

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIC PLAN 2005-2010

Positioning Bluefield as the
Premier Location for Business
and
Community Vitality

October
2005

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*Over the Summit
Arch Center*

Acknowledgements

A special thank you to the "Rethink Bluefield" Group, who facilitated the economic development strategic planning process with the Bluefield State College Research and Development Corporation. This process served as the foundation for this Economic Development Plan.

City of Bluefield

Gary Moore, Mayor

City Council **PUT IN THE COUNCIL NAMES**

Mark Henne, City Manager

ADD BSC and BSC R&D

ADD REVISION BLUEFIELD GROUP NAMES

On the cover – Put Images of Bluefield:

This five-year Plan sets forth an ambitious yet achievable strategic economic development agenda for the City of Bluefield and its business and community partners. The Plan is keyed to two of overall Strategic Plan goals - a Strong Economy and a Vibrant Downtown. The Economic Development Plan's purpose is to articulate a set of measurable strategies and actions to facilitate continued economic growth and new opportunities for the City's business districts and neighborhoods, and to clearly define the roles and responsibilities of the City's economic development partners in achieving successful outcomes. The Plan will serve as a work plan for the City's economic development team, providing focus and direction for future resource allocation and decision making.

As part of development of the Economic Development Strategic Plan, the City of Bluefield will partner with Dr. Felica Blanks at the Bluefield State College Research and Development Corporation and Dr. Albert Walker, President of Bluefield State College to research industry market trends in Bluefield and South Mercer County, as well as best practices in economic development throughout the U.S. The resulting report will be included in the Technical Appendix.

The City's Strategic Goals

PLAN PURPOSE AND PROCESS

“A strong local economy is one of the primary goals in this Strategic Plan. Our group understands that a prosperous economy enhances the vitality and livability of our community.”

Vision Statement: the “Revision Bluefield” Group

Economic Development Strategic Plan

- 1. Vibrant Downtown**
- 2. Safe Community**
- 3. Effective Transportation System**
- 4. Strong Local Economy**
- 5. Valued Government Services**

Business & Community Partners

Chamber of Commerce-Facilitated Economic Development Strategy Teams Provide Significant Input to this Plan. The City maintains close relationships with the Greater Bluefield Chamber of Commerce, the Bluefield Downtown Merchants Association, and the Bluefield State College Research and Development Corporation - all nonprofit, organizations dedicated to promoting a better economic climate in the Bluefield area. In October 2005, the Revision Bluefield Group, in partnership with the Bluefield State College Research and Development Corporation began a strategic planning effort for Bluefield's economy. Local businesses and civic volunteers met to discuss Bluefield's competitive advantages and disadvantages, and develop initial economic strategies. This Economic Strategic Planning Group divided into three subgroups: “Workforce of the Future,” “Downtown Center of Arts,” and “Southern West Virginia Gateway to Technology.” Each group identified gaps, made short-term and long-term recommendations (see Technical Appendix) and identified community leads

for each recommendation. Priority short-term and long-term recommendations from each group are included in the Plan.

BLUEFIELD CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

Recent Milestones in Bluefield's History

Bluefield incorporated in XXX with YYY residents.

1989

1990

1991

1992

1993

1999

2002

2003

2004

In this area list significant accomplishments.... Latest should be fiber loop, Cityscape, etc.... Each one should point to an area of interest in technology advancement, infrastructure improvements, major local government initiatives or support of the arts.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT GOALS

GOAL 1

Create a Vibrant Downtown to Serve as a Destination Retail and Community Gathering Place

GOAL 2

Strengthen and Grow the City's Workforce

GOAL 3

Invest in Development of "Neighborhood" Art Centers

GOAL 4

Promote the City's Image as the "Southern West Virginia Gateway to Technology" in the Region and Nationally through Marketing and Business-Friendly City Services

ACTION STRATEGIES

Quality Downtown Development

List several ideas for developing the downtown business areas

Create a Vibrant Downtown to Serve as a Destination Retail and Community Gathering Place

