



SUBMISSION FORM

All submission forms must include the following information. Separate submission forms must be turned in for each eligible program. **Deadline: July 1, 2024.** Please include this submission form with the electronic entry. If you do not receive an email confirming receipt of your entry within 3 days of submission, please contact [Gage Harter](#).

PROGRAM INFORMATION

County: Lancaster County

Program Title: Lancaster 2035

Program Category: Community & Economic Development

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Abstract

Like many rural areas across the Commonwealth and the United States, Lancaster County must grapple with the extraordinary challenges and pressures brought on by an increasingly uncertain future. With limited staff capacity and revenue, the county must be deliberate and methodical in addressing a multitude of critical challenges. As such, the Lancaster County Board of Supervisors established the Citizens Business Relations Advisory Committee (CBRAC) in 2019 to ensure a thriving future for the county. This committee of government and business leaders focuses on retaining our workforce, creating a business-friendly environment, and balancing rural character with planned progress. Their [Lancaster 2035 Strategic Plan](#) addresses the risks of unregulated growth, aiming to enhance residents' quality of life through infrastructure improvements, business development and workforce expansion.

Recognizing that boosting our working-age population requires long-term initiatives like affordable housing and new economic opportunities, CBRAC opted for a long-range plan versus a typical five-year plan. The Lancaster 2035 strategy aims to increase the percentage of working-age individuals by 20% by 2035 while maintaining the existing workforce, requiring an increase of 1,000 individuals of the workforce-aged population. The Lancaster 2035 Plan outlines six interconnected strategies with clear initiatives, costs, resources, and outcomes. By prioritizing and implementing these strategies, we can secure a prosperous future for Lancaster County.

The Lancaster 2035 Strategic Plan was approved by the Lancaster Board of Supervisors and the CBRAC was permanently established to implement the plan and update it annually as progress is made.

Lancaster County citizens are engaged as volunteer stakeholders in the plan's implementation and citizens are updated on the ongoing progress of these initiatives. Still, the effectiveness of these plans will largely depend on the community's support for area businesses and schools and working together for positive change.

Problem or Challenge Faced by the Locality

Changing Demographics

With a population of 10,750, Lancaster County, Virginia, is home to the third oldest population in the state. Over the preceding 10 years, there has been a decrease (-705) in the number of children and working-age residents, aged 20-60, while the number of older adults has increased (+471). This demographic shift can be attributed to national trends of declining birth rates and rising mortality rates, as well as the retirement of Baby Boomers and a lack of younger people entering the workforce to fill their positions. Additionally, many working-age individuals have left Lancaster County searching for better job prospects elsewhere, leaving the area with a limited pool of skilled and unskilled workers.

Why does it matter?

Lancaster County is experiencing the consequences of a dwindling young workforce. Businesses face disruptions and closures due to staffing shortages, and residents struggle to find skilled tradespeople. This trend threatens our community's standard of living and ability to attract employers offering livable wages. The root of the problem lies in our decreasing school enrollment, which leads to less state funding and a higher financial burden on the county. As young people leave, our Local Composite Index increases, shifting more of the educational costs onto local taxpayers. This is a nationwide issue for rural communities. To remain competitive, we must address the challenges of limited public services, an aging population, health disparities, poor internet access, and a volatile housing and job market. Lancaster's economy is particularly vulnerable, with a higher reliance on non-payroll income sources like investments and government payments compared to the state and national averages. Additionally, our unemployment spikes in the winter due to the seasonal nature of our tourism and seafood industries. Lancaster 2035 is a proactive strategy to attract and retain a workforce-age population. This will help

stabilize our schools' funding, improve our economic outlook, and ensure a sustainable future for Lancaster County.

How Can Lancaster County Attract and Retain a Working Population?

Numerous strategies must be employed to attract and retain young workers and families in Lancaster County. This includes creating a business-friendly economy, improving broadband access, upgrading infrastructure, enhancing the school system, offering better housing options, and promoting recreational and lifestyle activities that appeal to younger individuals. To become a more business-friendly location, Lancaster County aims to make it easier to do business in the county, which will attract new companies in our heritage industries and support the growth and success of existing companies. It is also important to communicate progress, plans, and alternative approaches clearly and transparently to engage the community further.

Introduction - Lancaster 2035

In establishing the Citizens Business Relations Advisory Committee (CBRAC) in 2019, the Lancaster County Board of Supervisors was intentional in defining its makeup and mission. CBRAC consists of ten members: two Supervisors, the Economic Development Authority Chair, Planning Commission Chair, and the Superintendent of Schools along with five at-large members consisting of business leaders, citizens, and town leadership. In addition, the committee reviewed input from discussion groups among community residents and workers, including but not limited to, new and long-time residents, realtors, financial institutions, trades workers, and critical industry sector leaders.

Lancaster County, like many rural areas, is grappling with a shrinking workforce that threatens residents' quality of life. If unaddressed, this trend will worsen, intensifying competition for workers among localities. Currently, Lancaster has a workforce of about 5,000, with only 47% of adults employed, lower

than state and national averages. Between 2011 and 2021, the county lost over 700 workers aged 20-60.

This decline stems from falling birth rates, retiring Baby Boomers, and a lack of younger workers due to limited affordable housing and better job prospects elsewhere. Lancaster 2035 aims to increase the workforce-aged population by 1,000 by 2035 while retaining existing workers.

The plan outlines six interconnected strategies to achieve this goal and spur business growth. One key focus is promoting small and medium-sized business recruitment, development, and retention in critical industry sectors, especially our heritage industries: commercial fishing, agriculture, forestry, and tourism. Another key focus is education, workforce readiness, and workforce development. By implementing these strategies, Lancaster can create opportunities that benefit the area and secure a sustainable future.

Six Strategies to Retain and Attract Workforce-Aged Residents - Implementing Lancaster 2035

In an effort to implement the strategies outlined in the Lancaster 2035 Strategic Plan, the CBRAC has established committees for each of the six strategies. These stakeholder groups, made up of local residents, business leaders, and subject matter experts of local, regional and state origin provide technical assistance and guidance to the Lancaster County Economic Development Director to implement the strategies, objectives and goals identified in the plan. Robust implementation is already underway and significant progress has been made in achieving the aims of Lancaster 2035, which are outlined below.

Strategy 1: Broadband Access to Households

Objectives:

- ✓ *Broadband Access for All*
- ✓ *Affordable Broadband for low-income/fixed income*

Reliable internet access is vital for attracting and retaining businesses and residents. The pandemic has accelerated our reliance on technology for work, education, healthcare, shopping, and entertainment. To address this, Lancaster County has established a Broadband Authority to bring high-speed internet to all underserved homes through public-private provider partnerships with Dominion Energy and All Points Broadband. By the third quarter of 2024, all households will have access to a provider, with only a few remaining to be connected soon after. Now, with multiple providers in some areas of the county, competition will afford Lancaster County residents the ability to shop around for a plan that is individually affordable. For low-income residents, internet providers offer discounted rates. Additionally, the federal government's Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP) provides a \$30 monthly discount to eligible households. However, uptake is low in rural areas like Lancaster, with less than a third of qualified participants using the broadband discount. To increase usage, the Broadband Authority has begun a process to inform residents about these discounts and eligibility criteria for participation in government programs like ACP.

Strategy 2: Create Business Friendly Environment

Objectives:

- ✓ *Create a business-friendly environment to attract and grow new business.*
- ✓ *Attract high-paying skilled labor and work-from-home jobs to the county.*
- ✓ *Create incentives and grants to attract and grow local small businesses*

This initiative aims to provide easy access to resources for small and medium-sized businesses, offer training classes for businesses and residents, and establish trade schools for certifications. It is crucial to form partnerships and coordinate with business support and training organizations to ensure the success of this initiative. Lancaster 2035 outlines several key recommendations to facilitate a business friendly environment.

The first step in advancing a business-friendly environment is hiring a business-focused employee for Lancaster County. Earlier this year Lancaster hired an Economic Development Director whose focus is on

economic and community development initiatives to enact the strategies and objectives of Lancaster 2035. The ED has established and is leveraging relationships with the Virginia Economic Development Partnership (VEDP), U.S. Small Business Administration, UMW Small Business Development Center and the Federal Reserve Bank of Richmond to increase investment in the county and provide resources to existing and prospective businesses.

