

# CENTRAL SHENANDOAH PANDEMIC RECOVERY AND RESILIENCY PLAN

## Executive Summary

Prepared by

**Central Shenandoah  
Planning District Commission**

112 MacTanly Place  
Staunton VA, 24401

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# ABOUT THE CSPDC

## WHO WE ARE

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

## WHAT WE DO

The CSPDC's vision is to be recognized as a leader in regional and local planning issues by providing support to the local governments of the Central Shenandoah region. The CSPDC aims to help communities and agencies within the Central Shenandoah region 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.

The CSPDC provides assistance to local governments and their citizens in the areas of community development, comprehensive planning, disaster mitigation and preparedness, economic development, emergency management, environmental programs, GIS mapping, housing, transportation, transit, and water and wastewater utilities.

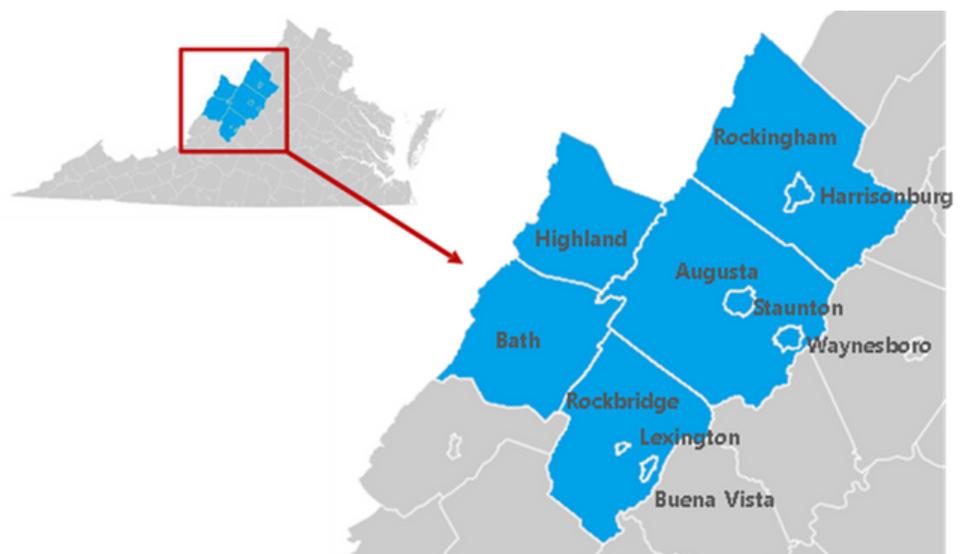
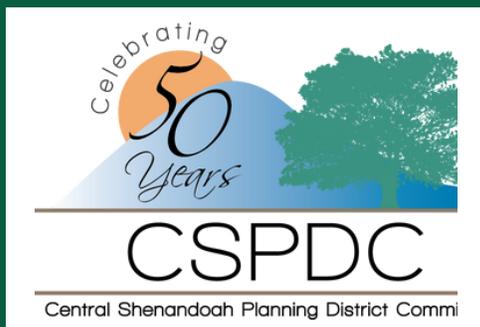




Photo Source: Harrisonburg Downtown Renaissance

Families gathered to enjoy Harrisonburg's first Best Weekend Ever outdoor festival in summer of 2021.

## Executive Summary

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The COVID-19 pandemic has been the most disruptive global public health crisis in recent history. In addition to the tremendous toll on human life, the pandemic has had an unprecedented impact on social, mental, and economic well-being. These effects were felt throughout the Central Shenandoah region as economic and social activity ground to a halt in March 2020. At the height of the pandemic, more than 15,000 jobs in the region were lost and GDP dropped by \$315 million. As the severity of the pandemic declines, the focus turns to two critical questions: how can we recover and how can our region increase its resilience for future crises?

In July 2020, the Central Shenandoah Planning District Commission (CSPDC) was awarded a CARES Act Recovery Assistance Grant from the U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA). Through this funding, the CSPDC developed the Central Shenandoah Pandemic Recovery and Resiliency Plan to guide the region's efforts to rejuvenate the economy. The Plan seeks to empower communities to recover stronger from COVID-19 by providing an actionable roadmap to resilience building. This Plan complements the regional 2018 Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) by presenting strategies and best practices to support immediate- and long-term economic recovery and to better prepare the region for future economic shocks.



