

WEST
PIEDMONT
PLANNING
DISTRICT
COMMISSION
**RECOVERY &
RESILIENCY
PLAN**

OCTOBER 28, 2021



THOMAS P. MILLER & ASSOCIATES



West Piedmont
Planning District Commission

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction.....	1
Goals of the Data Scan.....	3
Resources and Research Process.....	4
Summary of Findings.....	4
Industry Sector Breakdowns.....	5
Regional SWOT.....	20
Regional Goals.....	24
Recovery and Resiliency Strategies and Action Plan.....	25

INTRODUCTION

The term rapid recovery, by necessity, is now a critical part of our post-COVID-19 lexicon. Not letting this crisis define our future any more than necessary depends on well thought-out responses: 1) reducing the health impacts; 2) getting residents back to work; and 3) stabilizing and growing our economy. The West Piedmont Planning District Commission understands this and has put significant thought into what an effective response looks like to an unprecedented economic disruption.

Successful regions with successful communities hear the above refrains daily. Communities that once struggled are now vibrant with diversified economies and lively downtowns. In most cases they started with their natural assets and reinforced their sense of community.

Every region and every community experience growth and eventually some level of economic recession. Not all fully recover. Clearly, the West Piedmont region is in transition. It has a strong legacy of producing high quality textiles, wood products, and agricultural goods. Its natural resources and features have served it well for some time.

Tobacco has long been in decline with efforts underway that instead expand industrial hemp and its CBD products, vertical agriculture, and other diversified crops. Labor-intensive manufacturing has declined significantly. Locally owned businesses are more difficult to retain, especially when the region is experiencing decline – not growth.

Opportunities to reverse trends that might be impacting business decline are coming to fruition in the region. Tourism and hospitality have long been a regional opportunity that may not be fully leveraged. The West Piedmont region offers unique natural, historic, and cultural assets and events; however, hospitality infrastructure, such as hotels, is lacking, which makes it difficult for the region to leverage the full potential of this sector. The announcement of a Caesars Entertainment \$400 million resort and casino in Danville provides new job opportunities and additional linkages with tourism and hospitality businesses in the region.

The West Piedmont Planning District Commission (WPPDC) and its government members have been focused on accomplishing its regional vision. The 2021 CEDS plan provides a list of well-planned economic and transportation projects that are being executed as resources allow. The West Piedmont Region local leadership have planned well and are re-establishing the region's position in the Virginia and national economies.

Even the best plans must be revised when the unexpected internal or external influences shift. In those situations, proactive and innovative approaches are often necessary. We are now in unprecedented times. The pandemic has impacted our personal, social, and economic behaviors. Very little is the same.

This study and strategic plan aims to assess the state of the regional economy anticipating short- and long-term impacts and trends of the COVID-19 pandemic, and provide a set of actionable strategies for economic recovery and long-term economic resiliency.

The pandemic will not be replaced by a return to the way things were, which means regional citizens, institutions, businesses, and communities must adapt to ensure health, safety, social, and economic well-being. The WPPDC is leading the region to develop data-driven innovation and solidify a more resilient economic ecosystem.

GOALS

There are at least three critical questions that the regional Pandemic Recovery and Resiliency Plan will answer:

1. What are the current and future economic and social impacts to our region from the pandemic?
2. How do we begin to reverse existing impacts and minimize future impacts of COVID-19?
3. What steps must the West Piedmont Region take to expedite economic recovery and to ensure increased economic immunity or resiliency from future threats?

This plan attempts to answer these questions through sound data, informed experiences, open discussion, and idea-sharing among a diverse set of stakeholders. This inclusive approach helped ensure outcomes are feasible, broadly understood, and supported with talent and resources.

PROCESS

The process to answer the questions above included five key steps:

1. **Data collection:** A data scan was completed that evaluates the current macro-economic trends across the West Piedmont regional economy and considers the impact that the COVID-19 pandemic will have in terms of either presenting new opportunities or threats to the growth or decline of strategic regional economic sectors.
2. **Early and persistent engagement:** Regional stakeholder input (government and community leaders, businesses, educators, residents, and institutions) was utilized to complement economic data to further understand and measure the impacts of the pandemic and regional economic challenges.
3. **Processing, Disseminating, and Understanding:** The recovery and resiliency process generated a significant amount of new, real-time information and data. It was organized through a data pack which is fully included in the appendix of this report and highlighted throughout the study.
4. **Strategy Formation:** Based on collected data, goals, objectives, and strategies were formed and refined in collaboration with regional leadership. This process ensured those most impacted could assist in tailoring an effective strategy for economic recovery and resiliency.
5. **Branding, Buy-in, and Action:** A branding effort was completed that solidifies a regional vision for the West Piedmont region. This vision markets and brands the region effectively to promote life in West Piedmont for visitors, residents, and new and existing businesses.

These five steps resulted in the following recovery and resiliency plan that aims to assist the region and its communities, businesses, and residents for a future of regional prosperity.

GOALS OF THE DATA SCAN

Every community experiences growth and, at times, some level of economic recession. Prior to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, trends of economic change and restructuring had already appeared in the West Piedmont Region. Historically strong industries, such as textile and wood product manufacturing and agricultural production, began experiencing the challenges associated with labor-intensive manufacturing sectors, while growth in new sectors, such as advanced materials, advanced manufacturing, and healthcare, among others, made its impact on the region.

The economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic created a need to re-evaluate the strategies that the West Piedmont region deployed in response to these longer-term economic trends. Assessing the short- and long-term impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and recommending actionable strategies for near-term economic recovery and longer-term economic resiliency became imperative.

As a result, the West Piedmont Planning District Commission launched the Regional Pandemic Recovery and Resiliency Plan. This plan will address at least three critical questions:

1. What are the current and future economic and social impacts to our region from the pandemic?
2. How do we begin to reverse existing impacts and minimize future impacts of COVID-19?
3. What steps must the West Piedmont Region take to expedite economic recovery and to ensure increased economic immunity or resiliency from future threats?

The analysis summarized in this Data Scan provides insight into the first of the three questions outlined above. The analysis evaluates the current macro-economic trends across the West Piedmont regional economy and considers the impact that the COVID-19 pandemic will have in terms of either presenting new opportunities or threats to the growth or decline of strategic regional economic sectors.

RESOURCES AND RESEARCH PROCESS

To execute this analysis, the research team relied on local, regional, and national data inputs as well as on the knowledge gained from research and interviews with local experts. The team incorporated data from EMSI, the Census' American Community Survey, the Southern Virginia Alliance, and the West Piedmont Planning District Commission, among other sources. The research team also compiled and reviewed nearly twenty documents and interviewed nearly ten local experts to provide additional insight into the report's conclusions.

The process for completing the Data Scan involved five primary steps:

1. Review existing regional economic data and research
2. Compile initial observations and findings to identify strategic industry sectors facing specific risk or opportunity due to the pandemic
3. Review preliminary findings with the Steering Committee and other key stakeholders
4. Evaluate the risks and/or opportunities facing each strategic industry sector
5. Finalize the deliverables into a visual and written report for the broader project team that will help build consensus and guide subsequent stakeholder engagement over the duration of the project.

Interim progress reports were made to the Steering Committee overseeing the Regional Pandemic Recovery and Resiliency Plan on Friday, January 15, 2021 and on Thursday, March 11, 2021.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The data analysis, review of existing economic development strategy and literature, and interviews with local experts ultimately led to a focus on a prioritized list of seven strategic regional industries facing unique new challenges or threats as a result of the pandemic. These seven sectors prioritized for deeper review in this report are:

- Advanced Materials
- Wood Products, Forestry, and Furniture
- Food Manufacturing
- Advanced Manufacturing
- Healthcare, Including Skilled Nursing and Elderly Care
- Hospitality, Travel, and Tourism
- Childcare

The following sections of the report provide an overview of the current size and growth trajectory of each sector, discuss the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on each industry, and highlight possible questions for further discovery during the business and sector engagement efforts that form Phase II and Phase III of the Regional Pandemic Recovery and Resiliency Plan.





INDUSTRY SECTOR BREAKDOWNS

ADVANCED MATERIALS

SECTOR OVERVIEW

The Advanced Materials sector constitutes approximately 4,200 jobs in the West Piedmont region. This represents nearly 30% of the region's total manufacturing employment, and nearly 5% of the region's total employment. In this analysis, the Advanced Materials sector is made up of three sub-sectors:

1. Tire manufacturing: This sector consists of 1,300 jobs and has a location quotient of 50.8. However, it has lost 41% of its jobs in the region since 2008, compared to a decline of 10% nationally for this sector, and it is predicted to lose another 47% of its jobs by 2030.
2. Other plastics manufacturing¹: Collectively, this sector represents 1,800 jobs regionally and has a location quotient of 7. This sector has doubled its regional employment collectively since 2008, but employment is projected to remain constant through 2030.
3. Chemical manufacturing: This sector includes artificial and synthetic fibers and filaments manufacturing, pharmaceutical preparation manufacturing, plastics material and resin manufacturing, in-vitro diagnostic substance manufacturing, and other chemical manufacturing. Each of the top five industries in this sector has a location quotient above 2.0, and collectively, this sector represents approximately 1,000 jobs across the region. Jobs in this sector have doubled since 2008, largely due to growth in the artificial and synthetic fibers and filaments manufacturing sector and the emergence of pharmaceutical preparation manufacturing. Employment in nearly all sectors is expected to grow through 2030, and employment in pharmaceutical preparation manufacturing is forecasted to nearly double.

IMPLICATIONS OF COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted each of these three sectors in different ways:

1. Tire manufacturing: Significant declines in both passenger and commercial traffic have likely impacted demand in the tire manufacturing industry. Nationwide, the industry has seen a 16% decline in 2020 sales, a 5% decrease in unit volume, and a 7% decline in replacement tires. The biggest driver of local employment is the local Goodyear plant, and statements from the company indicate a positive outlook for 2021: "We delivered strong performance to end a challenging year," said Richard J. Kramer, chairman, chief executive officer, and president. "With a determination to win with our products in the marketplace and a relentless focus on cost and cash, we finished the year on a high note. We have good momentum as we enter 2021. Our commercial business continues to outperform the industry, our consumer replacement business is strengthening, and we are beginning to see the benefits of our robust consumer OE pipeline. I am confident we are positioned to capitalize on stronger industry fundamentals in 2021," added Kramer.
2. Other plastics manufacturing: Many companies in the plastics manufacturing industry have experienced increased demand as a result of changing consumption patterns during the pandemic. This may present an opportunity to capture new job creation on the heels of these demand shifts. For example, 94%, 65%, and 92% of companies in the medical, automotive, and consumer goods industries respectively have indicated that they plan to add or maintain staff in the next 6 – 12 months, according to one industry survey.²
3. Chemical manufacturing: Specialty chemical production has witnessed a 9.4% decline during the pandemic, and leading chemical manufacturers around the globe have reduced capital and operational expenditures and scaled down their manufacturing operations to 40%-60% capacity. These drawbacks in production have been due in part to labor shortages, reduced demand, potentially tightening credit markets, and shortage in the raw material supplies.

¹ Includes 326130 Laminated Plastics Plate, Sheet (except Packaging), and Shape Manufacturing, 326199 All Other Plastics Product Manufacturing, 326113 Unlaminated Plastics Film and Sheet (except Packaging) Manufacturing, 326111 Plastics Bag and Pouch Manufacturing and 326112 Plastics Packaging Film and Sheet (including Laminated) Manufacturing

² [The Impact of COVID-19 on Plastics and Parallel Industries](#)

Figure 1: Advanced materials (e.g., plastics, rubber, chemicals manufacturing) sectors

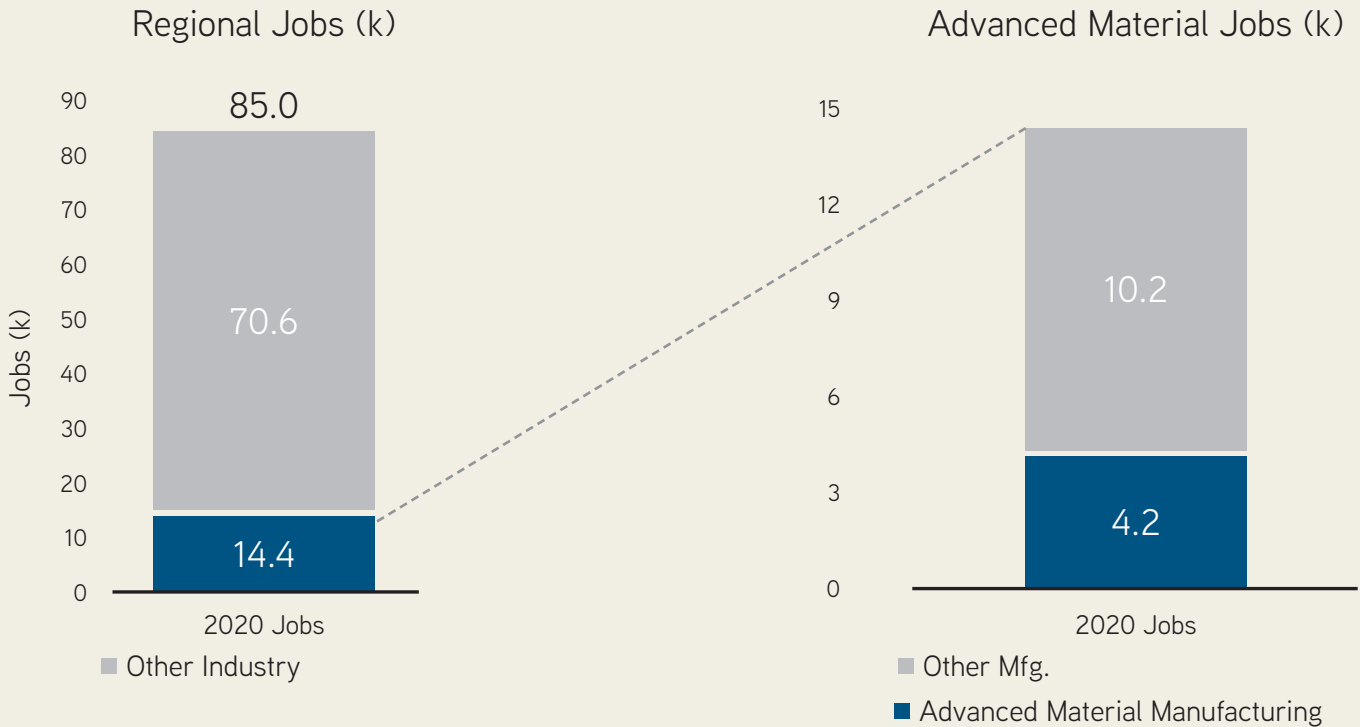


Figure 2: All advanced materials industries
Advanced Materials Industries

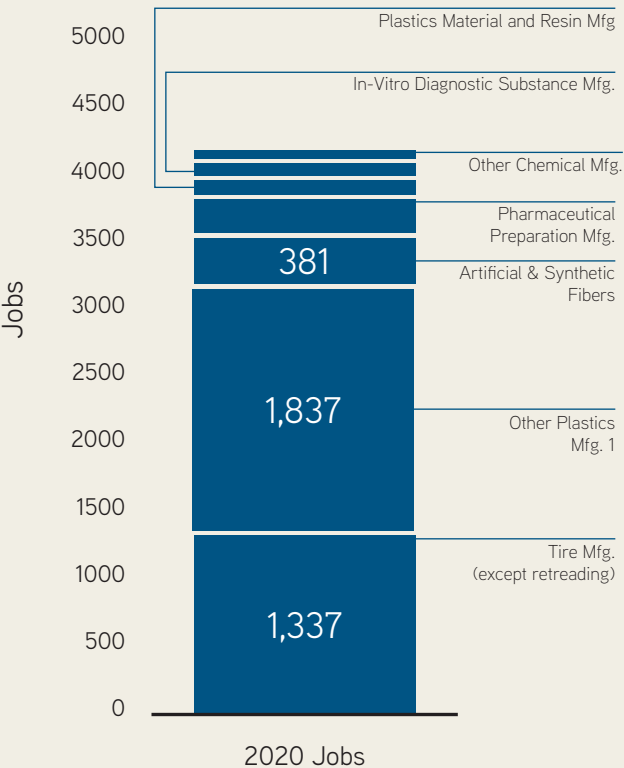
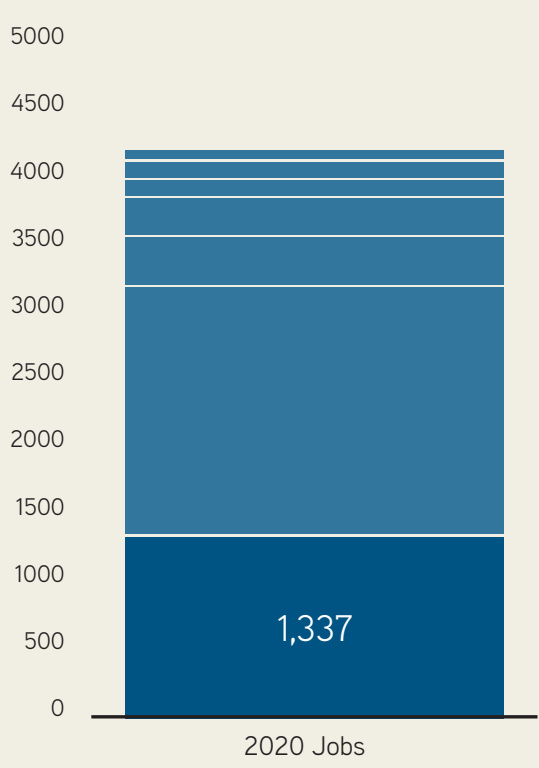


