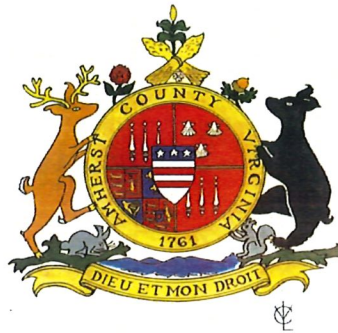


**Board of Supervisors**

Claudia D. Tucker, Chair  
District 2  
L. J. Ayers III, Vice-Chair  
District 3  
David W. Pugh, Jr., Supervisor  
District 4  
Kenneth M. Campbell, Supervisor  
District 1  
Jennifer R. Moore, Supervisor  
District 5



**County Administrator**  
Dean C. Rodgers

**County Attorney**  
Michael W. S. Lockaby

**AMHERST COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS  
And  
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY BOARD  
Joint Meeting**

**MINUTES**

**AGENDA**

July 12, 2018  
Administration Building - 153 Washington Street – Admin Conference Room  
Amherst, Virginia 24521  
Meeting Convened - 7:00 p.m.

- I. Call to Order**
- II. Presentation and Discussion of Business Friendliness Initiatives**
- III. Adjournment**

At a Special Joint Meeting of the Amherst County Board of Supervisors and the Economic Development Authority Board held at the Amherst County Administration building, Amherst, Virginia, thereof on Thursday, the 12<sup>th</sup> day of July, 2018, at 7:00 p.m., the following members were present:

**BOARD OF SUPERVISORS:**

**PRESENT:** Claudia D. Tucker, Chair  
L. J. Ayers, III, Vice-Chair  
David W. Pugh, Jr., Supervisor  
Kenneth M. Campbell, Supervisor  
Jennifer R. Moore, Supervisor

**ABSENT:** None

**STAFF PRESENT:** County Administrator Dean C. Rodgers and  
Deputy County Administrator David R. Proffitt

**ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY BOARD**

**PRESENT:** Calvin Kennon, Jr., Chair

**ABSENT:** Mitch Heishman, Vice-Chair

Edgar Kinnier, Treasurer  
Michael Russell, EDA Board Member  
David Wall, EDA Board Member  
Chad Eby, EDA Board Member  
Daniel Sweeney, EDA Board Member

STAFF PRESENT: EDA Director Victoria Hanson and  
EDA Assistant Director Lori Saunders  
Consultant Lee Cobb  
Planning/Zoning Director Jeremy Bryant

OTHERS PRESENT: Amherst County Chamber of Commerce President Sabrina Kennon

**I. Call to Order**

Chair Tucker called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

**II. Presentation and Discussion of Business Friendliness Initiatives**

EDA Director Victoria Hanson presented a PowerPoint presentation, highlighting short and long term recommendations. These recommendations include County policies and procedures that would improve the business environment related to Planning & Zoning, the Service Authority, the Commissioner of the Revenue, the EDA, the Chamber of Commerce, and the Virginia Department of Transportation. **(See Attachment 1)**

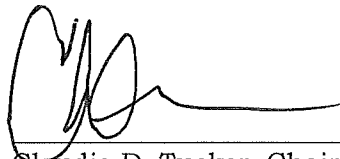
The public was invited to comment and those comments were received by both Boards.

It was the consensus of the Board of Supervisors that the information presented would be digested further and brought back to the next Board of Supervisors' meeting in August 2018 for further discussion.

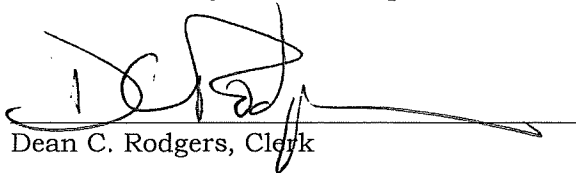
**III. Adjournment**

By motion of Chair Tucker and with the following vote, the Board adjourned at 8:45 p.m.

