



## BRISTOL AREA (TN-VA) 2040 STRATEGIC PLAN

Submitted by Market Street Services, Inc.  
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## BACKGROUND

While the reality of a two-state region holds challenges, it also offers promising advantages. There is no question that the more choices a community can offer, the better positioned it is for positive economic activity. The Bristol area's diverse mix of employment includes healthcare, manufacturing, retail, outdoor recreation and motor sports, and corporate management.

In 1996, community leaders worked together to develop a community vision that became Ignite Bristol. During that process, several goals were identified, including but not limited to revitalizing the train station, constructing a new library, creating a museum dedicated to the country music, and establishing a downtown redevelopment entity. Over the past 23 years, many of those goals were achieved, and the community experienced first-hand the power of collaborating under a common vision with specified goals. Under the leadership of the Bristol TN-VA Chamber of Commerce, the community is expanding that power by pursuing a collective vision for its future branded Bristol 2040 to ensure that population and economic growth continue to create wealth, enhance quality of life, and strengthen its appeal as a destination for companies, visitors, and talent. To facilitate this process, the Chamber has contracted with Market Street Services, the nation's top firm focused solely on strategic economic development for communities. The initiative brings together committed leaders to fashion a progressive way forward for the area and create a holistic, actionable, and realistic strategy to make the Bristol TN-VA region an even better and stronger community in which to live and work. This strategy acknowledges the success the community has already achieved, identifies existing programs and initiatives that can be expanded or enhanced, and recommends new programs and initiatives that address issues and opportunities that were called out by community stakeholders throughout the previous phases of the Bristol 2040 strategy process.

This has been accomplished by leveraging robust data analysis and outreach to constituents across the Bristol area to determine competitive strengths, challenges, and opportunities and formulate an actionable strategic plan to advance the community towards its goals. The process was overseen by a **Steering Committee** of influential public and private leaders who informed the development of strategic deliverables, discuss and approve draft reports, and ensure that strategic implementation is positioned for success.

Extensive **public input** was comprised of over a dozen one-on-one interviews, seven focus groups, and an online survey available for three weeks that garnered over 554 responses.

## KEY COMPONENTS OF THE BRISTOL 2040 PROCESS INCLUDE:

### *1. Community Assessment and Competitive Scorecards*

The Assessment synthesized existing research, community and stakeholder input, and a wealth of quantitative data covering Bristol, Tennessee and Virginia to produce a narrative about the community – where it has been, where it stands today, and where it may be heading. The stories presented in the Community Assessment included comparisons to three peer communities: **Augusta County/Staunton, VA; Spartanburg County, SC; and Spotsylvania County/Fredericksburg, VA**, as well as the states of Tennessee and Virginia and the U.S.

## ***2. Target Sector Analysis and Marketing Review***

The Analysis sought to identify target business sectors with the greatest potential to drive job creation, elevate standards of living in the Bristol area, and catalyze growth and development. The Marketing Review assessed Bristol Area economic development marketing programs to determine its strengths, challenges, and future needs in the context of the broader strategy.

Based on an extensive analysis of the Bristol area's economic composition and assets, Market Street recommended the following target sectors for the community to pursue over the next five years:

- Chemical Manufacturing
- Metals and Machinery Manufacturing
- Healthcare Services
- Entertainment and Tourism

A fifth category, **Entrepreneurship and Small Business Development**, will be advanced in an equally targeted manner but irrespective of industry sector.

## ***3. Bristol 2040 Strategy***

The Strategy represents the culmination of all the quantitative and qualitative research to date through the development of detailed action items geared towards addressing challenges and capitalizing on opportunities for a visionary future. The plan will be supported by innovative best practices successfully implemented by communities from around the country. Where possible, the Strategy will incorporate the numerous efforts already underway in the Bristol area. Upon approval by the project Steering Committee, the Strategy will serve as Bristol's blueprint for competitive enhancement across a broad range of strategic categories.

## ***4. Implementation Plan***

A plan, no matter how visionary, is only valuable when it is implemented. The Implementation Plan represents a work plan for the Chamber and its implementation partners to ensure that the Strategy is activated and sustained for the next five years and beyond. The Plan will formalize timelines for phasing in the Strategy's multiple actions, identify lead and support implementation entities, determine existing and necessary financial and personnel capacity to drive implementation, propose optimal staffing and governance operations, and confirm performance metrics to track implementation progress and success.

# OVERVIEW

The Twin City of Bristol, Tennessee and Virginia is a lynchpin of the Tri-Cities metropolitan area and a burgeoning lifestyle destination for residents looking for downtown vitality, affordable costs of living, plentiful outdoor amenities, strong arts and culture assets, lightning-fast internet speeds, and a legacy of established large and small employers. Though recent economic and demographic trends in the Bristol area have been challenging, there have also been notable successes like Downtown Bristol’s continuing revitalization, the Birthplace of Country Music Museum, the Pinnacle, and creation of Ballad Health.

Momentum to further reorient Bristol’s trajectory has been building, culminating with the commitment of public and private partners to engage in this Bristol 2040 process. Months of quantitative and qualitative research, including feedback from hundreds of local residents, workers, and business owners, have led to the identification of strategic priorities to champion under the Bristol 2040 banner. These initiatives will require leaders from across state lines to come together in new and different ways to dedicate the necessary time, resources, and personnel to achieve successful strategic implementation.

Each **Strategic Focus Area** – the thematic pillars of the Bristol 2040 vision plan – is comprised of **Catalyst Actions** that will enable Bristol to address challenges and capitalize on opportunities. While they are differentiated structurally in this vision plan, the Strategic Focus Areas are **interrelated and self-reinforcing**. In other words, effective implementation of one or more Focus Areas will be contingent on successful activation of the other Focus Areas.

We also must acknowledge that, while Bristol 2040 is centered on opportunities in Bristol, Tennessee and Virginia, the Twin City is impacted by competitive dynamics, programs, and opportunities in the greater Bristol area and the Tri-Cities region.

That said, Bristol 2040 reflects the reality that the principal implementation entities for the strategy will be centered around the cities of Bristol. In the Bristol 2040 Implementation Plan, specific organizations, departments, and constituency groups will be identified as lead and/or support entities for each Catalyst Action.

Above all, Bristol 2040 must be seen as the community’s plan to achieve its vision and not a strategy for a particular group or organization. Nothing less than a true bi-state, public-private collaboration among all key stakeholder entities will enable Bristol to effectively implement Bristol 2030.



# STEERING COMMITTEE

The Bristol 2040 Steering Committee has been critical to the success of this initiative, shaping the strategy through various feedback channels and meeting sessions. Representing a broad group of community leaders from the public and private sectors, the Committee was responsible for reviewing project deliverables, providing feedback, and participating in discussions about the future direction of the Bristol area.

The following individuals served on the Bristol 2040 Steering Committee:

### *Tri-Chairs*

<b>Jerry Caldwell</b>	Bristol Motor Speedway
<b>Jim Maxwell</b>	Bristol Herald Courier
<b>Beth Rhinehart</b>	Bristol Chamber of Commerce

### *Committee Members*

<b>Brad Adams</b>	Johnson Commercial Development	<b>Martin Kent</b>	United Co.
<b>T.C. Baker</b>	Wallace Family of Dealerships	<b>Jerry Kirk</b>	Renasant Bank
<b>Tyrone Foster</b>	Bristol Virginia Public Schools	<b>CeeGee McCord</b>	Eastman
<b>Bill Hartley</b>	Bristol VA City Council	<b>Pin-Chia Murphy</b>	Eastman
<b>Karen Hester</b>	Southern Churn and Cranberry Lane	<b>Israel O'Quinn</b>	KVAT Food City / VA House of Delegates
<b>Edd Hill</b>	HVAC, Inc.	<b>John Rainero</b>	Permatile
<b>J. Allen Hurley</b>	Vision, LLC	<b>David Ring</b>	Strongwell
<b>Blaine Hutchinson</b>	New Again Houses	<b>Scott Robertson</b>	The Business Journal of Tri-Cities, TN/VA
<b>Tony Keck</b>	Ballad Health	<b>John Vann</b>	The Summit Companies
<b>Chad Keen</b>	Bristol TN City Council	<b>David Wagner</b>	Bank of Tennessee
		<b>Whit Whittaker</b>	King University

## Strategic Focus Area: Arts and Tourism

The Bristol area's asset mix of quality of life amenities, a revitalizing downtown, cultural facilities and programs, new and legacy hotels, strong tourism draws like the Bristol Motor Speedway and Birthplace of Country Music (BCM) Museum, and compelling music history make the community a competitive player in the hospitality sector. This strength has been demonstrated in the sector's performance in recent years and the growing awareness of the Bristol area as a visitor destination. Amenities that benefit tourism also enhance the Bristol area's competitiveness as a location for existing and prospective talent.