Figure 3: Tire Manufacturing Spotlight
Tire Manufacturing Compared to Other Advanced Materials



WOOD PRODUCTS, FORESTRY, AND FURNITURE MANUFACTURING

SECTOR OVERVIEW

The Wood Products, Forestry, and Furniture Manufacturing sectors constitute approximately 4,900 jobs in the West Piedmont region. This represents nearly 34% of the region's total manufacturing employment and nearly 6% of the region's total employment. As of 2020, employment in this sector is broken down into 3,200 jobs in wood product manufacturing, 1,500 jobs in furniture and related product manufacturing, and 200 jobs in forestry and logging.

Total employment in these sectors has declined from 7,600 jobs in 2008 to 4,900 jobs in 2020. Employment in wood product manufacturing declined from 4,000 jobs to 3,200 jobs; employment in furniture and related product manufacturing declined from 3,300 to 1,500 jobs; and employment in forestry and logging declined from 300 to 200 jobs over this time period.

Despite these declines, opportunities for continued or renewed regional competitiveness in these industries appears to exist. Certain sub-sectors are performing well, notably sawmills and wood preservation centers, in which employment grew by over 30% since 2008. The region has also seen numerous attraction and expansion events in these sectors since Q3 2019, suggesting that there may be opportunities to build upon these wins and continue to exploit regional competitive advantages.

IMPLICATIONS OF COVID-19

This industry is likely to be experiencing impact from COVID-19 in the form of increased demand for homes and home improvement. This surge in national demand for home-building materials may impact the wood product industries in West Piedmont and could have supply chain or demand implications for regional companies that might create opportunities for new growth.

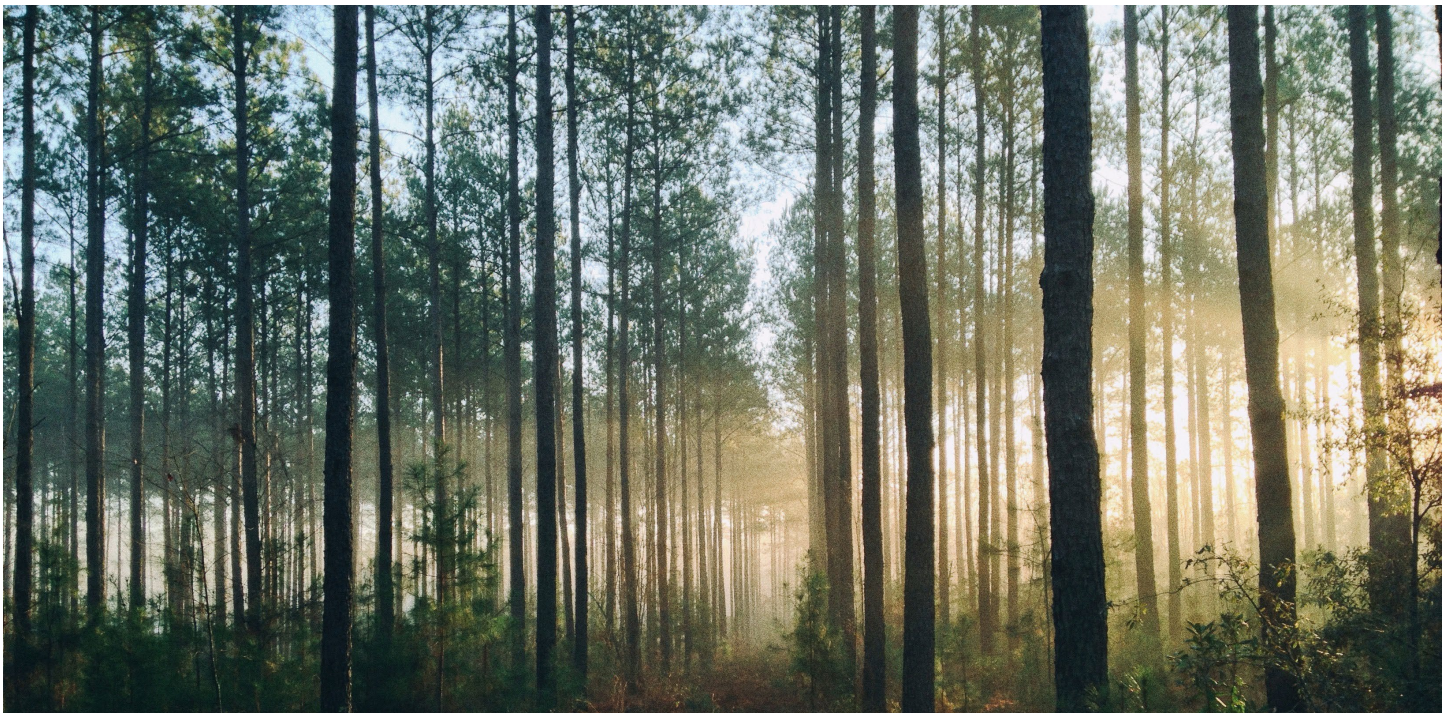


Figure 4: Wood Product, Furniture, and Forestry

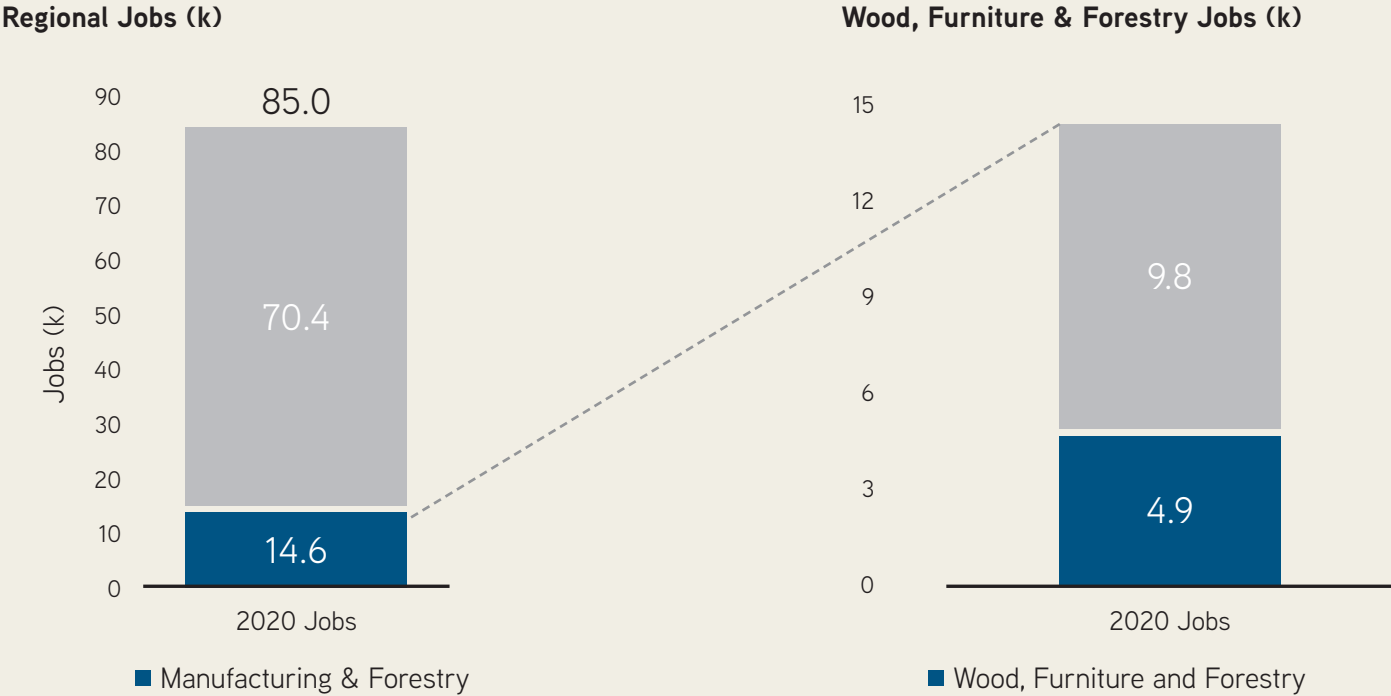
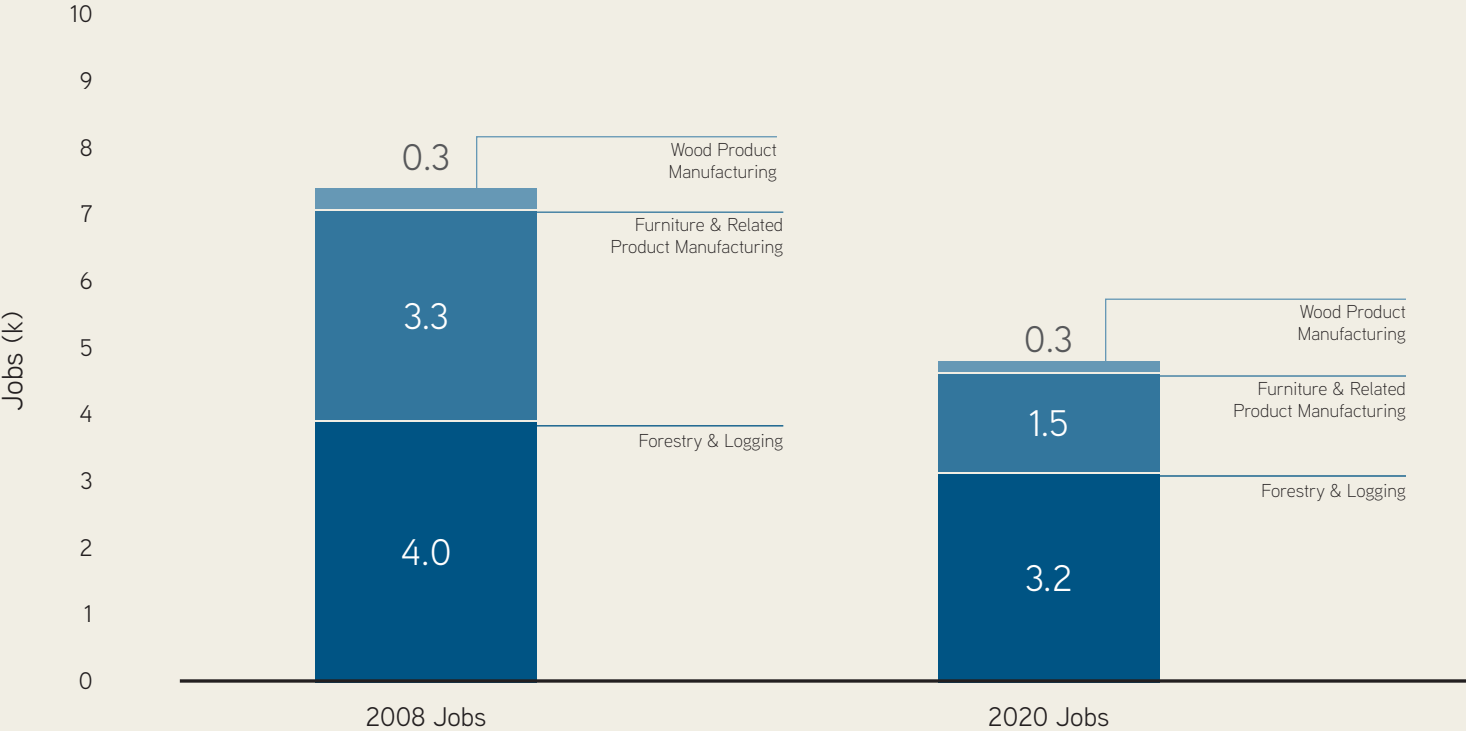


Figure 5: Forestry Jobs

Change in Wood Product, Furniture and Forestry Jobs



FOOD MANUFACTURING

SECTOR OVERVIEW

The Food Manufacturing sector constitutes approximately 1,100 jobs in the West Piedmont region. This represents nearly 8% of the region's total manufacturing employment, and nearly 2% of the region's total employment. As of 2020, employment in this sector is broken down into approximately 500 jobs in perishable prepared food manufacturing, and approximately 600 jobs in other food manufacturing.³

Overall, the food manufacturing sector has grown from just over 800 jobs in 2008 to nearly 1,200 jobs in 2020. The "other food manufacturing" sector increased from just over 100 jobs in 2008 to over 600 jobs in 2020, while the perishable prepared foods manufacturing sector decreased from approximately 700 jobs in 2008 to just over 450 jobs in 2020. However, despite losing 34% of its jobs from 2008 to 2020, the perishable prepared foods manufacturing sector still has a location quotient of 14, suggesting it is still highly specialized and concentrated in the region.

These growth trends are expected to continue in the years to come, with employment in the perishable prepared food manufacturing sector is forecasted to decline 42% between 2020 and 2030, but other sectors within food manufacturing are forecasted to grow by approximately 50%.

IMPLICATIONS OF COVID-19

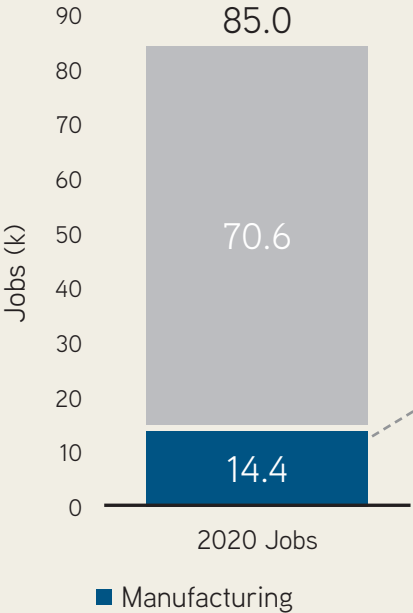
From a workforce perspective, food manufacturers have likely been faced with the same challenges regarding workplace changes to align with public health guidelines that have impacted the manufacturing sector as a whole. From an industry demand perspective, it is possible that the shutdown of restaurants could lead to further challenges for the perishable prepared foods sector. It is also possible that margins could be impacted, as at-home consumption has replaced out-of-home consumption, the latter of which traditionally generates the highest margins for producers.