AYE: Mrs. Tucker, Mr. Ayers, Mr. Pugh, Mr. Campbell and Ms. Moore  
NAY: None  
ABSENT: None



Claudia D. Tucker, Chair  
Amherst County Board of Supervisors



Dean C. Rodgers, Clerk

# **Business Friendliness Recommendations**

Amherst County July 2018

## Short Term Recommendations

1. Planning Commission begin a review process of ordinances and special exceptions (to include reserve drain field requirements and cell towers)
2. Evaluation of water & sewer availability charges
3. Easy access to information (website review, forms, ACSA website and roundtables, assistance at County Administration building entrance, checklists, start-up kits, pre-development meetings, construction and financing options for building water and sewer lines, etc.)
4. Reorganize ACSA Board of Directors to include private sector representation
5. Ongoing customer service training

## Long Term Recommendations

1. Examination of tax structure and incentives
2. ACSA strategic plan for aggressive development and services
3. Marketing Campaign (digital sign, buy local, County news, etc.)
4. Policy instead of ordinances for flexibility in decision making when possible

## County Policies & Ordinances

1. Policy instead of ordinances for flexibility in decision making
2. Customer Service training for frontline personnel
3. County website review for business user friendliness: Information & forms available and easily found, downloadable & fillable PDFs, easy online payments

## Planning & Zoning

1. Planning Commission begin a review process of ordinances that are over-regulatory and make recommendations of modifications to the Board of Supervisors.
2. Review all special exceptions and consider if they should be a by right use
3. More flexible zoning and allow the Planning & Zoning director more leeway to make zoning decisions
4. Reserve drain fields required at 100% when the State only requires 50% reserve. Consider reducing the drain field requirement to match the State.
5. Modify cell phone tower ordinances to encourage improved cell coverage
6. Monthly pre-development meetings with key departments & organizations
7. Configure website to be sure information is clear and easily accessible.

## Service Authority

1. Undertake a complete evaluation of water & sewer availability charges with the objective of making the fee structure uncomplicated and far less costly
2. Publicize the option of calculating availability fees on the calculations of a private sector project engineer rather than using the more rigid Amherst County code requirements. Do this prior to restructuring the code (#1 above.)
3. Reorganize ACSA Board of Directors to include private sector representation. 3 Options: new Board with all private sector appointees, combination public-private sectors appointees, or current public sector Board with non-voting private sector representatives.

4. Charge the newly reorganized ACSA with development of a strategic plan for aggressive development and services initiatives i.e., how to lower availability fees without damaging financial integrity of ACSA
5. ACSA public information initiative with new website and two annual round-table discussions with developers and customers (organization assistance from EDA)
6. Adopt a new policy allowing payment of high availability fees to be stretched over multiple years for major projects
7. Convey a clear, specific policy to builders, contractors, etc. as to the circumstances when County crews will be used to construct public water and sewer lines
8. Grant substantial availability fee reductions for any project using federal, state, or local grants to pay for the extension or replacement of public water & sewer lines
9. Update ACSA administrative office

#### Commissioner of the Revenue

1. Hire a consultant to assess the County tax structure and recommend changes, as well as recommend what local, state, or federal tax programs/designations Amherst County should create or pursue special reduced tax districts or zones that receive grant funds to encourage development
2. Update Information available on County Website & show examples of tax valuations EDA to have key business information in Commissioner's office
3. Commissioner e-mail EDA monthly with new business contact information.
4. EDA include relevant business information in the semi-annual tax mailings to business licensees
5. Update language on business license permit and on website
6. Business license & personal property easily found online & downloadable

#### EDA

1. Industry specific business start up kits
2. Guide/Checklist with a map for permits, projects
3. Provide personal guidance to businesses through permitting/project processes
4. Provide business resource & financing information to small and start up businesses through information at key County locations., including the Commissioner of the Revenue, Treasurer, Planning & Zoning, Inspections, Libraries, Clerk of Courts, etc.
5. EDA provide business information for Commissioner of Revenue's semi-annual mailings to business licensees
6. Hire a consultant to analyze Amherst County's current incentives, tax structure, and fees and recommend new incentives and grants for start-up businesses and existing businesses (may be in conjunction with the tax structure review)
7. Inform business community of County updates and initiatives
8. Offer classes on starting a business (based on demand)