It is important that entities working to expand the community's breadth of cultural amenities and market the Bristol area's destination appeal to outside interests have sufficient capacity to be successful. This will require an understanding amongst state and local officials that investment in arts, culture, entertainment, and tourism will have a measurable impact on the community's competitiveness across all sectors. Examples of communities like Asheville, North Carolina, Chattanooga, Tennessee, and others that have built a more diversified economic base catalyzed by destination appeal for tourism are proof that every visitor is indeed a potential resident, business owner, or investor.

### PROPOSED CATALYST ACTIONS:



#### *Communicate the value of arts, entertainment, and tourism as economic development drivers*

Multiple reports from government and non-profit entities have demonstrated the impact and value of arts-related sectors to communities' economy, workforce, and quality of life. Bristol area officials must determine the most effective way to convey to key local constituencies that arts and tourism has broader impact beyond just expanding the hospitality sector. Principally, this would help increase the potential that local arts funding would be enhanced to enable promotional efforts to be equivalent to competitor markets.

#### **Tactical Options:**

- ✓ Conducting an economic impact study to determine direct and indirect local economic benefits of hospitality, tourism, and the arts
- ✓ Surveying and packaging an analysis of diversified tourism-based cities into a presentation for state and local officials and the public at large
- ✓ Taking inter-city visits to communities that have leveraged arts and tourism into broader success in the knowledge-based economy
- ✓ Soliciting the support of state and national organizations and associations to help build a case for more aggressive local tourism funding



### *Effectively promote and enhance the Bristol area's full complement of arts, cultural, and outdoor amenities*

Discover Bristol must be actively supported as it promotes tourism in the Twin City in partnership with regional and state entities. This includes providing sufficient resources as well as continuing to improve the Bristol area's community product.

#### **Tactical Options:**

- ✓ Assessing and identifying additional tourism-support resources, including establishing a bi-state hospitality taxing district to levy hotel stays to support tourism promotion
- ✓ Supporting Discover Bristol's strategic priorities, including destination marketing; improving the visitor experience; sustaining a competitive travel industry workforce; facilitating and encouraging transportation enhancements; and facilitating unity among sector participants on both sides of the state line
- ✓ Continuing to partner with the Tennessee Arts Commission, Virginia Commission for the Arts, and Tennessee and Virginia state tourism departments to develop and promote the Bristol area tourism and hospitality sector
- ✓ Implementing the 2017 Bristol (TN) Comprehensive Trails and Greenways Plan and Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan, including priorities to address the limited connectivity of the city's existing pedestrian/bicycle network through development of pedestrian/cycling-friendly facilities and improving system safety through repair of existing dangerous pedestrian areas
- ✓ Effective advancement and coordination of the Bristol (TN) Comprehensive Parks and Recreation Plan and complementary efforts in Bristol, Virginia
- ✓ Further development of local mountain biking capacity to tap into regional efforts in Johnson City, Kingsport, Norton, and Marion
- ✓ Continuing support of existing arts and cultural entities, facilities, and programs, including exploring options to position Arts Alliance Mountain Empire as a higher capacity regional arts coordination, promotion, programmatic, and support entity



### *Designate, plan, and develop a Downtown Bristol Arts and Maker District*

Downtown organization Believe in Bristol's 2015 work plan as well as the recent Downtown Bristol Development Strategy both identified Arts and Entertainment districts as a key strategy, echoing Bristol 2040 input. The maker component is included in this document as well as in the Downtown Bristol Development Strategy to acknowledge the synergies that exist between existing and potential manufacturing operations, crafts makers, emerging technology entrepreneurs, fine artists, music, film, and the theatre arts. Design and implementation of a designated district must be coordinated and collaborative among all partners.

#### **Tactical Options:**

- ✓ Determination of district boundaries, assets, and opportunities

- ✓ Confirmation of existing assets and consensus reached on potential arts facility expansion and new development options in the district
- ✓ Identification of an optimal site for a makerspace and determination of necessary administrative, funding, programmatic, and promotional dynamics
- ✓ District branding, signage, online presence, and project and program implementation schedule developed and launched



### ***Ensure hospitality workers interact effectively with the public***

Staff at hotels, entertainment venues, downtown restaurants, and other Bristol area establishments more likely to be frequented by tourists become the face of the community for out-of-towners. If these staff speak poorly of the community or give bad impressions of the local workforce, these perceptions could become reality for potential residents, business owners, or investors.

#### **Tactical Options:**

- ✓ Development of a focused curriculum for a short-term program coaching hospitality workers on positive visitor interaction techniques and talking points
- ✓ Engagement of hospitality sector employers to offer program free or at reduced costs to their public-facing staff
- ✓ Creation of performance awards and other recognition opportunities to incentivize workers to apply the principles of the curriculum



### ***Optimize the impact of the Bristol Motor Speedway (BMS)***

Bristol Motor Speedway is the Twin City's highest volume attraction and most visible external landmark. With NASCAR attendance experiencing a dip, the entire Bristol community must commit to supporting efforts to keep the track viable and thriving.

#### **Tactical Options:**

- ✓ Continued prioritization of BMS in Bristol area tourism promotion efforts
- ✓ Partnering with racetrack officials to provide all necessary development and logistical support to achieve attendance and impact goals
- ✓ Maximizing Tri-Cities area attendance through "buy local" marketing and communications strategies
- ✓ Conducting a formal survey of comparable NASCAR tracks to identify utilization and event strategies for potential application to BMS
- ✓ Securing commitments for annual or regular high-profile college football games or other sporting events at the track



### *Attract Amtrak service to Bristol*

Since Bristol last had passenger rail service in 1971, nine feasibility studies assessing the potential for its return have been completed, the latest in December 2018. This most recent study found that Amtrak service to the Twin City via Roanoke would be well-supported and not overly expensive to operate, with a significant local economic impact.<sup>i</sup>

#### **Tactical Options:**

- ✓ Supporting ongoing efforts of the Bristol VA/TN Rail Coalition to sustain momentum for passenger rail's return to the Bristol Train Station
- ✓ Compelling Norfolk Southern to reengage with a state-initiated feasibility study on extending Amtrak west from Roanoke to Bristol
- ✓ Sustained lobbying with state and federal officials to urge action on studying, funding, and constructing improvements to facilitate passenger rail's return to the Twin City



### *Provide local arts entrepreneurship classes*

Making art is only the first step to becoming a professional artist. Promoting your work, finding buyers, using online marketplaces, and other tactics are equally if not more important than producing the art itself. Providing support to amateur artists looking to launch their careers can help grow the local arts economy.

#### **Tactical Options:**

- ✓ Identifying an entity (potentially a renewed Arts Alliance Mountain Empire) to oversee program design, administration, and faculty attraction and retention
- ✓ Formalizing the arts entrepreneurship curriculum, locating space to hold classes, and promoting the classes widely in the community
- ✓ Consideration of supporting program graduates through some type of low-interest or forgivable loan, stipend, or other assistance to help start their careers



### *Create a Bristol area restaurant incubator*

Restaurant incubators are growing in popularity as a local strategy to expand a community's number and diversity of restaurants. These could be food trucks all the way to brick-and-mortar establishments. The Bristol restaurant incubator would ideally be located downtown.

#### **Tactical Options:**

- ✓ Exploration of restaurant incubator models from other communities that could be feasible in Downtown Bristol
- ✓ Identification of an entity or volunteer group to lead efforts to secure a location, obtain permits, fund the build-out of the kitchen space, design the incubation program, and promote the incubator to existing and potential restaurateurs

- ✓ Leveraging the restaurant incubator as a downtown attraction to sample students' cuisine
- ✓ Potential development of funding or loan programs to assist incubator graduates with opening food trucks, catering businesses, or restaurants in the community



### *Support transformative private hospitality developments with demonstrated community benefit*

Two high-profile developments have the potential to contribute significantly to the Bristol area's tourism economy. A 350-acre, \$200+ million project from Johnson Commercial Development would create a hotel with an indoor water park, amusement park, and amphitheater in Washington County, Virginia. Meanwhile, legislation authorizing a public referendum on a \$250 million Bristol Resort and Casino project proposed for the Bristol Mall passed the Virginia General Assembly in spring 2019<sup>ii</sup>. Projects like these and others with transformative benefit for the Twin City's hospitality sector should be supported by top public and private leaders in the area.

#### **Tactical Options:**

- ✓ Outreach to, communications with, and support for investors exploring transformative tourism-serving developments in the Bristol area
- ✓ Incorporation of policy and infrastructure-related priorities into legislative advocacy efforts at the local, state, and federal levels
- ✓ Leveraging of organizational, institutional, and informal communications and relationship networks to rally and sustain public support for transformative local hospitality and entertainment projects

## Strategic Focus Area: Music Economy

From the Bristol Sessions in the early part of the last century to the popular Bristol Rhythm and Roots Reunion and the dynamism of the Birthplace of Country Music Museum and Radio Bristol, the Bristol area can claim a competitive stake in the music economy. By harnessing this base of assets to target growth in the business of music, the Bristol area can derive multiple benefits. Perhaps even more important than the job creation potential is the value a thriving music sector would provide to Bristol's reputation and attractiveness as a destination for creative talent, both in the music industry and among those interested in a "music city" as a place to live. Modern economic development compels communities to identify their most promising promotional niches and the qualities differentiating them from competitors; music can serve this purpose in the Bristol area.

### PROPOSED CATALYST ACTIONS:



#### *More aggressively support and leverage Birthplace of Country Music, Inc.*

The Smithsonian Institution has recognized the unique legacy and value of Bristol's country music history in its adoption of the Birthplace of Country Music Museum as an affiliate. However, local support for the Birthplace of Country Music, Inc. is not equivalent to the attention and resources provided by national, non-profit, and individual funders. BCM, Inc. is a \$3 million per year operation supporting three unique and impactful assets: the museum, Bristol Rhythm and Roots Reunion, and Radio Bristol. BCM must have the resources necessary to increase its capacity and impact.

#### Tactical Options:

- ✓ Incorporation of "Birthplace of Country Music" designation into official government communications platforms and materials of Bristol, Tennessee and Virginia
- ✓ Public and private endorsement of BCM grant solicitations
- ✓ Partnerships to host fundraising events benefitting BCM
- ✓ Identification of public and philanthropic monies to support and sustain BCM operations
- ✓ Local, state, and federal advocacy for funding support, as applicable



#### *Identify and advance opportunities to offer additional live music in the Bristol area*

Bristol Rhythm and Roots Reunion is the highlight of the local live music calendar, bringing thousands of visitors, millions of dollars, and widespread recognition to the community. The festival can serve as a linchpin of an expanded live music sector in the Bristol area that would benefit the economy, seed a music development ecosystem, and attract new attention, residents, and businesses to the community.

#### Tactical Options:

- ✓ Creation of smaller-scale music events – either associated with the Rhythm and Roots brand or Birthplace of Country Music – at key intervals during the year
- ✓ Analysis of existing live music economy, including an inventory of artists, venues, and potential demand (and necessary resources) for additional performances
- ✓ Provision of free or low-cost counseling to local music venues on ways to better accommodate and support live music programming
- ✓ Capitalizing a Live Music Support Fund with formal guidelines to subsidize venues' contracting with musicians for live performances
- ✓ Hosting of "Radio Bristol Sessions" as an opportunity to engage and attract traveling musicians to perform for a live audience in Bristol
- ✓ Leveraging Birthplace of Country Music artist and investor networks, expatriate Bristol area musicians and music industry professionals, artists associations, and other resources to include Bristol in recording artists' touring schedules



### *Create a non-profit recording artist development organization and music label*

To truly create a professional music economy, the Bristol area will need to develop at least a baseline of industry infrastructure. This includes the ability of artists to have their music recorded, published, protected, promoted, and distributed. Other communities have planted the seeds of this capacity through the funding and operation of a non-profit entity or program. Of course, the long-term goal is to establish for-profit, vertically integrated music sector in the Bristol area.

#### **Tactical Options:**

- ✓ Consideration of building out the Birthplace of Country Music annex to include music recording, production, and management space
- ✓ Identification of resources to secure personnel, equipment, and technology to launch a non-profit label and support operations
- ✓ Outreach to Bristol area music industry expatriates to support the non-profit label through multiple means
- ✓ Connecting the label to the Birthplace of Country Music and/or Bristol Rhythm and Roots Reunion brand
- ✓ Fully leveraging existing and proposed music festivals to advance the non-profit label's brand and artists
- ✓ Potential artist-in-residence scholarship program for an up-and-coming songwriter and/or performer to live, record, and perform in Bristol



### *Provide career-based music education programming at all institutional levels*

Bristol area high schools currently offer music education as elective programs. At the post-secondary level, Northeast State Community College in Blountville, TN offers music courses with transfer credit to King University and a technical certificate in Entertainment Technology - Sound and Lighting; King University offers Bachelor degrees in Music and Music Education; and East Tennessee State University (ETSU) offers majors and minors in music education and performance in addition to a Jazz Studies program, and a pre-college program for high school students. ETSU also offers the world's first bachelor's degree in Bluegrass, Old Time, and Country Music, preparing graduates for careers in performance, academia, or music production technologies.

#### **Tactical Options:**

- ✓ Promotional efforts to optimize awareness of existing music education programs in the Bristol area and Tri-Cities
- ✓ Fully leveraging ETSU's Bluegrass, Old Time, and Country Music degree to prepare graduates to work in the Bristol area's music industry, including connections between students and local venues and employers
- ✓ Creation of a two-year degree or certificate in music industry skills and/or professions related to production, licensing, copyright, distribution, promotion, or management
- ✓ Offering music career internships and fellowships through the proposed non-profit music label, Radio Bristol operations, and other employers



### *Increase the awareness of Bristol's music history and current assets*

Bristol's federal designation as the birthplace of country music is championed locally and through promotion of the Birthplace of Country Music's three branches. Enhancing awareness of Bristol's musical heritage as well as its current capacity in music supports the ongoing development of a music industry ecosystem in the community.

#### **Tactical Options:**

- ✓ Supporting BCM's efforts to secure a stronger broadcasting signal for Radio Bristol through acquisition of an existing frequency
- ✓ Capitalizing on the potential syndication of the "Farm and Fun Time" radio program and accompanying tour
- ✓ Maximizing the impact of the "Born in Bristol" film
- ✓ Securing resources to develop additional multi-media performance, narrative, and promotional content for distribution and syndication
- ✓ Fully leveraging Virginia's Crooked Road and Tennessee's Music Pathways tourism marketing campaigns



*Capitalize on personal and professional networks to bolster Bristol's music sector*

Visitors from Nashville comprise the Bristol area's largest tourism market. These and other connections to Music City can potentially lead to opportunities to attract Nashville-based organizations, institutions, associations, and affiliated facilities to the Twin City. Coupled with the Birthplace of Country Music's national and international relationship network and the diaspora of expatriate Bristol music professionals, strong potential exists to grow Bristol's music-related asset base.

**Tactical Options:**

- ✓ Attraction of Nashville-based music entities, venues, talent, and programs to the Bristol area
- ✓ Purposeful efforts to leverage BCM's national and international connections to identify opportunities for partners to establish a presence in the Twin City
- ✓ Identification and outreach to expatriate Bristol performers, producers, music industry professionals, investors, and entrepreneurs to support growth in the cities' music economy

## Strategic Focus Area: Competitive Workforce

The quality and sustainable availability of a community's workforce is the most important issue in modern economic development as the jobs of tomorrow increasingly require post-secondary training and technology literacy. Because its legacy economy is concentrated in production-based and lower-skill services employment, the Bristol area has a less robust information and communications (ICT) sector. Without a steady supply of ICT jobs to accommodate local graduates with these skills, the Bristol area might see trained tech talent leave for other regions. Efforts to prepare a competitive knowledge-based workforce are linked with strategies to stimulate technology entrepreneurship and leverage Bristol's quality of life and broadband capacity to retain and attract top talent. These initiatives will dovetail with a continuing focus on developing an effective pipeline linking local students with college and the workplace and fully engaging adult talent with the local economy.

### PROPOSED CATALYST ACTIONS:



#### *Develop a bi-state, multi-institutional career and technical education (CTE) center in the Bristol area*

While Bristol benefits from two-year higher education programming at Northeast State Community College, Virginia Highlands Community College, and other Tri-Cities institutions, there are no degree programs offered on-site in the Twin City. Creating a multi-institutional hub of career-focused training in Bristol would centralize technical education for local students of all ages and aggregate support services such as childcare, financial literacy training, drug and alcohol counseling, and other programs and services critical to building competitive workforce capacity. Partnerships with local and regional institutions could provide more Bristol-based class options for students unable to access programs in other communities.

#### Tactical Options:

- ✓ Building bi-state consensus for the center, including determining joint funding opportunities, and potential statutory changes necessary to design, program, and build the facility
- ✓ Establishment of a public-private bi-state coordinating committee to shepherd the center's planning, design, and construction
- ✓ Exploration of model CTE/community services hybrids nationally to inform Bristol's project
- ✓ Identification of an existing location or new-build development site for the center
- ✓ Partnerships with Bristol area businesses to fund programs, inform and/or design curricula, donate equipment, and provide experiential learning and employment opportunities for the center's students and graduates

- ✓ Utilization of all potential state and federal resources, including the potential co-location of Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) funded one-stop delivery system programming and services



### ***Support and enhance existing college and career programming and connectivity***

As Bristol 2040 input identified, there are numerous existing programs, institutions, and facilities preparing students for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century workplace. Often, the key challenge is maximizing awareness and utilization of these programs and better connecting them into a pipeline of training from cradle to career. Improved coordination and collaboration will also help identify needs, gaps, and opportunities to enhance existing programs and develop new capacity.

#### **Tactical Options:**

- ✓ Determining opportunities to improve provision, access, and utilization of early childhood programming in Bristol, TN and VA
- ✓ Creation of an online resource listing available Bristol area CTE and workforce-supportive programming and how to access it
- ✓ Establishment of protocols and partnerships to formalize the process of K-16 workforce development needs assessment, gap analysis, and creation of enhanced and new programmatic capacity
- ✓ Leveraging the United Way of Southwest Virginia Ignite Program connecting schools and students with employers and employees to foster career awareness and skill development
- ✓ Better incorporation of essential (soft) skills training in existing K-12 curricula
- ✓ Continued outreach and engagement with parents and other “influencers” to improve their understanding of targeted college and career programming, experiential learning opportunities, scholarship funding (FAFSA, etc.), and other ways they can support student progress
- ✓ Development of additional dual-admissions programs, shared credit and transferability programs, and other collaborations among Bristol area post-secondary institutions
- ✓ Full linkages between existing education and training entities and the proposed CTE center in Bristol

### ***Fund full-time partner engagement and coordination capacity at Bristol area high schools***

Speaking in a Bristol 2040 focus group, educators noted that goals of fully engaging with peers, employers, social services entities, parents, and other constituencies to improve students’ college and career prospects were laudable but unattainable without additional resources and personnel wholly dedicated to these opportunities.

#### **Tactical Options:**

- ✓ Empowering faculty to inform district planning, policies, and practices in community and partner engagement

- ✓ Designing the partner outreach function and establishing priorities and expectations for new community and partner liaison personnel
- ✓ Securing public and, potentially, private resources to accommodate hiring of community and partner engagement staff at school districts on both sides of the state line
- ✓ Working with local community and economic development organizations to connect their memberships with school district outreach personnel
- ✓ Commitment to implement policy and program changes based on learnings from community and partner liaison interactions



### *Commit to purposeful local efforts to become a more diverse and welcoming community*

A critical component of building a competitive workforce is ensuring that residents of all colors, beliefs, national origins, sexual orientations, and political affiliations feel at home in the community. This does not mean that everyone agrees on all topics, but that individual beliefs are respected and constructive dialogue can take place around key issues. Today's Bristol is not a diverse place, but that is changing. Leaders and residents alike must acknowledge that diversity and inclusion are economic development issues and take steps to foster a more inclusive and welcoming community climate.

#### **Tactical Options:**

- ✓ Development of a statement supporting diversity for adoption and display by local governments, businesses, and institutions
- ✓ Short-term diversity-training sessions and implementation protocols provided free of charge to local employers
- ✓ High profile annual diverse workplace awards for local businesses at different employment tiers
- ✓ Commitment to appoint diverse membership to public and not-for-profit boards and committees
- ✓ Yearly event celebrating the nations of origin of Bristol's native and foreign-born populations



### *Collectively apply social services capacity to enhance the Bristol area's workforce availability*

Maximizing labor force participation is not only about providing the necessary skills and opportunities to access local jobs. Mental illness, homelessness, drug addiction, single parenthood, and other issues also impact working-age adults' ability to seek and sustain employment. The Bristol area, like most communities, has a wide array of social services organizations, agencies, and programs to improve the health and welfare of residents of all ages. Some of these entities are program operators while others are funders and/or coordinators. Above all, programmatic design, delivery, and optimization must be managed through a collaborative network of providers working collectively to achieve defined, measurable outcomes.

#### **Tactical Options:**

- ✓ Updating an inventory of all local social services providers and programs, including the work managed and/or funded by the United Way of Bristol TN/VA, United Way of Southwest Virginia, government agencies, and key local/regional not-for-profit partners
- ✓ Exploration of positioning Bristol's Promise – Youth Networking Alliance as a staffed local affiliate of a national Collective Impact<sup>iii</sup> network such as Strive or Alignment to effectively coordinate Bristol area social services entities and programs
- ✓ Fully leveraging the Ballard Health accountable care community initiative, a partnership of 150 regional agencies focused on addressing issues of tobacco usage, substance abuse, obesity, and childhood resiliency

## Strategic Focus Area: Entrepreneurship

Because the Bristol area has a lower concentration of information technology and professional services employment and occupations than Tennessee, Virginia, and the nation, it will be difficult at first to attract prospect firms in these sectors to the community. Growth will have to occur from enterprise creation and expansion of existing technology employers. Consistent with its under-represented ICT and small business sectors, the Bristol area lacks a so-called entrepreneurial “ecosystem” to support the development, launch, and long-term health of technology startups. Therefore, the Bristol area must advance a multi-pronged initiative to establish a culture of entrepreneurship while also pursuing the purposeful expansion of an ecosystem of supportive services, facilities, programs, and funding.