³ Includes animal (except poultry) slaughtering, all other miscellaneous food manufacturing, fluid milk manufacturing, confectionery manufacturing from purchased chocolate, frozen specialty food manufacturing, other animal food manufacturing, meat processed from carcasses, mayonnaise, dressing, and other prepared sauce manufacturing, frozen cakes, pies, and other pastries manufacturing, commercial bakeries, spice and extract manufacturing.

Figure 6: Food Manufacturing

Regional Jobs (k)



Food Manufacturing

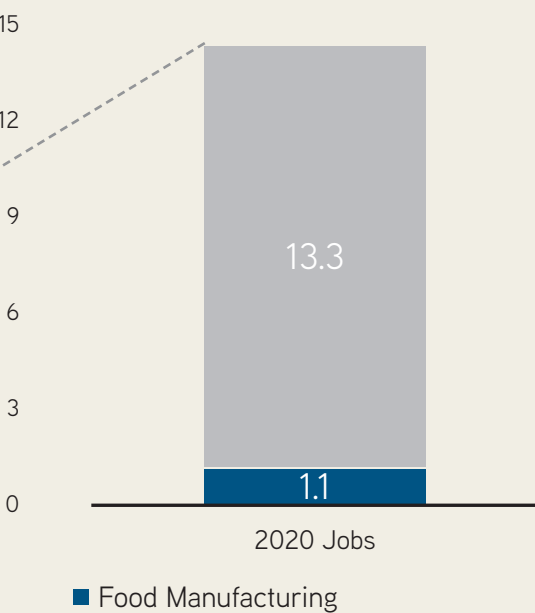
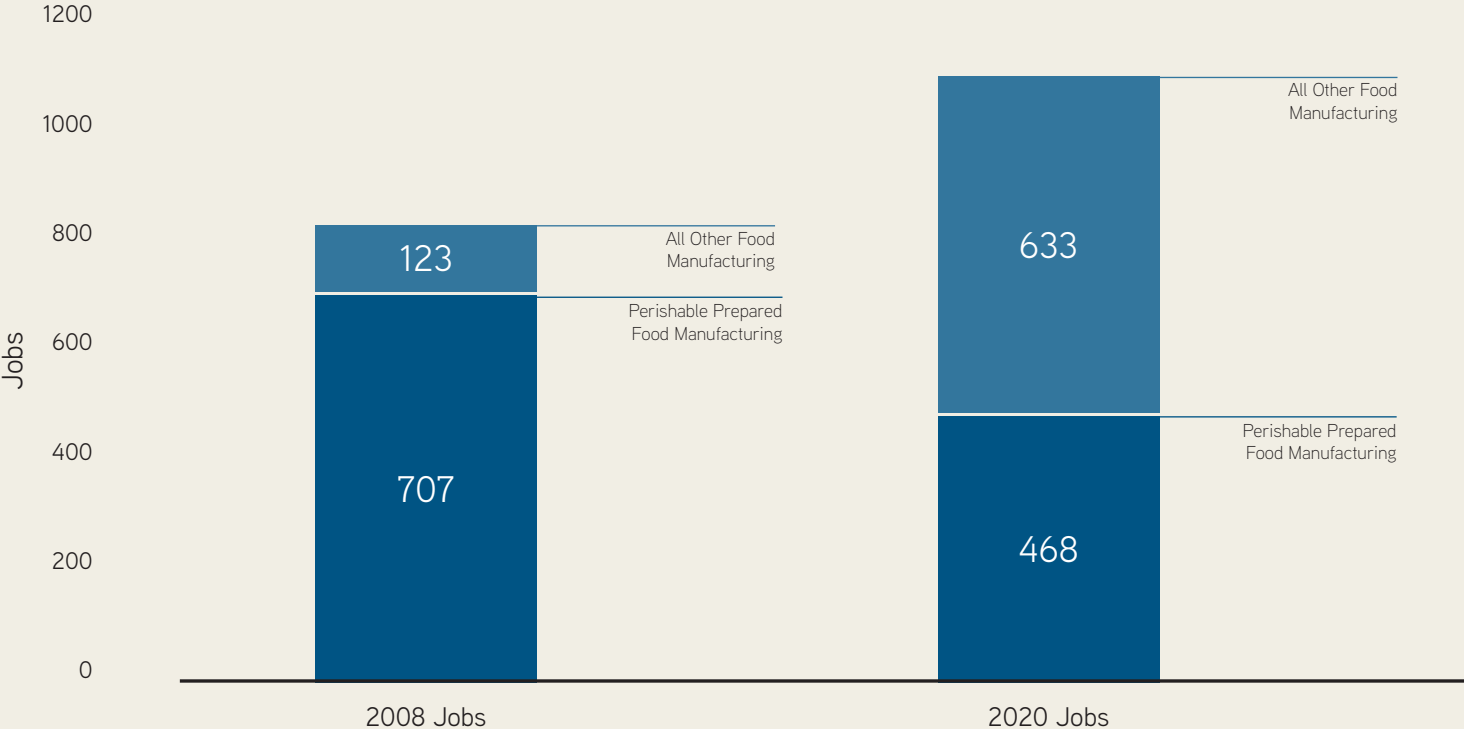


Figure 7: Food Manufacturing Jobs

Food Manufacturing Job Change



ADVANCED MANUFACTURING

SECTOR OVERVIEW

The Advanced Manufacturing sector constitutes approximately 1,000 jobs in the West Piedmont region. This represents nearly 8% of the region's total manufacturing employment, and about 1% of the region's total employment. As of 2020, employment in this sector is broken down into approximately 300 jobs in electrical equipment, appliance, and component manufacturing, 300 jobs in transportation equipment manufacturing, 200 jobs in machinery manufacturing, and 200 jobs in computer and electronic product manufacturing.

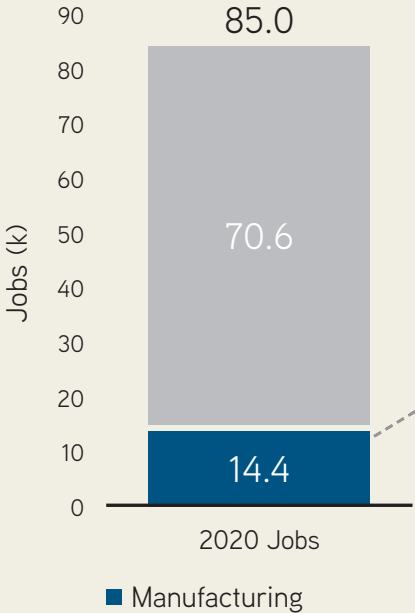
Total employment in Advanced Manufacturing in West Piedmont has decreased since 2008 but is expected to grow by 39% by 2030. Specifically, electrical equipment, appliance, and component manufacturing are forecasted to add approximately 200 jobs, and computer and electronic product manufacturing are forecasted to add another 100 jobs by 2030. Electrical equipment manufacturing has the highest location quotient (1.55), and it is expected to increase in 2030 (2.16), demonstrating a rate of growth and increasing concentration in the region that exceeds that of national rates. Transportation equipment manufacturing is expected to grow by 58% by 2030, which is the highest rate of all four Advanced Manufacturing industries.

IMPLICATIONS OF COVID-19

From a workforce perspective, advanced manufacturers have likely been faced with the same challenges regarding workplace changes to align with public health guidelines that have impacted the manufacturing sector as a whole. From an industry demand perspective, transportation demands have decreased temporarily but are likely to return to pre-COVID levels, creating demand for transportation products. Overall, the pandemic has placed an increased demand on technology to promote remote working and an emphasis on electronic connectivity, which could be sustained and help accelerate future growth in these industries beyond pre-pandemic levels.



Figure 8: Advanced Manufacturing
Regional Jobs (k)



Advanced Manufacturing Jobs

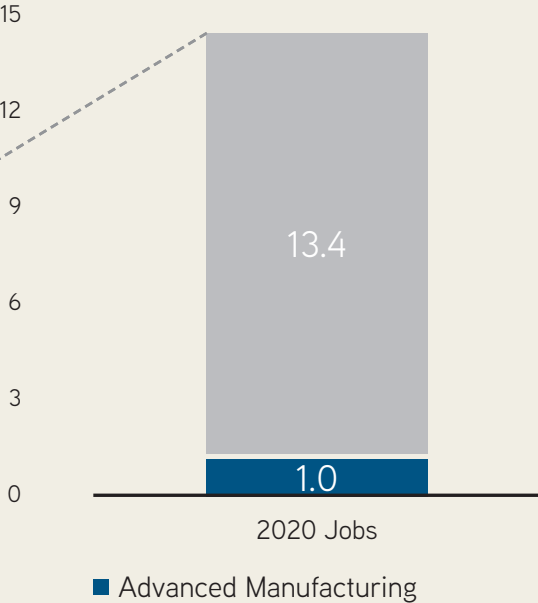
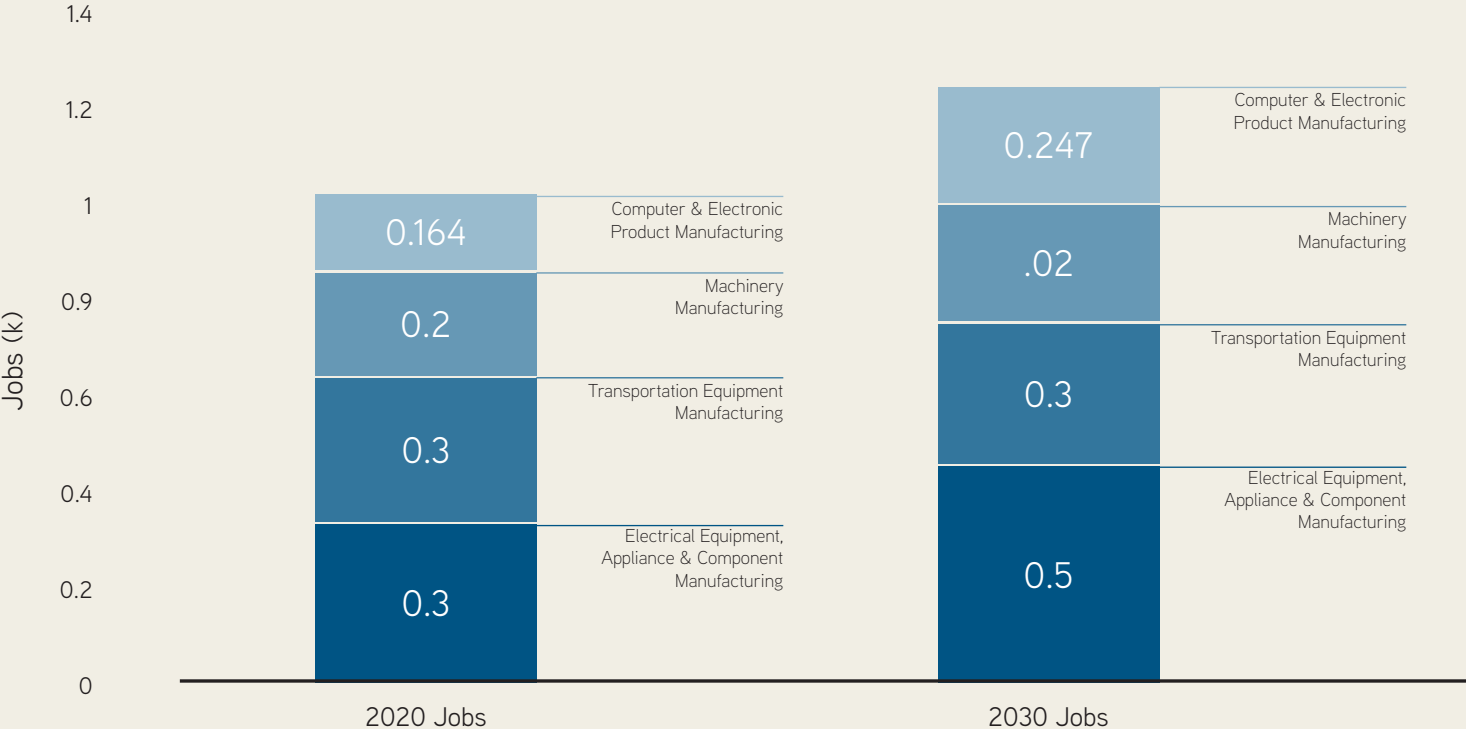


Figure 9: Advanced Manufacturing Jobs and Projected Change

Advanced Manufacturing Job Change



HEALTHCARE, INCLUDING SKILLED NURSING AND ELDERLY CARE

SECTOR OVERVIEW

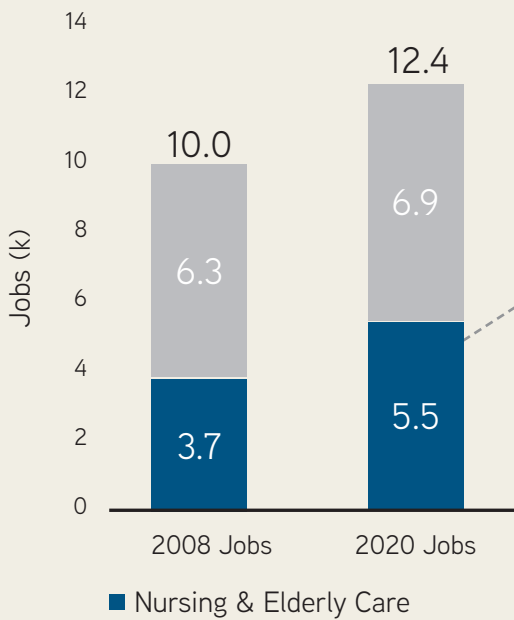
In this analysis, the healthcare sector was analyzed in two parts:

1. **Elderly Care and Skilled Nursing:** Growth in this sector accounts for nearly 75% of total healthcare job growth since 2008. Elderly care and skilled nursing employment jumped from approximately 3,700 jobs in 2008 to 5,500 jobs in 2020. In 2020, employment in this sector was divided among five subsectors: services for the elderly and persons with disabilities (2,300 jobs), nursing care facilities (skilled nursing facilities) (1,300 jobs), home health care services (1,000 jobs), continuing care retirement communities (600 jobs), and assisted living facilities for the elderly (400 jobs). Employment in these sectors is expected to grow by 25% by 2030, with growth concentrated in elderly services, home health services, and continuing care retirement communities. Collectively, these sectors have averaged over 1,000 job postings per year, and that demand for workforce is likely to remain constant or increase based on pandemic-related needs. As such, some places across the country are beginning to experiment with strategies to use state or federal pandemic-related funding to help create new entry points for employees into these skilled nursing positions.
2. **Other Healthcare Employment:** Employment in other healthcare sectors is concentrated primarily in large healthcare facilities and physician offices. In 2020, general medical and surgical facilities accounted for 2,000 jobs regionally and physicians' offices (except mental health specialists) accounted for 1,600 jobs regionally. The balance of the jobs in the healthcare sector are in smaller industries. Overall, these smaller sectors have increased their employment in the region from years 2008 to 2020.



