade and other Downtown public gathering places.

## **Historic Preservation and the Economy**

- EE.28. Support and promote the Blacksburg Historic District as both a cultural resource and an economic development tool.
- EE.29. Continue to support the work of the Blacksburg Museum and Cultural Foundation in promoting and cataloguing Blacksburg's history.

## **Technology Infrastructure and the Economy**

- EE.30. Support community broadband build-out and expansion to make Blacksburg a competitive location for companies with respect to technology infrastructure.
- EE.31. Encourage the completion of the "last mile" of infrastructure to homes, businesses and governments in Blacksburg.
- EE.32. Create a high-level framework for the implementation of fiber-to-the-home (FTTH).
- EE.33. Align Town technology project investments with community needs.
- EE.34. Address the issue of demand for more wireless infrastructure in Blacksburg.

## **ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PLANNING**

- EE.35. Begin implementation of the Town's Downtown Strategic Plan.
- EE.36. Continue the parking education plan, monitoring total public parking availability, and maximizing use of the new smart parking meters.
- EE.37. Construct a parking garage on Progress Street to serve the downtown area that is context sensitive and aligns with the Downtown Strategy.
- EE.38. As shown in the Beyond Boundaries 2047 campus plan, encourage Virginia Tech to construct a parking garage on the University campus adjacent to Downtown.



- EE.39. Minimize the visual impact of new parking decks and ensure deck construction contemplates future transportation alternatives and allows for the repurposing of structures.
- EE.40. Continue streetscape improvements in Downtown.
  - EE.40.1. Finish brick sidewalks and street furniture upgrades in Downtown.
  - EE.40.2. Plan and construct Draper Road Corridor streetscape improvements.
  - EE.40.3. Plan and construct Progress Street Corridor streetscape improvements.

## **PARTNERSHIPS**

- EE.41. Continue to support local and regional economic development organizations that assist in recruiting and marketing the Town.
- EE.42. Support the Roanoke Regional Small Business Development Center, which serves the Town through the Blacksburg Office, as means to encourage small business growth and retention.
- EE.43. Engage with Virginia Tech and the Virginia Tech Foundation on continued development in the Corporate Research Center, implementation of the Arts Initiative, future commercial developments, and the implementation of the campus plan.
- EE.44. Use special service districts or tax increment financing programs as a way to create private-public partnerships that support key economic development needs in the Town.
- EE.45. Use the Virginia Tech/Montgomery Executive Airport as an economic tool to recruit new businesses to the area.
- EE.46. Continue to work with the Montgomery County Department of Economic Development and other regional partners for recruitment of businesses.
- EE.47. Implement a façade improvement program and explore other opportunities to develop public-private partnerships that result in updates and enhancements to local businesses.
- EE.48. Explore potential tools that can address vacancies and lack of building maintenance in Downtown.
- EE.49. Continue Town involvement in and support of the Downtown Revitalization Committee.
- EE.50. Engage with the University in the creation of its planned Creativity and Innovation District and work with the University on integrating the District into the fabric of the Downtown.