

March 12, 2013

**AMHERST ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ACTION PLAN
FOR IMPLEMENTING AMHERST COUNTY'S
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY**

I. BACKGROUND – BASIS FOR THE ACTION PLAN

In 2004 Amherst County began development of its comprehensive plan. An analysis of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats, etc. all served to shape the effort. The result was the County's Comprehensive Plan adopted in 2007, and which is currently being updated. A prominent component of the original and draft update is that for the County's economic development goals, objectives, and strategies. In effect, the Comprehensive Plan spells out the County's strategy for economic development. Key elements of the strategy were further validated in the 1 to 3 year goals for economic development adopted by the Board of Supervisors at its September 2012 planning retreat. The task for AEDA is now to prepare and execute an action/work plan that will begin implementing the strategy.

Though progress has been made with some notable accomplishments (e.g., adoption of an incentive policy, establishment of the CVCC facility, expansion of internet service, and activities of the Business Task Force), systematic pursuit of most of the priority goals, objectives, and strategies has not taken place. To this end, the AEDA is taking the next step. More specifically, the Authority is proposing this action plan to begin addressing the county's economic development in a more methodical and structured manner.

II. COMPONENTS OF THE ACTION PLAN TO IMPLEMENT THE STRATEGY

It must be recognized that the comprehensive plan is exhaustive in the items it identifies as strategies to be undertaken. In fact, taken cumulatively, the goals, objectives, and strategies for economic development identify dozens of actions. AEDA considers it impractical to attempt addressing all of these simultaneously. So, the Authority takes the position that an action/work plan be developed for what it has identified as the highest priorities.

To establish what it believes are the highest priorities, AEDA first focused on those identified in the Comprehensive Plan that it considered could bring the greatest benefits to the county over the next 2-3 years. The Authority also agreed that these should serve as the foundation for longer term efforts beyond the initial 2-3 year period. Further, the internal EDA process identified the desirability for greater participation from the county's citizens; and the assistance of Sweet Briar College was secured for this purpose. Through 2 public workshops, 2 structured internet surveys, presentations to several organizations in the county, and numerous individual discussions between EDA members and staff with people in the county, a set of consensus priorities has emerged.

The balance of this document will address 6 priorities for the AEDA, should the Board of Supervisors approve, over the next 2-3 years. An action/work plan for the first year of this period offers detail on the pursuit of these priorities. This action/work plan is to be

evaluated annually, with necessary adjustments being made for the ensuing year. Further, assuming the action plan is endorsed and undertaken, it must be recognized that there will be unanticipated issues, opportunities, demands, etc. that will interrupt the work schedule. But, this action plan is the starting point for a deliberate, long term approach to economic development in Amherst County.

III. ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ACTION/WORK PLAN

Priorities recommended for an action/work program over the next 2-3 years are as follows:

- A. MAINTENANCE AND REFINEMENT OF THE 2013 ADOPTED INCENTIVE PROGRAM
- B. PROVISION OF SUFFICIENT SITES TO ACCOMMODATE NEW AND EXPANDED BASIC BUSINESSES
- C. SUPPORT OF WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVES
- D. CONDUCT AN ENHANCED EXISTING BUSINESS OUTREACH AND SUPPORT EFFORT
- E. MARKETING OF THE COUNTY AS A PLACE OF OPPORTUNITY FOR NEW BUSINESSES
- F. PROGRAM AND ORGANIZATION DEVELOPMENT

For each of these 6 action components, this plan offers a brief narrative, specific actions to be undertaken, and measurables for the initial 15 months (assumes the Board of Supervisors approves this action plan in the spring of 2013).

A. MAINTENANCE AND REFINEMENT OF THE 2013 ADOPTED INCENTIVE PROGRAM

Narrative

AEDA began work in the summer of 2012 on a new economic development incentive proposal. A major step forward came at its meeting of February 5, 2013 meeting when the Board of Supervisors approved the new program. However, there are additional action items required.

Action 1—Information Flier

AEDA will convey provisions of the new incentive program to Amherst County businesses and to potential new businesses.