The City has a longstanding vision to create a more vital and identifiable Downtown, with retail, office, residential and entertainment uses located adjacent to transit. To further this vision, the City has made strategic investments: LIST THESE

GOAL 1

Create a Vibrant Downtown to Serve as a Destination Retail and Community Gathering Place

- Encourage the development of at least 100 units of new market rate housing in Bluefield by 2010. Consider incentives for new housing construction such as:
 - Reduced or waived permit development fees.
 - Building code changes to allow encourage developers to choose this area.
 - Creating a multifamily tax exemption program for rental market rate housing.

- In partnership with the Bluefield State College Research and Development Corporation, develop a conference and meeting center by 2010 that can accommodate at least 200 people.
 - The Center could include an adjacent hotel.
 - The Center should include state-of-the-art video-conferencing and multi-media capabilities.
- Downtown Transportation Improvements

Review the downtown transportation plan to ensure it meets expanded needs

- Business Growth and Retention
 - Attract two new businesses to downtown annually. (City has the lead role.)
 - Work directly with businesses to keep them in the area. There needs to be as much effort put into retaining businesses as there is to getting new ones into the area.
 - Persuade three existing retail businesses annually to expand their evening/weekend operating hours. (City has lead role.)
- Downtown Image, Activities and Pedestrian Experience
 - Expand the downtown streetscape and parking/pedestrian plan for key areas of downtown by 2008.
 - Develop activities to expand use of downtown areas with a major focus on events that bring in tourism and visitors.

In the short-term:

- Create and implement a marketing strategy and Bluefield brand to attract desired businesses. Focus on “business-friendly” environment of the City and local government, the natural advantages of the region and the technology infrastructure. (City has lead role, with Chamber and Civic involvement.)

Community Dialogue - Economic Development Strategic Plan Downtown Subgroup Recommendations

Involve the local civic and economic groups in the development of a plan to improve the appearance of the downtown area. The plan may include gateway features, signage, way finding, banners, public art, street furniture, landscaping, and other design features, as well as consideration for street vendors and performers. Phase I of the project should focus on the creation of an attractive corridor area near Chicory Square.

In addition:

- Provide matching grant funding to at least five downtown businesses through a pilot Façade Improvement Program funded through federal Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) dollars by 2008.
- Provide new landscaping and paint at least three buildings in downtown that front along the Railroad corridor by 2008. This corridor symbolizes Bluefield's connection to the past and should play a key role in defining our tourism positioning. (City has lead role.)
- Bring a "Farmers' Market" to a City-owned outdoor location in downtown Kent by 2008.
- Create a comprehensive special events strategy that brings people to downtown who will shop in downtown businesses. (City has lead role.)
- Support the local Chamber as an Agent of Downtown Revitalization
 - Continue to contract on an annual basis and partner with the local civic and economic groups to complete City design, promotion and economic development goals for Downtown.
 - Complete a City branding strategy and recruitment package and host a broker's event to unveil the brand by 2005. (City has lead role.)
 - Create a Bluefield Economic Development website by 2006. (City has lead role.)
 - Form an Economic Development Alliance, perhaps calling in the Bluefield Economic Development Alliance (BEDA), with a mix of business and economic leaders. This would need to be a mix of creative thinkers, action-orientated individuals with a broad political and social impact base.
- Market downtown school success stories to Bluefield citizens, realtors, developers, employers, prospective employers and housing buyers. (City has lead role, with Chamber and Civic involvement.)

In the long-term:

- Develop a state-of-the-art conference center in cooperation with Bluefield State College Research and Development Corporation. As an alternative: Attract a hotel with meeting space to hold 300- 500 seats. (City has lead role, with Chamber and Civic involvement.)