#### Chamber of Commerce


1. Buy local campaign
2. EDA share new business license list with Chamber and coordinate visit to new businesses
3. Chamber work with entities to be included in Greater Lynchburg promotions

4. Digital Sign at Madison Heights entryways for positive news/events and highlighting Amherst County businesses (coordinating with County Public Information Officer)
5. Local business to local business campaign
6. Produce a video that showcases Amherst businesses and run the video at the welcome center, on social media, the County's website, at public meetings, at the high school, etc., for a reasonable fee to the businesses
7. Market that Amherst is a short drive from Lynchburg, Forest, Campbell, etc.

#### County-Wide

1. EDA work with County Departments and Constitutionals on business friendly website information (requires participation with IT)
2. Forms/Permits on website and downloadable with fillable pdf
3. Unify merchant services for lowest credit card processing fee (when updated financial software is purchased and implemented) and have a uniform County credit card fee. Consider eliminating transaction fees.
4. When people enter the County Administration building, there is no person or sign to tell them where to go. Have an employee or trained volunteer at the entrance of the County Administration Building to assist & direct visitors. One option would be to move the information officer to the entrance. A second option would be to have an information kiosk or sign at the entrance.
5. Quarterly meeting of EDA, County Departments, Clerk of Courts, Treasurer, and Commissioner of the Revenue to get a better understanding of each other's departments and procedures regarding business interaction or issues.
6. Market that Amherst is a short drive from Lynchburg

#### VDOT

1. Land use issues commonly require permits and review from VDOT. Often times, the regulations and policies of the Department can be difficult for professionals and citizens alike. County staff is willing to hold a monthly roundtable to help foster a climate of partnership and open communication.
  2. Planning & Zoning liaison who assists business owners with VDOT issues
  3. Discussion with Amherst VDOT representative about willingness to be creative and flexible in approach to projects
- 

# Amherst County Economic Development Business Friendliness Initiative

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July 2018

“Development is like water, it follows the  
path of least resistance.”



The Board of Supervisors requested the EDA & Planning Commission examine the County's reputation for being unfriendly to business and suggest changes to County ordinances, processes, policies or procedures to improve the business environment for both existing and new businesses in Amherst County. The request also asked for proposals that will have the greatest and quickest impact that are fully coordinated with stakeholders and staff and be presented in a final form.

# Goal

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Improve the business environment for existing and new businesses in Amherst County. Perceptions take time to change, but the changes that result from this thorough examination of business friendliness issues should demonstrate to our local, regional, and new businesses that Amherst County is open for business.



# Information Gathering (Jan.-June 2018)

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- Steering Committee of business owners
- One-on-one Business Interviews\* (Developers, Builders, Surveyors, New Business Owners, Current Business Owners, Retail, etc.)
- Business Survey\* (Sent to 150 businesses with 79 responses)
- Interviewed County & Constitutional employees who regularly interact with businesses
- ACSA focused contractor & developer interviews by EDA Consultant Lee Cobb
- Focus Group
- Data from 2016 Economic Development Strategic Plan
- List of business comments from Board of Supervisors 2017 Retreat

\* Businesses have been promised confidentiality to encourage open, honest feedback

# Overview

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- Perceptions are not always reality. Some comments made by businesses are not correct, but as the EDA was asked to examine the County's reputation - which includes perceptions (whether they are correct or incorrect) - these types of comments are included.
- There were many positive comments about Amherst County, staff, & Departments.
- Many businesses had no issues to report, "Amherst County has been good to us!"
- Established businesses sometimes brought up issues that had already been resolved (submitting permits online, sign ordinances that have been updated, etc.).
- Despite asking for detailed comments, some respondents made broad comments that could not be addressed, i.e. "Amherst County doesn't want business."