Measurable and Schedule

Completion, May 31, 2013--Prepare information flier. Distribute fliers through business visitations, partnership with Chamber of Commerce, CVCC, public presentations, and other outlets as determined. Include the incentive program's provisions on the EDA/economic development web site, the Region 2000 web site, and the marketing flier.

Action 2—Evaluation

AEDA will manage and evaluate effectiveness of the incentive program.

Measurable and Schedule

Completion, September 30, 2014--Manage program for initial 15 months. At the end of 15 months, conduct analysis on new investments and jobs the program helped create, provisions requiring improvement, etc. Prepare a report for Board of Supervisors summarizing accomplishments and recommending any changes.

B. PROVISION OF SUFFICIENT PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SITES TO ACCOMMODATE NEW AND EXPANDED BASIC BUSINESSES

Narrative

If Amherst County is to succeed in retaining and attracting businesses (top 2 priorities from the citizen's survey) that pay sizable taxes, create larger numbers of jobs, and stimulate formation of small service businesses, there must be a variety of sites on which they can locate. This is true for large commercial uses that generally gravitate to privately owned sites as well as manufacturers and distributors which more often find their best location opportunities in publicly owned parks. All of these sites must be competitive with those of other jurisdictions in factors such as cost, utility infrastructure, transportation access, size, and zoning.

To compete for manufacturers, large wholesalers, distributors, and many service firms with markets beyond the county line, publicly owned sites are an absolute requirement in this part of Virginia. By owning and developing property a community can control the site characteristics as well as retaining the ability to compete with other jurisdictions for businesses that can locate in a number of places.

Currently in the county there is only 1 publicly owned industrial-business park (not including Brockman Park which is owned by the Town), the Amelon Commerce Center. Ten sites remain in this park. However, they are relatively small (only 1 is as large as 12 acres but very difficult to access), and each site is restricted to varying degrees by wetlands, easements, terrain, and rights-of-way. With something less than 70 total acres available, Amelon offers very limited opportunities for construction of new facilities; and when these sites are gone, Amherst County will have no sites with which to compete for new businesses or on which to locate expansions of existing firms. This is a critical matter.

The conclusion arising from this situation is two-fold. First, we need to address issues with Amelon Park. A "clean-up" of drainage ways, easements and encroaching vegetation is required. Secondly, if we are to succeed with larger scale industrial development and offer options in the county for growth by existing firms, control must be gained over a sizable tract of land. Should the decision be made not to pursue more property, the attraction of companies with large capital investments and jobs can be eliminated from the County's strategy.

The most immediate opportunities for attracting new taxable investment and jobs (the top priority in the citizen survey) lie at the intersections of Routes 210 and 130 with Route 29 Bypass. To a lesser extent, another opportunity exists with property of Sweet Briar College, particularly at the convergence of Route 29 Business and Route 29 Bypass.

These properties, all privately owned, offer particular appeal to businesses relying on major highways. Further, because properties at these intersections cumulatively total several hundreds of acres, they also offer some rather unique potential. However, to eliminate uncertainties of cost and timing, we must begin answering development questions now and be prepared when clients closely investigate the search as particularly the routes 201 and 130 intersections.

It is not suggested that the EDA or County pursue ownership of these properties, especially those acres closest to the intersections. Rather, they offer the opportunity for a partnership whereby the County can help in the development of plans, tools, utilities, and marketing that will lead to desirable growth. Thus we need to initiate a working relationship with the landowners and begin planning a course of action.

Action 1—Transfer Ownership

The Board of Supervisors is requested to transfer ownership of Amelon Commerce Center with budgeted maintenance and development funds to AEDA.

Measurable and Schedule

Completion, June 30 2013--Transfer completed

Action 2—Amelon Maintenance

AEDA is to develop and manage an agreement with a private contractor for park maintenance/vegetation control, starting with the agreement currently in force through the County's Purchasing Department.

