



2022 STRATEGIC PLAN

KENT COUNTY ECONOMIC AND TOURISM DEVELOPMENT
FEBRUARY 8, 2022

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INTRODUCTION

The Economic and Tourism Development Strategic Plan for Kent County, Maryland is a guideline for the goals, strategies, and objectives, based on research, data, and public input. Economic growth will be enhanced when the goals, strategies, and objectives are met.

OVERVIEW

Kent County is a predominantly rural county on the Eastern Shore in the State of Maryland. It is the smallest county by population and has some of the best agricultural lands on the Atlantic seaboard, is surrounded on three sides by water, and has an appealing rural character. Kent County evolved from an agrarian economy, through the industrial revolution, to the current information age. The county benefits from modern digital infrastructure and public and private educational institutions, including one of the oldest private colleges in the United States. It has an industrial base that includes leading-edge global manufacturing companies. Despite these advantages, Kent County faces challenges in expanding its population, attracting new businesses, providing a workforce trained for the 21st century, and upgrading its infrastructure.

VISION

Kent County will be known as a preferred destination, business-friendly, technology and entrepreneurial hub within the State of Maryland where personal and professional life is in perfect balance.

MISSION STATEMENT

Kent County Economic and Tourism Development promotes activities that generate growth and prosperity and seek to enhance the business community, the services and income opportunities available to residents, as well as the social well-being and quality of life for all.

GOALS

- **CULTIVATE BUSINESS RETENTION, EXPANSION, AND ATTRACTION**
- **ADVOCATE FOR WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT AND EDUCATION**
- **PROMOTE KENT COUNTY AS A DESIRABLE PLACE TO LIVE, WORK, AND VISIT**
- **SUPPORT THE ENHANCEMENT OF CURRENT AND FUTURE INFRASTRUCTURE**
- **ESTABLISH AND STRENGTHEN PARTNERSHIPS**

ECONOMIC SUMMARY

Kent County's population is 19,192, Kent County jobs available are 8,923, and a median household income of \$58,600.

Kent County has an economy of \$864.2 million in Gross Regional Product (GRP) and a workforce of 9,239.

As of 2020, the County's population **declined by 2.8%** since 2015, falling by 553. The population is expected to **increase by 0.3%** between 2020 and 2025, adding 55.

From 2015 to 2020, jobs **declined by 11.3%** in Kent County, MD from 10,061 to **8,923**. This change **fell short of the national growth rate of 0.0% by 11.3%**. As the number of jobs declined, the **labor force participation rate decreased from 60.4% to 56.8% between 2015 and 2020**.

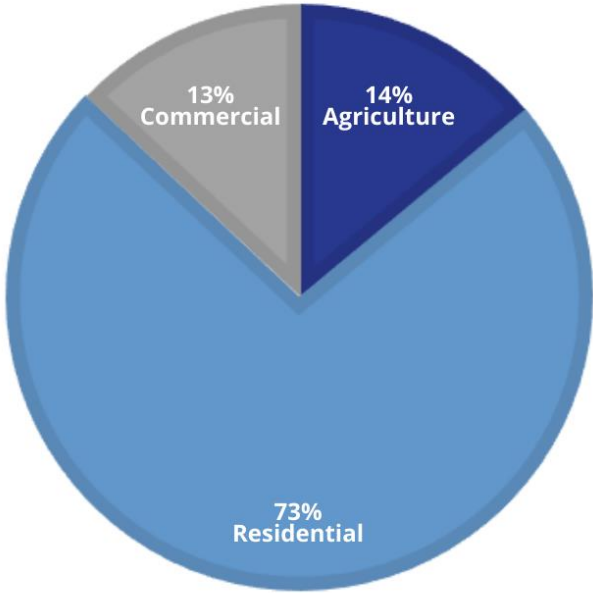
Top five industry sectors based on the number of jobs:

Top five industry sectors based on GRP:

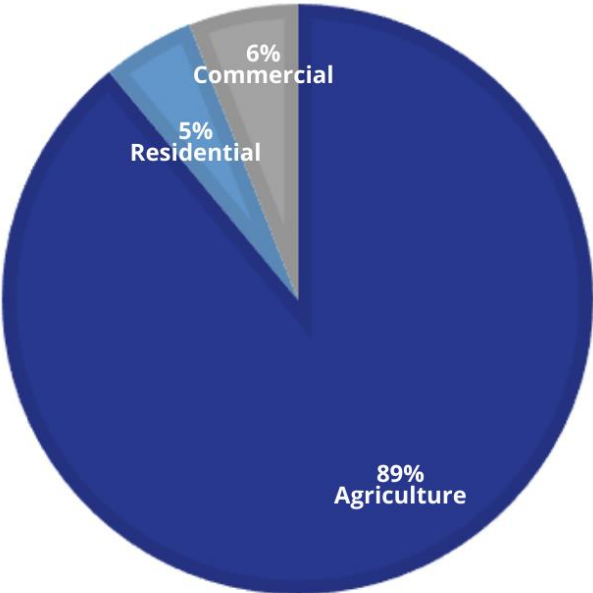
Top five industry sectors based on wages:

Source: Emsi Q4 2021 www.economicmodeling.com

Kent County Real Property Assessment (July 2021)



Kent County Zoning



GOAL: CULTIVATE BUSINESS RETENTION, EXPANSION, AND ATTRACTION

STRATEGY: Create a welcoming entrepreneurial environment.

STRATEGIC ACTIONS:

- Encourage the development of remote workers and home-based businesses reliant on a high-speed internet connection.
- Develop, identify, and promote programs to support and encourage business ownership.

OBJECTIVES:

- Double the number of entrepreneurs utilizing the Chestertown hotDesks location by December 31, 2022.
- Visit each new business in Kent County to introduce County services and assistance available through the Department of Economic and Tourism Development.

STRATEGY: Promote business retention and expansion.

STRATEGIC ACTIONS:

- Maintain ongoing communication with businesses.
- Assist businesses to navigate government regulations and requirements.
- Assist businesses ready to transition from home-based businesses into the larger business community.
- Conduct an annual Business Appreciation Week during Maryland's Economic Development Week.

OBJECTIVES:

- Develop a "Buy Local" Program for Kent County or in partnership with the USRC by December 31, 2023.
- Target 25 employers to touch during our Business Appreciation Week, invite Commissioners and Senior Staff to participate.
- Distribute Monthly Newsletters and increase circulation by 30% from January through December of 2022.

STRATEGY: Attract businesses in targeted industries.

STRATEGIC ACTIONS:

- Seek out targeted businesses.
- Emphasize the low cost of leasing and purchasing commercial property.
- Promote the attractiveness of living and working in Kent County, through all available media.
- Promote the availability of the high-speed fiber-optic network.
- Advertise incentives, i.e., tax credits, loan programs.
- Capitalize on the availability of a large regional labor pool.

- Work with and market commercial properties for business attraction, expansion, and job growth, including business parks and shopping centers.
- Attract agricultural-related industries that provide job opportunities for County residents and support the diversification of the agricultural industry that uses raw materials from area farms.
- Attract supply chain businesses within industry clusters that already have a strong presence in Kent County, including agriculture, education, healthcare, manufacturing, and tourism.
- Encourage the development of new health-related businesses.

OBJECTIVES:

- Maintain Kent County presence with 6 ads annually in site selection publications identified by the International Economic Development Council (IEDC) and take advantage of editorial content when applicable.
- Attract 2 major businesses with a minimum of 5 employees, i.e., American Rock Hall Service Center each calendar year.
- Attract 5 small businesses with a maximum of 5 employees, i.e., Hooked on The River each calendar year.

GOAL: ADVOCATE FOR WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT AND EDUCATION

STRATEGY: Develop an educated workforce with the skills and training required to meet the needs of current and future employers.

STRATEGIC ACTIONS:

- Amplify the marketing efforts by the Kent County Public Schools, Public Relations/Communications Specialist, focusing on the experiences of high school graduates that are academically skilled and successful in being accepted at colleges and universities and/or who work in local businesses.
- Retain young people by making private and public-school students aware of the careers with local employers by partnering and collaborating with the Next Generation Scholars Senior Coordinator, Maryland Business Roundtable for Education, and the Career Technology Liaison for Queen Anne’s and Kent County.
- Foster a cooperative relationship among the Board of Education, private employers, higher education institutions, and training facilities to nurture vocational training programs.
- Support the growth of the marine trade program at Chesapeake College.
- Collaborate with regional workforce partners.
- Assist businesses in recruiting talent.
- Support the continuing efforts to maintain, train, and attract a diverse workforce.

OBJECTIVES:

- Staff to attend quarterly American Job Center partner meetings.