Figure 10: Healthcare Sector

Healthcare Job Change



Nursing & Elderly Care Jobs

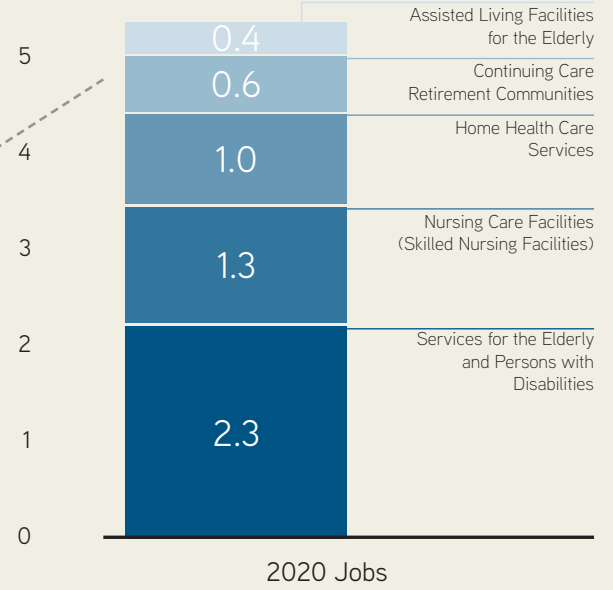


Figure 11: Healthcare and Skilled Job Postings by Occupation (2017-2020)

Average Annual Job Postings

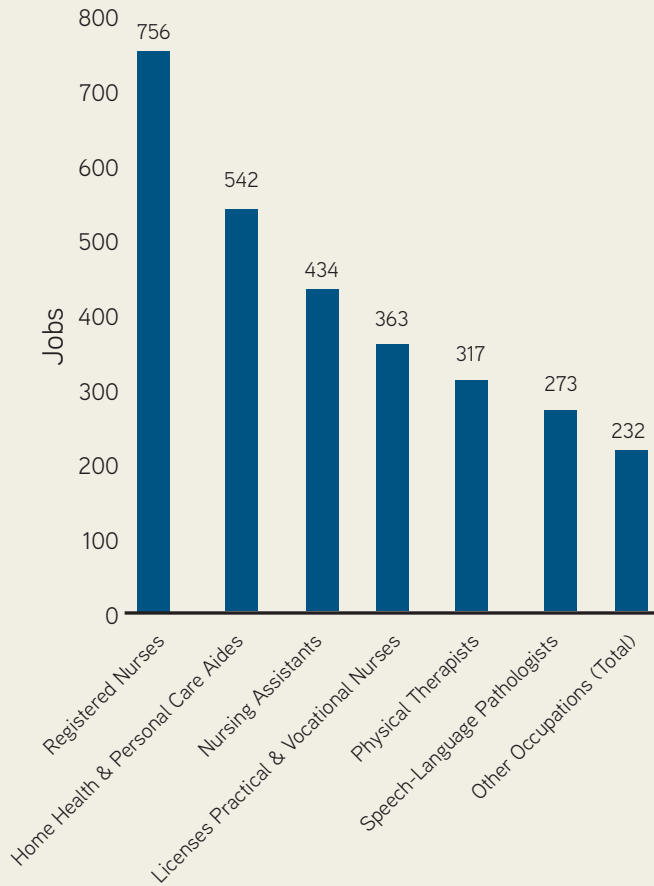
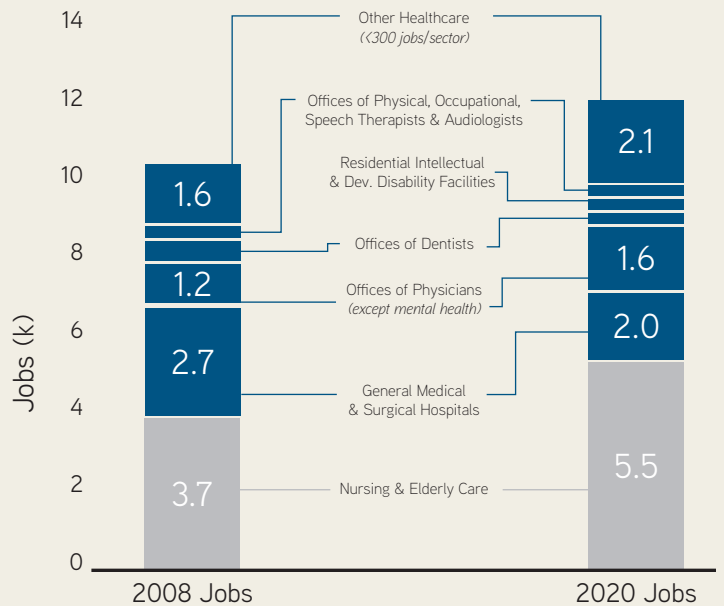


Figure 12: Non-Nursing and Elderly Care Jobs

Non-Nursing & Non-Elderly Care Jobs



HOSPITALITY, TRAVEL & TOURISM

SECTOR OVERVIEW

The travel, tourism, and hospitality sectors were among the hardest hit by the pandemic as mandatory shutdowns limited these activities for large portions of 2020. Indeed, visitor spending statewide declined to nearly 70% below 2019 levels by April 2020 but has started to rebound. That said, data from the Virginia Tourism Corporation indicate that even in “upside” scenarios, statewide visitor spending is likely to remain below pre-COVID levels for the duration of 2021. These trends are reflected as well in state-wide room demand and room revenue data, where actual demand and revenue remain between the prior upside and baseline forecasts.

Looking forward, there appears to be a retail spending leakage in the West Piedmont region when it comes to drinking establishments and restaurants. This data suggests potential opportunities for business growth in retail industries related to hospitality, travel, and tourism or other in-demand industries, such as specialty food stores. However, near-term capacity restrictions for restaurants and drinking places and longer-term pre-COVID trends related to shifts to online shopping and decline of big box stores must be considered when developing strategies for future growth in this sector.



Figure 13: Visitor Spending in VA: Three Scenarios; (Source: VTC)

Visitor Spending in VA, Three Scenarios

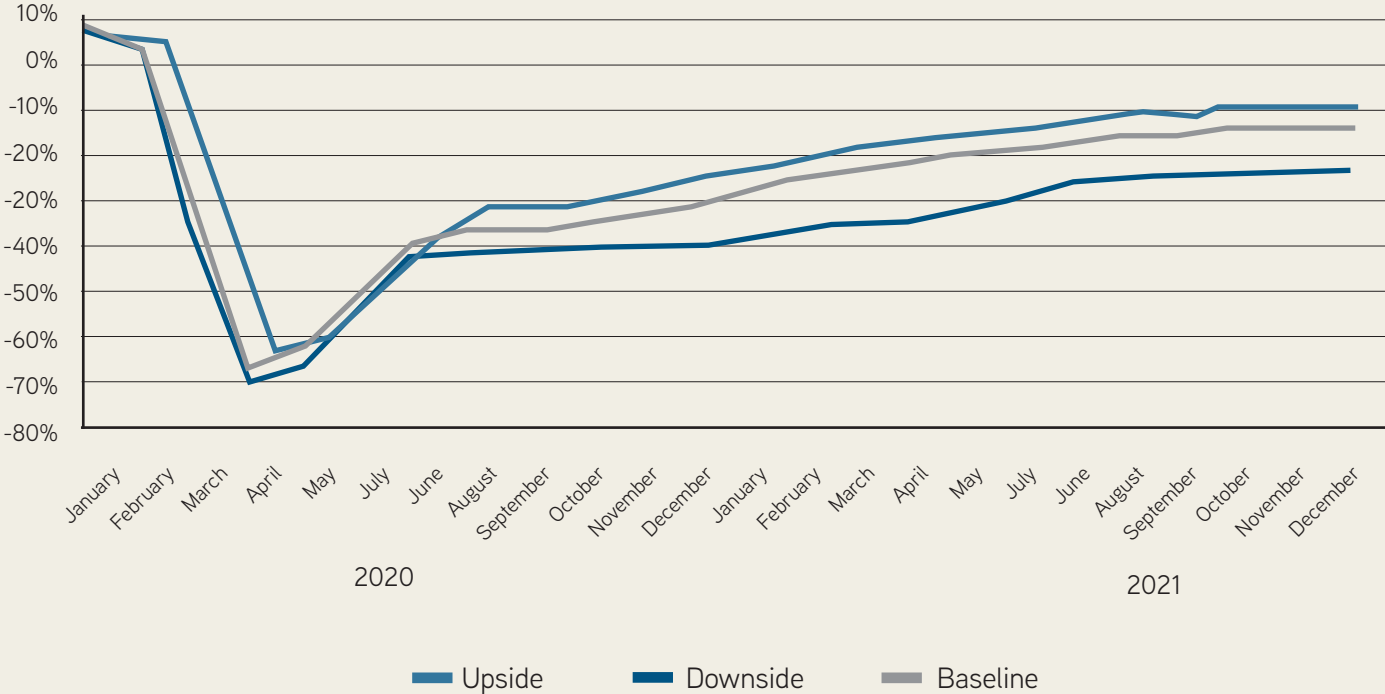


Figure 14: Retail Industry Surplus and Leakage



CHILDCARE

SECTOR OVERVIEW

Childcare employment has remained steady over the past decade, representing approximately 900 jobs in the West Piedmont region. These consistent employment trends persist despite a documented need for more childcare in the region. Studies⁴ have indicated a scarce supply of childcare in rural areas regionally, as well as more populated areas such as Rocky Mount. These trends exist state-wide as well, with about two-thirds of Virginia's rural zip codes qualifying as childcare deserts.

IMPLICATIONS OF COVID-19

Experts predict that COVID-19 will likely exacerbate challenges for regions facing limited or insufficient childcare.⁵ The business dynamics initiated by the onset of the pandemic create challenges for childcare operators. Overall demand for childcare services has dropped by as much as 75 percent in some communities. These demand reductions are occurring while childcare providers still in operation face health- and safety-related cost increases as they comply with public health guidelines. Dealing with decreased revenues and increased costs is challenging in any industry but especially in childcare where many operators do not have formal education in business practices. Finally, childcare providers tend to have limited access to cash reserves or credit lines because they don't often work with traditional lenders. These difficult economic circumstances coupled with a lack of access to capital may cause some of the already scarce number of childcare operators to cease operations.



⁴ <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/early-childhood/reports/2018/12/06/461643/americas-child-care-deserts-2018/>; <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/early-childhood/reports/2016/10/27/225703/child-care-deserts/>; <https://childcaredeserts.org/index.html>

⁵ <https://www.minneapolisfed.org/article/2020/covid-19-challenges-the-child-care-market>

Figure 15: Regional Childcare Workers
Total Childcare Employment

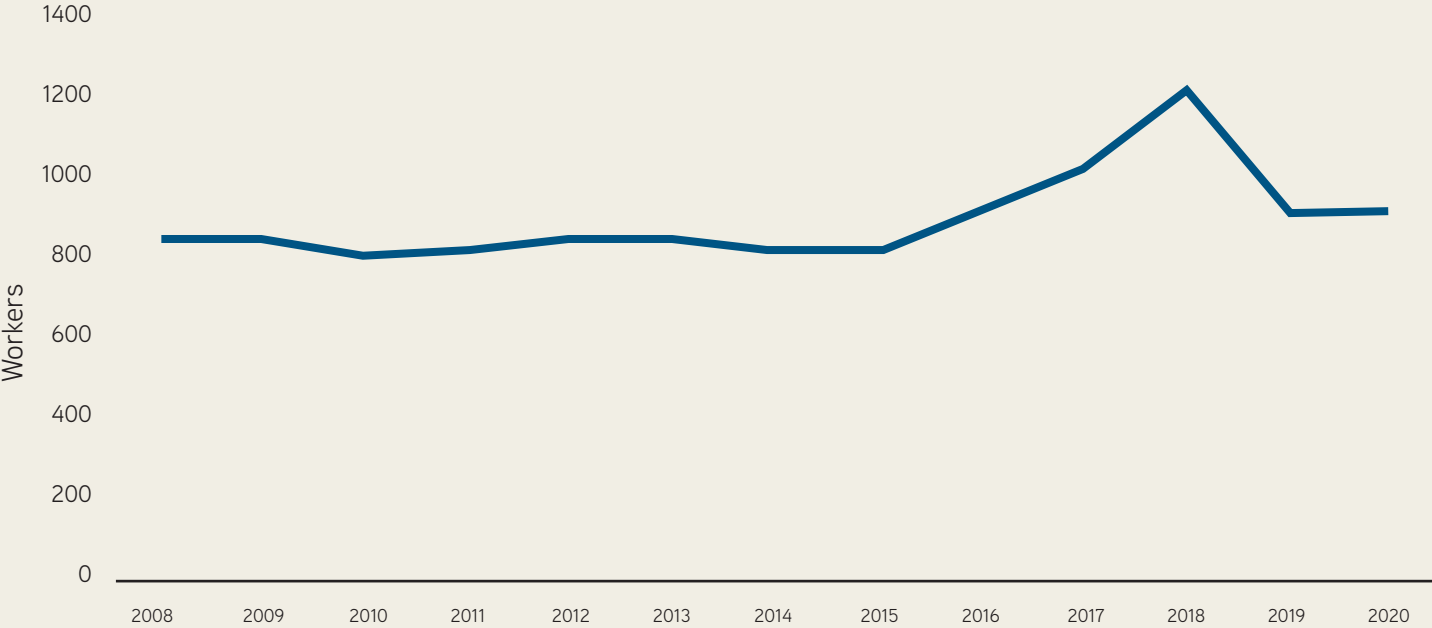
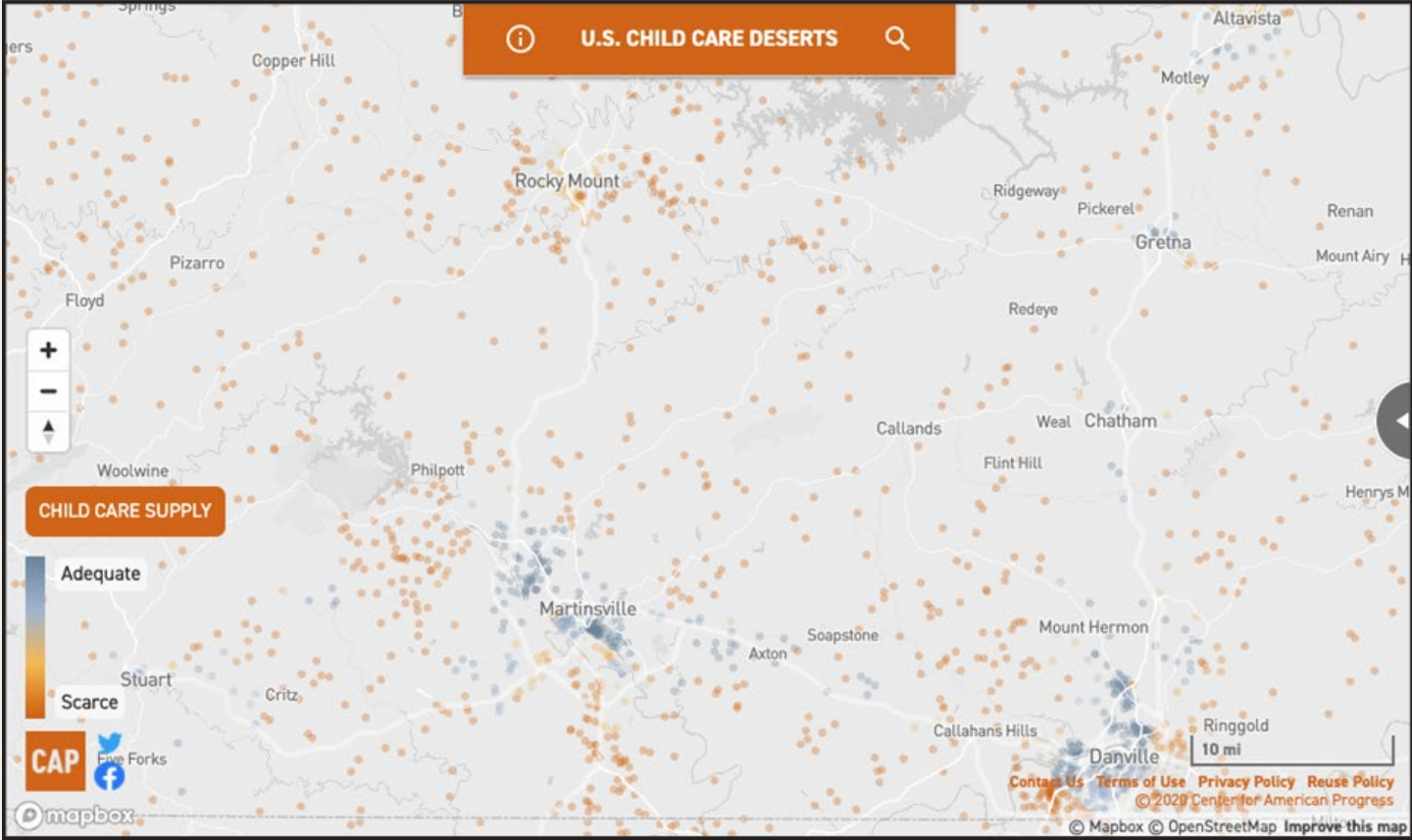


Figure 16: Regional Childcare Deserts (Source: americanprogress.org)



REGIONAL SWOT

In addition to the Regional Data Scan, individual interviews with community leaders, on-site windshield tours, and an online community survey was completed to inform strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats affecting the region. Key findings indicate that the region has a strong manufacturing base and business-friendly environment. Weaknesses included declining population trends and stock of suitable housing. Opportunities included redevelopment and revitalization efforts and enhancement of hospitality and tourism sectors. This is primarily driven by quality of place and unique natural assets as well as a new Casino that will be developed in Danville. Threats include availability of workforce and challenges amplified by COVID-19. Aging infrastructure and access to childcare also fall into this category. The remainder of this section will describe strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats in more detail.