Measurable and Schedule

Completion, June 30, 2013--Agreement in place

Action 3—Drainage Ways and Easements

With assistance of Planning Department, Service Authority, and consulting engineer, elimination and/or rerouting drainage ways and easements in Amelon is to be achieved.

Measurable and Schedule

Completion, March 31, 2014--Agreements, paperwork, and plat revisions completed.

Action 4—Site Feasibility

AEDA will identify tracts of 250+/- acres in the County's designated growth area that could be used for a publicly owned business-industrial park. Feasibility analysis will be conducted on all sites with assistance of the Planning Department, Service Authority, and a consulting engineer to determine which site(s) could be acquired and the costs of development. (Costs for a consulting engineer could be \$30,000+/-)

Measurable and Schedule

Completion, December 31, 2013—Identify tracts, select engineer, and conclude analysis

Action 5—Feasibility of Acquisition

If feasibility is established, funding for purchasing and developing a new public industrial park is to be investigated. Feasibility, including potential funding, is to be reported to the Supervisors. A decision from the Board on property acquisition will be sought.

Measurable and Schedule

Completion, February 28, 2014--Report to Supervisors on feasibility, costs, and purchase-development strategy

Completion, April 30, 2014—Request decision by Supervisors on purchase-development proposal, if feasibility is established

Action 6—Utilities to Route 29 Intersections

The county via the Service Authority should develop a preliminary engineering report on feasibility and costs of extending water and sewer service to unserved areas at the intersections of Routes 210 and 130 with Route 29 Bypass (cost of \$30,000+/-).

Measurable and Schedule

Completion, December 31, 2013—Complete engineering survey

Action 7—Rt. 29 Intersection Development

Discussions with intersection property owners on how EDA can partner in marketing and developing their properties are to be started.

Measurable and Schedule

Completion, August 13, 2013 Discussions to be initiated and determination on EDA's role. Actions to be scheduled and pursued.

Action 8—Sweet Briar Property Development

AEDA will continue to interface with Sweet Briar College to determine interest(s) in developing its properties and the role the County might assume as a partner.

Measurable and Schedule

Completion, Ongoing- No specific objectives at this time

Action 9—Flex Space

A need has been identified for modern, small sized (5,000 to 15,000 sq. ft.) light industrial/warehouse/distribution space in which small businesses can locate in the early stages of their development and growth. Companies need to be able to access such space for 2-4 years at a reasonable cost, growing to the point that they can move into permanent, larger facilities. AEDA should try to partner with the private sector to stimulate construction of a "flex" space facility that will accommodate several smaller businesses.

Measurable and Schedule

Completion, May 31, 2014 Solicitation Proposals from AEDA to private sector developers for a partnership in providing flex space using Amelon Park property and financial resources of AEDA to be distributed by mid-year. Acceptance or rejection of proposals to be accomplished by May 31, 2014

C. SUPPORT OF WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVES

Narrative

Initiatives other than those of the Amherst County public school system to strengthen skills of Amherst's working population take place largely at the regional level. Central Virginia community College (CVCC) and the Region 2000 Workforce Investment Board (WIB) are the principal organizations with this mandate.

Currently, AEDA leases space to CVCC in the Town for its Amherst location. The college offers both academic and workforce training programs. With current arrangements,

CVCC can continue at this location for six more years. AEDA will continue to support this relationship and additional activities of the college to bolster workforce development.

A second opportunity for the county, largely underutilized to date, is the Region 2000 Workforce Investment Board. There are currently 2 representatives from Amherst County on the WIB; but we require stronger representation, particularly with a person who will coordinate closely with county government. Such a person could help the county take advantage of new workforce training opportunities as well as helping to insure receipt of all possible benefits of ongoing services. We need to represent our own interests.

Action 1—CVCC Liaison

AEDA will continue to liaise with CVCC Amherst staff on an informal basis to insure it is aware of problems and opportunities to which AEDA and/or County government might respond.

Measurable and Schedule

Completion, Ongoing—No specific objective at this time

Action 2—Workforce Board

AEDA will cause to have appointed a representative to the Region 2000 Workforce Investment Board with the mandate to keep local government and AEDA apprised of WIB activities affecting Amherst County.

