



# Central Shenandoah Planning District Commission Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy

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Prepared for:

Central Shenandoah Planning  
District Commission  
112 MacTanly Place  
Staunton, VA 24401

## WHAT IS A COMPREHENSIVE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY ?

A CEDS is a key component in establishing and maintaining a robust, diverse economic ecosystem. The CEDS provides a platform for individuals, organizations, local governments, institutes of learning, and private industry to engage in a meaningful conversation about how local strengths can be leveraged to improve overall quality of life and how barriers can be overcome to achieve goals. Establishing regional economic development goals through an intensive planning process is not only important in terms of setting roles and responsibilities among stakeholders, completing an EDA-approved CEDS unlocks federal and state funding sources that are invaluable to localities who may not otherwise have access to capital.<sup>1</sup>

## ABOUT THE CENTRAL SHENANDOAH PLANNING DISTRICT COMMISSION

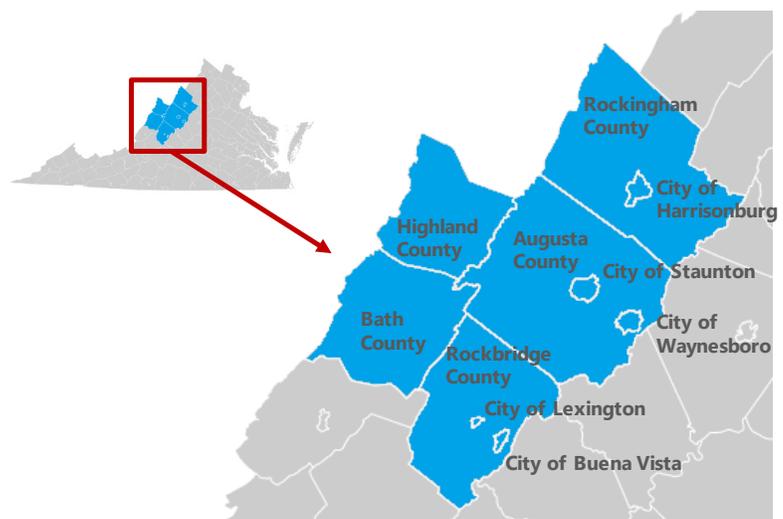
### Who we are

The Central Shenandoah Planning District Commission (CSPDC) is comprised of Rockingham County, City of Harrisonburg, Highland County, Augusta County, City of Staunton, City of Waynesboro, Bath County, Rockbridge County, City of Lexington, and City of Buena Vista and 11 incorporated towns.

The CSPDC is a designated Economic Development District (EDD) under a program administered by the U.S. Department of Commerce's Economic Development Administration (EDA). Economic planning services are provided to all towns, cities, and counties within the CSPDC region.

### What we do

The CSPDC's vision is to be recognized and respected as a leader in regional and local planning issues by providing support to the local governments of the Central Shenandoah Valley Region. They aim to help communities and agencies within the Central Shenandoah Valley work together by providing high-quality planning, technical assistance, and facilitation services that address local, regional, and state needs in an innovative, timely, and cooperative manner.



<sup>1</sup> Adapted from the Economic Development Administration website



# Executive Summary

The Central Shenandoah Region is an area rich in employment opportunities, natural resources, and economic assets that can support sustainable growth into the future. Every corner of the Central Shenandoah Region is diverse in its geography and industry mix, which is part of what makes the region enticing to residents and business alike.

Focused on sustaining and enhancing these characteristics, the CSPDC engaged in a CEDS to pursue strategy-driven regional economic development. The CEDS serves as a roadmap to guide the region in achieving their vision. The vision is a result of collaboration and extensive engagement through key stakeholder interviews, focus groups, and CEDS Project Team meetings. The CEDS is an important economic development tool for the CSPDC that builds on other impressive regional planning efforts, like the GO Virginia Economic Growth and Diversification Plan.

The CEDS is informed by a rigorous analysis of the region's current state, which includes a Background Conditions Report; Infrastructure and Environmental Conditions Overview; and a Strengths, Weakness, Opportunities, Threats (SWOT) Analysis. The CEDS focuses heavily on implementation with an Action Plan Matrix guiding the CSPDC through priority projects and performance metrics to gauge the success of their efforts.