# Overview Continued

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- Reducing development obstacles helps stimulate new development, however, Fairfax County is a highly regulated County but it is also an economic engine in Virginia. Conversely, Floyd County is a locality without zoning regulations and is less of an economic engine for the State. Regulations should be minimal when possible, but should also reflect a locality's values and desire for outcomes (Beautification of Business 29 for example.) Regulations should be carefully reviewed for need and usefulness and removed if they don't comply with the locality's goals and objectives.

# Overview Continued

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- Each affected County Department director or Constitutional officer was met with individually, or by phone if they couldn't meet in person, to discuss the results of the Business Friendliness initiative. It was important to meet face-to-face to explain the initiative, the information gathering process, business comments, and discuss recommendations.
- Many department heads reported being understaffed, which affects customer service.

# Primary Categories

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- County Code/Ordinances/Policy
- Taxes & Incentives
- Access to Information
- Sewer & Water
- VDOT

## Top 7 Business Friendly Strategies in Order of Importance to Businesses (survey results)

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1. Changes in County Code/Ordinances
2. Tax breaks, grants or incentives
3. A step-by-step manual on how to start a business
4. A Facilitator who would assist you through the process
5. Monthly pre-development meeting with key County departments
6. Additional Financing resources
7. Change in Tax Structure

## County-Wide Comments

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- “Understanding that businesses are dependent on growth in the county. The governing bodies have had anti-growth thoughts for too long, and the small businesses have to look for work outside of the county. We like the beauty of Amherst County, but if it's not growing, it's dying. Our technology with cell phones and internet has led to a depressed real estate market and led to a loss in population in the county.”
- “I would like to thank the Board of Supervisors for recognizing a problem. Now let's work together and fix this so we can all benefit.”
- The Amherst County website is not user friendly.
- “You have got to do something to improve Amherst County's perception as a backward locality.”
- “Too much red tape”

- “County government needs to stand up for businesses and not cower when one person in the county whines about something.”
- “They acted as if I was a bother when I went in”
- “The fear of growth in the county has hurt our building industry hard! That needs to change.”
- Need better internet & cell coverage “Cell phone and internet towers should be allowed in all areas!”
- “I feel they are ready to say no to anything new. They should take time to review options & encourage new businesses to relocate to Amherst.”
- “A group of decision makers that will make decisions for the whole county, not just the squeaky wheel! Things that are good for the county today & in the future!”
- “The clerk was very standoffish & not helpful. Like..you should know this already.”
- “We are getting left behind. Cell towers and internet should be going up all over the county along with growing the sewer and water line system.”



# County Policies & Ordinances

(Rated 3.3 on a 5 point scale)

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Comments:

- “There are so many old guidelines that it takes too much time for the average person to make things happen - even with help from the county.”
- “They just need to be clear and easy to understand. Very objective.”
- “Appears to take longer than normal to get issues heard or resolved.”

Recommendations:

1. Policy instead of ordinances for flexibility in decision making
2. County website review for business user friendliness: Information & forms available and easily found, downloadable & fillable PDFs.

# Planning & Zoning

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Comments:

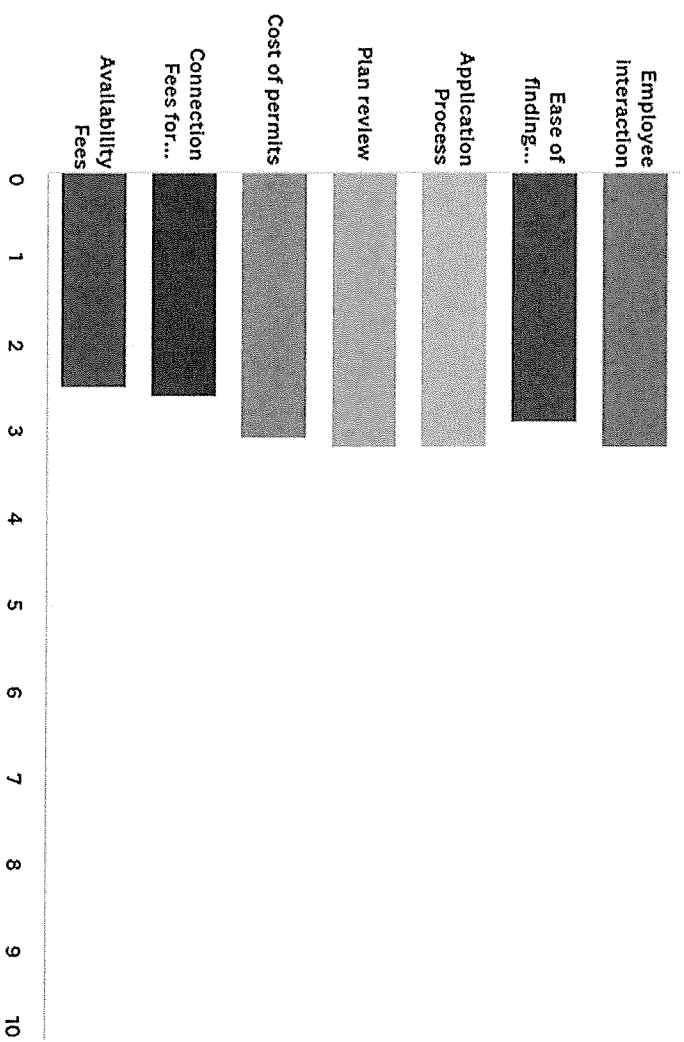
- “More leeway for Zoning Director in decision making.”
- “Make the site plan approval process smooth and as fast as possible. I think the staff works very hard to work things out but can’t deliver due to all unnecessary guidelines that could use an update.”
- “I was directed to the Health Department, they said they weren’t responsible for what I was doing, then directed somewhere else. Still not 100% sure I have everything.”
- “100% reserves for the septic systems is a horrible concept and is not done in any of our neighboring counties!! This requires larger lot size.”

# Recommendations: Planning & Zoning

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1. Planning Commission begin a review process of ordinances that are over-regulatory and make recommendations of modifications to the Board of Supervisors
2. Review all special exceptions and consider if they should be a by right use
3. More flexible zoning and allow the Planning & Zoning director more leeway to make zoning decisions
4. Reserve drainfields required at 100% when the State only requires 50% reserve. Consider reducing the drainfield requirement to match the State.
5. Modify cell phone tower ordinances to encourage improved cell coverage
6. Monthly pre-development meetings with key departments & organizations
7. Configure website to be sure information is clear and easily accessible

Q11 Rate how customer-friendly Amherst County Service Authority (water & sewer) is on a scale of 1 to 5 where 5 is the highest.



# Amherst County Service Authority (ACSA)

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## Comments:

- Complicated fee structure for businesses
- Tap/connection Fees are too high
- “Availability fees should be eliminated to encourage new construction. The average age of the housing and commercial building stock in the County is probably 50 years old, dating to the building boom of the 60s.”
- “The availability fees and connection fees should be waived if the developer is willing to run the lines for the county. You are stunting the growth or increasing the lines along side potential income for the county through monthly fees and how it affects real estate value.”

- “Lack of foresight with extension projects for future development” (water line was near a new development but ACSA wouldn’t extend the line, only to extend it a few years later - loss of customers and availability for project.)
- “Working with everyone is awesome except the water department. VERY DIFFICULT”
- “Archaic contractor selection for new work- must be on an Approved Contractor list.”
- “Very difficult to work with”
- “Can’t find sewer lines online.”
- Bills don’t get to customers in time to pay the bill on time.
- Outdated water lines

# Recommendations: Service Authority

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1. Undertake a complete evaluation of water & sewer availability charges with the objective of making the fee structure uncomplicated and less costly.
2. Publicize the option of calculating availability fees on the calculations of a private sector project engineer rather than using the more commonly understood code requirements. Do this prior to restructuring the code (#1 above.)
3. Reorganize ACSA Board of Directors to include private sector representation.  
3 Options: new Board with all private sector appointees, combination public-private sectors appointees, or current public sector Board with non-voting private sector representatives.
4. Charge the newly reorganized ACSA with development of a strategic plan for aggressive development and services initiatives i.e., how to lower availability