Lancaster County has an established Economic Development Authority (EDA) whose mission it is to attract and support small businesses. With direction from the new county staff liaison, the EDA is implementing changes to the EDA Grant Program that will increase the efficiency and effectiveness of the funding program to target business growth and expansion. The EDA will track awards and document successes or failures to improve the performance of this limited pool of funding. Additionally, the EDA is working in tandem with the Chamber of Commerce and Business Associations to develop a user-friendly business website as a comprehensive resource for companies looking to start or expand in Lancaster.

The next step in advancing a business-friendly environment is creating a one-stop business resource center and incubator. According to the National Business Incubator Association, 87% of incubator-supported startups survive after five years, likely due to the incubator's support and the membership vetting process. The EDA and CBRAC Business Committee, in coordination with the Chamber of Commerce, is exploring the creation of such a resource, which is expected to be up and running by early of 2024.

Additionally, the ED and CBRAC Business Committee have increased coordination between County Government and the incorporated Towns. Effective communication and coordination between the county government and incorporated towns is crucial to avoid confusion and prevent overlapping tasks. Representatives from Lancaster County, Kilmarnock, White Stone, and Irvington are coordinating potential economic development opportunities and new business development projects.

Strategy 3: Education

Objectives:

- ✓ *FACILITIES: Provide facilities conducive to 21st-century learning*
- ✓ *POST-SECONDARY SUCCESS: Prepare our students for plans following high school*
- ✓ *STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT & GROWTH: Accelerate growth and achievement for all students*
- ✓ *RECRUIT & RETAIN HIGH QUALITY STAFF: Increase teacher satisfaction, recruitment and retention*

Lancaster County Public Schools (LCPS) is currently updating its six-year strategic plan through a phased process involving stakeholder input, data analysis, and the development of specific goals and an implementation plan. The final plan, scheduled for completion before December 2024, will include a 'Profile of a Lancaster Graduate' and a workforce readiness plan for Pre-K through 12th grade to prepare students for post-graduation with career pathways. As such, Lancaster County is investing in the future of its youth through modernized educational facilities and updated curriculum and teaching practices aligned with current best practices. Two years ago, LCPS began the process of consolidating its school facilities to drive down the costs of public education and provide world class facilities for the education of its students. This began with the renovation of the former Middle School into a modern Elementary School and the creation of an Early Childhood Education Center for Pre-K students. This year, LCPS broke ground on a new Middle/High School campus to create continuity in the transition of students from Middle to High School and beyond. All new school facilities presented an opportunity to further incorporate local culture and a sense of place in the design and layout that will carry through students' formative years into adulthood.

Additionally, LCPS is collaborating closely with the local workforce development and business community to offer job shadowing and career exploration opportunities, fostering valuable work skills and potential career connections for LCPS graduates. In order to perpetuate this effort, LCPS and Lancaster County are piloting a U.S. Dept. of Education and U.S. Dept. of Labor approved internship program this summer. The program, aimed at providing workforce readiness and soft skills to rising Seniors at LCHS, is also designed to provide an introduction to local government and public service to ground students education in

government and civics curriculum. It is the intent of LCPS to use this pilot as a springboard to advancing the internship program to include local businesses representing critical industry sectors and exposing students at a younger and younger age to work experiences that will prove to be formative and insightful as they navigate their post-secondary career pathways.

Business recruitment and development requires a robust and highly trained workforce. Several organizations in the area are dedicated to supporting Lancaster businesses. CBRAC has established the Workforce Development Committee to include Rappahannock Community College, Northern Neck Technical Center, Bay Consortium Workforce Development Board, Virginia Employment Commission, UMW Small Business Center, and the Chamber of Commerce, among others. Under the auspices of this committee, these groups will collaborate to explore the workforce training needs of public service and other critical industry sectors and local businesses to develop programs that support workforce training. These partners are dedicated to increasing the quality and quantity of our local workforce, ensuring a sustainable workforce and local economy.

