



# Eastern Shore of Virginia

November 2007  
Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy

# CEDS

## Developing a Plan

### The Research Phase

To conduct the research needed for a new CEDS document, the Accomack-Northampton Planning District Commission obtained planning funds from the US Economic Development Administration and Accomack and Northampton counties. The resulting report, "Community Economic Development for the Eastern Shore: Summit Report" ([www.a-npdc.org/ESVAFinRep2007.pdf](http://www.a-npdc.org/ESVAFinRep2007.pdf)). The Summit Report provides updated demographics, an inventory and analysis of assets based on people, places, and industries, as well as key findings and implications. In addition, a special follow-up meeting was held in Northampton County in June 2007 to specifically address key concerns around agriculture and aquaculture, tourism, new and existing businesses, education, and water quality.

### The CEDS Committee (with race & sex as requested by the EDA)

Name	Affiliation	Interest
C. Reneta Major (AA, F)	Accomack County Board of Supervisors	Community, Government
Sandra Hart Mears (C, F)	Accomack County Board of Supervisors	Community, Government
Wanda J. Thornton (C, F)	Accomack County Board of Supervisors	Tourism, Government
Donald L. Hart (C, M)	Accomack County Public Schools	Education
Laura Belle Gordy (C, F)	Accomack County Board of Supervisors	Community, Government
Gwendolyn F. Turner (AA, F)	Health Department	Health, Minority
Thomas E. Rienenrth (C, M)	Retired	Aged
Andrew R. Barbour (C, M)	Northampton County Board of Supervisors	Tourism, Government
Richard B. Tankard (C, M)	Northampton County Board of Supervisors	Agriculture, Business
Jeffrey K. Walker (C, M)	Northampton County Board of Supervisors	Government
Rev. Charles J. Kellam (AA, M)	Church	Community, Minority
Roland P. Bailey (AA, M)	Service Business	Business
John H. Tarr (C, M)	Town of Chincoteague	Community, Government

## Public Participation

In February 2007 public meetings were held separately in each county. In Northampton County, an estimated 300 people attended the meeting, and in Accomack County, about 75 people participated. The high attendance in Northampton County was no doubt partly due to a contentious zoning meeting held the previous month. The agenda for both meetings was crafted to include a lot of public participation, and attendees in both counties expressed their views freely.

In June 2007, a follow-up meeting was held in Northampton County to review the draft summit report and to discuss further the key findings. About 40 county residents attended, most of whom reported having attended the previous meeting in February.

## Demographics

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See Economic Development Summit Report pp 7 – 8

## Socioeconomic Characteristics

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See Economic Development Summit Report pp 8-10

## Labor Force

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See Economic Development Summit Report pp 11-17

## Geography & Environment

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See Economic Development Summit Report pp 18-26

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## Climate

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### Mild Weather

The Eastern Shore of Virginia enjoys a mild climate with four distinct seasons. The Atlantic Ocean has a moderating effect on both summer highs and winter lows.

Snowfall is rare and generally melts in one day. Most of the rainfall occurs in winter and spring months.

The summer months are hot and humid with infrequent thunderstorms. Refreshing maritime breezes generally provide a cool break at day's end. Hurricanes sometimes skirt the region in the fall, but compared to other Atlantic coastal regions, little damage has been done by hurricanes over the last fifty years.

#### *Climate Data*

Average Annual Temperature	57.5 F
Average Annual Precipitation	41.9 inches
Average Annual Snowfall	8.4 inches
Cooling Degree Days (F)	1,219
Heating Degree Days (F)	3,859

Source: National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

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## Transportation

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See Economic Development Summit Report pp 20-21

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## Telecommunications

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Verizon provides the Eastern Shore of Virginia with all of the latest telecommunications technology. DSL broadband Internet access is available to 80% of our region; however, Verizon reports that they have only a 22% “take rate.” Verizon admits that its physical plant and the database for DSL potential does not match, which might contribute to the low take rate.

There is a perceived need in most communities for higher band-width choices at more affordable rates than is currently available from Verizon. In remote areas, Hughesnet and Wild Blue satellite services are becoming more popular, but they are expensive compared to DSL. In other areas, Charter Cable has promised Internet access, but deployment has been delayed.

Like many other rural regions, the Eastern Shore of Virginia is considered to be underserved with choices for affordable high-speed broadband access.

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## Water & Wastewater

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See Economic Development Summit Report p 21

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## Location Advantages & Disadvantages

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The Eastern Shore of Virginia is isolated from the Hampton Roads metro area by the Chesapeake Bay. Without the influence of a vibrant city economy, the region has remained very rural and the economy dependant on farming and seafood.

The largest and most direct relationship of the economy of the Eastern Shore of Virginia to that of the greater region is shopping. Residents of the region go to Hampton Roads or Salisbury, Maryland, to make major purchases. The population of the Eastern Shore of Virginia is not large enough to support the large chain stores that now dominate retailing.

The other major relationship is the growing number of people from outside the region purchasing vacation or retirement homes on the Eastern Shore of Virginia. This influx balances the impact of young people leaving the area and helps support local retail and service businesses. The development of a new 2,000 acre residential community in Cape Charles is supporting this trend.

Geographic isolation may become an Eastern Shore of Virginia advantage. It is not just retirees who find the region a great place to live. Business owners are also attracted by the quality of life. Small, family-owned businesses have relocated to the region. