

COUNTY OF YORK

MEMORANDUM

DATE: July 29, 2024

TO: York County Board of Supervisors

FROM: Mark L. Bellamy, Jr., County Administrator 

SUBJECT: Strategic Priorities Quarterly Report – Department of Economic and Tourism Development

The Strategic Priorities adopted by the Board provide clear direction to shared attainable goals, establish a common understanding among managers and teams, and provide a straightforward approach to future challenges. As stated in the previous memorandum from January 12, 2024, I want to share the projects, related to your priorities, that the Department of Economic and Tourism Development (ETD) has completed and those they continue to work on.

Exemplary Public Safety

- **Disaster Preparedness Webpage for Local Businesses:** ETD created a new disaster and crisis planning page on our website that is designed to equip existing County businesses with the knowledge, tools, and resources they need to face uncertainty head-on, and respond more effectively if disaster strikes. The webpage is actively maintained and updated as needed. www.yesyorkecounty.com/4183/disaster-planning-resources
- **ETD Emergency Ops Plan:** Staff reviewed and updated the Departmental Emergency Operation Plan so staff can efficiently and effectively prepare and respond to natural disasters.

Excellent Educational Opportunities

- **Freight Shed:** The Freight Shed is utilized multiple times each year as an educational space during community events at the waterfront. The venue provides the perfect layout to set up special exhibits and presentations for visitors during featured Market Days and historical events. Recent topics include aquaculture and workboats, lifesaving procedures, and zoological facts. The Freight Shed also hosts employee training sessions, the benefits enrollment fair, and many other internal workshops and meetings throughout the year.
- **Local Job Fairs:** Staff participated in Grafton High School's job fair to educate students about the current job postings ETD has available and participated in the York County Human Resources Department Job Fair.
- **Student Engagement:**

- York County School Division (YCSD) Pitch Night: Staff represented the department at YCSD's annual Pitch Night where they listened to and voted for the best sales pitches on innovative entrepreneurial ideas.
- Mock Interviews: Staff conducted mock interviews as part of an EngagedIN YCSD project. The idea is to help students improve their interview skills by providing practice and constructive feedback.
- York County Youth Commission: ETD hosted Youth Commissioners that assisted with kids' crafts and other activities during nine Yorktown Market Days events throughout the 2023-2024 school year teaching them skills in communication and public engagement.
- Events: ETD included four students from York High School as members of the "Green Team" to help promote recycling at Riverwalk Landing.

Value-Driven Economic Development

- York County Economic Development Authority (EDA) Grants: Staff recently reviewed and proposed changes and additions to existing grant programs, which were approved by the EDA. These changes will potentially provide more funding and easier access for existing businesses seeking financial assistance.
- Business Recruitment and Retention: Recently, our Economic Development Specialist obtained Business Recruitment and Expansion certification. This gives staff expanded tools and a broader knowledge base for recruiting and retaining businesses in York County. Additionally, staff has been active in the Hampton Roads Alliance business retention and expansion group which leverages regional expertise and insight to better serve York County businesses.
- While nearly 50% of the County's total land area is unable to be developed, York County continued to see new development take place in locations such as Busch Industrial Park. In FY24, construction was completed on a new 20,000-square-foot flex space on Stafford Court. This space is online and available for occupancy. Southport Holdings continues to develop property it owns and subsequent buildings are slated for construction based upon market demand.
- Backfill of vacant retail space in the County continues to be an area of focus. The Edge District, specifically the James-York Plaza Shopping Center, experienced a boost on the retail side with several new business openings and expansions including Dominion Dogs, The Swirl, Parker & Peony Boutique, Colonial Iron Gym, Catalillies Play Café, Williamsburg Floral, and Column 15. In the southern portion of the County, the former Dress Barn space in the Village Square Shopping Center was backfilled by Addicted to Golf.
- The former Iceplex facility in Kiln Creek was acquired and is under new ownership as Chilled Ponds Ice Sports Complex at Yorktown. The facility underwent a \$2 million renovation to upgrade and modernize to be better positioned to operate in

partnership with their Chesapeake facility in attracting regional ice hockey tournaments. Chilled Ponds also worked with York County Parks & Recreation to offer free public skating sessions to York County residents.