*The Staunton Public Library held socially-distanced outdoor story time sessions in Gypsy Hill Park and other locations around the community.*

## **CHMURA'S COVID-19 ECONOMIC ANALYSIS REPORT**

In order to understand the pandemic's impact on the Central Shenandoah region, the CSPDC first partnered with Chmura Economics & Analytics to conduct a comprehensive economic analysis. Chmura's analysis offered insight into how COVID-19 affected the region's industries, small businesses and downtown areas, and supply chains. By studying trends in employment, industry clusters, and real estate, Chmura identified the region's gaps and opportunities for future development. Chmura's report provided detailed data used to inform and shape the Plan's recovery and resiliency goals and strategies.

Key takeaways from Chmura's Economic Analysis:

- The Central Shenandoah region lost 15,000 jobs (10.7% of total workforce),
- Labor force participation rate has been slow to rebound,
- The impact on small business and downtowns were more severe,
- Remote work trends accelerated,
- Change in retail behaviors is expected to continue,
- Supply chains were disrupted,
- Demand for housing in rural and small metros increased, and
- Housing cost burden was amplified.

## RECOVERY & RESILIENCY PLANNING

The COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated that regional economic prosperity is linked to an area's ability to be resilient. Economic resilience has 3 primary attributes:

- The ability to recover quickly from a shock,
- The ability to withstand a shock, and
- The ability to avoid the shock altogether.

Establishing economic resilience in a local or regional economy requires a concentrated effort to anticipate risk, evaluate how that risk can impact key economic assets, and build response capacity. To accomplish this, the Pandemic Recovery and Resiliency Plan:

- Details how the pandemic impacted the Central Shenandoah region (Chapter 2),
- Highlights the creative ways our communities responded (Chapter 3),
- Examines key challenges during the pandemic that now offer strategic opportunities for recovery and resilience building (Chapter 4),
- Recognizes equity as an important element of the region's holistic recovery (Chapter 5), and
- Identifies strategies that actively position the region to recover stronger from COVID-19 (Chapter 6).

In short, the Plan provides the Central Shenandoah region with a path toward recovering from the shock of the pandemic in a way that builds long-term economic resilience and strengthens the region to withstand any future shock.

*Working groups continued to hold outdoor, socially distanced meetings to remain active during the pandemic.*



*Photo Source: Lexington-Rockbridge Chamber of Commerce*

# VISION

**Empowering communities to prevent, prepare for, and respond to future disruptions**

## THE VISION

The Central Shenandoah region is committed to working together to empower resilient communities by preventing, preparing for, and responding to the impacts of pandemics and future disruptions.

## THE PATH FORWARD

The Recovery and Resiliency Plan presents actionable strategies to create communities of resilient **People**, **Places**, **Businesses**, and **Services** positioned to recover stronger from COVID-19 and withstand future disruptions.

Communities that are:

- Empowered by **People** trained and equipped with the tools to adapt to and overcome disruptions,
- Enlivened **Places**, whose downtowns, housing options, and community amenities thrive under any circumstances,
- Activated by **Businesses** positioned to flourish in the post-pandemic economic landscape, and
- Powered with the **Services** to stay open, stay connected, and spark innovation.

For each focus area, strategic goals and associated action items are identified to provide the region with a path toward recovery and resilience building.



Resilient People



Resilient Places



Resilient Businesses



Resilient Services

# Resilient People



Empowered by **People** trained and equipped with the tools to adapt to and overcome disruptions

## GOAL 1: WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

*Attract, develop, train, and retain an agile workforce capable of adapting to rapidly changing economic conditions and fueling the region's economic recovery.*

## GOAL 2: COMMUNITY-DRIVEN RECOVERY

*Increase citizen engagement through the use of new technology embraced during the COVID-19 pandemic as well as traditional formats to reach as much of the whole community as possible.*

## GOAL 3: PUBLIC HEALTH

*Ensure the region is prepared to protect the public health, safety, and welfare from future health crises.*