Measurable and Schedule

Completion, March 31, 2013 AEDA to secure representative for the WIB who will apprise the County and AEDA of workforce development activities no less than semi-annually.

D. CONDUCT AN EXISTING BUSINESS OUTREACH AND SUPPORT EFFORT

Narrative

Keeping existing businesses, large and small, in the county is an equal priority as that of attracting new businesses. Responding to the needs and opportunities of specific firms, adopting business friendly policies, and communicating the goal of a good county business climate should all be roles of local economic development. These are the things the Authority can do that will help convince businesses to stay and grow in Amherst County. In most years, the great majority of new jobs and investments will come from this existing business base.

For Amherst County, nearly all businesses are small by almost any definition. Thus, the existing business effort is designed to be encompassing enough to assist the complete size range as well as types of firms (service, retail, manufacturing, commercial agriculture, distribution, etc.). To this end, the following should build a foundation, along with other components of this plan, for an even more useful future program.

Action 1—Visitations

AEDA will enhance the current visitation program with more existing business visits to gauge the general environment as well as issues and opportunities of individual

companies. Visited businesses are to represent all sizes and sectors of the local economy. A commitment to respond to assistance requests is required.

Measurable and Schedule

Completion, June 30, 2014 AEDA to visit 3 businesses per month representing all sectors, with 30 businesses having less than 25 full time employees. Reports on visits to be attached to monthly AEDA meeting minutes that go to Board of Supervisors. Accelerated visits to commence in April 2013 and conclude the first cycle in June 2014 with 42 visits. Respond to requests for assistance as necessary and report to monthly meeting of AEDA.

Action 2—Roundtable

Previous visits to larger basic employers indicate a desire for periodic meetings with peers in a “roundtable” setting. Companies want to share information, hear from service organizations, learn of anticipated legislation, etc.

Measurable and Schedule

Completion, December 31, 2013 AEDA to seek partnership with Amherst Chamber of Commerce to conduct “roundtable” event for companies with over 25 full-time employees. Determination on frequency of “roundtables” after first event

Action 3—Small Business Development Center

The regional Small Business Development Center (SBDC) currently located in Lynchburg is scheduled to be phased out by the end of 2013, unless matching funds for a supporting grant can be found. The purpose of the SBDC is to assist start-up and existing small businesses, at no cost, with a variety of business planning, research, marketing, and related activities. If adequate funding is located, CVCC could be the operating entity for the program and use existing community college locations as bases for service delivery. While a part-time presence is all that could be expected, a physical presence of a business counselor from the SBDC would be a “first” for the county.

Measurable and Schedule

Completion, December 31, 2013 AEDA to work with Region 2000, CVCC, Region 2000 communities, Amherst Chamber of Commerce, and the Town of Amherst to identify funding and devise a plan for retaining the SBDC.

Action 4—Sweet Briar Media Marketing

The Sweet Briar College Business Department is working on an initiative to use students, with faculty advice, to generate sales for Amherst area businesses. The idea is to provide increased sales through the use of social media at no up-front cost to a local company. Only after sales are made through Sweet Briar assistance with this “virtual sales model” does a company pay a commission to Sweet Briar. AEDA and the Amherst Chamber of Commerce will be asked to help present this to the business community.

Measurable and Schedule

Completion, Autumn, 2013 AEDA to partner with Amherst Chamber of Commerce and Sweet Briar College to introduce new sales initiative to Amherst businesses when model is developed and tested.

E. MARKETING THE COUNTY AS A PLACE OF OPPORTUNITY FOR NEW BUSINESSES

Narrative

Practically everything the County and AEDA undertake with regard to economic development could be considered marketing in some fashion; but for the purpose of this action/work plan, the tools we develop and the overtures directed to businesses, both inside and outside the county, will be addressed. Aggressive advertising is not recommended as this time as it is costly and the county currently has very little product, publicly or privately owned, for which clear objectives have been established. However, there are things we can do now to enhance the ability of our allies (Region 2000 and the Virginia Economic Development Partnership) in promoting Amherst County and which will help AEDA when working with clients generated locally. These things will also serve as a foundation for more aggressive marketing in the future as we build product inventory and institutional capacity.