A Capable, Trained, Motivated Workforce Drives Economic Growth

Workforce training and education is a vital strategy to ensure that Bluefield's young and diverse workforce has the training and experience needed to reach livable wage employment, and to fill skill-intensive jobs in the manufacturing/technology sectors. Many of Bluefield's residents commute outside the City for jobs; the City should consider strategies to improve the accessibility of Bluefield's jobs to Bluefield's residents. Manufacturing and technology have long been subject to the ups and downs of regular market cycles and the pressures of an increasingly competitive global market. Globalization and the ability of other countries to export deflation have caused some U.S. manufacturers to lose pricing power. In the past ten years, successful manufacturers have built their success on being the low-cost producers of high-quality products. Some of these firms may need outside assistance to make the strategic change to a focus on innovation. Therefore, not only must the City invest in training new technologies to the workforce, Bluefield must also invest in training existing businesses in utilizing new strategies, processes and markets.

GOAL 2

Strengthen and Grow the City's Workforce

In the short-term:

- Work collaboratively with the Chamber and Region 1 Workforce to clearly define the needs of Bluefield's businesses. Conduct a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats analysis. (City and Chamber take lead roles for completion in 2006.)

ACTION STRATEGIES

- Partner with the Chamber of Commerce, Center for Applied Research and Technology (CART), Bluefield State College Research and Development Corporation (BSC R&D) and Bluefield State College to create a Center for Advanced Technology by 2008, which would include a research institution to transfer technology to commercial applications, a public access research library and librarian, and a teaching facility to develop a skilled workforce.
- Build real life work problems into curriculum to be used. Teachers should job shadow at businesses, carry back industry information and incorporate industry standards into the curriculum. (City has lead role with involvement of the College.)
- Write a 21st Century Community Learning Center federal grant in order to offer adult education and after-school activities for English-language learners.
- Offer business assistance and training targeted to small, ethnic businesses.
- Use a "Magnet-School" approach to highlight a specific discipline at the high school level and work with the school board to re-designate or allocate a school to focus on gifted students within that discipline.

- Partner with the Chamber and work collaboratively with local colleges to develop a consortium of training programs and niches serving the technology, furniture, manufacturing and construction sectors.
- Fund literacy-based, on-site basic skills training and soft-skill training to increase employee skills at Bluefield businesses.
- Provide child care scholarships to improve the ability of low- and moderate income wage earners to maintain and progress in their jobs.

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In the long-term:

- Create a Bluefield/South Mercer County Transitional Manufacturing Economic Plan and Center for Advanced Manufacturing. The Center should concentrate on one manufacturing sub sector and/or disciplines common to key sub sectors, and offer:
 - Research institution to transfer technology to commercial applications in the area.
 - A clearinghouse of best practices and national research and training, curriculum and courses to develop a manufacturing segment that is suited to growth in the area.
 - Train and promote a skilled workforce with a focus on quality and efficient practices. (City has lead role with Bluefield State College, CART and BSC R&D as partners.)

There is a "World Market" for the Heritage of this Area

This area is rich in history and artistic heritage. By providing an environment where artistic endeavors are supported and assistance is provided to spotlight local artisans, bring their products to market and attract new artists the City can capitalize on a relatively untapped resource.

GOAL 3

Invest in Development of "Neighborhood" Art Centers

We need to expand on this area and include partnership through the MountainSouth Incubator Alliance to the new Tri-Cities Regional World Trade Center. This Center is now fully licensed and works directly with other WTC's around the globe. Andy Burke has been named its first director. Emphasize the potential impact on the area including providing motivation to "think globally". Additionally:

- Establish a "street-presence" area focused on the arts.
- Actively recruit regional artisans to locate shops here.
- Work to expand the market for these items outside of the local geographic area by using the internet and by association with the WTC.
- Hold annual, highly publicized events focusing on the artisan community.