STRENGTHS

The region has a very strong economic base of manufacturers. Manufacturing sector employment in the WPPDC region is nearly three times more concentrated than that of the Commonwealth of Virginia. This is driven by a business-friendly economy that offers low cost of doing business and strong workforce training assets that can tailor programs to fit business needs. Evidence of this success is demonstrated by the region's ability to attract international business as well as large domestic companies. Recently, the region attracted Morgan Olson, a manufacturer of delivery vans and the company made a multimillion-dollar investment in the region. Agriculture has been a historic foundation for the regional economy and there are still sectors doing very well.

Tobacco production was a historic economic driver, but national trends have caused this industry to decline. Still, the region is a leader in flue cured tobacco even though this industry is not as prominent as it once was. Dairy is also an agricultural sector that remains strong in the region. Niche agricultural businesses and local farms have opened agritourism and farm to table business opportunities that have improved quality of life for residents and created a tourism draw for visitors. The region's natural and historical assets are additional strengths that the region has leveraged.

Outdoor recreation in the region is strengthened by the abundance of natural assets that exists. The region includes numerous public lands, parks, trails, rivers, and lakes. This creates opportunities for biking, kayaking, hunting, fishing, and off-roading. The region also maintains a rich history evident by historical sites that date back to the 18th century. Music and art add to the region's rich cultural heritage through festivals, art galleries, and historic music venues. The region is also home to Martinsville Speedway, one of the nation's first auto racing tracks. The Speedway hosts two nationally televised NASCAR races each year which attract thousands of visitors to the region.

The region has a long history of planning, which has mostly been led by the West Piedmont Planning district commission. The commission has worked with other strong regional and local organizations to develop plans for housing, broadband, hazard mitigation, economic development, and transportation.

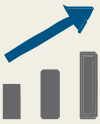


WEAKNESSES

Regional weaknesses are tied to categories that include historic economic conditions, need for investment to promote regional vibrancy, and collaboration among some groups. Historic economic drivers included textiles, tobacco, and wood products. Due to offshoring, consumer preferences, and industry trends, these sectors have experienced a decline. Foundational regional industries are shifting toward advanced manufacturing, healthcare, and biosciences, but economic diversification efforts have not completely rebounded from challenges created by the decline of legacy industry sectors.

This economic decline contributed to a loss of regional vibrancy marked by higher vacancy rates in regional downtowns and community centers. While regional organizations have worked to revitalize and restore vibrancy to community centers, there is still more work to be completed. Additionally, for a region that has tremendous natural beauty, stakeholders described challenges with litter that detracts from vibrancy. Hotels are limited in the region, which has created challenges for the hospitality and tourism industry. While the region has many unique sites and natural amenities, there is not an adequate number of hotels to completely serve regional visitors.

Housing and utilities tend to be older in some portions of the region, and there is a need to update and improve these two areas. The WPPDC is leading efforts to address housing needs and promote development of new residential products, but at the time of writing this plan, age of housing stock is a weakness. Broadband infrastructure has improved in the region, but there are still areas of significant need where access is not available. Like housing, the WPPDC is working with regional organizations and communities to improve broadband access, but there is still more work needed in this area. Though weaknesses exist, regional leadership is not ignoring deficiencies. There are many ongoing plans and efforts aimed at creating new opportunities.



OPPORTUNITIES

The WPPDC region has a vast number of opportunities to build upon. Many of these opportunities are related to regional strengths, addressing weaknesses, and new investment. One of the most significant investments proposed for the region is two new interstate routes, I-785 and I-73. I-785 is designated to run through Danville and the I-73 corridor would be constructed through Franklin and Henry counties. Development of these interstates is estimated to bring \$4 billion in investment and create over 53,000 permanent jobs from new business growth. Four lane expansion of Highway 58 through Patrick County between I-77 and the Port of Virginia is planned. These developments create opportunities for new economic development attraction and expansion efforts but also opportunities to improve regional multimodal transportation infrastructure and preserve, promote, and enhance transit systems.

The region has opportunities to build on recent economic success and promote diversification efforts. Interstates will help promote connectivity to new parts of the nation as well as connectivity to new development sites. Currently the region has an abundance of developable land, sites, and business parks. Opportunities exist to activate this land for new economic development. In addition to transportation connectivity, infrastructure and utilities are the key items needed to promote build out of additional sites.

The region has a strong manufacturing base, but there are likely opportunities to expand the regional supply chain and promote economic diversification and resiliency. Over-reliance on manufacturing could pose challenges for the region in the event of future economic downturns.

Building on regional successes driven by organizations, such as the Institute for Advanced Research and Learning, to promote innovation and entrepreneurship is a significant opportunity. Further collaboration and investments that promote a regional entrepreneurial ecosystem and develop resources for business start-ups would allow the region to capitalize on this opportunity.

Building more capacity for regional collaboration is another opportunity in the region. The WPPDC does a well with bringing stakeholders together, but throughout the data collection process, opportunities were identified to enhance collaboration between local and regional economic development organizations, higher education providers and community colleges, local chambers of commerce, and local governments. Additional collaboration and alignment between regional organizations could allow for greater impact from a service provision perspective on tight budgets.

Tourism is significant to the region but is likely not fully tapped as an economic development tool and could continue to be built out. The region's unique natural and cultural resources to grow local tourism industry also create opportunities for asset-based development strategies. Agritourism is another sector the WPPDC is working to grow and has achieved early success. Further efforts to enhance agritourism through the region likely exist. In addition to WPPDC's effort, the three converging Commonwealth Tourism Regions could be leveraged to assist with tourism based economic development strategies. The future Casino development in Danville is another opportunity that could drive additional visitors and tourism in the region.



THREATS

Threats to the region may be attributed to aging infrastructure and buildings, size of the workforce pool, COVID-19, access to childcare, population decline, and supply chain challenges. The most significant threat identified by regional leadership and businesses was access to talent. While the region has good educational providers, there are difficulties with supplying the numbers of workers needed to fill job openings throughout the region. Trends indicating regional population decline do not help overcome this challenge. Housing availability and age of housing stock may have contributed to challenges attracting resident workers.

The regional housing stock tends to be older and new construction has been limited. There is a shortage of middle housing or more affordable and/or multi-family options. This could have affected the region's ability to retain resident workers. Addressing housing challenges is a priority of the WPPDC and will help deal with this threat. In addition to older residential properties, there is also an abundance of older and more obsolete vacant industrial buildings and class B and C commercial centers. Older real-estate may have negatively affected quality of place and can detract from the region's ability to attract and retain younger residents and new businesses.

The population of the Region has declined in recent decades, and this trend is anticipated to continue in the foreseeable future. The regional population is also aging. For this reason, it is important that the region looks to reduce migration of young talent and identifies ways to retain younger residents. An aging population can add additional stress to a regional workforce pool as there are fewer young residents to fill jobs that older residents may be transitioning out of as they reach retirement age.

Access to talent has been highlighted throughout this section as a significant challenge for regional employers. Housing and population trends are two factors that have triggered this threat, but issues like access to childcare and COVID-19 present additional challenges. Access to adequate childcare in the region is limited due to two reasons. The first issue is availability of childcare providers, as there are a limited number in the region. The threat is cost, as many regional families may not be able to afford childcare for their children. These trends have increased the number of stay-at-home parents who are not able to work. COVID-19 also has threatened residents' ability to work.

Regional businesses noted concerns about COVID-19 outbreaks at the workplace and the effects that this would have on productivity. Labor has been historically difficult to find and caused productivity issues for local employers. COVID-19 outbreaks have caused and could continue to cause declines in production if large portions of a business's employees are required to quarantine for significant periods of time. Many regional businesses have also faced supply chain issues due to national labor shortages, which further affects their output. It is important that these barriers and threats be considered to ensure the region maintains its pro-business environment. The following sections identify regional goals, strategies, and action items that build on SWOT findings to promote regional success.

REGIONAL GOALS

The Project Team, working with key regional stakeholders across public, private, and philanthropic sectors, identified four key focus areas: Economy and Innovation, Education and Workforce, Recreation and Tourism, and Livability and Housing. Informed by data, stakeholder engagement sessions, the SWOT analysis, and consistent communication with the project steering committee, subsequent strategies were identified for each focus area. The following sections will outline each focus area in depth, including corresponding strategies, action items, and implementation steps. In addition, where appropriate, best practice case studies will be shared to highlight how the region can implement corresponding strategies. Goals for each focus area are listed below:



ECONOMY & INNOVATION

GOAL 1:

Work with regional communities to prioritize and invest in broadband and other infrastructure improvements to promote future growth.

GOAL 2:

Leverage existing resources and new investments to promote and grow the regional entrepreneurial ecosystem and small businesses.

GOAL 3:

Promote collaboration among regional economic development organizations as well as local governments.



EDUCATION & WORKFORCE

GOAL 1:

Build, attract, and retain a sustainable workforce for regional manufacturers, healthcare providers, hospitality, and childcare sectors.

GOAL 2:

Help employers address staffing issues including those caused by the pandemic.



RECREATION & TOURISM

GOAL 1:

Promote a sense of place and brand that unites the region; represents its exceptional, natural, and recreational resources and community events, festivals, and family activities; and encourages community cohesion and tourism.

GOAL 2:

Promote vibrant and attractive development to enhance quality of life and encourage tourism.



LIVABILITY & HOUSING

GOAL 1:

Encourage the creation of a housing strategy that addresses development and rehabilitation of a variety of housing types at a range of price points that meet the needs of households and residents of all incomes and ages throughout the region.

GOAL 2:

Work to identify and promote innovative opportunities to increase childcare accessibility in the region.

GOAL 3:

Revitalize regional downtowns through concerted efforts to build quality of place, renovated and improved housing

RECOVERY AND RESILIENCY STRATEGIES AND ACTION PLAN

Strategies were developed for each goal above. The following sections will discuss each goal in depth, including the corresponding strategies, action items, and implementation elements including timing and key partners.



ECONOMY AND INNOVATION

The following section identifies goals and strategies to promote regional economic growth and entrepreneurship. Each goal is identified separately along with associated strategies to achieve the goal. Each strategy includes action items, implementation timeline, and partnerships recommended to implement strategies. Best practices were provided for some strategies where applicable.

GOAL 1:

WORK WITH REGIONAL COMMUNITIES TO PRIORITIZE AND INVEST IN BROADBAND AND OTHER INFRASTRUCTURE IMPROVEMENTS TO PROMOTE FUTURE GROWTH.

Additional infrastructure in key areas of the region is needed to spur quality growth. There is an abundance of land in the region suitable for industrial, commercial, and residential development, but improved planning can help target areas for certain types of growth. Identifying land areas of focus and targeting potential development types will help determine infrastructure needs. This will allow for infrastructure planning and promote smart growth and new development. Key infrastructure priorities should focus on extending broadband as well as water, wastewater, electric, and gas utilities to potential growth areas in the region. Strategies to achieve this goal include:

STRATEGIES

1. Work with regional community and economic development organizations to enhance broadband and infrastructure improvements by prioritizing existing industrial and business parks and identifying potential growth areas that may need service at some point over the plan period.
2. Review development processes and specifications related to regional industrial and business parks to increase each park's rating at least one level.

A detailed description of these two strategies is provided below along with action items, timeline, and recommended partnerships.



STRATEGY 1: *Work with regional community and economic development organizations to enhance broadband and infrastructure improvements by prioritizing existing industrial and business parks and identifying potential growth areas that may need service at some point over the plan period.*

Broadband is a critical aspect of infrastructure for all types of development. As communities look to become more connected, high-speed internet access is vital for attracting businesses and residents. The WPPDC is in the process of aiding local communities with assessments and access to funding that promotes additional broadband development. However, the last mile connections to residential and industrial areas are still needed, especially for residents and businesses to succeed in a digital global economy. Additionally, the region should plan broadband infrastructure connections in identified areas conducive for future residential, commercial, and business growth.

Identifying the key areas of growth can help maximize infrastructure investment by prioritizing certain locations. A comprehensive review of development areas can also help plan for appropriate infrastructure needs to encourage positive, consistent growth. Priority growth areas likely include existing industrial and business parks as well as areas positioned for future residential development.

ACTION ITEMS

1. Assist regional communities access funding for broadband and other infrastructure studies and with completion of studies.
2. Identify areas of critical need and projected growth which will likely align with identified sites for commercial, residential, and industrial development
3. Assess development readiness of each site to understand utility accessibility and additional site constraints.
4. Coordinate findings of regional community needs with priorities of utilities providers to address identified deficiencies.
5. Document needed improvements to ensure sites are development ready and potential federal, state, and regional funding sources that could finance improvements.
6. In partnership with local communities, apply for grants and funding opportunities to address regional infrastructure gaps.

TIMELINE

Medium (2-3 years)

STAFFING AND POTENTIAL PARTNERSHIPS

- WPPDC
- Regional Communities
- SVRA
- Martinsville Henry County Economic Development
- Danville Pittsylvania County Economic Development

BEST PRACTICES

[Acadia Planning Commission – Acadia Regional Broadband Initiative | Delta Broadband Mapping Project | Acadia Broadband Assessment 2021](#)

“The Acadiana Planning Commission is currently hosting an online broadband speed test to measure internet delivery across the Delta Region. The SPEED TEST will measure residents and businesses actual upload and download speeds and give organizations an opportunity to share information about their service.”

<https://planacadiana.org/divisions/economic-development/broadband/>

FUNDING OPPORTUNITY

United State Department of Agriculture – Rural Development Broadband Reconnect Program

“The Rural Development Broadband Reconnect Program offers unique federal financing and funding options in the form of loans, grants, and loan/grant combinations to facilitate broadband deployment in areas of rural America that don’t currently have sufficient access to broadband.”

<https://www.usda.gov/reconnect/program-overview>

STRATEGY 2: *Review development processes and specifications related to regional industrial and business parks to increase each park's rating at least one level.*

Industry attraction efforts often hinge on availability of shovel ready sites. The Virginia Economic Development Partnership (VEDP) advertises sites deemed shovel ready based on a tiered ranking system. It is recommended that the WPPDC and partners assess existing industrial sites within the region to identify opportunities to improve rankings and ensure more regional sites are actively marketed by VEDP. Furthermore, working with regional economic development organizations and local communities to streamline systems and development/permitting processes will improve engagement with developers and site selectors and lead to more positive outcomes. The WPPDC is in position to support regional economic development organizations with this task by facilitating connections and assisting with planning and access to funding.

ACTION ITEMS

1. Identify industrial development sites that should be marketed by VEDP.
2. Assess infrastructure gaps and needed improvements to enhance each site's tiered ranking.
3. After identifying gaps, work with local officials to understand specific infrastructure financing solutions.
4. Apply for grants and other funding opportunities to secure funding for required improvements.
5. Work with local communities to review permitting and development processes and identify opportunities to streamline for developers and builders.
6. Engage developers and builders on identified development opportunities and determine public/private roles for addressing remaining infrastructure gaps.

