

# Edge District moves forward with branding new entertainment destination

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July 13, 2020



Shoofly Dairy Bar would be another business located in the district. (WYDaily/File Photo)

A new branding plan to market “The Edge District” in the Historic Triangle is moving forward at full-force, despite challenges of the coronavirus pandemic.

The Edge District is a new marketing scheme that will create a branded-area for businesses along Second Street, Merrimac Trail Capitol Landing Road and the 143 Corridor. It runs along the edge of the three localities — James City County, Williamsburg and York County — and is home to a number of food and entertainment businesses.

The project is heading toward a full launch in July and despite some of the recent challenges and those involved still expect a summer opening.

“I would say first and foremost, the pandemic makes the project even more important to that district,” said Stephanie Heinatz, a partner with Consociate Media. “Because as we continue to come out of the different phases and practice social distancing, it’s more important than ever to have a cohesive message for the area.”

Consociate Media is a subcontractor for the project alongside the primary contractor, Draper Aden Associate, a civil engineering firm.

The project funding has remained the same despite any economic impacts from the pandemic, said Jim Noel, director of the Economic Development Authority for York County. Each locality had previously committed \$2,000 to the project, which will be used once the marketing campaign is launched.

The district also had been awarded a \$600,000 Brownfields Grant from the Environmental Protection Agency which is funding the contractors involved on the project.

“It’s an important commercial quarter for all three localities,” Noel said. “We want to promote that and the whole intent of branding it as the Edge District is to give it an identity that we could market to increase attraction.”

Heinatz said the logo design has been drafted and plans to be presented to business owners this week. A website and social media campaign will also be constructed to present the district’s brand.

Heinatz said the pandemic did pose some challenges for the marketing plans. For example, the photography and video aspects of marketing had to be delayed because many of the businesses were shut down throughout the spring.

“We had to wait because businesses were closed and the way businesses are operating right now is very different with the distancing and masks,” she said. “And we want to get images that support whatever the normal is that we want to get back to.”

The current situation of the pandemic also limits what kind of launch event The Edge District can have. Heinatz said originally the goal was to have a big event with lots of people celebrating but those plans have to be altered because of health concerns.

There isn’t yet a set plan for how the launch will be celebrated.

One challenge the project also had ended up being a moment of inspiration. Instead of holding an in-person focus group for business owners, project leaders hosted a virtual group in which they were able to hear first-hand how businesses in the area had to be creative and band together during the economically difficult time.

“When we did the focus group, people talked about how they wanted to be innovative and push the envelope while still being respectful of traditions in the area,” Heinatz said. “So that’s what they said, but then we saw they were actually living those things and working together to collaborate.”

The goal of the Edge District is to create an entertainment destination for businesses, but during the time of a pandemic that goal has become more important than ever. The new branding could help businesses thrive economically.

“Before the pandemic hit, the business in the Edge District was strong,” she said. “But now they have the opportunity to come out of a crisis and communicate as a collective group. Multiple voices is stronger than one and I think having this project in play before the pandemic will leave this district even stronger moving forward.”

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