### PROPOSED CATALYST ACTIONS:



#### *Create an online entrepreneurial connection and information hub*

One tenet of entrepreneurial ecosystem development is that they are typically “entrepreneur-driven.” In other words, it is difficult for an organizational, institutional, or government entity to successfully cultivate these systems. However, there are still administrative roles to play, including managing a “front door” to the community’s entrepreneurial economy that provides necessary information on programs and facilities as well as opportunities to connect with experienced or aspiring business founders.

#### **Tactical Options:**

- ✓ Identifying an entity to develop and manage the online hub
- ✓ Determining a domain name, designing the website, and cataloguing the Bristol area’s entrepreneurial resources for incorporation into the online tool
- ✓ Utilizing the resource inventory to determine if programmatic overlap exists for potential streamlining or integration
- ✓ Tapping into what local businesses are doing around innovation to inform website content, promote connections between entrepreneurs and established companies, and promote capital availability for startups and young businesses
- ✓ Consistently refreshed content, including local technology and small business news, thought leadership, profiles of and interviews with local entrepreneurs, updated resource listings, etc.
- ✓ Embedding a software platform on the site to foster connections and information sharing between local entrepreneurs, investors, mentors, students, and other constituencies
- ✓ Use of search engine optimization (SEO) and other tools to promote the site and drive visitation rates



### ***Develop and program an innovation and entrepreneurial networking and event facility***

Entrepreneurial ecosystems benefit from having a so-called “center of gravity” location where the entrepreneurial community and those interested in building their networks can interact, share ideas, and gain information about facilities, programs, capital, mentors, and other benefits. Leaders should consider prioritizing a Downtown Bristol location to capitalize on the district’s dynamism and attractiveness to professional talent. While these facilities are often developed and run by for-profit entities, the Bristol area might initially need to launch a non-profit space if a private developer does not show interest.

#### **Tactical Options:**

- ✓ Surveying local developers and private sector leaders to determine if a for-profit facility is feasible
- ✓ In lieu of private sector interest, determining the optimal purpose for a physical entrepreneurial hub, either for co-working, startup incubation or acceleration, a makerspace, or some combination of these elements
- ✓ Identifying a location<sup>iv</sup> – ideally donated or subsidized – to house the non-profit entrepreneurial facility with access to ten-gigabit internet connectivity
- ✓ Sourcing sustainable funding for facility management, maintenance, programming, and promotion
- ✓ Diverse calendar of regular programming, including classes, seminars, lectures, networking events and “meet-ups,” pitch contests, hackathons, and others
- ✓ Potential co-location of small business development center resources and staff as well as personnel from other entrepreneurially-focused organizations and programs



### ***Provide entrepreneurial training programs at all levels of education***

In order to build a culture of entrepreneurship in the Bristol area, residents must understand the realities and benefits of small business development and see entrepreneurship as a viable career option. These attitudes can be inculcated in the local population through exposure to entrepreneurial concepts in secondary school or even earlier. Higher education institutions can provide increased focus, skill-development, and even startup development opportunities through customized curricula and programming.

#### **Tactical Options:**

- ✓ Partnerships with state officials in Tennessee and Virginia to incorporate entrepreneurial education into core curricula
- ✓ Outreach to local businesses to assess support levels for providing Junior Achievement and other small business development programs in all grades at all Bristol area K-12 campuses
- ✓ Support for the Northeast State Community College Entrepreneurship certificate program, including connecting graduates to the Bristol area ecosystem

- ✓ Encouraging Virginia Highlands College and King University to offer stand-alone entrepreneurship certificates and/or degrees
- ✓ Offering entrepreneurship specializations for existing two- and four-year degrees in high-tech program areas
- ✓ Connecting students with entrepreneurial education programming at the proposed networking and event facility



### *Launch a technology track during Bristol Rhythm and Roots Reunion*

South by Southwest (SxSW) in Austin, Texas is the best known example of a music festival that has morphed into a multi-media event with numerous program tracks. SxSW Interactive is now an immensely popular event in its own right, with multiple presentations, forums, awards, and networking opportunities. Because music festivals tend to attract creatives and technology professionals, it is a natural extension of these events to create programming tracks around technology.

#### **Tactical Options:**

- ✓ Assessment of the value proposition of adding a technology component to Rhythm and Roots Reunion
- ✓ Based on the assessment, identification of funding and sponsorships to facilitate the programming and promotion of the technology event
- ✓ Programming the event, potentially including presentations, workshops, awards, networking opportunities and parties, startup pitch sessions, and other options
- ✓ Establishing follow-up protocols to leverage ideas and connections made during the technology event



### *Create a Bristol area angel investor network*

Throughout Bristol 2040 public input, stakeholders spoke of the community's strong legacy of philanthropic giving and the numerous local individuals who have funded transformative projects like the Birthplace of Country Music Museum, Paramount renovation, Bristol Public Library, and multiple social services programs. In fact, one interviewee noted, "Money is not our problem here." Capturing some of this philanthropic capacity through creation and management of an angel network could help strengthen the Bristol area's entrepreneurial ecosystem and startup culture.

#### **Tactical Options:**

- ✓ Exploration of angel networks in comparison communities to identify models and components for replication in Bristol
- ✓ Outreach to potential members of the angel network to organize informational and discussion sessions

- ✓ Confirmation of network members, priority investment focus areas, and documentation to establish investment guidelines, parameters, legal and accounting specifications, loan criteria and ownership stake, exit strategies, etc.
- ✓ Identification of capacity to manage the fund, investments, and investors
- ✓ Establishment of a protocol for introduction of investment opportunities to the network and a process for loan due diligence, market viability assessment, residency requirements, and other typical components of angel investment processes
- ✓ Promotion of the Bristol angel fund to potential recipients, including aggressive outreach to Bristol area expatriate entrepreneurs who might be interested in opportunities to start companies back home

## Strategic Focus Area: Housing

As in many smaller communities that have experienced flat population and income growth, the Bristol area features an older housing stock with fewer options for quality market-rate multifamily residences for purchase and rent and desirable single-family detached housing at all price points, but especially entry-level and high-end. Stakeholders feel that developers have an incomplete understanding of opportunities in Bristol, believing that the main market is under \$250,000 per unit while there is actually pent up demand at higher price points. Land is available for new development, while incentives such as tax increment financing (TIF) were actually created to stimulate residential construction. As was noted in the introduction to this plan, while Housing is differentiated as a separate Strategic Focus Area, actions in other Focus Areas for development of live-work artist housing and loft-style residences in Downtown Bristol are clearly applicable to the overall themes of this Housing section.

### PROPOSED CATALYST ACTIONS:



#### *Assess existing housing conditions and demand to inform development strategies*

The first step in identifying an actionable way forward for the Bristol area's housing sector is to understand past trends, current conditions, and projected demand. This will require a detailed study of the Twin City (and, potentially, a broader geography) housing market. This analysis should incorporate all existing plans and studies and not create redundant research, assessment, or prescriptions. Findings and recommendations will serve as the blueprint for enhancing Bristol's housing stock to enhance its competitiveness for new and existing residents.

#### Tactical Options:

- ✓ Inventory of existing analyses and plans and partner outreach to determine the planning area and process components of the housing study
- ✓ Identification of in-house capacity to conduct the housing study, seeking grant monies, contracting of an outside firm, or partnering with a non-profit institution for subsidized or in-kind planning assistance
- ✓ Conducting the study as a bi-state collaboration among Twin City governments (and, potentially, partner cities and/or counties) and implementing its recommendations



#### *Update regulatory frameworks to support the construction of new and rehabilitated housing in the Twin City*

It is critical that regulations, policies, and incentives support the type of housing the Bristol area is seeking to develop and redevelop. Based on the results of the proposed housing study, the development guidelines of both Bristol, Tennessee and Virginia should be revisited to ensure they are consistent with best practices recommended by the housing plan. Analysis of existing regulations could also be a component of the

housing study itself, in which case any proposed revisions would be addressed through implementation of the housing plan.