TIMELINE

Medium (2-3 Years)

STAFFING AND POTENTIAL PARTNERSHIPS

- WPPDC
- Regional Communities
- SVRA
- Martinsville Henry County Economic Development
- Danville Pittsylvania County Economic Development

GOAL 2:

LEVERAGE EXISTING RESOURCES AND NEW INVESTMENTS TO PROMOTE AND GROW THE REGIONAL ENTREPRENEURIAL ECOSYSTEM AND SMALL BUSINESSES.

The region is well positioned for economic growth and building on recent economic development wins. With new major investments from Morgan Olsen and other manufacturers as well as the presence of strong institutions promoting innovation, businesses are seeing the benefits of locating in the region. The region offers many entrepreneurial, innovation, and educational assets to build on. These resources can help grow new and existing industry sectors which will strengthen the regional economic and make it a leader in southern Virginia. Key assets include the Institute for Advance Research and Learning (IALR), Patrick and Henry Community College (PHC), the Small Business Development Centers (SBDCs), and other community foundations and organizations. Strategies to achieve this goal include:

STRATEGIES

1. Connect businesses with access to funding, and resources like IALR, PHC's Dalton Idea Center, and Longwood SBDC.
2. Identify supply chain opportunities/gaps within existing sectors that could be addressed by regional small business.
3. Support fair treatment in access, opportunity, and advancement for all individuals by identifying and working to eliminate barriers for disadvantaged groups.



STRATEGY 1: *Connect businesses with access to funding, and resources like IALR, PHC's Dalton Idea Center, and Longwood SBDC*

The region is home to many organizations that drive innovation and entrepreneurship however, there are likely opportunities to better coordinate these assets and connect them to regional small businesses and entrepreneurs. Examples of regional leaders in this space include IALR, PHC, and Longwood SBDC.

IALR serves as a regional catalyst for economic transformation by advancing applied research, advanced learning, economic development, and advanced manufacturing. IALR identifies, plans, executes, and leverages opportunities for regional revitalization and prosperity. IALR works with many regional partners to create opportunity, discover breakthroughs, lead collaborative innovation, power progress, and provide excellence service to enhance regional economic and social well-being. This includes providing space and equipment for small businesses and entrepreneurs.

PHC's Dalton Idea Center is a three-floor, 20,520 square-foot facility that houses a Fabrication Laboratory and Technology Accelerator. The Fabrication Lab is a technical prototyping platform for innovation and invention, providing stimulus for local entrepreneurship. The lab is available for the community, students, and businesses. Additionally, local businesses and industry can gain access to a variety of resources that can take them from concept to prototype to finished product, all in one space. This also includes innovation-centered business management training classes.

The Longwood SBDC, a partnership program with the U.S. Small Business Administration, provides assistance and training to help small business owners and potential owners make sound decisions for the successful operation of their business. The Longwood SBDC offers individual, one-on-one, confidential counseling and sponsors workshops, conferences, and courses.

The WPPDC is in position to help build and facilitate connections between these organizations and others in the entrepreneurship and innovation space to help enhance the region's entrepreneurial ecosystem. The PDC can also help raise awareness and connect businesses and entrepreneurs to these resources.

ACTION ITEMS

1. Sponsor and coordinate an effort to map out regional assets in the entrepreneurial ecosystem.
2. Procure funding and resources to design and coordinate a regional business outreach program to better serve small business owners across the region.
3. Help secure resources to assist with training for business outreach professionals to ensure best-in-class service delivery.
4. Connect and meet with entrepreneurs in an intentional manner to understand their specific needs to build out additional components of a thriving ecosystem.
5. Create and activate a young professional group focused on leadership development, community involvement, and networking opportunities.
6. Facilitate and participate in Global Entrepreneurship Week.

TIMELINE

Medium-Long (2-5 years)

STAFFING AND PARTNERSHIPS

- WPPDC
- Regional Partners

BEST PRACTICES

Global Entrepreneurship Week

“The Global Entrepreneurship Network operates a platform of projects and programs in 180+ countries aimed at making it easier for anyone, anywhere to start and scale a business. Programs, including Global Entrepreneurship Week, an awareness campaign engaging millions of people each November through 35,000 activities, and other efforts that celebrate entrepreneurs and inspire others – particularly those who face structural barriers or may have never considered the idea of launching their own startup – to follow in their footsteps.”

<https://www.genglobal.org/gew>

Mountain BizWorks, | Asheville, North Carolina

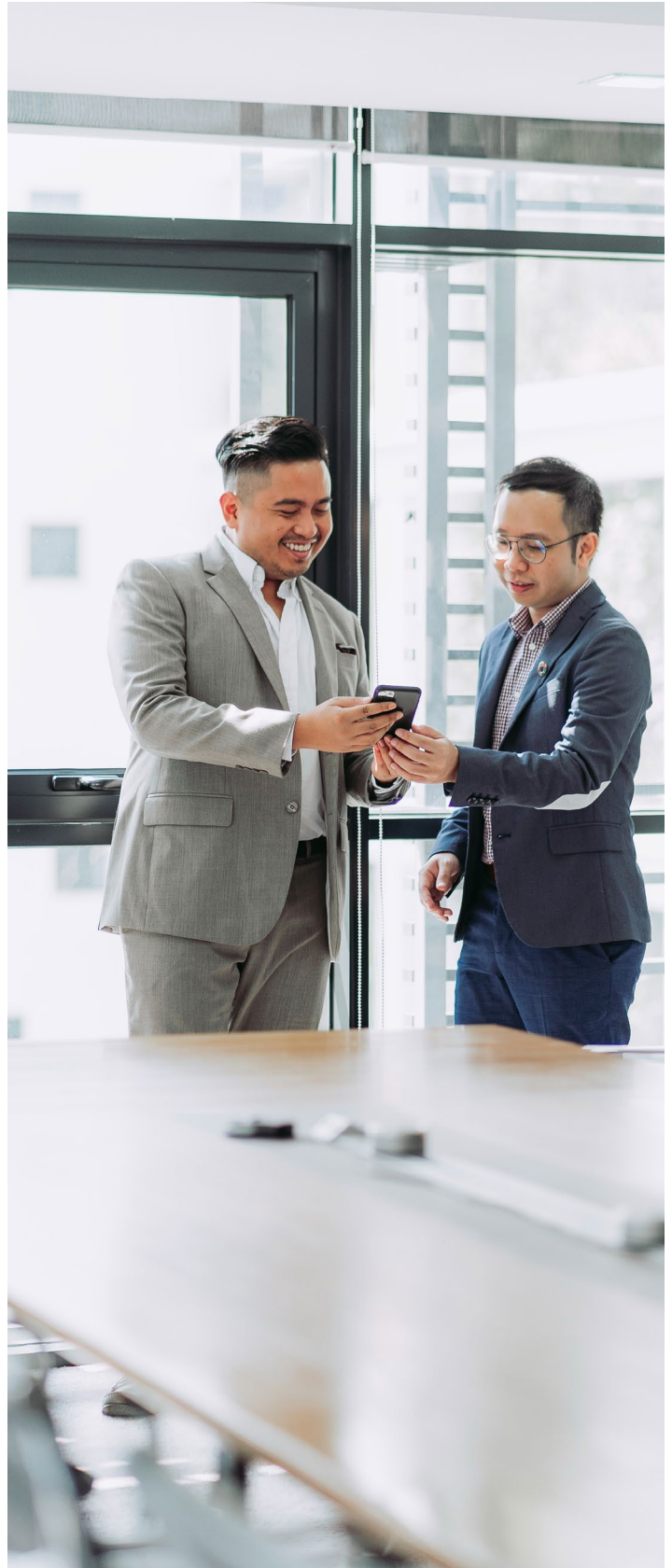
“Mountain BizWorks provides business loans and coaching to emerging and established small businesses in Western North Carolina. They have a particular focus on working with businesses unable to access financing from banks and other traditional sources, as well as low-income, minority, women, and immigrant entrepreneurs, and businesses that operate within the local food system.”

<https://www.mountainbizworks.org/about-us/>

TYPROS | Tulsa, Oklahoma

“Founded as an initiative of the Tulsa Regional Chamber in April 2005, TYPROS was created with the mission to attract and retain young, creative talent to the Tulsa region, while also developing the next generation of leaders and enhancing Tulsa’s sense of place.”

<https://www.typros.org/>



STRATEGY 2: *Identify supply chain opportunities/gaps within existing sectors that could be addressed by regional small business.*

One of the challenges indicated by regional businesses was supply chain issues caused by the pandemic. This has been especially challenging for manufacturing businesses that rely on national supply chains to supply materials used to produce finished goods. Increased prices and unreliable supply chains have created uncertainties for businesses about whether they will have materials needed to produce enough products to meet demand from buyers. Businesses that are not able to keep pace with demand risk losing businesses and revenue. Regional businesses indicated that supply chain issues are magnified when suppliers are in more distant locations in the country. The pandemic has likely created new local business opportunities to fill gaps in regional supply chains. The WPPDC should help organize regional economic development partners and facilitate connections with local businesses to better understand opportunities to address new and existing supply chain gaps.

ACTION ITEMS

1. Identify initiatives and roles regional economic development organizations are applying to address regional supply chain issues.
2. Convene regional economic development organizations to understand roles in preparing supply chain study and potential finding sources.
3. Secure funding for regional supply chain analysis.
4. Complete a supply chain mapping analysis to understand the current state of the regional network.
5. Document information across companies, suppliers, and individuals who are involved in regional supply chains.
6. Employ an information campaign to inform how a local-buying program will serve anchor institutions economic self-interest, ensuring safe, vibrant, and healthy communities.
7. Facilitate connections between large regional businesses and entrepreneurs and small businesses that could fill supply chain gaps.

TIMELINE

Long-term (3-5 years)

STAFFING AND PARTNERSHIPS

- WPPDC
- Regional Economic Development Organizations
- Chambers of Commerce
- SBDCs

BEST PRACTICES

Pure Michigan Business Connect

“An initiative of the state of Michigan, Pure Michigan Business Connect (PMBC) is a concierge service that helps strengthen supply chains by connecting suppliers to new opportunities, both domestic and international. Through a comprehensive database, PMBC plays matchmaker for OEMs by introducing them to Michigan suppliers that fit their specifications. PMBC also provides networking services through a B2B network, matchmaking summits, and international trade research.”

<https://www.michiganbusiness.org/services/pure-michigan-business-connect/>

STRATEGY 3: *Support fair treatment in access, opportunity, and advancement for all individuals by identifying and working to eliminate barriers for disadvantaged groups.*

Disadvantaged groups are disproportionately underrepresented in regional business ownership. While there are many factors that contribute to this issue, access to funding and resources tends to be more challenging for minority- and women-owned small businesses and entrepreneurs. Improving access to tools and resources for minority-, veteran-, and women- owned businesses to remove the barriers is critical for ensuring equitable economic development in the region. Developing a minority business council could also help overcome barriers. The council should serve to enable purposeful communication to inform policy and programming offerings by the economic development ecosystems, and to serve as a peer-to-peer network to share best practices and common obstacles

ACTION ITEMS

1. Convene a minority-owned business council to serve as a peer-to-peer network to share best practices and common obstacles.
2. Enhance availability and access to training and certification programs for small, minority-owned and women-owned businesses.
3. Work with minority-owned businesses in the region to gain official Minority-Owned Business certification through the National Minority Supplier Development Council and the Small Business Administration.
4. Work with women-owned business to gain official WBE certification through the Small Business Administration and consider adopting a regional Athena PowerLink organization to support women-owned businesses.

TIMELINE

Short (1-year)

STAFFING AND PARTNERSHIPS

- WPPDC
- SBDCs
- Local Chambers

BEST PRACTICES

ATHENA International | ATHENA Affiliate Program

“The ATHENA Leaders Affiliate is a local, ATHENA branded community formed to align with ATHENA International’s goal of developing, supporting and honoring women leaders. Local ATHENA group or organization will receive the right to use the ATHENA licensed mark as an element of the Affiliate’s name and in connection with marketing affiliate programs. In addition, organizations will receive a variety of support and benefits from ATHENA International including ATHENA Forum materials, introduction to the ATHENA Leadership Model, marketing tools and discounted rates on ATHENA International programs.”

<https://www.athenainternational.org/page/Affiliate>

Minority Business Development Agency

“The U.S. Department of Commerce, Minority Business Development Agency (MBDA) is the only federal agency solely dedicated to the growth and global competitiveness of minority business enterprises. MBDA helps minority-owned businesses access capital, compete for government contracts, and positions minority-owned businesses perform in high growth industries, emerging markets, and global supply chains.”

<https://www.mbda.gov/>

GOAL 3:

PROMOTE COLLABORATION AMONG REGIONAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ORGANIZATION, BUSINESSES, AND LOCAL GOVERNMENTS.

The significance of working together as a region cannot be underestimated. Visitors, site selectors, and businesses care little, if at all, about city limits and county lines. Their interests are more focused on other aspects of the community. Visitors seek quality experiences, updated facilities, and easy to locate and use information. Businesses are looking for skilled workers, great locations, dependable infrastructure, lower costs, and other factors which enable them to compete. The region has strong regional organizations working to promote growth and development. Often these organizations do collaborate, but there are likely additional opportunities to align efforts and truly embrace regionalism. Strategies to achieve this goal include:

STRATEGIES

1. Build lines of communication among business and community leaders to affect policy responsiveness and help reinforce collaboration among organizations along clear objectives and desired outcomes.
2. Create sector strategies for business attraction efforts around manufacturing, healthcare providers, hospitality, tourism, wood products, and childcare sectors.



STRATEGY 1: *Build lines of communication among business and community leaders to affect policy responsiveness and help reinforce collaboration among organizations along clear objectives and desired outcomes.*

To ensure a coordinated and collaborative regional economic development ecosystem, the WPDCC should consider creating a Regeneration Alliance. The Regeneration Alliance should be composed of back-bone organizations in the region that can connect the dots between the public, private, and philanthropic sectors. The Alliance should serve as a coordinating intermediary – focused on setting local priorities, identifying and understanding federal and state funding opportunities, building readiness teams to capture funding, and engaging the community in planning efforts.

ACTION ITEMS

1. Identify economic development, local government, and business leaders that would participate in a regeneration alliance.
2. Support SVRA and other regional economic development organizations with facilitation of the group.
3. Convene regular meetings to identify additional strategies to access funding for economic and regional development strategies.
4. Assist the alliance with procurement of funding.

TIMELINE

Medium (2-3 years)

STAFFING AND PARTNERSHIPS

- WPPDC
- SVRA
- MHC
- DPCRED
- Regional Communities
- Local Chambers



STRATEGY 2: *Create sector strategies for business attraction efforts around manufacturing, healthcare providers, hospitality, tourism, wood products, and childcare sectors.*

Business attraction activities in the region should focus on growing and well-established industry sectors. Manufacturing is a key focus as innovation in this sector continues to produce growth. The region is already well established as a hub for a variety of manufacturing sectors and has complementary research and assets including IALR. This could help spur additional investments in manufacturing related sectors such as advanced materials and advanced manufacturing. Other areas that present opportunities to grow and are critical to the regional economy include healthcare, wood products, hospitality and tourism, and childcare. More information on these targeted industries can be found in the data scan overview. Focus on manufacturing is important to strengthen the region's economic base, but emphasis on other critical sectors is important to promote economic resiliency and recovery.

The following action items are likely spearheaded by regional economic development groups and WPPDC may play a supporting role to promote regional approaches for strategies, convene organizations, and help with access to funding and planning.

ACTION ITEMS

1. Identify new opportunities to enhance regional marketing tools that highlight pro-business conditions for targeted industries including regional brand campaigns.
2. Identify businesses operating in other parts of the United States or the east coast in critical sectors showing signs of expansion, such as significant employment growth, investing heavily in R&D, investing heavily in capital, or requiring additional real estate.
3. Using findings from supply chain analysis; market to businesses that could fill identified gaps.
4. Reach out to identified businesses using marketing materials to begin ongoing conversations about doing business in the region.
5. Identify and attend conferences for targeted industry businesses to build contacts and market opportunities in the region.