- Increase internships by 5 employers annually.
- Add 1 new business to the apprenticeship program annually.
- Identify workforce development opportunities for employers and assist in recruitment through job fairs and job postings.
- Develop a survey of the businesses' needs and share the results with those people/partners who train/educate by June 30, 2024.
- Maintain someone from the Education sector as a Commission Member.

STRATEGY: Support Kent Forward, Kent County Public Schools (KCPS), and Private Education Organizations in providing quality primary and secondary education to all.

STRATEGIC ACTIONS:

- Support KCPS and Kent Forward for the success of the public school system.
- Support Washington College and Chesapeake College to strengthen career opportunities.

OBJECTIVES:

- Schedule an annual KCPS update with Administration.

GOAL: PROMOTE KENT COUNTY AS A DESIRABLE PLACE TO LIVE, WORK AND VISIT

STRATEGY: Develop a marketing and communication plan.

STRATEGIC ACTIONS:

- Engage current residents and businesses in conversations about their challenges and successes. Residents are our best ambassadors.
- Familiarize residents on the need to support intelligent, planned economic development in the County.
- Target potential residents and businesses to locate in the County and market to those sectors through multiple media channels and marketing activities.
- Establish communication channels with the towns, business associations, non-profits, and other community organizations.
- Improve communication in the community about the ongoing efforts of economic and tourism development.
- Understand the community's needs by conducting periodic surveys and community meetings to bring different constituencies together to identify common goals and approaches and communicate the results of the efforts.
- Target underrepresented populations to encourage and build collaborative relationships to promote and develop tourism programs and initiatives.

OBJECTIVES:

- Formalize communication processes, annual marketing plan, and consider the placement of articles in local media outlets.

- Continue to utilize in-house resources where applicable for marketing efforts; develop an identifiable brand across Economic and Tourism Development.
- Develop a 'Contact Us' webpage with staff contact information and photos by June 30, 2022.
- Develop a Children's Activities page for the County website by June 30, 2023.

STRATEGY: Continue to promote Kent County as a desirable place to visit.

STRATEGIC ACTIONS:

- Promote Kent County as a boating center, relating to marinas, sailmakers, yacht design, yacht building, boat repair, boat sales, and boat charters.
- Promote the county as a destination for arts and entertainment.
- Promote the development of a program focused on the agricultural and maritime heritage with displays, activities, and tours on a year-round basis.
- Promote tourism and outdoor activities such as hunting and fishing as economic development assets, by leveraging the quality of the County's natural resources.

OBJECTIVES:

- Increase annual visitor spending by 2%.
- Encourage organizations to list their events on the County website.
- Increase county event awareness across a larger geographic area by listing annual events on regional sites.
- Promote events on social media and in editorial content.
- Distribute Monthly Tourism Newsletter and increase circulation by 30% from January through December of 2022.
- Facilitate delivery of visitor guides and partner guides/maps to tourism partners across the county and state.

GOAL: SUPPORT THE ENHANCEMENT OF CURRENT AND FUTURE INFRASTRUCTURE

STRATEGY: Support the Housing and Transportation Coordinator in efforts to enhance housing options i.e., workforce, senior, market-rate; and encourage homeownership.

STRATEGIC ACTIONS:

- Work with the County and towns on the extension of public water and sewer systems, where service is planned, to developments such as Chesapeake Landing and Still Pond.
- Identify developers who specialize in 55+ projects.
- Support a Smart Growth strategy for affordable and workforce housing that cluster multi-family developments where the necessary infrastructure already exists or is planned.
- Support public policies that provide financial incentives for affordable and workforce housing, i.e., Public-Private Partnerships and Tax Increment Financing (TIF) for

Moderately Priced Dwelling Units (MPDU).

OBJECTIVES:

- As projects are identified, monitor needs, engage in conversations with partners, and bring issues forward to the Economic and Tourism Development Commission for evaluation.
- Schedule annual Kent County Real Estate presentation.

STRATEGY: Promote utilization of existing infrastructure and identify infrastructure improvements needed for businesses to locate in Kent County.

STRATEGIC ACTIONS:

- Identify and promote the availability of commercial property or buildings where businesses can locate.
- Identify potential new commercial zones along new and improved highways.
- Identify and promote the availability of sites for the development of co-packing centers to leverage the availability of products from Eastern Shore Entrepreneurship Center's F3, Farm-Fish-Food, program.