# Recommendations Continued

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5. ACSA public information initiative with new website and two annual round-table discussions with developers and customers (organization assistance from EDA)
6. Adopt a new policy allowing payment of high availability fees to be stretched over multiple years for major projects
7. Convey a clear, specific policy to builders, contractors, etc., as to the circumstances when County crews will be used to construct public water and sewer lines
8. Grant substantial availability fee reductions for any project using federal, state, or local grants to pay for the extension or replacement of public water & sewer lines
9. Update ACSA administrative office building



# Commissioner of the Revenue

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Comments:

- “Fees and taxes too high”
- Merchants Capital tax “an inventory inhibitor”
- Tax on business equipment - “No depreciation for eternity”
- “Create a flat rate tax for small 1 person businesses”
- “Treasurer should take credit cards with lower added fees”
- “Real Estate Assessments are unrealistic”
- “Business license tax on independent contractors unfair - Gross receipts vs. income” (pay on the full \$30,000 job = \$27,000 in parts and \$3,000 in labor)
- “Tax car dealers in a manner in which they pay a tax to operate and is a fair tax based on other categories of business with similar net receipts”

## Recommendations: Comm. of the Revenue

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1. Hire a consultant to assess the County tax structure and recommend changes, as well as recommend what local, state, or federal tax programs/designations Amherst County should create or pursue, special reduced tax districts or zones that receive grant funds to encourage development
2. Update Information available on County Website & show examples of tax valuations
3. EDA to have key business information in Commissioner's office
4. Commissioner e-mail EDA monthly with new business contact information.
5. EDA include relevant business information in the semi-annual tax mailings to business licensees

# Business License (Comm. of Revenue)

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Comments:

- Simplify business license process
- “We usually get an extension on our taxes but the business license requires a copy of a page from the taxes so I can’t get my license until fall yet they are due in May”

Recommendation:

1. Update language on business license permit and on website
2. Business license & personal property easily found online & downloadable

# EDA Relevant Comments

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- Need for guide/checklist for permitting, zoning, projects
- Lack of resources for small and startup businesses
- More financing options
- Easier to access incentives
- A person to help guide businesses through County processes
- Classes on starting a business
- Real estate tax credits
- Tax Incentives and other means of reducing the cost of owning/operating businesses in Amherst County. "Any break helps. I've never understood why Brockman Park never took off. Maybe good startup incentives to come here would help."

# Recommendations: EDA

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1. Industry specific business start up kits
2. Guide/Checklist with a map for permits, projects
3. Provide personal guidance to businesses through permitting/project processes
4. Provide business resource & financing information to small and start up businesses through information at key County locations, including the Commissioner of the Revenue, Treasurer, Planning & Zoning, Inspections, Libraries, Clerk of Courts, etc.
5. EDA provide business information for Commissioner of Revenue's semi-annual mailings to business licensees

# Recommendations Continued

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6. Hire a consultant to analyze Amherst County's current incentives, tax structure, and fees and recommend new incentives and grants for start-up businesses and existing businesses (may be in conjunction with the tax structure review)
7. Inform business community of County updates and initiatives
8. Offer classes on starting a business (based on demand)

# Chamber of Commerce

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Comments:

- “Chamber of Commerce is top notch!”
- Lack of advertising and marketing support
- Not being included in Greater Lynchburg promotions
- Not visiting new businesses and welcoming them to Amherst County
- “Advertising is one of the highest annual expenses a company faces”
- Perception that Amherst/Madison Heights is a long way away from Lynchburg & Forest

# Recommendations: Chamber of Commerce

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1. Buy local campaign
2. EDA share new business license list with Chamber and coordinate visits to new businesses
3. Chamber work with entities to be included in Greater Lynchburg promotions
4. Digital Sign at Madison Heights entryways for positive news/events and highlighting Amherst County businesses (coordinating with County Public Information Officer)
5. Local business to local business campaign
6. Produce a video that showcases Amherst businesses and run the video at the welcome center, on social media, the County's website, at public meetings, at the high school, etc., for a reasonable fee to the businesses
7. Market that Amherst is a short drive from Lynchburg, Forest, Campbell, etc.