Action 1—Development Tools

AEDA will develop 2 primary marketing tools and position itself for a third. First, the economic development web page will be updated adapting to the new “look” and format of the County’s new web site. It will be incorporated into the County’s site, but it also needs to be comprehensive enough to stand alone. This will be done once the County has upgraded its internet system and determined the format, “look,” etc. of the overall new web site. Secondly, a flier highlighting Amelton Commerce Center, basic county data, and the incentive policy will be developed. This is to be printed by computer and suitable for distribution to county businesses and organizations as well as potential clients. Finally, AEDA will reserve a modest amount of funds for partnering in advertising initiatives with Region 2000, the Virginia Economic Development Partnership, area economic developers, the Hollingsworth Companies, and/or for independent targeted marketing.

Measurable and Schedule

Completion, Autumn 2013 Complete flier and have web page either completed or pending completion per County’s web site schedule. Schedule 2013-2014 advertising activities as other organization’s schedules allow or dictate

Action 2—Networking and Marketing Function

Networking with marketing activities sponsored by the Virginia Economic Developers Association, The Virginia Economic Development Partnership, Region 2000, and the Hollingsworth Companies will be pursued to secure recognition of Amherst County. AEDA will participate in at least one marketing function (trade show, marketing trip, familiarization tour, etc.)

Measurable and Schedule

Completion, June 30, 2014 Participate in at least one marketing function (trade show, marketing trip, familiarization tour, etc.). Secure at least 4 visits by outside companies evaluating Amherst County as a possible location.

F. PROGRAM AND ORGANIZATION DEVELOPMENT

Narrative

This action plan is ambitious and demanding, particularly considering that it is to be undertaken by a volunteer board with a part-time consultant in support. However, it is achievable; and AEDA intends to be accountable, reporting on its work program results annually to the Board of Supervisors. Coinciding with the annual report will be an updated action plan for the ensuing year.

With the work undertaken in FY 2013-2014 to serve as a foundation, Amherst County will be in the position to sponsor a much more vigorous effort by the beginning of FY 2014-2015. By that time, the scope of AEDA's activities will increase noticeably. This will be the result of new existing business opportunities to which the Authority must respond, prospect development, incentive administration, other results of this first action plan, and constant unanticipated issues that arise.

Assuming energetic pursuit of these items, a full-time economic developer with an assistant will be necessary. These people will require an equipped office, a reasonable budget, and training to be effective. By continuing to work under the model of staff reporting to the AEDA while coordinating closely with the County Administrator, an arrangement that works well in other communities in Virginia, the 2014-2015 Action Plan can be pursued in a seamless fashion.

Action 1—Annual Report and Next Action Plan

Each year the AEDA will compile an annual report on activities and their results in pursuit of that year's action plan. This report will also itemize actions (action plan) for the ensuing year.

Measurable and Schedule

Completion, June 30 of Each Fiscal Year Report to Board of Supervisors itemizing results of previous year and specifying actions, measurables, and schedules for the ensuing year.

Action 2—Staffing Plan

As AEDA gets into the 2013-2014 fiscal year, it should begin developing a plan for full-time staff and appropriate support. This plan should include job descriptions for a full-time economic developer and assistant working at the direction of the AEDA, an operating budget for 2014-2015 (budget in the range of \$250,000+/-) , and a transition plan for the consultant helping to train new staff while gradually exiting his position.

Measurable and Schedule

Completion, January 2014 Have plan prepared in time for submission to Board of Supervisors consideration in FY 2014-2015 budgeting process. Identify office space sooner if possible.

Action 3—Office Space

Currently there is no designated office space for the AEDA staff. There is no place for business meetings unless conference room space happens to be available in the County office building, files are distributed through several locations, phone and email messages go to the consultant's personal cell phone and computer, and there is no

place where a client or interested citizen could “visit” to discuss economic development matters. AEDA views this as a critical matter.