TIMELINE

Long (3-5 Years)

STAFFING AND PARTNERSHIPS

- SVRA
- MHC
- DPCRED
- WPPDC
- Tourism Organizations
- Local Chambers of Commerce



EDUCATION AND WORKFORCE

The following section identifies goals and strategies to promote regional education and workforce development. Each goal is identified separately along with associated strategies to achieve the goal. Each strategy includes action items, implementation timeline, and partnerships recommended to implement strategies. Best practices were provided for some strategies where applicable.

GOAL 1:

BUILD, ATTRACT, AND RETAIN A SUSTAINABLE WORKFORCE FOR REGIONAL MANUFACTURERS, HEALTHCARE PROVIDERS, HOSPITALITY, AND CHILDCARE SECTORS.

Regional population loss and the need for a skilled workforce is likely the single most pressing issue for regional businesses. In today's economy, as young, skilled workers increasingly concentrate in major urban areas, the competition for talent is fierce. The WPPDC region needs to be able to compete in attraction of talent to support sustained economic growth and recovery. The region has a number of attractive assets that must be leveraged in order to draw the type of people that value unique lifestyle amenities provided by the WPPDC region.

Demographic trends are constantly changing, and different people have different expectations, desires, and decision factors when it comes to choosing a place to live. The WPPDC region is in a unique position as demographic trends spurred by COVID are drawing people to less dense and populated communities. Greater demand is being placed on outdoor and recreational amenities. West Piedmont can be a leader when it comes to offering unique outdoor recreation-oriented lifestyles for talent attraction.

In addition to leveraging lifestyle opportunities, it is important that the region consistently and strategically coordinate talent attraction, development, and retention strategies. Leveraging partnerships with local educational institutions and employers will help the region build a robust workforce pipeline. Strategies to achieve this goal include:

STRATEGIES

1. Convene workforce consortiums and sector partnerships around priority sectors to advance and align regional workforce development efforts.
2. Develop a talent retention strategy aimed at local high school, college, and university students.
3. Pursue data-driven strategies that improve communication between the skills development ecosystem and employers in order to achieve optimal employment for individuals and businesses.

STRATEGY 1: *Convene workforce consortiums and sector partnerships around priority sectors to advance and align regional workforce development efforts.*

A regional workforce system that is clearly aligned with business needs will better allocate resources to strengthen efficiencies between career-readiness providers and industry sectors. This helps ensure that employer demand is driving programming, which in turn results in talent being properly trained to meet critical industry needs. To achieve this alignment, the region should focus on three primary areas: equity and accessibility in career training, sector specific strategies including work-based learning, and sector partnerships.

Sector Partnerships are an employer-driven model for aligning resources and promoting collaboration among educational institutions, workforce service providers, and community-based organizations to meet the needs of business. The sector partnership model ensures business needs are factored into development of a strong and qualified workforce, while also expanding access to the skills development, leading to jobs with higher wages for workers.

ACTION ITEMS

1. Identify regional organizations and businesses that could drive workforce consortiums and sector partnerships.
2. Develop common purposes and objectives for partnerships in priority sectors.
3. Develop annual action plans, goals, and accountability measures and include in a strategic plan for consortium activities.
4. Select chairs and leadership groups to drive implementation of sector partnerships.
5. Develop and assign roles and responsibilities for government, education, and business consortium members.
6. Assess programming needs, and build standing committees to promote implementation of appropriate workforce development initiatives.

TIMELINE

Long (3-5 years)

STAFFING AND POTENTIAL PARTNERSHIPS

- Workforce Development Boards
- Regional Economic Development Organizations
- Regional Education Providers
- WPPDC

BEST PRACTICES

Erie Regional Manufacturing Partnership

“The Erie Regional Manufacturer Partnership (ERMP) is an industry-led partnership dedicated to ensuring that manufacturing remains a strong contributor to the regional economy. Formed in 2014 by a group of 20 local manufacturers to develop and implement a plan to identify, qualify and recruit individuals for manufacturing jobs today and in the future. ERMP companies employ close to 9,000 individuals, over 6,000 locally.

ERMP is leading a collaborative approach among manufacturers, educators, workforce development professionals, and other leaders to align efforts and create a mechanism for ongoing dialogue to ensure manufacturing remains a strong contributor to the regional economy.”

<https://industryneedsyou.com/about/ermp>

WorkReady | Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

“WorkReady is a program for youth living in Philadelphia. Offering both incentive-based and wage-based program targeted towards young people aged 12-14 with little to no previous experience. These programs offer opportunities to learn about careers and career pathways, set short-term goals, and provide the opportunity to work on individual or group projects.”

<https://www.workready.org/>

STRATEGY 2: *Develop a talent retention strategy aimed at local high school, college, and university students.*

Regional educational institutions are key resources for training residents with strong job skills. Some of those that are trained in the region leave after completing their education and move out of region. Increased efforts to retain young talent could be made to better support existing employers in critical sectors. This would ensure more consistent business growth within these sectors. COVID-19 is driving lifestyle preferences for less dense communities that offer recreation and outdoor amenities. The region should focus on retaining a younger workforce by promoting this lifestyle to existing residents and students.

Emphasis should also be placed on existing local connections to the region to promote talent retention and upskilling. Connecting local graduates at the high school, community college, and university level with jobs and career pathways to further talent development will help strengthen the regional workforce making it more beneficial to residents and local employers.

ACTION ITEMS

1. Identify skills needed most in demand by conversations with regional employers.
2. Work with education providers and local schools to implement internships and career pathways.
3. Survey graduating seniors to understand ways to retain them in the community.
4. Explore and help access funding for talent retention initiatives such as homebuyers assistance, tax credits for student loan repayment, and other incentives to retain students.

TIMELINE

Medium (2-3 years)

STAFFING AND POTENTIAL PARTNERSHIPS

- Workforce boards
- K-12
- Local Community Colleges
- WPPDC

BEST PRACTICES

Buffalo Homecoming

“Buffalo Homecoming is a three-day annual event in which Western New York expats will interact with local policy makers, entrepreneurs, and organizers; attend seminars, discussions, tours and entertainment; and reconnect with their hometown and experience its renaissance.”: <https://buffalohomecoming.com/>

What’s So Cool About Manufacturing?

“The What’s So Cool About Manufacturing? video contests excite students to explore cool manufacturing careers and produce profiles of companies throughout Pennsylvania. Teams of students and teacher coaches receive camera equipment and professional guidance as they learn to script, record, and edit their video stories.”: <https://www.whatssocool.org/>

GOAL 2:

HELP EMPLOYERS ADDRESS STAFFING ISSUES INCLUDING THOSE CAUSED BY THE PANDEMIC.

Regional businesses noted concerns about COVID-19 outbreaks at the workplace and the effects that outbreaks would have on productivity. Labor has been historically difficult to find and caused productivity issues for local employers. COVID-19 outbreaks have caused and could continue to cause declines in production if large portions of a business's employees are required to quarantine for significant periods of time. Challenges finding workers existed pre-pandemic so strategies to address both COVID-19 threats and general workforce shortages need to be addressed to ensure the region maintains its pro-business environment. Strategies to achieve this goal include:

STRATEGIES

1. Identify and support new localized opportunities to connect employers to prospective workers.
2. Assist employers with implementation of best practices to help adapt to post COVID-19 workforce preferences.

STRATEGY 1: *Identify and support new localized opportunities to connect employers to prospective workers.*

Businesses indicated that they have challenges filling job openings. This existed pre-pandemic but has become a greater challenge since the COVID-19 pandemic began. WPPDC and partners can help connect current residents to job openings. Enhanced and streamlined communication between employers and jobseekers could help fill job openings. Building better businesses to employee connections could help the region thrive.

ACTION ITEMS

1. Identify and create a one-stop location for new localized opportunities to connect unemployed residents to job services and opportunities.
2. Create a database with prospective workers and their skillsets as well as job openings and postings.
3. Identify businesses that would like to be involved with the initiative.
4. Market job services to regional residents.

TIMELINE

Short (1-year)

STAFFING AND POTENTIAL PARTNERSHIPS

- Regional Businesses
- Workforce Boards
- WPPDC
- Regional Economic Developers

STRATEGY 2: *Assist employers with implementation of best practices to help adapt to post COVID-19 workforce preferences.*

As described throughout this report, COVID-19 related shutdowns are a major threat for regional businesses, especially if an outbreak forces businesses to shut down. Getting workers vaccinated was indicated as a challenge for regional businesses, even though it significantly mitigates risk of virus transmission and protects safety of employees and production capacity of regional businesses. WPPDC could help promote and advertise best practices for preventing COVID-19 transmission in the workplace. This includes encouraging measures such as wearing masks and receiving vaccines.

ACTION ITEMS

1. Host forum for local businesses to discuss best practices that have worked for them.
2. Survey/interview existing workforce to get their input.
3. Organize a regional health and wellness campaign encouraging residents to get vaccinated to prevent COVID-19 related workforce challenges.

TIMELINE

Short (1-year)

STAFFING AND POTENTIAL PARTNERSHIPS

- WPPDC
- Regional Economic Development Office
- Chambers of Commerce
- Healthcare Providers
- Local Governments





RECREATION AND TOURISM

The following section identifies goals and strategies to promote regional tourism and recreation opportunities for residents and visitors. Each goal is identified separately along with associated strategies to achieve the goal. Each strategy includes action items, implementation timeline, and partnerships recommended to implement strategies. Best practices were provided for some strategies where applicable.

GOAL 1:

PROMOTE A SENSE OF PLACE AND BRAND THAT UNITES THE REGION; REPRESENTS ITS EXCEPTIONAL, NATURAL, AND RECREATIONAL RESOURCES AND COMMUNITY EVENTS, FESTIVALS, AND FAMILY ACTIVITIES; AND ENCOURAGES COMMUNITY COHESION AND TOURISM.

It is important for the region to demonstrate and sell itself as a desirable place to live, work, play, and visit. Creating and maintaining a sense of place promotes community pride and unifies local communities. A strong unified sense of place encourages tourists to return to communities that they feel a part of when they visit. A customized brand platform establishing a unified regional visit around community values and effectively showcasing the variety of built, natural, and historical assets within the region will support a sense of place that attracts visitors, employers, and new residents. Enhancing sense of place will also help retain existing residents. Strategies to achieve this goal include:

STRATEGIES

1. Develop and maintain an effective regional place brand strategy and visual identity that highlights unique community and natural assets.
2. Establish a vision and plan for the joint development of internal and external marketing campaigns that leverages new branding and educates, promotes, and encourages residents and tourists to take advantage of regional recreation opportunities.



STRATEGY 1: Develop and maintain an effective regional place brand strategy and visual identity that highlights unique community and natural assets.

Key stakeholders in the region have worked to develop a unique brand and visual identity. This brand is in the final phases of development. Once complete, the region will market its new brand through collateral materials including a website that demonstrates why the region is an attractive place to live, work, and play. Defining a strong, consistent, and customized brand platform and creating collateral materials that visually support marketing efforts will help effectively promote the region's quality of place.

ACTION ITEMS

1. Convene a tourism committee to create a regional tourism plan that addresses a common regional brand, goals, and assets.
2. Define and create a strong, consistent, and customized, strategic brand platform that establishes a unified vision, reflects community values, and supports internal and external marketing efforts.
3. Create collateral that leverages new logo systems and digital assets to support strategic brand objectives.
4. Create a trail map linking all the regional natural assets.
5. Use collateral to support a regional advertisement campaign for the unique tourism attractions for the region.

TIMELINE

Short (1-year)

STAFFING AND PARTNERSHIPS

- WPPDC
- SVRA
- Local Tourism Offices
- Local Chambers
- Virginia Tourism Corporation (VTC)



STRATEGY 2: *Establish a vision and plan for the joint development of internal and external marketing campaigns that leverage new branding and educate, promote, and encourage residents and tourists to take advantage of regional recreation opportunities.*

Partnerships between the regional and local organizations and communities could help enhance a unified effort to market and promote natural, recreation, and historic assets to residents and visitors. Partnerships with education providers to encourage programs focused on training and raising interest in hospitality, tourism, and outdoor recreation jobs could further ensure there is a pipeline of workforce to support a growing tourism economy.

ACTION ITEMS

1. Convene leaders to promote formation of partnerships with regional and local organizations and communities for recreation, travel, tourism, and hospitality infrastructure.
2. Create a marketing plan with guidance from regional partnerships to promote existing natural, recreation, and historical assets to increase awareness of these resources among visitors and residents.

TIMELINE

Short (1-year)

STAFFING AND PARTNERSHIPS

- WPPDC
- Local Tourism Offices
- VTC



GOAL 2:

PROMOTE VIBRANT AND ATTRACTIVE DEVELOPMENT TO ENHANCE QUALITY OF LIFE AND ENCOURAGE TOURISM.

Planning for targeted growth areas should occur to promote investment, development, and effective talent and business recruitment connectivity between growth areas and community and regional assets. This will provide benefits to residents and tourists. Ultimately the region seeks to create a quality of life that that supports a diverse range of businesses, features connectivity to natural and recreation assets, and offers a strong sense of place to retain local talent and attract new residents, businesses, and visitors. Strategies to achieve this goal include:

STRATEGIES

1. Partner with local, regional, and federal agencies to develop and promote destination-quality outdoor recreation infrastructure that will serve a diverse and growing residential and tourist population of all ages and abilities.
2. Organize and work with regional public and private sector leaders to align and identify new and existing agritourism opportunities.
3. Address litter through innovative regional waste reduction and source control measures.



STRATEGY 1: *Partner with local, regional, and federal agencies to develop and promote destination-quality outdoor recreation infrastructure that will serve a diverse and growing residential and tourist population of all ages and abilities.*

WPPDC could help facilitate creation of an advisory committee with regional stakeholders that will help establish a vision for recreation infrastructure that promotes the region and local communities and the assets that makes these places unique. Recreational infrastructure development should increase access to tourism assets for residents and visitors to enhance quality of life and regional tourism.