*A student in Blue Ridge Community College's Welding Program practices their skills.*



# Resilient Places



Enlivened **Places**, whose downtowns, housing options, and community amenities thrive under any circumstances

## GOAL 1: EXPANDED HOUSING CHOICES

*Prioritize expanding housing choice to accommodate regional workforce needs.*

## GOAL 2: CAPITALIZING ON TOURISM & OUTDOOR RECREATION OPPORTUNITIES

*Promote and develop outdoor recreation opportunities that enhance residents' quality of life and encourage tourism.*

## GOAL 3: REVITALIZED DOWNTOWNS

*Support and encourage downtown and storefront businesses.*

*Outdoor dining in Downtown Staunton*



*Photo Source: Visit Staunton*

# Resilient Businesses



Activated by **Businesses** positioned to flourish in the post-pandemic economic landscape

## GOAL 1: ADAPTIVE BUSINESS IN THE TELE-ECONOMY

*Build upon the success of our region's co-working spaces to strategically strengthen our workforce attraction efforts.*

## GOAL 2: E-COMMERCE BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

*Position the region to capitalize on the accelerated growth of e-commerce.*

## GOAL 3: RESILIENT SUPPLY CHAINS

*Build and develop supply chains that are more resilient to national and global disruptions.*

*Entrepreneurs gathered at JMU in April 2022 for the Shenandoah Community Capital Fund's Techstars Startup Weekend, a program allowing entrepreneurs to immerse themselves in the logistics of startups.*

*Photo Source: Shenandoah Community Capital Fund*



# Resilient Services



Powered with the **Services** to stay open, stay connected,  
and spark innovation

## GOAL 1: UNIVERSAL BROADBAND COVERAGE

*Pursue universal broadband coverage in the CSPDC region.*

## GOAL 2: PUBLIC TRANSIT & MULTI-MODAL TRANSPORTATION

*Respond to future unforeseen events in a manner that maintains rider and operator safety while providing essential transportation, both for public transportation services and other alternative modes of transportation.*

## GOAL 3: MULTI-HAZARD RESILIENCE

*Maintain a multi-hazard approach to emergency preparedness, hazard mitigation, and continuity of government that provides resilience at the local level for natural and man-made disasters.*

*BRITE Bus was fare-free from March 2020 to June 2021 to provide bus service to essential workers during the pandemic.*



# Acknowledgements

The Central Shenandoah Planning District Commission would like to thank the following for their participation in the planning process:

- The 21 Localities in the Central Shenandoah Region:
  - Counties of Augusta, Bath, Highland, Rockbridge, and Rockingham
  - Cities of Buena Vista, Harrisonburg, Lexington, Staunton, and Waynesboro
  - Towns of Bridgewater, Broadway, Craigsville, Dayton, Elkton, Glasgow, Goshen, Grottoes, Monterey, Mount Crawford, and Timberville
- Blue Ridge Community College
- Board of Commissioners, Central Shenandoah Planning District Commission
- Central Shenandoah Health District, Virginia Department of Health
- Chambers of Commerce in the Central Shenandoah Region:
  - Bath County Chamber of Commerce
  - Greater Augusta Regional Chamber of Commerce
  - Harrisonburg-Rockingham Chamber of Commerce
  - Highland County Chamber of Commerce
  - Lexington-Rockbridge Chamber of Commerce
- Chmura Economics & Analytics
- Community Foundation of the Central Blue Ridge
- Harrisonburg-Rockingham Business Resiliency Task Force
- James Madison University
- Shenandoah Community Capital Fund
- Shenandoah Valley Partnership
- Shenandoah Valley Regional Workforce Development Board
- Shenandoah Valley Small Business Development Center
- Staunton-Augusta-Waynesboro Disaster Recovery Task Force
- Staunton Downtown Development Association
- U.S. Economic Development Administration
- United Ways of
  - Harrisonburg and Rockingham County
  - Staunton, Augusta County, and Waynesboro
  - Rockbridge, Lexington, and Buena Vista
- Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development
- Virginia Economic Development Partnership
- Virginia Housing
- The businesses and organizations throughout the Central Shenandoah Region for their creativity and adaptability that informed many of the best practices included in this Plan.