



# **GROWTH & RURAL PRESERVATION** in King George County, VA

# Economic Development Studio

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# Executive Summary

The Economic Development Planning Studio at Virginia Tech was hired by King George County to prepare an analysis of the county's existing conditions, assets, and challenges to economic development, as well as to develop a set of findings and recommendations based on that body of research. The studio was comprised of 13 graduate students in the Master of Urban and Regional Planning program, with one faculty advisor. The students were organized into groups, each focusing on a different aspect relating to King George County's economy. In total, four different areas were researched by the students:

## **Community Context**

King George County is the 2<sup>nd</sup> fastest growing county in Virginia, second only to Loudoun County. As a result, it was necessary to examine the county's population and workforce. Current social, education, employment, demographic, and housing conditions were analyzed for King George County. Planned and projected changes to these topic areas were also considered.

## **Base Assets**

Naval Support Facility Dahlgren is the largest employer in King George County. In addition to the mission of Navy and Air Force commands located on base, contracts associated with base operations, physical characteristics of the base, demographics and other characteristics of base employees and visitors, the relationship of the base to the immediate surrounding area, and prospects for future growth at the base were all explored.

## **Community Conditions**

As with the Community Context section, the population increases of recent years have begun to change conditions within the county. While the Community Context group focused more on the characteristics of King George County residents and employees, the Community Conditions group members focused more on the physical environment. Existing land use, public transit, zoning, and infrastructure conditions were assessed, as well as the county's capacity for future growth in each of these subject areas.

## **Economic and Fiscal Impact**

The overall economic and fiscal conditions of the county were explored, including the current revenues and expenditures in the annual budget, as well as projections for the overall fiscal health of the county in the future. Several potential funding mechanisms were researched in an effort to identify opportunities to enhance the county's fiscal health

Throughout the analysis, three central themes emerged. Using the existing conditions, assets, and challenges identified in each of the four chapters, the following three themes were developed further into a comprehensive set of findings and recommendations. Many of these findings and recommendations intersect several of the themes:

## **The Importance of Naval Support Facility Dahlgren**

Dahlgren is the major employer of King George County. As a result, many of the base's activities have a direct effect on the county; including

what businesses locate in the county, the amenities required for base employees, and the type of individuals that choose to reside in King

George County. Dahlgren also has an impact on land use in the county, due to the size of the military installation, as well as the activities that are associated with Dahlgren's various missions. The county and base officials should conduct a joint land use study to address these issues. A SWOT analysis of the base determined that Dahlgren is well-positioned for future BRAC rounds; however, there is always a chance that the Department of Defense could recommend personnel reductions or base closure, particularly if encroachment becomes a major issue. Base officials need to continue to be proactive with their community outreach efforts and maintain a positive rapport with community members.

In addition to the employees located on base there are a number of private contractors located directly off the base. Some of these contractors are large businesses, while others are smaller, locally based businesses. If Dahlgren were to close in the near future, however, most of these contractors would leave King George County. County and base officials need to continue to improve small business development opportunities related to the base, as well as to market the concept that Patuxent River and Quantico are nearby.

#### **The Need for Economic Diversification in King George County, as Well as the Need for King George County to Recognize the Economic Specialization that Currently Exists**

King George County's economy is extremely dependent on Naval Support Facility Dahlgren, resulting in a lack of overall economic diversity. At the same time, King George County has concentrations of workers in certain technology and engineering industries, mainly due to base activities. These are some of the highest paid workers in the county.

There is currently an educational mismatch between this industry specialization and the types of careers for which King George County students are prepared. For most of the jobs associated with the technology and engineering industries, advanced degrees are required. King

George County currently has a higher dropout rate than the state of Virginia overall; the number of students who take Advanced Placement courses has declined, while the number of students who dual enroll at the community college has increased. Officials at the new Mary Washington campus should work to develop a curriculum that is tailored to the needs of King George County and its students. Other workforce development programs should be explored as well, including specialized trade schools.

In addition to the need for King George County to further foster economic specialization in the technology and engineering sectors, officials need to attempt to diversify the local economy. The industrial park presents one location where this could take place. The marketing budget for the industrial park needs to be increased in an effort to attract the highest-quality users. The county should also encourage development of a business development center or a small business incubator, in order to take advantage of the technology and engineering skills present in the county and to develop new businesses based in the county.

#### **The Potential for Unmanaged Growth in King George County and Related Land Use Considerations**

King George County's population is anticipated to continue to increase rapidly for the 20 year horizon that was used in this analysis; this growth will have an impact on all facets of the county. If existing zoning parameters remain in place the county will develop a sprawl pattern and lose the rural character that it strives to maintain. A significant amount of the county's developable land would be reduced under the status quo. This growth pattern would also have a fiscal impact, with unmanaged growth straining infrastructure and creating additional expenditures for new students and new schools, resulting in a higher debt service. Changes need to be made to the factors that shape fiscal policy, including raising BPOL rates in targeted activity types such as Contractors and Consulting, as well as implementing a Special Taxing District in

the area immediately outside of Dahlgren's gates, in an effort to target businesses that are contractually required to be located near the base. A fiscal gap could also be bridged through federal programs such as the New Market Tax Credits and the HOPE VI Main Streets program.

Most homes in King George County are single-family, which does not match the demand of many county residents and base employees. By concentrating growth and density in the county's Primary Settlement Areas (PSAs), the county will be able to diversify its housing stock and preserve the rural character outside of the PSAs. There are few amenities around the base at the moment that are used by base personnel

King George County is at a pivotal time in its development; the character of King George County 20 years from now is heavily dependent on the actions officials and residents take today. King George County needs to undertake a community involvement process to gain consensus on what the county should look like in 20 years. Once consensus is achieved the county needs to develop a branding strategy that corresponds with the intended character, and to enact policies that will support the development of such character.

and related employees (restaurants, coffee shops, retail shops); development in the Dahlgren PSA should be geared towards creating these amenities. Development in the Courthouse PSA should be centered on developing a "town center" feel.

The existing zoning ordinance regulations do not adequately protect King George County's rural character. For land zoned commercial, industrial, and residential, densities are not defined. Use types are not adequately defined either; many use types such as drive-thrus are not restricted at all, which could also contribute to a sprawl-like growth pattern.