ACTION ITEMS

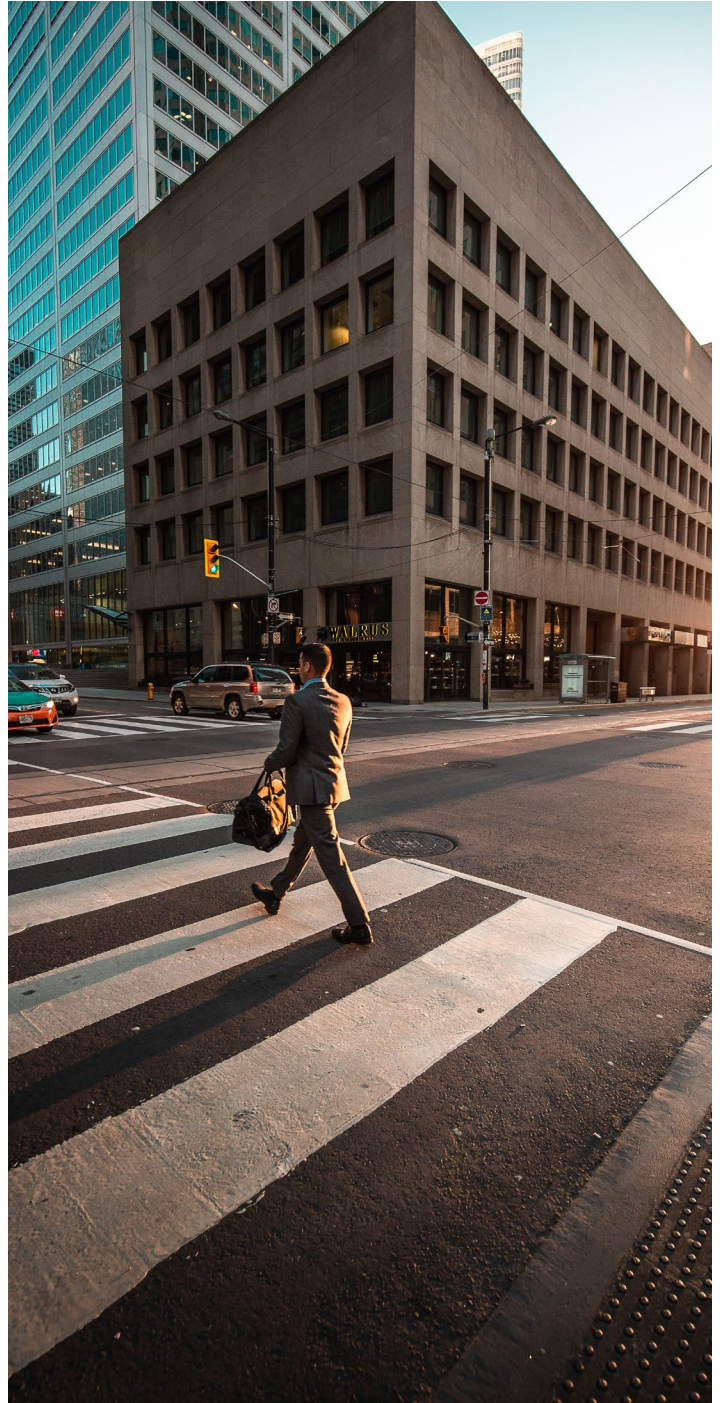
1. Facilitate creation of a regional advisory committee including local government officials, economic development, tourism representatives, educational institutions, and business owners to establish a vision and plan for regional recreation infrastructure development.
2. Identify resources necessary to implement the regional outdoor recreation plan to address staffing, implementation, and marketing.
3. Facilitate regional advisory committee meetings and planning to coordinate regional recreation development and marketing efforts

TIMELINE

Medium to Long (3-5-years)

STAFFING AND POTENTIAL PARTNERSHIPS

- WPPDC
- SVRA
- Local Tourism Offices
- VTC
- Local Chambers of Commerce
- Local Recreation Businesses



STRATEGY 2: *Organize and work with regional public and private sector leaders to align and identify new and existing agritourism opportunities.*

Agriculture has historically been a backbone of the regional economy. WPPDC and regional leaders have identified an opportunity to increase business opportunities for agriculture businesses through agritourism. Agricultural businesses traditionally generate products but have not leveraged the tourism aspect of their businesses. The WPPDC is positioned to help businesses realize these additional revenue generating opportunities.

ACTION ITEMS

1. Create a database of agricultural businesses in the region.
2. Assess ability for each identified business to incorporate agritourism offerings.
3. Engage businesses and assist with plans to create agritourism programming.

TIMELINE

Short and ongoing (1-year, ongoing)

STAFFING AND POTENTIAL PARTNERSHIPS

- WPPDC
- SBDCs
- Local Chambers
- USDA Extension Service
- VTC

BEST PRACTICE

SOAR | Shaping Our Appalachian Region | Eastern Kentucky

“SOAR is a regional nonpartisan nonprofit that champions local projects, programs, and advocacy for the 54 ARC-mandated counties in Eastern Kentucky. With breathtaking views and state parks numbering in the double digits, Eastern Kentucky is an essential destination for adventure seekers. SOAR works with our region’s chambers, parks, tourism boards, and nonprofits to draw residents and visitors alike to enjoy everything Kentucky have to offer.”

<https://www.soar-ky.org/plan/#prosperity>

FUNDING OPPORTUNITY

EDA Travel, Tourism, and Outdoor Recreation Grant Program

“Through the Travel, Tourism & Outdoor Recreation program, EDA is focused on accelerating the recovery of communities that rely on the travel, tourism and outdoor recreation sectors. \$750 million of EDA’s American Rescue Plan funds are allocated to help states quickly invest in marketing, infrastructure, workforce, and other projects to rejuvenate safe leisure, business, and international travel. In addition, competitive grants are available to help communities that have been hardest hit by challenges facing the travel, tourism, and outdoor recreation sectors to invest in infrastructure, workforce, or other projects to support the recovery of the industry and economic resilience of the community in the future.”

<https://eda.gov/arpa/travel-tourism/>



LIVABILITY AND HOUSING

The following section identifies goals and strategies to promote regional housing development and improve quality of life. Each goal is identified separately along with associated strategies to achieve the goal. Each strategy includes action items, implementation timeline, and partnerships recommended to implement strategies. Best practices were provided for some strategies where applicable.

GOAL 1:

ENCOURAGE THE CREATION OF A HOUSING STRATEGY THAT ADDRESSES DEVELOPMENT AND REHABILITATION OF A VARIETY OF HOUSING TYPES AT A RANGE OF PRICE POINTS THAT MEET THE NEEDS OF HOUSEHOLDS AND RESIDENTS OF ALL INCOMES AND AGES THROUGHOUT THE REGION.

The age, availability, and limited diversity of housing stock affects current residents and workers. This creates challenges for economic developers attempting to attract new employers and residents. Demand for housing will continue to grow as new businesses locate in the region and industry sectors continue to grow. Local leaders should work together to identify the key needs of their populations and assess current trends and existing policies. Creation of incentives for development and funding opportunities for housing must be used in combination to assist developers and meet the needs of residents in the region. Strategies to achieve this goal include:

STRATEGIES

1. Create a regional housing strategy with cooperation of education and business leaders to ensure an adequate supply of housing for all income levels.
2. Encourage development of livable and sustainable communities which include a mix of housing types that respect unique environmental, rural, and urban settings of regional communities and leverage existing policies and development incentives to promote equitable accesses to housing for all residents.
3. Evaluate existing land and housing stock for redevelopment and new construction opportunities to preserve long-term affordability and quality rental and ownership opportunities.

STRATEGY 1: *Create a regional housing strategy with cooperation of education and business leaders to ensure that an adequate supply of housing for all income levels.*

Understanding the key housing needs of the region and analyzing existing supply affordability and demand is key to developing an effective regional housing strategy. WPPDC can facilitate partnerships between local government, regional organizations, employers, and developers to create additional assistance programs for renters and homeowners and to build capacity for additional housing development.

ACTION ITEMS

1. Create a regional housing advisory committee with cooperation of local communities, businesses, and education providers to guide regional housing efforts
2. Analyze local trends in housing supply, affordability, and demand to define need
3. Assess the current capacity for housing development by non- and for-profit housing developers and the capacity for local government to play a role

TIMELINE

Short (1-year)

STAFFING AND POTENTIAL PARTNERSHIPS

- WPPDC
- Regional Economic Development Foundations
- Local Governments
- Housing Developers
- Regional Employers



STRATEGY 2: Encourage development of livable and sustainable communities which include a mix of housing types that respect unique environmental, rural, and urban settings of regional communities and leverage existing policies and development incentives to promote equitable accesses to housing for all residents.

Policies that encourage and incentivize a mix of housing types at a range of price point for targeted development of residential sites will promote housing construction that meets the key needs of the community. Housing types and diverse housing communities that focus on affordability and accessibility are important to allow all residents to have access to adequate housing.

ACTION ITEMS

1. Assess existing housing development policies for support of non-traditional housing, accessible housing, housing renovations, and housing types that address key needs.
2. Encourage regional and local incentives that expand partnerships and funding sources for housing types that meet needs in key development areas
3. Promote development of housing types with an emphasis on affordability and accessibility as well as aging in place.

TIMELINE

Medium to Long (3-5 years)

STAFFING AND PARTNERSHIPS

- WPPDC
- Regional Communities



STRATEGY 3: *Evaluate existing land and housing stock for redevelopment and new construction opportunities to preserve long-term affordability and quality rental and ownership opportunities.*

WPPDC should work with regional partners to evaluate tracts of land that could support future residential development. Land should be evaluated based on location, sustainability for development that will meet regional needs, and access to utilities. Assessing existing housing stock will help determine the need for rehabilitation, repair, and accessibility. Funding opportunities to finance and implement improvements will preserve older homes in the region and help encourage long-term housing sustainability and affordability.

ACTION ITEMS

1. Explore establishment of a regional land bank/trust program to acquire and maintain properties for future housing development
2. Promote establishment of funding opportunities to finance and implement housing rehab, repair, and improvements that preserve existing housing stock

TIMELINE

Medium to Long (3-5 years)

STAFFING AND PARTNERSHIPS

- WPPDC
- Regional Communities

BEST PRACTICES

Greenville Housing Fund

“The Greenville Housing Fund is a non-profit entity, founded in 2018 under CommunityWorks Carolina, a US Treasury-certified community development financial institution (CDFI) with a long history of advocating for affordable housing throughout Greenville County. GHF envisions a future where every neighborhood in Greenville County is thriving and affordable for all. Its goals are to 1) serve as an advocate and champion for affordable housing in Greenville, 2) invest in affordable housing development and preservation, and 3) acquire land to facilitate affordable housing development opportunities.”

<https://greenvillehousingfund.com/plan-summary/>

Cuyahoga County Land Reutilization Corporation | Cuyahoga County, Ohio

“The Cuyahoga Land Bank was created as a non-profit, government sponsored entity to strategy acquire properties, return them to productive use, reduce blight, increase property values, support community goals and improve the quality of life for county residents.”

<http://cuyahogalandbank.org/>

**GOAL 2:
WORK TO IDENTIFY AND PROMOTE INNOVATIVE OPPORTUNITIES TO INCREASE CHILDCARE ACCESSIBILITY
IN THE REGION.**

The COVID-19 pandemic brought to light the importance of quality childcare to the national economy. Not only is quality and accessible childcare a critical service to employees and their employees in the short-term, but quality childcare is also an investment in the future – an investment in children and a positive step to creating a prosperous future for the region. Strategies to achieve this goal include:

STRATEGIES

1. Assess opportunities to help families and employers pay for childcare costs and implement assistance programs if feasible.
2. Assist K-12 and higher education providers with expansion of workforce training programs in childcare

STRATEGY 1: *Assess opportunities to help families and employers pay for childcare costs and implement assistance programs if feasible.*

The pandemic has taught us that lack of childcare is a detriment to economic growth. Due to the rising costs of childcare, many parents are forced to forgo employment opportunities. This not only leads to stagnant regional economic growth, but it also deprives parents of the opportunity to flourish by finding meaningful work. All efforts should be made from a policy standpoint, and all funding sources should be explored to reduce barriers for families requiring quality childcare. This should be viewed as an economic imperative today and a strategic investment in the region’s future economic success.

The following action items will help the region take the necessary steps to recognize and address the importance of access to quality childcare. Potential partnerships exist to implement the action steps and include Harvest, Danville Regional Foundation, United Way, and other community organizations.

ACTION ITEMS

TIMELINE

1. Help with implementation of strategies and findings from Strategy 1 by identifying and helping to secure funding.
2. Convene employers and childcare providers to assess opportunities to make space available on-site that can be managed by a certified childcare provider.
3. Identify opportunities to help employers subsidize childcare costs.

Short (1-year)

STAFFING AND PARTNERSHIPS

- WPPDC
- Regional Childcare Providers
- Harvest
- Danville Regional Foundation
- United Way other Community Organizations

STRATEGY 2: *Assist K-12 and higher education providers with expansion of workforce training programs in childcare.*

In addition to identifying ways to reduce the cost burden of childcare for regional families, WPPDC should also help promote additional training for childcare jobs to increase the pipeline of childcare providers. Working with education institutions including public schools and higher education providers to expand childcare workforce training programs may be an opportunity to increase the childcare talent pipeline. It is important to note that wages tend to be lower for some occupations related to childcare providers so WPPDC and regional partners may also need to identify opportunities to increase wages for childcare workers.

ACTION ITEMS

1. Convene K-12 and higher education providers to align career pathways into childcare.
2. Encourage higher education providers to expand programs around childcare careers.
3. Support education providers in program expansion by helping to secure funding.

TIMELINE

Short (1-year)

STAFFING AND PARTNERSHIPS

- WPPDC
- Regional Childcare Providers
- Harvest
- Danville Regional Foundation
- United Way other Community Organizations
- Education Providers



**GOAL 3:
REVITALIZE REGIONAL DOWNTOWNS THROUGH CONCERTED EFFORTS TO BUILD QUALITY OF PLACE,
RENOVATED, AND IMPROVED HOUSING.**

Young professionals are increasingly drawn to regions that can provide them with a walkable lifestyle that enables them to work, live, learn, and play within a 15-minute walk. Further, young professionals are attracted to communities that are rich in cultural heritage and convey an authentic sense of community. This is accomplished by both the natural and built environment. The region can look to other emerging communities, who have been successful at leveraging historic and cultural assets and redeveloping and repurposing them to meet the needs of a modern economy and workforce. Strategies to achieve this goal include:

STRATEGIES

1. Identify and support opportunities for the preservation of downtown buildings to retain an authentic sense of place and cultural heritage.
2. Encourage development of unique programmable public spaces like parks, plazas, greenways, that can serve community, cultural, and social events.

STRATEGY 1: *Identify and support opportunities for the preservation of downtown buildings to retain an authentic sense of place and cultural heritage.*

All efforts should be made to identify culturally significant properties as part of a larger strategy to maximize the current built environment to accommodate existing residents and to support the attraction of new professionals to the region. This effort should focus on creating diverse, mixed-use neighborhoods abundant in cultural and practical amenities and local retail businesses.

Historic preservation and redevelopment of culturally significant assets is not only appealing to large segments of the population, but also environmentally mindful and more cost-effective than greenfield and new development initiatives. Stakeholders should build capacity to utilize private-public partnerships to raise needed capital for redevelopment and familiarize themselves with development finance tools, such as Historic Tax Credits and New Markets Tax Credits.

The following action steps should enable the preservation of historical and cultural significant buildings to retain an authentic sense of place. The West Piedmont Planning District Commission should work in lockstep with VA Main Street to take the following action steps.

ACTION ITEMS

1. Identify funding opportunities to support downtown revitalization plans.
2. Identify buildings in regional downtowns that may be vacant or need redevelopment.
3. Create site control strategies including funding strategies for buildings identified as redevelopment candidates.
4. Work with local communities to apply for redevelopment funds for identified buildings.

TIMELINE

Short to Medium (1 to 3 years)

STAFFING AND PARTNERSHIPS

- WPPDC
- Regional Communities
- Virginia Main Street

STRATEGY 2: *Encourage development of unique programmable public spaces like parks, plazas, greenways, that can serve community, cultural, and social events.*

The region and local communities have developed a variety of trails, greenways, and blueways. These improvements encourage residents to walk, bicycle, kayak, and canoe. It is recommended that the region and partners continue to build on these assets. As these assets are further built out, the region should also consider how safer alternative transportation oriented development can be incorporated in future improvements to existing trails and roadways. Connections of additional trails, greenways, and blueways should provide connections between key tourism destinations and attractions in the region. These resources will support health and wellness and environmental sustainability.

ACTION ITEMS

1. Assess needs for additional public space, greenways, and blueway improvements.
2. Identify funding resources that could finance public space improvements.
3. Explore options for landowner incentives to allow for conservation and future development of public greenways/trails within these corridors.
4. Work with regional communities to develop standards and align street design standards, wayfinding, and criteria for pedestrian infrastructure.

BEST PRACTICE

Cincinnati Center City Development Corporation | Cincinnati, Ohio

“The Cincinnati Center City Development Corp. (3CDC) is a 501(c)(3), tax-exempt, private, non-profit corporation. Its mission and strategic focus are to strengthen the core assets of downtown by revitalizing and connecting the Central Business District and Over-the-Rhine (OTR). 3CDC aims to create and manage great civic spaces, create high density and mixed-use development, preserve historic structures and improve streetscapes, and create diverse, mixed-use neighborhoods supported by local business.”

<https://www.3cdc.org/>

TIMELINE

Medium to Long (3 to 5 years)

STAFFING AND PARTNERSHIPS

- WPPDC
- Regional Communities



THOMAS P. MILLER & ASSOCIATES