**Tactical Options:**

- ✓ Conducting a review of existing zoning, development controls, and incentives in the context of housing study findings – or leveraging a review from the housing study – to identify necessary changes to foster improved housing development and redevelopment
- ✓ Ensuring concurrency between new city ordinances and county, regional, and state regulations, land use policies, and incentives specific to housing
- ✓ Securing the consensus necessary to implement recommended policy changes



***Change developer perspectives about housing opportunities in the Bristol area***

Stakeholders noted a disconnect between their perceptions of local housing demand and the product developers feel the market can accommodate. While developers were said to focus on the low-end market, stakeholders feel there is great unmet demand for urban multifamily, entry-level family homes, “move-up” stock for established professionals, and high-end product approaching seven-figure pricing. Housing study data could be used to motivate developers to construct higher price-point housing in multiple styles.

**Tactical Options:**

- ✓ Production of digital and print materials summarizing the findings of the housing study related to current and projected market demand
- ✓ Leveraging existing relationships with housing developers to communicate the study’s findings and identifying additional developers who could be motivated to build in Bristol
- ✓ Conducting “development tours” of the Bristol area to show investors and builders locations primed for new housing development or redevelopment

## Strategic Focus Area: Leadership and Collaboration

Time and again in Market Street’s client communities we have found that a key determinant of their lasting success is the vision and capacity of their public and private leadership. Providing steadfast guidance on issues that may be controversial but are necessary for sustainable growth and prosperity can be difficult, especially for public officials serving at the whims of the electorate, but it is often these tough decisions that provide the greatest long-term impact. Feedback from multiple Bristol 2040 sources in interviews, focus groups, and an online survey consistently noted that the Bristol area would benefit from more proactive, visionary leadership. When private leaders collectively engaged on an issue – for example, the Ballard merger – results were positive and safeguarded the community’s health care sector from fracture and decline. Stakeholders would like to see more examples of this unity to improve the local business climate and expand resources for projects and organizations benefitting the community’s future competitiveness and growth.

### PROPOSED CATALYST ACTIONS:



#### *Host an economic development “boot camp” for municipal elected officials and staff*

A very common program in communities of all sizes across the U.S., an informational session offered to newly elected public officials on the dynamics of economic development, how governments can impact these processes, and the roles elected officials play in advancing progressive economic development policies and projects provides a useful grounding in these concepts. These half- to full-day sessions also enable economic development professionals (EDPros) and new public officials to initiate strong working relationships that can advance future job and wealth creation. EDPros facilitating the boot camps can represent all levels of government and include local, regional, and state economic development entities.

#### Tactical Options:

- ✓ Exploration of comparison programs and curricula from similarly sized communities to inform the agenda and content of session
- ✓ Day-long event to provide municipal elected officials and staff the guidance, skills, and tools to effectively encourage economic development in their communities
- ✓ Ongoing follow-up, including a potential second boot camp, to continue the process of partnering EDPros with elected officials to create a unified voice for economic development



#### *Offer facilitated information sessions for local individuals considering elected office*

Running for elected office can be intimidating, especially for residents who have never pursued this path. To ensure a diverse and representative field of candidates, many communities offer stakeholders the opportunity to learn about the process, discuss their options, and receive tutoring on the most effective ways to run a campaign.

**Tactical Options:**

- ✓ Pursuit of a multi-jurisdictional partnership among Bristol area governments to collaborate on hosting and programming information sessions for prospective candidates
- ✓ Identifying common components of public office information sessions to guide development of the Bristol area's program
- ✓ Recruiting existing or former politicians to speak at the sessions and share their experiences and suggestions
- ✓ Ensuring that the sessions are widely promoted through multiple media outlets and outreach to key local constituency groups



***Coordinate annual inter-city visits for Bristol area public and private leadership***

Regardless of how compelling a strategy looks on paper or sounds in conversation, actually seeing examples of successful project and program implementation has a powerful impact and often stimulates action back home. Inter-city visits are pursued by most communities of size in the U.S. Members of the Bristol 2040 Steering Committee have spoken of the strong impression a trip to Chattanooga made on them by observing the city's efforts and progress on downtown and riverfront development, innovation and entrepreneurship, placemaking, and other strategies.

**Tactical Options:**

- ✓ Identification of an organization to lead and coordinate the inter-city visit program
- ✓ Discussions with local leaders to identify potential visitation markets
- ✓ Outreach to colleagues in best-practice communities to schedule and program the inter-city visits
- ✓ Leveraging learnings from the visits to advance local policy, program, and project priorities



***Create a local government collaboration project in the Twin City***

The city councils of Bristol, Tennessee and Virginia often hold joint sessions to discuss issues of shared interest. The cities could take these efforts even further by partnering on a formal project designed to better collaborate on public services to reduce costs, redundancies, complexity, and time commitments. Importantly, the project should include city staff in addition to elected officials.

**Tactical Options:**

- ✓ Consensus on the need for and benefits of a collaboration project
- ✓ Identification of a facilitation agent for project meetings, either contracted or through in-kind, discounted, or donated services
- ✓ Determination of initial categories of focus for project participants (e.g., first-response processes, sanitation, emergency services, water and sewer, etc.)

- ✓ Hosting facilitated sessions with clearly defined goals, actionable outcomes, and performance measurements to track project implementation progress



### ***Fully engage and leverage leadership program members and graduates***

The Bristol Chamber of Commerce implements the Bristol area’s principal leadership development programs. The nine-month LEAD Bristol! adult training program focuses on providing skills essential to leadership development. A complimentary initiative for local students, Bristol Youth Leadership is a seven-month program for high school sophomores and juniors. Program graduates represent a tremendous resource to positively impact local strategic initiatives.

#### **Tactical Options:**

- ✓ Maintaining an active database of all adult and youth leadership program graduates
- ✓ Developing class-year cohorts or other graduate combinations to form project teams to work on impactful local efforts
- ✓ Working with all necessary partners to catalogue and confirm potential projects for graduate teams to adopt
- ✓ Effective tracking of project-support progress for promotion to the general public and media



### ***Develop a formal Bristol area mentorship program***

The Bristol area has an illustrious group of established leaders who have generously supported the community with their time, effort, and resources. However, stakeholders are concerned that there is an insufficient “bench” of emerging leaders to replace the current generation. Formalizing leadership transition through mentorship and network building is one way to ensure that a new cohort of leaders is prepared to ascend to local prominence.

#### **Tactical Options:**

- ✓ Determining a local entity to oversee program development, launch, and ongoing management
- ✓ Formalizing program dynamics, including number of participants and sessions, duration, meeting schedule, session agendas and content, inter-meeting activities, and graduate engagement
- ✓ Careful selection of the first class of mentors and mentees to ensure diverse representation from across the community
- ✓ Application of learnings from the first and subsequent classes to continuously improve the program

## Strategic Focus Area: Downtown Bristol

Downtown Bristol's ongoing revitalization is a source of great local pride and uplift amid the Twin City's recent economic and demographic trends. Stakeholders speak of downtown as Bristol's ascending complement to the draws of Eastman in Kingsport and ETSU in Johnson City. Downtown Bristol's momentum must not be taken for granted; continued dynamism will require new and enhanced public assets and smart planning to complement robust private investment. The dividing line running down the middle of State Street is both a challenge and an opportunity. How bi-state issues are addressed and leveraged will be critical to the downtown district's capacity to sustain its revival for years to come.