THIS AREA NEEDS EXPANSION

Bluefield is a PRIME Location for Technology-Based Companies

Bluefield is centrally located within a day's drive of every major metropolitan, financial and government center on the East Coast. Free from the destructive hazards of nature's

Positioning Bluefield as the Premier Location for Business and Community Vitality

whims, this area boasts rail and highway access, low crime rates, low property costs, plentiful energy, a workforce with a high degree of work ethics, excellent colleges producing highly skilled and valued graduates, and a very large fiber trunk connection to the Internet. Bluefield offers a quality of life and a safe environment far superior to those locations that have become synonymous with the term "High Tech". Focus needs to be on the quality of life and investments made in neighborhoods, schools, and facilities as well as the technology layer.

GOAL 4

Promote the City's Image as the "Southern West Virginia Gateway to Technology" in the Region and Nationally through Marketing and Business-Friendly City Services. ✓

In the short-term:

- Work collaboratively with the Chamber to clearly identify the technical resources available to Bluefield's businesses. Conduct a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats analysis. (City and Chamber take lead roles for completion in 2006.)

ACTION STRATEGIES

○ Marketing Program

- Develop an overall community and economic development marketing plan and a media and real estate broker outreach strategy for the City by 2006, to promote the City's image as a Technology Center in the region and to attract new investment, development and residents. Consider marketing efforts targeted towards high-profile people of influence who do not live in this area.
- Market the quality school district and diversity of housing options.
- Produce City marketing materials by 2006, including a community profile and brochures on Bluefield's park and recreation facilities and investments in transportation, the High Technology Corridors Program, the downtown fiber loop, etc...
- Promote Bluefield through development of marketing materials as an International Community that welcomes and promotes diversity and is tied to the global marketplace by 2006.

○ Business Retention and Attraction

- Provide direct assistance to 15 existing businesses annually targeted towards retention and expansion. Promote the long-term stability of Bluefield businesses by providing assistance to those who purchase their own real estate.
- Contact or provide recruitment assistance to a minimum of 25 businesses annually. Focus on businesses that could be recruited because of Bluefield's locational advantages and competitive property and lease rates.
- Partner with BSC R&D to open a Small Business Incubator in Bluefield by providing partial funding by 2006.
- Partner with BSC R&D to open a Small Business Support Center in Bluefield to provide technical assistance, grant writing services and training to a minimum of 30 regional businesses or residents annually.

- Work directly with elected officials in Washington to target federal activities needing to expand their data facilities, establish new call centers or data warehouse operations.
- Establish a “plug-and-play” data center. Utilize an existing space to build a small state-of-the-art data center with UPS, air handlers, raised flooring, racks, biometric security access, and high speed internet access. Use this to demo capabilities and lease to first available customer.
- Establish a “plug-and-play” call center. Utilize an existing space to build a small state-of-the-art call center with VOIP phones, full IVR, voice recording, auto-attendant, GUI interface, Call Center Metrics capability, biometric security access, and high speed internet access. Use this to demo capabilities and lease to first available customer.
- **Business-Friendly City Services**
 - Continue to improve, monitor and market the permitting and inspection process for development:
 - ✓ Explore the feasibility of developing an on-line permitting system and allowing on-line completion of permit application forms by 2006.
 - Market the success of how easy it is to get permits in Bluefield.
 - Enhance the City’s image and improve accessibility to City information and services by redesigning the City’s website.
 - ✓ Establish an Economic Development website by 2006 that includes graphics, pictures, data from the GIS system database and easy navigation. Monitor hits to the website and send emails to every person, not located in Bluefield that visits the site.
 - Promote the City’s position as an advocate and ombudsperson within the for the business community.
 - ✓ Invested in an up-to-date, private sector-maintained real estate database that includes all industrial, office and commercial properties for lease or sale in Bluefield. The database is used by the City for business attraction and retention activities and is used as a resource for firms considering locating in Bluefield. This database will link to the Economic Development website.
- **Transportation Improvements**
 - Support and pursue freight mobility transportation improvements to State highways that benefit the region.
 - Fix the water damage issues created by the sidewalk/road project. Turn the complaint into a success story on how the City stepped in.
- **Property Redevelopment**
 - Complete environmental review and platting actions necessary for the future development of vacant parcels within the City limits.
 - Create an inventory of any “brownfields” property in Bluefield by 2006 and pursue assessment grants, cleanup grants and loans and remedial action grants from the Federal Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and state agencies.
 - Re-evaluate the City’s Building Demolition plan and support any feasible plan that encourages redevelopment of key parcels/buildings in Bluefield.
- **Tourism, Culture and Destinations**

