



CITY OF  
**BRISTOL**  
VIRGINIA

Department of  
Economic Development  
Strategic Plan



## About Bristol

The City of Bristol, Virginia, incorporated in 1890, makes up 13.3 square miles of Southwest, Virginia. Known for being the birthplace of country music, our City's contribution to American music history cannot be understated. With its location in the Appalachians, Bristol is graced by beautiful mountainous scenery and outdoor recreation opportunities. There is something for everyone to enjoy. Bristol, Virginia has a beautiful and culturally rich downtown area for all to love. Proximity to natural areas such as Sugar Hollow Park provides a great opportunity for families and adventurers alike to hike and enjoy the wild beauty of the mountains. For those more interested in food and nightlife, Bristol, Virginia also offers a plethora of great restaurants and bars to enjoy, and a new Hard Rock Hotel & Casino.

The City of Bristol is the central tourism point of Southwest Virginia. Bristol boasts an array of festivals annually, which draw thousands of visitors. With the Hard Rock Hotel & Casino opening recently, Bristol is in prime position to see world renowned acts take the Hard Rock Live stage and add millions of additional visitors to the area.

The City of Bristol, Virginia is blessed with exceptional human capital. As Virginia overall is viewed as an attractive place to do business, the Department of Economic Development strives to leverage these qualities to provide more job opportunities and bridge the gap between the local and state average median income for the citizens of Bristol, Virginia. The City will continue to do this using four key components: business retention & expansion, recruiting new business, placemaking, and utilizing strategic partnerships. By focusing on these components, our goal is to retain and grow the workforce and contribute to keeping Virginia a great place to do business.

Though we continue to face certain financial strains, Bristol is resilient. We know that if we can take advantage of all that makes Bristol beautiful, we can create a destination where tourists want to visit, and new professionals want to stay. With our location just off of I-81 and the proximity to the Tri-Cities Airport, Bristol has the benefit of accessibility. The potential expansion of Amtrak Rail to our area could help enhance the accessibility of Bristol for visitors. Through more development efforts, our goal is to retain our current workforce and small businesses, while recruiting new businesses and expanding our workforce. This will lead to more jobs and better wages for our residents. Despite our challenges, we hope to provide for our citizens and improve our City so that we can continue to embody our slogan, "A Good Place To Live."



## Vision, Mission, and Values

### Vision



Our vision for the City of Bristol in the coming years can best be encompassed by the slogan, “**Live, Work, Play.**” We envision Bristol as being a safe, happy, and healthy place for our citizens and stakeholders to “live, work and play.” Bristol will be an inviting place to live and visit, and all will feel welcome in our City. We will restore blighted homes and create new places to live and do business. Bristol will be recognized as a place where

people can live a well-balanced life. Bristol will offer the amenities of a big city while still fostering the warmth and comfort of a tight knit community. The City will provide resources for businesses, exceptional service to our stakeholders, and thrive as a unique tourist attraction.

### Mission

We are a team dedicated to enhancing the quality of life for our residents, while focusing on economic resilience. We foster an environment that values the safety and well-being of our existing citizens, while also looking to attract new residents and stakeholders. We invest in quality of life measures to benefit all who visit or reside in Bristol. We provide quality educational and workforce opportunities for all who come to our City. We preserve Bristol’s historic and cultural heritage. Bristol Virginia’s Department of Economic Development focuses on business retention and expansion, as well as recruiting new business.

### City Values

Bristol’s values are our core beliefs and principles that guide our actions and decisions:

- Economic Resilience
- Accountability to our Citizens and Stakeholders
- Financial Stability
- Community Engagement
- Economic Diversity
- Safety and Public Health



## How We Got Here



As part of the Strategic Plan development process, Bristol's Economic Development Strategic Plan Development Team conducted a SWOT analysis. SWOT stands for strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. The purpose of Bristol's Economic Development SWOT analysis was to identify and understand potential constraints and to identify what can move Bristol forward in terms of economic development.

To ensure that community engagement was part of the process, we developed an online survey focused on specific economic development questions. We advertised access to the survey and encouraged citizens and stakeholders to participate.

Through our process, we identified the following:

### **Affordable Housing and Support for the Unhoused**

The most important issue that was identified is the lack of affordable housing. Whether solutions have to do with restoration of blighted homes or construction of new ones, the affordable housing crisis is a problem Bristol plans to address. In a similar vein, many have expressed the need for more support of Bristol's unhoused population. This could mean providing financial support to assist those with mental health or addiction struggles, or providing temporary housing for those hoping to get assistance.

### **Transportation**

The need for increased public and pedestrian transportation options across Bristol was also identified. The Tri-Cities Airport is already a huge asset for Bristol residents. The potential to increase incoming and outgoing flights at the airport would be a major factor in attracting more visitors to the City. Another possibility, many suggested, would be attracting the expansion of Amtrak Rail through Bristol. Visitors would be able to ride through the City, see our beauty, and may decide to return in the future. Expansion of passenger rail into Bristol would not only attract tourists to the area but it may even convert those tourists into future residents.



## **Education, Development, and Tourism**

Other areas of emphasis included education and workforce development, housing development, and retention of the younger generation in the area while providing life-long learning opportunities for all residents.

In terms of housing development, many brought up restoring blighted buildings for businesses, the need for more community and cultural events, as well as developing a greater presence online to better market our city. Bristol wants to do an amazing job of maintaining our downtown for the community that lives there, works there, and plays there.

To support business engagement, expansion, and continuity, the City may want to utilize job creation and term commitment requirements in conjunction with economic incentives.



## Looking Ahead

### Goals and Objectives

**Goal 1.** *The City will aim to increase accessibility to the City of Bristol.*

**Objectives:**

- Support efforts to bring passenger rail into Bristol
- Support efforts to increase flights into the Tri-Cities Airport
- Support efforts to bring an inland port to Southwest Virginia
- Promote the City's location as an advantage to perspective and existing residents and businesses

**Goal 2.** *The City will attract and retain high quality businesses.*

**Objectives:**

- Use economic incentives in a responsible manner
- Leverage existing development to attract new businesses
- Support workforce training and development
- Market the City toward more industry
- Use state and grant resources to attract and retain businesses

**Goal 3.** *The City will ensure an economically diverse revenue stream to the City.*

**Objectives:**

- Pursue manufacturing, tourism, and hospitality opportunities
- Work with the local colleges to communicate business and industry needs
- Work with state officials to stay engaged with emerging industries
- Promote and supporting emerging technologies and innovating sectors

**Goal 4.** *The City will support and invest in the growth of the Downtown area.*

**Objectives:**

- Increase business retention and expansion efforts in our downtown
- Support efforts to make our downtown more walkable and safer
- Use incentives or grant opportunities to not only recruit new business, but to retain existing businesses

**Goal 5.** *The City will increase tourism to the City of Bristol.*

**Objectives:**

- Improve existing events and increasing the number of new community celebrations across the City
- Continue to support Explore Bristol in marketing the City of Bristol throughout the United States
- Continue to support an expansion of transportation opportunities into Bristol, VA.



**Goal 6.** *The City will ensure that economic development initiatives increase the quality of life for Bristol's citizens.*

**Objectives:**

- Support transportation initiatives
- Promote the entrance of higher wage jobs into the City
- Promote educational opportunities in agriculture, business development, other trades, and higher education
- Be fiscally responsible when making economic development decisions

**Goal 7.** *The City will create Economic Development Zones.*

**Objectives:**

- Work with City Planning, IDA, and City Council to create territories for development incentives
- Work with state partners to increase regional opportunities, collaboration, and further our internal economic stability and development

**Bristol is already “A Good Place To Live.” Let's make it an even better one.**