- York County Restaurant Week: ETD hosted its inaugural York County Restaurant Week from February 26 to March 3, 2024. Staff recruited 18 restaurants to participate and offer specials specific to the week. This first year was a success, reporting a heavy patron turnout and increased sales for the participating restaurants. (www.visitryorktown.org/767/York-County-Restaurant-Week)
- Secure and Enhance Land: Staff is forging ahead with the effort of securing and enhancing commercial land with the potential for long-term economic-based expansion. Although the Beale's project has experienced delays, the developer is nearing an agreement with a tenant that will operate the facility as a coastal-themed brewpub. At the Kings Creek Commerce Center, site plans have been submitted by Dominion Energy to move forward with the proposed solar farm, and staff is engaging with various interested parties on the remainder of the property with one prospect in final negotiations.
- Promote Tourism Activities: Staff continues to highlight tourism activities in Yorktown and the Historic Triangle for the benefit of residents, businesses and visitors. The County continues to invest in our expanded shoulder-season events to enhance year-round visitation. Staff is planning VA250 related anniversary events to drive overnight stays and continues to leverage sponsorship opportunities associated with Yorktown Market Days, VA250, and grants.
- Expanded Visitor Programming: Staff continues to collaborate with other departments and organizations to expand educational and entertainment programming at major County focal points, such as the Yorktown Waterfront and Riverwalk Landing; Vintage Market/Car Show on Main Street, Christmas Market on Main, and An Enchanted Evening on Main Street in Historic Yorktown; and the Juneteenth Celebration and York County Vintage Market at the McReynolds Athletic Complex. There is an ongoing effort by staff to identify opportunities for event expansions or additions, like the Pirate Invasion and Maritime Market moving to two-day events, the addition of the Yorktown Work Boat Races, and various York County VA250 events. www.visitryorktown.org/737/Virginia250-Celebration
- National Park Service and York County Collaboration: Staff meets monthly with representatives from the National Park Service as part of ongoing collaboration to revitalize Historic Main Street to not only reestablish the location as a tourism draw, but also as an economic driver.
- Riverwalk Landing Piers Utilization: The Riverwalk Landing Piers has seen an increase in utilization. Cruise ship visitation revenue continues to increase through additional services provided and a new priority docking agreement with American Cruise Lines, that outlines even more Yorktown dockings. The piers also serve as a major attraction and will continue to draw visitors to our home-ported tall ship, the pier-centric Yorktown Work Boat Races, and now, Coastal Seaplanes.

- Dockmaster Building: Plans for the new Dockmaster Building are in final stages with construction slated to begin in September 2024. Approved by the Board of Supervisors at their April 16, 2024 meeting, this facility will replace the existing dilapidated structure and feature new ADA-accessible restrooms and a Visitor Center. This new Visitor Center will be the epicenter of guest services at the Yorktown Waterfront and will also represent a new opportunity for revenue generation through enhanced retail offerings and ticket sales.

Maximize Outstanding Communications and Customer Service

- Business Communications: Newly launched business communication pieces across various formats give the same information at least three times and in at least three media types. This ensures that local operators will be exposed to key messages and increase their recall and engagement with opportunities and updates. The new publications are complementary to our general monthly York County ETD e-newsletter and include:
 - Economic Development Infographics created to educate the community on the importance and benefits of economic development.
 - Print Magazine (with digital Flipbook): New in 2024, ETD is producing a “*It’s Your Business*” printed magazine to all commercial businesses in the County.
 - Real Estate Development E-newsletter: New in 2024, this quarterly email is created and sent exclusively to the region’s commercial real estate and development community. Relationships and partnerships with local brokers and developers are an essential part of economic development.
 - Buy Local E-newsletter: New in 2024, ETD is producing a quarterly e-newsletter to encourage and incentivize the community to patronize local business. The York County community has supported “buy local” and ETD continues to develop *Keep It In The County* campaigns to further promote this important initiative.
- Local Business Marketing Video Production
 - Small Business Appreciation Video: In honor of Small Business Week 2023, ETD produced a short video to thank our local business owners for choosing York County and for the many benefits they provide to the community. This video was updated and also used for the 2024 Campaign. <https://bit.ly/SmallBusinessWeek2024>
 - Buy Local Video Series: In June 2024, ETD produced two short videos highlighting testimonials from local business owners on why you should shop local. These pieces will be heavily promoted each November for Buy Local Month. <https://bit.ly/BuyLocal2024>
- ETD Website Relaunch: During the summer of 2023, the ETD team worked collaboratively to review all pages of existing content on the Economic Development website. The information was updated and then migrated over to the new ETD portal, within the framework of the larger County website. The overall design was updated to match other recently revamped marketing materials. This

also allowed the navigation to be simplified, making it easier for visitors to quickly find the information they need. www.yesyorcounty.com