Strategy 4: Housing Available for All

Objectives:

- ✓ *Create a public-private partnership to develop the County owned Good Luck Road site.*
- ✓ *Create a Lancaster County Community Development Corporation.*
- ✓ *Create economic incentives or pursue grants to attract for-profit and nonprofit development*

The underpinning of Lancaster 2035 is the availability of safe, accessible and affordable housing options for a wide range of income demographics ranging from 120% AMI to 30% AMI and below. As such, the CBRAC Housing Committee was established to include a group of stakeholders representing local, regional, State, and nonprofit entities whose primary objective is the creation of affordable housing. The CBRAC Housing Committee and the Lancaster Housing Department are currently undertaking a workforce housing study to comprehensively evaluate options for workforce housing and available federal and state grants.

Creating affordable housing in rural areas can be challenging, this is especially true in Lancaster County where average home prices are unattainable for the majority of working residents. The cost of building materials is increasing, there is limited availability, and managing completed rentals is expensive. All these factors make it challenging to build affordable workforce housing in the private sector without government assistance. The Housing Committee is exploring the creation of a Community Development Corporation that focuses specifically on addressing affordable housing for workers in Lancaster County. Creating a nonprofit Community Development Corporation can aid in securing funding to attract developers, builders, and additional federal, state, and private investment in affordable housing. Additionally, the Housing Committee is exploring public-private partnership opportunities to develop county owned property that is in close proximity to Kilmarnock, our commercial hub. This effort represents a unique opportunity to leverage prime developable land to secure affordable housing for a growing workforce as demand is created and satisfied.

Strategy 5: Recreation

Objectives:

- ✓ *Develop multiple county public access facilities and parks throughout the county.*
- ✓ *Continue community partnerships to foster and coordinate recreational programming.*
- ✓ *Cultivate relationships that promote the arts and maritime culture of the community.*

In order to provide high quality amenities to serve existing residents and attract a new workforce, Lancaster County is in the process of hiring a recreation coordinator and CBRAC has established a Recreation Committee consisting of local recreation enthusiasts and businesses. These stakeholders share the common goal of providing world class recreational amenities that serve residents and visitors alike. According to Lancaster 2035, these amenities should serve the dual purpose of stimulating public health and promoting the arts and maritime culture of the community.

In an effort to provide equity of access for residents and visitors, Lancaster County is currently planning and constructing two new public water access sites and redeveloping three existing sites. The newly minted County Maritime Recreational Campus at Windmill Point will see the creation of a premiere Chesapeake Bay public access beach and fishing pier at Westland Beach (completion early 2025) and currently includes a power boat landing at Windmill Point Marina, a canoe/kayak launch on Little Oyster Creek. Other new sites include the Carter Cove (2025) and Taylor Creek (2026) waterfront parks in Weems, and upgrades to existing facilities include a new pier at Thomas Landing on Greenvale Creek and the Chesapeake Trail canoe/kayak launch (2025) on the Eastern Branch of the Corrotoman River.

The need for a linear multi-use trail and increased traversal between Lancaster County's three incorporated Towns is a priority that the county and TriWay Trail Board are eager to see come to fruition. The Triway Trail will add a transformational amenity running through the middle of the County's designated growth zone, creating connection between Kilmarnock, Irvington, and White Stone, and fostering a sense of unity while providing an excellent opportunity for residents and tourists alike to explore these delightful towns. Construction began earlier this year and at a recent event, Senator Mark Warner announced a grant of nearly one million dollars to complete Phase 1 of the TriWay trail.

Additionally, with the increased emphasis on recreational amenities, private entities and business have begun to invest in Lancaster County. This is evident with the creation of the Dead Rise Disc Golf Course at Hills Quarter in Irvington, a planned offroad bike course in Kilmarnock, and public-private partnerships with watersports, fishing, and cycling outfitters that will collocate and utilize these public amenities.

