

Livable Roanoke Valley

Executive Summary Infrastructure Meeting

DRAFT

Background

The Partnership for a Livable Roanoke Valley is undertaking a coordinated, regional planning process to promote economic opportunity and quality of life in the Roanoke Valley. Central to the partnership is identifying how local governments, businesses, and nonprofits can bring together their separate efforts to pursue a common vision. Over 60 community leaders from our region have dedicated time towards achieving this overarching goal and we are now ready to develop integrated strategies to ensure our success. To develop these strategies, we are convening a series of workshops in areas of economic development, workforce, health, and vibrant communities.

In the area of economic development, we have identified three areas of strategic focus:

- Innovation through Higher Education
- Cultivate and Market Outdoor Recreation and Amenities
- Strategic Investments in Regional Infrastructure

On Wednesday, August 14th, a small group of Economic Development experts met to help us better understand the drivers and needs regarding “*Strategic Investments in Regional Infrastructure*”.

Participating in the process were:

- Beth Doughty, Roanoke Regional Partnership
- Dan Motley, Norfolk Southern Corporation
- Michael McElvoy, Western Virginia Water Authority
- Wayne Bowers, City of Roanoke Economic Development
- Melinda Payne, City of Salem Economic Development
- J. Smolak, Appalachian Power Company
- Dana Martin, formerly with Commonwealth Transportation Board
- Wayne Strickland, RVARC
- Jake Gilmer, RVARC

The goal for our discussion was to determine how “*we will make strategic public/private investments in regional infrastructure that provide competitive advantages in attracting businesses. Regional infrastructure investment decisions will be made to obtain the greatest return on investment*”, which is the intent of this area of focus.

Executive Summary

The discussion revolved around what businesses are looking for; what we have in place; what we need; and what would give us a competitive advantage. The top opportunities and areas of focus that were identified by the group were Buildings/Sites, Fiber and enhanced transportation.

#1 - Suitable Sites and Real Estate

This was identified as a core need. Without appropriate sites and real estate to offer, we will continue to lose potential prospects. Particularly in demand and in short supply are:

- Modern manufacturing facilities (30' ceilings, 100,000-300,00 sq. ft., under 10 years old)
- Office/business sites that are easily accessible by workers; have adequate parking; are in a business campus environment; and are close to amenities.

Of course all of these sites would also have to have appropriate water and sewer capacity, as well as the energy capacity and reliability to support these kinds of needs.

Because there is relatively little inventory that fits that criteria now in the region, the localities have agreed to form the Western Virginia Industrial Facilities Authority to address this issue. The Authority would include Roanoke, Botetourt, Franklin and Montgomery counties, along with Vinton, Salem and Roanoke. Together, the localities would work to identify and create 100-plus acre industrial parks to bring in larger business.

Getting this Authority up and running quickly and efficiently is a priority. Without real estate that is readily available and in move-in condition, we will not be able to attract business.

#2 - High capacity fiber available across the region in business-critical areas

It is critical in today's world to have available the communications capacity and speed required by and expected from both local business as well as those we want to attract. Currently we have a patchwork system owned by different entities, and there are gaps in coverage and a lack of consistency. There is a task force currently headed by William Fralin who is driving this initiative. ***This also needs to be a priority.***

#3 – Enhanced transportation options

This is a broad category that includes everything from implementation of the Intermodal facility, acceleration of I-73, expanded, reliable air service and rail access. These are more complicated issues because the decision authority is often not made in our jurisdiction. Nonetheless, they are issues that need to be championed by key stakeholders at a regional level.

Most Critical for Success

While the areas noted above are those that are critical to be competitive in attracting business to our region, our success in accomplishing these critical priorities, both now and in the future, is dependent upon strong, visionary leadership from both the private and public sectors. Many of the leaders that have led the charge in the past are either no longer here or will be retiring soon. We must have a plan to develop those future leaders now. There needs to be a transference of critical history; an awareness of how to get things done; a vision of how things could be; a resilience and strong backbone; and a personal passion and commitment to step into that role. We cannot wait to do this. It is suggested that perhaps the Business Council be approached about taking on that role along with other key stakeholders, to develop, mentor and support future leaders.