- **Ribbon Cuttings:** Since January 1, 2024, staff has facilitated 12 ribbon cuttings for new businesses and businesses celebrating grand re-openings. These events not only celebrate York County business but also provide a marketing platform and additional exposure to potential customers.
- **Development Facilitator Position:** Leadership from the Department of Economic and Tourism Development, Planning and Development Services, and the Commissioner of the Revenue identified a need to be more proactive and visible in supporting our businesses and advocating for more business-friendly codes, processes, and practices. To improve the County's business environment and meet this need, staff members from these areas convene monthly to facilitate customer service coordination in assisting prospective and existing businesses as they navigate starting a new business and/or expansion.
- **Entrepreneurship Engagement:** The department continues to promote entrepreneurship in the County through various initiatives such as the Small Business and Workforce Development Summit hosted at the Yorktown Freight Shed in May 2024. York County also takes a lead role in the Peninsula Home-Based Business Network, which is a regional initiative designed to support and provide resources for home-based businesses. Additionally, staff is key in supporting the Launchpad: Greater Williamsburg Business Incubator, which creates research and technology transfer opportunities, and develops infrastructure and skills that support high value-added work opportunities in the Commonwealth.
- **ETD manages a conservative advertising budget of designated marketing dollars to maximize exposure in paid media including radio, print, digital, and regional visitor publications. The exposure and brand awareness enhances the Visit Yorktown campaign and ensures that York County is top of mind for prospective visitors. Visitor services collateral is distributed statewide, locally, and at events, including maps, brochures, visitor guides, and event calendars, utilizing in-house and staff expertise. The materials have been streamlined, updated, and enhanced on all marketing pieces.**
- **Consistent Marketing Messaging:** Engaging, lighthearted, with a playful yet professional tone, is the goal to convey consistent promotional messaging across various mediums. Utilizing print, e-newsletters, video, and social media, the content focuses on announcing events, sharing stories, providing important updates, and promoting Historic Yorktown as part of the Greater Williamsburg destination.
- **Regional Marketing Cooperation:** Staff continues to actively participate in Visit Williamsburg marketing programs and leverage marketing and branding opportunities including media days, hosting social media influencers, and attending destination networking events. They also represent Yorktown at Virginia Tourism Corporation (VTC) sponsored conferences that offer educational seminars and the rollout of the latest grant and marketing campaigns.

- Collaborate on Countywide Messaging: Staff coordinates with other departments and organizations to cross-promote events and release important information by tagging, sharing, and using hashtags on social media; sending joint press releases; posting on visityorktown.org; and providing marketing collateral at York County/Visit Yorktown booths.
- Customer Service: Staff provides outstanding customer service with many points of contact including call-in requests and questions, the Yorktown Freight Shed, Riverwalk Landing Piers, cruise ship information tent, community events at the Yorktown Waterfront, Yorktown Trolley service, and programs such as Waterfront Ambassadors, event support staff, and parking attendants. This outstanding customer service is reinforced through constant feedback to departmental employees and mandatory customer service training. It is rewarded by positive visitor and resident feedback received via surveys, emails, and social media.
- Presentations and Updates: Staff provides updates on all departmental activities and programs to the York County Board of Supervisors and Economic Development Authority several times each year.

Environmental Stewardship with a Focus on Resiliency

- Virginia Clean Marina Program: The Riverwalk Landing Piers continues to participate in the Virginia Clean Marina Program which focuses on improving water quality and habitat for living resources. This commitment to the environment helps create an aesthetically pleasing facility that attracts responsible boaters who respect and follow good boating practices.
- Virginia Green Chapter: ETD recently announced a new partnership with Virginia Green Travel. Staff established an Eco-Friendly/VAGreen web page that lists businesses' current sustainability practices in York County as a way to encourage "green" tourism. As a Chapter member, the department recruits businesses and encourages them to embrace environmentally friendly practices. www.visityorktown.org/769/Virginia-Green

Quality Technology Investments

- Track the Trolley: Staff continues to leverage the investment in the *ETA Spot* app to provide riders with area information, service bulletins, estimated times of arrival and real-time tracking of the Yorktown Trolley on their mobile device.
- Tourism Website Premium Package Upgrade: ETD is investing in modernizing the design of the visityorktown.org website. The updated site is expected to launch in August 2024 and will feature a variety of tools and platforms designed to make the user experience better and increase staff efficiency and productivity. www.visityorktown.org