Measurable and Schedule

Completion, October 31, 2013 County administration and AEDA to find suitable office space and equip same to serve economic development function.

IV. SUMMARY

Cumulatively, actions enumerated for each of the six major components/priorities of the Action Plan indicate an ambitious, demanding year for the AEDA. It will be a year that establishes a solid foundation for a long-term effort by the County with AEDA implementing critical components of the County’s economic development strategy as manifested in the Comprehensive Plan. This will certainly result in a more positive environment for business activity that will create jobs and tax base in the future. The Plan also offers a transition from part-time professional staff to the full-time staff support necessary for the day-to-day sustainability of an aggressive program.

Though the specified actions are realistic, it is again noted that there are invariably unscheduled items that arise which will disrupt this work program. Existing companies needing help with a major opportunity or threatening issue, unanticipated mandates from state or federal governments, natural disasters, and a number of other possibilities can, and probably will, occur to interrupt the schedule.

At the end of the year, AEDA will report to the Board of Supervisors and the citizens of Amherst County. Successes, disappointments, interruptions and their consequences, work program adjustments and other pertinent information will allow an evaluation of the program’s effectiveness (i.e., return on investment). This report will also serve as the basis for the ensuing year’s action plan specifying work on priorities to which the County remains committed as well as new priorities which may have arisen.

Endorsement of this FY 2013-2014 Action Plan by the Board of Supervisors and provision of the financial support required for the AEDA to undertake the specified actions will be a major step for the County. If we all continue to work diligently, it will be a step on a journey eventually resulting in a vigorous economic environment offering more opportunities to our citizens and a stronger tax base necessary for local government services.

Amherst Economic Development Authority

Economic Development Action Plan

March 12, 2013

Components	Action	Responsibility	Schedule
"A" Incentive Program	#1 Information Flier	AEDA	May 31, 2013
	#2 Evaluation	AEDA	Sept 30, 2014
"B" Sites	#1 Transfer Ownership	Bd. Of Supervisors	June 30, 2013
	#2 Amelon Maintenance	AEDA (P) Purchasing Dept (S)	June 30, 2013
	#3 Drainage Ways & Easements	AEDA (P) Eng. Consultant (S) Planning Dept (S) Services Auth (S)	Mar 31, 2014
	#4 Site Feasibility	AEDA (P) Planning Dept (S) Eng. Consultant (S)	Dec 31, 2013
	#5 Feasibility of Acquisition	AEDA	Apr 30, 2014
	#6 Utilities to Rt. 29 Intersections	County via Service Authority	Dec 31, 2013
	#7 Rt. 29 Intersection Development	AEDA	Aug 31, 2013
	#8 Sweet Briar Property Development	Sweet Briar Business Dept	Ongoing
	#9 Flex Space	AEDA Private Sector	May 31, 2014
"C" Workforce	#1 CVCC Liason	AEDA	Ongoing
	#2 Workforce Board	AEDA	Mar 31, 2013
"D" Existing Business	#1 Visitations	AEDA	June 30, 2014
	#2 Roundtable	AEDA (P) Chamber of Commerce (S)	Dec 31, 2013
	#3 Small Business Dev Ctr	Region 2000 (P) Chamber of Commerce (S) AEDA (S)	Dec 31, 2013
	#4 Sweet Briar Media Marketing	Sweet Briar Bus Dept (P) AEDA (S) Chamber of Commerce (S)	Autumn, 2013
"E" Marketing	#1 Development Tools	AEDA	Autumn, 2013
	#2 Networking and Mkt Function	AEDA	June 30, 2014
"F" Program-Organization Dev	#1 Annual Report and Next Action Plan	AEDA	June 30, 2014
	#2 Staffing Plan	AEDA	Jan 2014
	#3 Office Space	County Administration (P) AEDA (S)	Oct 31, 2013
Unanticipated Demands	#1 Help with expansions, business emergencies, client visits, administrative changes, etc	AEDA	Ongoing

(P) Primary

(S) Secondary