OBJECTIVES:

- As projects are identified, monitor needs, engage in conversations with partners, and bring issues forward to the Economic and Tourism Development Commission for evaluation.

STRATEGY: Evaluate proposed development projects i.e., the Chester River Bridge Crossing (aka Chester River Boulevard) development on Maryland Route 291, development of US Route 301 Corridor, and development of the Worton Industrial Area.

STRATEGIC ACTIONS:

- Advocate for the Chester River Bridge Crossing to be listed in the annual Maryland Department of Transportation priority project letter from the Commissioners for Kent County.
- Be involved in the dialogue and identify the economic impact of the proposed development.
- Identify potential developers and end-users for the proposed development.
- Engage stakeholders in conversations regarding the proposed development.

OBJECTIVES:

- As projects are identified, monitor needs, engage in conversations with partners, and bring issues forward to the Economic and Tourism Development Commission for evaluation.

GOAL: ESTABLISH AND STRENGTHEN PARTNERSHIPS

STRATEGY: Develop a marketing and communication plan.

STRATEGIC ACTIONS:

- Work with Local Partners:
 - Kent County Chamber of Commerce
 - County and Town Elected Officials and Departments
 - Kent Cultural Alliance (KCA)
 - Business Associations
 - Downtown Chestertown Association (DCA)
 - Greater Rock Hall Business Association (GRHBA)
 - Main Street Chestertown
 - Main Street Rock Hall
- Work with Regional Partners:
 - Upper Shore Regional Council (USRC)
 - Eastern Shore Entrepreneurship Center (ESEC)
 - Eastern Shore Heritage, Inc. (ESHI) Stories of the Chesapeake Heritage Area
 - Chesapeake Country, All American Road Byway Alliance
- Work with State Partners:
 - Maryland Department of Commerce and its Office of Tourism Development (OTD)
 - Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD)
- Work with Federal Partners:
 - US Commerce, Economic Development Administration (EDA)
 - United States Department of Agriculture (USDA)
 - National Park Service

OBJECTIVES:

- Director to meet annually with each Town's Mayor and Council, give an overview of Economic and Tourism Development's work and share how the partnership can be enhanced.
- Staff to attend business association meetings and report back to the entire team.
- Continue communication and partnerships with regional, state, and federal partners by attending meetings and workshops, keeping abreast of programs and legislation that directly affect the business community.
- The Director or the Economic Development Manager will attend all Maryland Economic Development Association meetings.
- The Director or the Tourism Manager will attend all Maryland Office of Tourism and Maryland Destination Marketing Organization meetings

RESOLUTION 2022-03
COUNTY COMMISSIONERS OF KENT COUNTY, MARYLAND
A RESOLUTION ADOPTING THE
2022 ECONOMIC AND TOURISM DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIC PLAN

WHEREAS, The Economic and Tourism Development Strategic Plan for Kent County, Maryland is a guideline for the goals, strategies, and objectives, based on research, data, and public input. Economic growth will be enhanced when the goals, strategies, and objectives are met. Kent County's economy is diverse, and we recognize the strength of that diversity; and

WHEREAS, The plan was developed with public input during, many hours of discussion with the Economic and Tourism Development Commission members and staff and conversations with our Towns and other community organizations. The process began in March of 2020 and was completed in March of 2022, although slowed by the pandemic, the process continued and additional insight was revealed as a result of the pandemic; and

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, That this plan will serve as a working document in the work of Economic and Tourism Development for Kent County. The objectives will be measured, and deadlines met to achieve the goals.

- Cultivate Business Retention, Expansion, and Attraction
- Advocate for Workforce Development and Education
- Promote Kent County as a Desirable Place to Live, Work, and Visit
- Support the Enhancement of Current and Future Infrastructure
- Establish and Strengthen Partnerships

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, We, The County Commissioners of Kent County, hereby adopt the 2022 Economic and Tourism Development Strategic Plan, as amended, and ask all to join staff and Commission members in their work to achieve the vision of making Kent County a preferred destination, business-friendly, technology and entrepreneurial hub within the State of Maryland.

ATTEST:

THE COUNTY COMMISSIONERS
OF KENT COUNTY, MARYLAND


Sallie Watson, Deputy Clerk II


P. Thomas Mason, President


Ronald H. Fithian, Member


Robert N. Jacob, Jr., Member

ADOPTED: February 8, 2022