Strategy 6: Public Communications

Objectives:

- ✓ *Communicate to residents a greater understanding of the Lancaster 2035 goals and action plans.*
- ✓ *Communicate to residents about the progress goals and actions of Lancaster County as a whole.*
- ✓ *Communicate externally to nonresidents, future residents, future businesses, and visitors.*

The importance of communicating these efforts with the public both within and outside the community are critical to their success. The goal of the Lancaster 2035 plan is clear and consistent public messaging for all county initiatives. Since there is a diversity of demographics, using multiple media outlets for public messaging is being pursued. CBRAC is currently developing individual communication plans for each of the Lancaster 2035 initiatives to include newsprint, radio, and social media. Residents will also be informed through a county quarterly newsletter in the near future. All internal and external communications will consistently brand Lancaster County as a highly desirable place to live, work, and play—with a balance of rural nature, small community, and economic vitality.

Satisfying Selection Criteria - Worthiness of Award

This undertaking by Lancaster County, its leadership and residents, offers an innovative solution to a problem, situation and delivery of services faced by rural local governments across the Commonwealth and the United States. With limited capacity and resources, promoting intergovernmental cooperation and private enterprise in addressing this problem is paramount. In this, Lancaster County is leveraging its most abundant asset...volunteerism and a community sense of pride and social investment. With public and private investment of all kinds, from all demographic types, Lancaster County will be able to achieve these ambitious goals. In submitting this application for a VaCO Achievement Award and promoting our activities, we hope that this effort will provide a model that other local governments may learn from or implement in their own localities.

Supplemental Attachments

Documents outlining some of the aforementioned successes stemming from the Lancaster 2035 effort:
New High-Middle School Plans, New Public Access Parks Plans, New TriWay Trail Plans.

New High-Middle School Plans



Overview

Lancaster County Public Schools is currently developing a new High-Middle School campus located just outside of Kilmarnock, VA. This state-of-the-art facility aims to consolidate the county's educational resources, providing a more cohesive and efficient learning environment for its youth.

High-Middle School Building



The new school building features a modern architectural design with expansive windows that allow natural light to flood the interior spaces. The use of sustainable energy sources in the form of geothermal and solar underscores a commitment to environmental responsibility and achieving net zero energy. The building layout is meticulously planned to balance functionality with aesthetic appeal, creating an engaging and inspiring environment for both students and staff.

Sports Complex



The campus will also host a state-of-the-art sports complex designed to cater to a variety of athletic activities. This facility promotes physical education and supports extracurricular engagement. The sports complex is designed with accessibility in mind, ensuring that it can be utilized by the entire community for various events and activities.

Campus Grounds



The new High-Middle School campus is thoughtfully integrated with the natural landscape, providing a serene and peaceful setting for students. This natural integration not only enhances the aesthetic appeal but also offers additional educational opportunities through outdoor events, gatherings, and environmental education programs, such as meaningful watershed education.

By blending modern architecture with sustainable practices and integrating the campus with its natural surroundings, this new High-Middle School campus represents a significant investment in the future of Lancaster County's educational infrastructure.

New Public Access Parks Plans



Thomas Landing Boat Ramp and Newly Completed Courtesy Dock



Located: Thomas Landing Rd, Lancaster, VA 22503

Amenities: Boat Ramp, Ample Boat Trailer Parking, and a Courtesy Dock/Fishing Pier on Greenvale Creek

Coming Amenities: Improved parking to include ADA compliant parking space.

Westland Beach at Windmill Point - Currently Under Construction



Location: The terminus of Windmill Point Road.

Historically, Windmill Point – Westland Beach has served as the only public beach access in Lancaster County. The beach has eroded over the years, with 110 ft of beach lost in a little over a decade. A shoreline stabilization project has been approved to restore the beach. Construction for this project will begin in 2023 and continue into 2024.

Coming Amenities: Restored and expanded beach access on the scenic Rappahannock River and a large fishing pier. This public beach access will provide opportunities for sunbathing, swimming, paddling, nature gazing, fishing and provide ample parking.



Carter Cove Park



Location: 212 Carter's Cove Drive, Weems VA 22576

Current Amenities: Courtesy/fishing pier, picnic tables, sandy launch area for paddle craft on Carter Creek with rapid access to the Rappahannock River.

Coming Amenities: Boat Ramp, fishing pier, Oyster Heritage Learning Shelter House, walking trails, bathroom facility and parking.