The CEDS effort was a collaborative process that sought insight from existing plans and key stakeholders to achieve regional goals. The goals were devised by examining the main areas for development and progress, and include workforce, infrastructure and community needs, business attraction and retention, agriculture and agribusiness, and economic and business resiliency. Objectives under each goal area are ranked in order of regional priority, which was determined during an interactive activity in a strategy development workshop.

## CEDS PROCESS

1. ANALYZE DATA
2. DERIVE THEMES
3. BUILD CONSENSUS
4. CREATE ACTION STEPS



## EXPECTED OUTCOMES

1. INCREASED WAGES
2. GREATER QUALITY OF LIFE
3. WORKFORCE PREPARED FOR FUTURE ECONOMY
4. ENHANCED VISITOR EXPERIENCE
5. ASSET-BASED ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
6. INNOVATION

## REGIONAL STRENGTHS

- Diverse industry mix.
- Abundant cultural, historical, natural and recreational assets.
- Substantial transportation assets in rail, road, and airports.
- Prevalence of higher education institutions.
- Strong relationships among economic development and planning organizations.
- Rural settings with high quality of life in close proximity to regional urban centers.



# Vision Statement

*The Central Shenandoah Region is committed to collaborating across sectors to create a prosperous environment that encourages sustainable development, supports a diversity of employment opportunities, provides a high quality of life for residents, and preserves the many natural resources that make the Shenandoah Valley a unique place to visit, live, and work.*

## MOVING FORWARD TOGETHER

The CSPDC's Strategic Direction/Action Plan contains five ambitious visions, which are outlined on the following pages. Each vision promotes the individual qualities of each locality, while striving to make a positive regional impact.

Beneath each vision are goals, which help define how that vision will be achieved. Nearly every goal requires collaboration from not only localities, but regional economic development and planning partners.

Regionalizing economic development efforts allows parties to concentrate resources, draw on the expertise of partners and empower organizations to work across jurisdictional boundaries.

The complete Strategic Direction/Action Plan can be found in the Appendices of this report.





## VISION I:

Prepare the Central Shenandoah Region's workforce for in-demand occupations with opportunities to advance up the career ladder and build human capital.

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### GOAL 1:

Expand the workforce talent pool in the Central Shenandoah Region by attracting new residents and retaining workers.

### GOAL 2:

Partner with local industry to engage students and recent graduates to change the culture around careers available to students locally.

### GOAL 3:

Enable the growth of programs that recognize the potential of the local workforce to upskill and climb the career ladder.



## VISION II:

Address critical infrastructure updates and anticipate future community needs to improve the Central Shenandoah Region's competitiveness to attract and retain business.

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### GOAL 1:

Expand and improve the Region's technology and telecommunications systems.

### GOAL 2:

Maintain and improve transportation networks that carry goods and people throughout the Central Shenandoah Region.

### GOAL 3:

Invest in site improvements by focusing on essential infrastructure upgrades or installation.

### GOAL 4:

Diversify housing options within the Central Shenandoah Region.



## VISION III:

Expand and diversify economic activity in the Central Shenandoah Region by focusing on developing physical assets and cultivating natural resources.

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### GOAL 1:

Encourage the diversification of new and existing industries to ensure economic resiliency.

### GOAL 2:

Support business attraction and retention efforts in the Central Shenandoah Region.

### GOAL 3:

Enhance natural resources, heritage sites and other outdoor recreation elements throughout the Region to promote quality of life, increase visitation and spur the outdoor recreation economy.

### GOAL 4:

Create, improve, and renovate downtown corridors or other significant centers of activity to be economically productive.

## VISION IV:

Grow agribusiness by expanding the markets for farmers, producers, food manufacturers, and other related sectors, like forestry, in the Central Shenandoah Region and beyond.

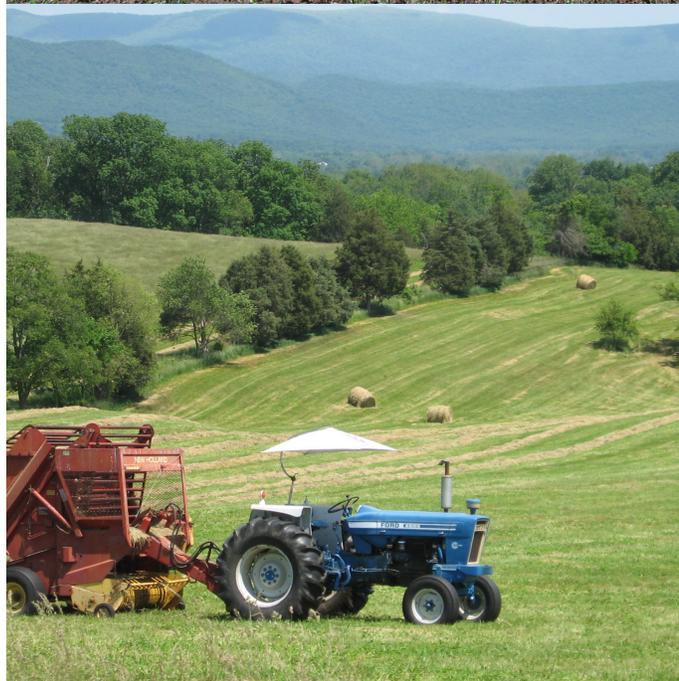
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### GOAL 1:

Collaborate with agribusiness to understand challenges facing their production and strategies to improve their business.

### GOAL 2:

Support resources and programs to grow the agritourism sector.





## **VISION V:**

**Increase resilience to natural and man-made hazards, economic downturns, and social vulnerabilities that impact communities and businesses in the Central Shenandoah Region.**

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### **GOAL 1:**

Make the Region more resilient through planning, education, and mitigation activities.

### **GOAL 2:**

Facilitate strategic land use to mitigate negative effects of natural disasters on residents and businesses.

### **GOAL 3:**

Diversify regional funding assistance and federal funds to strengthen organizational capacity in times of stability and disaster efforts.

## **Implementation**

The planning process was initiated with the understanding that developing relationships among stakeholders in the public and private sector would be essential for successful implementation. The factors, partners and other resources expected for implementation are detailed in the Action Plan Matrix, contained in the report's Appendices. Potential funding sources are identified so that the organization can launch into implementation from planning. CSPDC anticipates taking on the role of facilitator, while enabling local experts to take on goal areas that match their expertise. Additionally, each objective has a performance measure, which will be updated along with other necessary elements during each annual review of the CEDS required by the Economic Development Administration.

# Acknowledgements

The CEDS was a collaborative effort that came together successfully because of the valuable contributions of community members around the Central Shenandoah Region.

## CEDS PROJECT TEAM

The CEDS Project Team was integral in reviewing draft CEDS materials, refining strategies and advising on regional priorities from diverse perspectives. Representatives are listed below.

**Amanda Glover**, Director of Economic Development & Tourism at Augusta County

**Betty Mitchell**, Executive Director at The Highland Center

**Bonnie Riedesel**, Executive Director of CSPDC

**Carolyn Dull**, CSPDC Board member and Mayor of Staunton

**Chris Slaydon**, Assistant Director of Community Development at Rockbridge County

**Courtland Robinson**, Director of Business Development at Shenandoah Valley Partnership

**Dr. Kevin Ratliff**, Dean of Workforce and Continuing Education at Blue Ridge Community College

**Elizabeth McCarty**, Director of Planning at CSPDC

**Joan Hollen**, Shenandoah Valley Workforce Development Board

**Peirce Macgill**, Assistant Director at City of Harrisonburg Economic Development

## CEDS COMMITTEE

The CSPDC Board of Commissioners also acts as the CEDS Committee. Members of the Board are listed below.

### Augusta County

- Marshall Pattie, Board of Supervisors
- Terry Kelley, Board of Supervisors
- Vickie Moran, Craigsville Town Council
- Leslie Tate, Non-Elected Representative

### Bath County

- Edward Hicklin, Board of Supervisors

### Buena Vista

- Lisa Clark, City Council

### Harrisonburg

- Ted Byrd, City Council
- George Hirschmann, City Council
- Adam Fletcher, Non-Elected Representative

### Highland County

- Kevin Wagner, Board of Supervisors

### Lexington

- Frank Friedman, City Council

### Rockbridge County

- Jay Lewis, Board of Supervisors
- Chris Slaydon, Non-Elected Representative

### Rockingham County

- Ned Overton, Timberville Town Council
- Rick Chandler, Board of Supervisors
- Rhonda Cooper, Non-Elected Representative
- Kim Sandum, Non-Elected Representative

### Staunton

- Carolyn Dull, City Council
- Sharon Angle, Non-Elected Representative

### Waynesboro

- Terry Short, City Council
- Warren Johnson, Non-Elected Representative

Thank you also to the team at Camoin Associates who facilitated the planning process and coordinated the CEDS development.



## THE PROJECT STAFF

### Project Principals

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