- Partner with the local hotels/motels to attract soccer, golf and softball tournaments with a regional draw to increase hotel stays.
- Pursue the feasibility of promoting Bluefield as a location for filmmaking. ?
- **Commitment to the City's Neighborhoods**
 - An emphasis on developing strong neighborhoods should be a Citywide strategic goal. Create a policy that reflects a strengthened commitment to neighborhood involvement and broadened communications between neighborhoods and the City.
- **Launch A New Neighborhood Improvement Program**
 - The City has an opportunity to encourage neighborhood residents, groups and organizations to propose a broad array of neighborhood-initiated and community-oriented improvements. Organizing and planning projects have encouraged connections between neighbors, fostered civic involvement, increased neighborhood safety and community ownership in other cities that fund such programs.
 - Initiate a neighborhood-sponsored matching grant pilot program by 2007, to create community improvement projects and to foster neighborhood identity and connections.
- **An Opportunity to Enhance Neighborhood Character.**
 - A City's livability is greatly determined by the quality and character of its neighborhoods. The City has an opportunity, through redevelopment of key parcels, to create interesting new commercial and residential development in neighborhoods throughout the City. By encouraging quality development of key neighborhood commercial and residential areas, the City can help to sponsor vibrant neighborhood centers, that will serve as a focus for the neighborhood services, parks and civic facilities essential for a high quality of life.

Bluefield Has A Great Story to Tell

A key element of the successful implementation of this Plan is communicating Bluefield's story to businesses considering locating in Bluefield, current residents and to visitors who enjoy Bluefield's destination recreation and sports facilities.

Bluefield's story is one of accomplishment.

Bluefield is receptive and responsive to business and citizen needs – as demonstrated throughout this Plan and by the City's continued commitment to maintain a high quality of life and to foster an environment for business success. Key messages:

- **Bluefield has room to grow.** Bluefield can communicate the City's advantages to the development community, including its key location in the region and the demographics to support business investment.
- **A high quality, full service City.** Bluefield's commitment to its citizens is reflected in the City's current facilities, Chicory Square, and in continuous

strategic investments in parks, recreation, human services, public safety and transportation. Kent intends to continue attracting tourists, conferences, sporting events and other recreational opportunities.

- **Bluefield is committed to enhancing businesses through technology.** The educational partnerships and availability of educational resources allow Bluefield to offer a workforce that is trained on the latest technologies. Additionally, Bluefield State College is extremely responsive to business needs and has a wide array of programs designed to assist in research, development and technology transfer.

Partnerships and Collaboration

Bluefield enjoys a strong working relationship with state and federal level elected officials. By expanding our relationships and garnering support for the goals in this document we can work together to positively enhance economic growth and development in this area. Bluefield needs to:

- Continue to work with the Governor and the Legislature on policies that impact the City's major manufacturing and business centers. Focus on developing options for the State's reducing insurance costs, reducing the costs of Worker's Compensation Plans, court reform, and increasing the benefit and levels of relocation package the state and this area can offer.
- Continue collaboration and coordination on economic development issues and opportunities with the Chamber(s) of Commerce, the West Virginia Development Office, the High Technology Corridors Program, the West Virginia Manufacturing Extension Partnership, the State and local Development Authorities, Bluefield State College, and local educational institutions.
- Through a public relations and education effort, work with local elected officials, the School District, colleges and area leaders to reinforce the importance of Bluefield's manufacturing, technological and industrial businesses.