Taylor Creek Park

Location: Terminus of Park Creek Lane, Weems, VA 22576

Coming Amenities: Trails, environmental learning center, picnic area, ADA compliant kayak launch, scenic overlook, and limited parking on Taylor Creek, a tributary of the Corrotoman River.



Chesapeake Trail - Improvements Coming Soon!

Improvements are funded through a Department of Conservation and Recreation Trails Program Grant.

Location: Mary Ball Road, Lancaster VA 22503 just west of Avis Trail

Current Amenities: .75 miles of trail terminating at a wildlife viewing platform on the Western Branch of the Corrotoman River. Picnic tables, an outdoor classroom and educational signage can all be found along the trail. Excellent birding spot.

Coming Amenities: ADA compliant parking, ADA accessible restroom, ADA compliant kayak launch and accessibility improvements to the trail and decking.

New TriWay Trail Plans



Overview

The TriWay Trail is a scenic recreational pathway that connects the charming towns of Kilmarnock, Irvington, and White Stone. This trail provides an idyllic escape for nature enthusiasts, offering a blend of picturesque landscapes, serene water views, and a variety of flora and fauna. Whether you're an avid hiker, a cyclist, or simply someone looking to enjoy a leisurely stroll, the TriWay Trail offers a welcoming environment for all.

Stretching across the tranquil landscapes of Virginia's Northern Neck region, the TriWay Trail is a testament to community collaboration and dedication to preserving natural beauty. The trail is well-maintained and designed to be accessible for people of all ages and abilities. Along the way, visitors can find informational signage that highlights the historical and ecological significance of the area, making the journey not only a physical activity but also an educational experience.

The Triway Trail will add a transformational amenity running through the middle of the County's designated growth zone, creating connection between Kilmarnock, Irvington, and White Stone, and fostering a sense of unity while providing an excellent opportunity for residents and tourists alike to explore these delightful towns. Each town offers its unique charm, from Kilmarnock's bustling downtown, Irvington's quaint shops, and waterfront views, to White Stone's relaxed atmosphere and local eateries. The TriWay Trail not only promotes a healthy lifestyle but also encourages community engagement and appreciation for the natural world, making it a treasured asset for the region.

The rendering below provides a visual overview of the Trail as it traverses varied conditions along its nine and a half-mile route, crossing through urban, suburban, rural, wooded and natural lands.

Legend

- Sidewalk improvements
- New shared-use path
- Existing path repurposed to a shared-use path
- Spur trail or alternative route
- Future phase bike lanes
- Inactive golf cart paths
- A Proposed amenity area
- Potential bridge crossing
- X Proposed feature
- X Existing feature

Key- Proposed Amenities

- A** Kilmarnock Town Centre Park trailhead and potential future BMX park
- B** Fitness path with exercise stations and trail amenities, disk golf, sculpture garden
- C** Visitor Center/ Museum/ restrooms and trail parking
- D** Trailhead with parking amenities
- E** Environmental education area with fisher's pond overlook and picnic areas
- F** Irvington Park / Commons trailhead with restrooms and parking
- G** White Stone trailhead with outdoor play kitchen and food truck parking
- H** Main Street pedestrian crossing improvements
- I** Alternative bike route on School Street
- J** Improved 6' sidewalk with on-street bike lanes
- K** Rappahannock General Hospital, YMCA, Free Health Clinic, Child Day Care Center (existing)
- L** Trail alignment parallels proposed entry for new school
- M** Hills Quarter community (existing; golf cart path network to be retained and expanded as needed for neighborhood connectivity)
- N** Future middle and high school facility at Hills Quarter
- O** Compass Entertainment Complex (existing)
- P** Golden Eagle Golf Course (existing)
- Q** Rappahannock Westminster- Canterbury (existing)
- R** Improved 6' sidewalk with on-street bike lanes
- S** The Tides Inn (existing)
- T** Existing bridges in Hills Quarter to be repurposed for shared-use path
- U** Pedestrian crossing (Harris Road) at DMV Drive
- V** Maintenance road in Golden Eagle to be partially repurposed as a shared-use path
- W** Trail adjacent to RWC maintenance road
- X** Dream Fields (existing)