To that end, a recently completed Downtown Bristol Development Strategy – funded by Bristol, Tennessee but incorporating the entire downtown – lays out a compelling vision for the district's future growth and development. These recommendations, in addition to the program of work of Believe in Bristol, the bi-state downtown organization, comprise Bristol 2040's Downtown Bristol Strategic Focus Area. It is not the intention of Bristol 2040 to create redundant recommendations or add another layer of strategic complexity to Downtown Bristol development. Rather, Bristol 2040 provides the opportunity to integrate downtown development into a holistic, comprehensive strategic plan for Bristol's future that can be implemented through coordinated, collaborative, and sustainable partnerships.

### PROPOSED CATALYST ACTIONS:



#### *Effectively implement the Downtown Bristol Development Strategy*

This months-long effort involved extensive quantitative analysis and public input. It focused on two primary planning areas: 1) Downtown Core, and 2) Downtown Fringe and West State Corridor. Recommendations addressed all aspects of downtown development, including the physical realm, programmatic opportunities, and social issues such as talent capacity and homelessness. The following are summaries of the strategic components found in the full Downtown Bristol Development Strategy.

#### **Tactical Categories:**

- ✓ **Physical Enhancements Strategies:** These components focus on recommendations for Pedestrian and Cyclist Mobility; Parking; and Public Space
- ✓ **Economic and Market-Based Strategies:** These components focus on recommendations for Upper Floor Reuse; Downtown and Pinnacle Relationship; Tourism, Arts, and Entertainment; Economic Development; and Establishing Downtown as a Destination
- ✓ **Place-Specific Strategies:** These components include recommendations focused on key downtown and downtown fringe corridors and blocks as well as expanding the downtown footprint and leveraging the state line sign
- ✓ **Other Strategies:** These components address homelessness, branding, stakeholder support, young professional recruitment, and other recommendations



### *Support the advancement of Believe in Bristol's strategic priorities*

Believe in Bristol is a non-profit 501(c)3 organization created after Downtown Bristol's designation as a Certified Main Street Community. It facilitates the bi-state district's future growth by implementing the Main Street Four Point Approach focusing on Organization, Design, Promotion and Economic Restructuring. Believe in Bristol's program of work<sup>v</sup> in these categories is summarized in the following tactical categories.

#### **Tactical Categories:**

- ✓ **Arts and Entertainment:** Multiple strategic tactics are focused on a goal of using the arts to make a positive difference in the downtown's future, boost Bristol's creative economy and cultural tourism, and cultivate Bristol's creativity
- ✓ **Design:** Multiple strategic tactics are focused on a goal of enhancing the appearance of the commercial district by rehabilitating historic buildings, encouraging new construction, developing context-sensitive design management systems, and conducting long-term planning
- ✓ **Economic Restructuring:** Multiple strategic tactics are focused on a goal of strengthening and expanding the district's economic base, retaining and expanding existing businesses, converting unused or underutilized space into productive property, and information-sharing with downtown businesses
- ✓ **Promotion:** Multiple strategic tactics are focused on a goal of creating a positive downtown image that will rekindle community pride and improve consumer and investor confidence in the district

## Strategic Focus Area: Targeted Business

Economic development can mean different things to different people. In the context of Bristol 2040, we are positioning economic development as a practice that programmatically supports the retention and expansion of existing business, changes perceptions of the community's competitive position and prospects, and capitalizes on key opportunities for new investment and bi-state collaboration. The tools that economic development professionals use to stimulate investment in parcels and properties are valuable and must be effectively leveraged. Above all, economic development is a "team sport" that requires local and regional public and not-for-profit partners to work together effectively to optimize the competitive climate for quality job and wealth creation.

Because it is a bi-state geography, the Bristol area's economic development representation is complicated. This presents challenges related to policy, incentives, and programming but also means that Bristol can tap into multiple funding pots. Leveraging its bi-state representation as an opportunity rather than a challenge is the ultimate goal of Bristol 2040. The following entities – in addition to state-level efforts at the **Tennessee Department of Economic and Community Development** and the **Virginia Economic Development Partnership** – impact economic development in the Bristol area:

- **NETWORKS Sullivan Partnership:** NETWORKS represents Bristol, TN-VA, Kingsport, TN, and Bluff City, TN, and principally implements marketing and attraction and existing business programming.
- **City of Bristol, Tennessee Industrial Development Board:** The board has authority to authorize industrial development bonds under state and federal statute, amid other powers. The Bristol, Tennessee City Council appoints seven members to the IDA Board, which handles the city's Economic Development Strategy and Economic Development Incentive Program.
- **City of Bristol, Virginia Industrial Development Authority:** This is the primary organization responsible for the city's industrial development, including the development of publicly owned industrial parks utilizing a variety of financing mechanisms.
- **GO Virginia Region One:** GO Virginia supports programs to create more high-paying jobs through incentivized collaboration between business, education, and government to diversify and strengthen the economy in every region of the Commonwealth. Region One includes the counties of Bland, Buchanan, Carroll, Dickenson, Grayson, Lee, Russell, Scott, Smyth, Tazewell, Washington Wise, and Wythe; and the cities of Bristol, Galax and Norton.
- **Northeast Tennessee Valley Regional Industrial Development Association (NETVRIDA):** Bristol, TN-VA's two principal utilities, Bristol Tennessee Essential Services (BTES) and Bristol Virginia Utilities (BVU), are among 11 power distributors funding this marketing organization for a 13-county region that includes Bristol, TN, Sullivan County, TN, Bristol, VA, and Washington County, VA.
- **Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA):** TVA is a corporate agency of the United States that provides electricity for business customers and local power companies serving 10 million people in parts of

seven southeastern states. It also assists local power companies and state and local governments with economic development and job creation.

The proposed catalyst actions in this Strategic Focus Area are intended to be implemented by one or more of the above organizations working collaboratively to grow the Twin City's economy. Specific lead and support roles of these partners will be detailed in the Bristol 2040 Implementation Plan, the final phase of the planning process.

## PROPOSED CATALYST ACTIONS:



### *Implement enhanced existing business retention and expansion programming*

Roughly three-fourths of local jobs are created by existing companies, so it is critical that communities effectively support their growth and competitiveness. Business retention and expansion (BRE) programs must be professionally staffed and effectively resourced and programmed to: 1) address businesses' competitive challenges and growth issues, 2) identify opportunities to source goods and services locally and potential attraction prospects in companies' networks, 3) resolve workforce challenges in partnership with training providers; and 4) help incorporate new technologies into companies' operations,

#### Tactical Options:

- ✓ Planned expansion of NETWORKS' FIRST existing business program to support growth of incumbent Bristol, Tennessee firms
- ✓ Building a coalition of partners to implement existing business programming in Bristol, Virginia
- ✓ Coordination of Twin City BRE programs to identify shared issues and opportunities to address and capitalize on
- ✓ Effective leveraging of Bristol, TN-VA's development authorities' bonding capacity and incentives tools to advance business retention and expansion opportunities
- ✓ Ensuring that city government policies and regulations optimize the local business climate for existing firms



### *Effectively market Bristol's prime development sites and buildings*

Of the six industrial parks in the NETWORKS service area, three are Select Tennessee Certified Sites – a designation signifying they are "development ready" for investment. These are Aerospace Park, Bristol Business Park, and Partnership Park II. While Bristol, Virginia contains no industrial parks, it features a number of sites and buildings listed in TVA's database. Development property and product are important assets to accommodate growth of existing industry and attraction of high-value prospects.