# **Business Name Registration (Clerk of Courts)**

## **Comments:**

- “Need to convert to an online system”
- “Staff is rude”
- Hard to find information online
- Businesses are served by the same staff as court cases and there is a lot of discord stemming from the court cases

## **Recommendations**

1. Information & forms available online & easily found on the County website.
2. Customer service training for personnel
3. Partition a new office for business name registration, marriage licenses, wills

# Countywide Recommendations

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1. EDA work with County Departments and Constitutionals on business friendly website information (in cooperation with IT)
2. Forms/Permits on website and downloadable with fillable pdf
3. Unify merchant services for lowest credit card processing fee (when updated financial software is purchased and implemented) and a uniform County credit card fee. Consider eliminating transaction fees.
4. When people enter the County Administration building, there is no person or sign to direct them. Have an employee or trained volunteer at the entrance of the County Administration Building to assist & direct visitors. One option would be to move the information officer to the entrance. A second option would be to have an information kiosk or sign at the entrance.

# Countywide Recommendations Continued

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5. Regular meetings of EDA, County Departments, Clerk of Courts, Treasurer, Health Department, VDOT and Commissioner of the Revenue to get a better understanding of each other's departments and procedures regarding business interaction or issues
6. Customer Service training for frontline personnel "We are excited you want to do business in Amherst County!"
7. Market that Amherst is a short drive from Lynchburg

# Virginia Dept. of Transportation (VDOT)

**Rated 3 out of 5 (one of the lowest ratings in the survey)**

Comments:

- “VDOT issues kill projects”
- “Cumbersome, expensive, demanding”
- “Incredibly slow and over regulating. They often stand in the way of new businesses making progress.”
- “Amherst VDOT representative more strict than other localities”
- “Inflexible. Imposing rules applicable to northern Virginia to rural Amherst County. Ride around and look at vacant properties along Rt 29 in Madison Heights. Most cannot afford commercial entrances so they remain vacant”
- Doesn't return calls or respond to general public

## Comments Continued

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- “Hard to get a response to plan submittals and no willingness to find a way to move forward as opposed to finding all of the reasons to deny approval”
- “They don't mind talking with you but takes forever for anything to be done and they spend a lot of their time sending you to someone else”
- “Awful to deal with. The paperwork is crazy!”
- “VDOT employees changed over and over again during a housing development, there was never consistency from one employee to the next. We had to make constant changes because the next employee would give us new requirements. The driveway entrance permit process is ridiculous. The engineers will come out to inspect and look at it from the car and not get out to talk to you so you don't know if it met their requirements or not.”

## Recommendations: VDOT

---

1. Land use issues commonly require permits and review from VDOT. Often times, the regulations and policies of the Department can be difficult for professionals and citizens alike. County staff is willing to hold a monthly roundtable to help foster a climate of partnership and open communication.
2. Planning & Zoning liaison who assists business owners with VDOT issues
3. Discussion with Amherst VDOT representative about willingness to be creative and flexible in approach to projects

# Short Term County Recommendations

---

- Planning Commission begin a review process of ordinances and special exceptions (to include reserve drain field requirements and cell towers)
- Evaluation of water & sewer availability charges
- Easy access to information (website review, forms, ACSA website and roundtables, assistance at County Administration building entrance, checklists, start-up kits, pre-development meetings, construction and financing options for building water and sewer lines, etc.)
- Reorganize ACSA Board of Directors to include private sector representation
- Ongoing customer service training

# Long Term County Recommendations

---

- Examination of tax structure and incentives
- ACSA strategic plan for aggressive development and services
- Marketing Campaign (digital sign, buy local, County news, etc.)
- Policy instead of ordinances for flexibility in decision making when possible





## Questions or Comments?

Victoria Hanson

Executive Director, Economic Development Authority of Amherst County

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434.260.4497 (Cell)

[www.AmherstVAbusiness.com](http://www.AmherstVAbusiness.com)