



## COUNTY OF AMHERST

### Public Information Officer

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### Promoting Business in Amherst County

In August of 2017, the Board of Supervisors asked the county's Economic Development Authority (EDA) and Planning Commission to look at the county's reputation for being unfriendly to business and come up with recommendations to change that perception. The EDA held focus group meetings, conducted interviews of business owners in the county, and collected survey data. That information as well as the EDA's recommendations for changes were presented to the Board last night.

Now underway are the following initiatives:

- The county's website has been completely revamped to make it easier for citizens and businesses to find what they need.
- Building and zoning permit applications can be completed and paid for online.
- Cell tower ordinances have been updated to make many approvals automatic (by right).
- A county-wide broadband provider is being given access to county radio towers to get internet service into our rural areas.
- An aggressive incentives program for new investment by existing businesses.

At the workshop, the Board of Supervisors heard comments from the EDA and almost a dozen members of the business community. The Board has asked staff to move a number of initiatives onto its business agenda. They are numerous and vary widely but here is a sampling:

- Improve connectivity to the public with fillable PDF forms, live chat, unified online payment mechanisms and other technological improvements.
- More advertising, spotlighting and promotion of local businesses.
- Move away from regulatory controls toward policy guidance to give staff authority to say "yes".
- Have an outside consultant look at our tax structure and business incentives to encourage business.
- Clear out old regulations and modernize the rest to increase ease of use and understanding.
- Find ways to reduce the burden of water/sewer availability fees.
- Equip staff to be friendlier and more supportive as they guide businesses through government processes.

The goal of the workshop was find ways to improve the county's reputation for business friendliness. The community wants the government to honor its mission statement, that it is "open for business", by developing a reputation of speed, convenience and cheerful assistance to business owners. It wants Amherst to be a place where businesses can expect to hear "yes" from local government when they want to move projects forward.

Over the past year, Amherst County has incentivized over \$51,974,000 in reinvestment by local businesses. Developers are pursuing purchase and redevelopment of the County's Winton Country Club. A repurposing of the Phelps Road School into apartments is underway. The first water-powered brewery in the nation is under construction by Waukeshaw Development LLC, the parent company of the Trapezium Brewery in Petersburg. The Riveredge Park trail continues to receive grants and local funding to extend its reach down the James River. Route 29 Business in Madison Heights is funded to receive shade trees and banners to promote beautification and pride throughout that corridor. These and other projects are in the works to move the County's economic development goals forward.

Amherst County is working hard to demonstrate the County is, indeed, open for business.

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