#### Tactical Options:

- ✓ Leveraging existing organizations, programs, and partnerships focused on promoting Bristol area development sites and buildings

- ✓ Consistently ensuring Bristol area properties are listed on state, regional, and TVA site and building databases and contain up-to-date specifications
- ✓ Connecting Bristol, VA development sites to opportunities generated by the commonwealth’s new tourism manufacturing initiative
- ✓ Enhancing the competitiveness of sites and buildings by seeking certification and/or upgraded infrastructure
- ✓ Identifying and pursuing high-value opportunities to secure and prepare additional development sites as market conditions demand

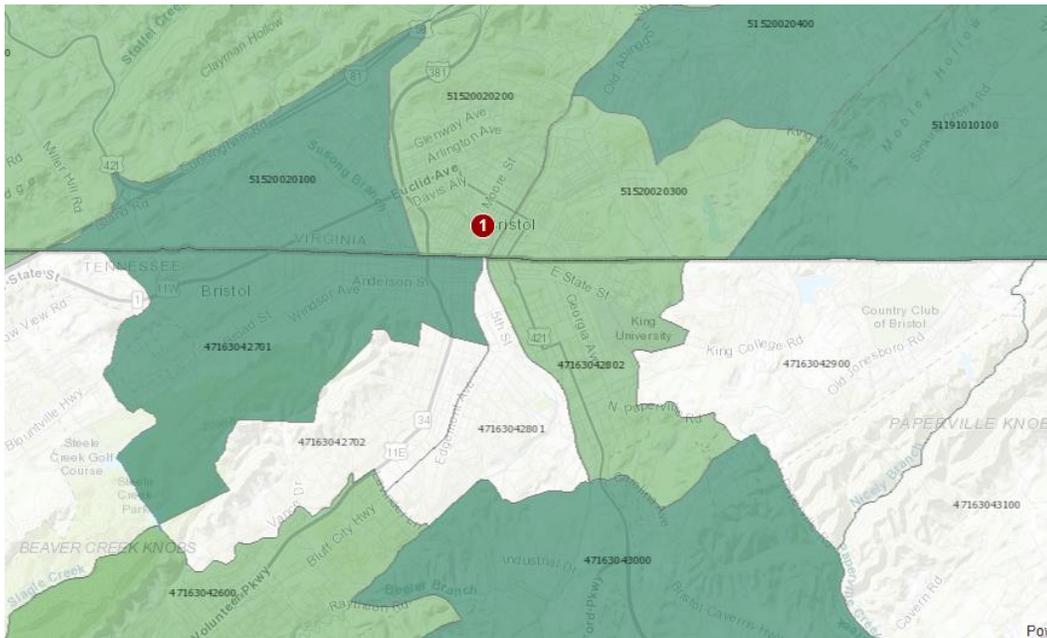


**Secure quality investment in Bristol, TN-VA Opportunity Zones**

A component of the 2017 Tax Cuts and Jobs Act, an Opportunity Zone is an economically distressed U.S. Census Tract where new investments, under certain conditions, may be eligible for preferential tax treatment. A Qualified Opportunity Fund (QOF) is an investment vehicle set up as either a partnership or corporation for investing in eligible Qualified Opportunity Zone property<sup>vi</sup>. Since its inception, the Opportunity Zone program has attracted billions in potential investments through QOFs poised to invest as soon as the federal government finalizes the law’s specifications.

There are four designated Opportunity Zone Census tracts in Sullivan County and two in Bristol, Virginia. The following map displays Opportunity Zones in the **darker green** color.

**BRISTOL OPPORTUNITY ZONES**



Source: [www.cims.cdfifund.gov](http://www.cims.cdfifund.gov)

**Tactical Options:**

- ✓ Parcel and property assessment to confirm an up-to-date inventory of investment tracts in Bristol's Opportunity Zones
- ✓ Development of prospectuses detailing Bristol's most compelling and competitive Opportunity Zone investment sites, including recommendations for potential uses
- ✓ Creation of online and printed marketing materials for the Opportunity Zones, principally consisting of the prospectuses
- ✓ Collaboration with all necessary economic development partners to ensure that Bristol's Opportunity Zones are marketed as broadly as possible, including Virginia's new initiative<sup>vii</sup>



***Change external perceptions about the Bristol area's competitiveness for business and talent***

Perception is reality in economic development. As numerous Bristol 2040 input respondents noted, if the perception of the Bristol area is a community in decline suffering from opioid addiction and manufacturing loss, that will become the reality, which negatively impacting the community's growth potential. Most of the entities listed at the front of this section market Bristol, TN-VA in some capacity. It is critical that those themes and messages are not only positive and compelling, but reflect a shared vision and voice.

**Tactical Options:**

- ✓ Optimized web content, design, search engine optimization, usability, and interactivity to ensure Bristol is marketed effectively online
- ✓ Continued promotion of Bristol area assets and opportunities to site consultants and other influencers through inbound events such as NETWORKS' Red Carpet Tour, attendance at real estate association events, and direct visits to consultants' home markets
- ✓ Attraction of earned media through collective public relations efforts to seed positive Bristol-related stories in regional, state, and national publications in all media
- ✓ Fully leveraging potential efforts to change perceptions of the greater Tri-Cities region (Tennessee and Virginia) through collaborative, multi-media promotional outreach and programming
- ✓ Collaboration with state-level partners to participate in domestic and international marketing trips, trade show and industry conference attendance, and internal and external prospect meetings

## CONCLUSION

This Bristol 2040 draft strategic plan has leveraged input from hundreds of local stakeholders and a comprehensive array of statistical research and analysis to identify eight Strategic Focus Areas and over forty underlying Catalyst Actions to position the Bristol area to lay the groundwork for the community's success in the coming 20 years.

The area's recent economic and demographic trends will not be improved overnight. However, through a compelling vision and purposeful implementation of a transformative strategic plan, the Bristol area can reorient its growth curve and become a more dynamic destination for talent and investment. The building blocks are there; it will be up to the community's public and private leadership and legacy organizations and institutions to come together across state, city, and county lines to advance a progressive agenda for change.

It is critical to understand and acknowledge that Bristol 2040 is the community's plan. It is not the strategy of a single organization, the "business community," government, or any other entity. Rather, it represents an integrated set of transformative strategies for coordinated and collaborative pursuit by all local partners.

Bristol leaders should view its two-state geography not as a challenge but an opportunity to unite not divide and differentiate the Twin City as one community that is a "good place to live" on either side of State Street.

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<sup>i</sup> McGee, David. "Study: Passenger rail service is 'needed'". Bristol Herald Courier, December 19, 2018. Accessed from: [https://www.swvatoday.com/news/article\\_4d75ae01-03a4-5ce0-ad24-26fbc7a986ad.html](https://www.swvatoday.com/news/article_4d75ae01-03a4-5ce0-ad24-26fbc7a986ad.html)

<sup>ii</sup> McGee, David. "Virginia General Assembly approves casino legislation." Bristol-Herald Courier, February 23, 2019, accessed from: [https://www.heraldcourier.com/news/virginia-general-assembly-approves-casino-legislation/article\\_ab6b7c6c-a90d-5532-9b51-cf25772ccb77.html](https://www.heraldcourier.com/news/virginia-general-assembly-approves-casino-legislation/article_ab6b7c6c-a90d-5532-9b51-cf25772ccb77.html)

<sup>iii</sup> Collective Impact is the commitment of a group of actors from different sectors to a common agenda for solving a specific social problem, using a structured form of collaboration. The concept hinges on the idea that in order for organizations to create lasting solutions to social problems on a large-scale, they need to coordinate their efforts and work together around a clearly defined goal. (source: Wikipedia)

<sup>iv</sup> If a makerspace function is included, the facility would ideally be located in the proposed Downtown Bristol Arts and Maker District

<sup>v</sup> Believe in Bristol's work plan elements focused on organizational management have been omitted.

<sup>vi</sup> Source: <https://www.irs.gov/newsroom/opportunity-zones-frequently-asked-questions>

<sup>vii</sup> The commonwealth of Virginia will develop an online marketplace to help educate stakeholders on the program, share project ideas and pipeline, and connect investors to businesses and property in Virginia's Opportunity Zones. In addition, tools and investment resources will be available to help projects with capital stacking and ensuring deal flow is occurring. (Source: <https://www.governor.virginia.gov/newsroom/all-releases/2019/april/headline-840030-en.html>)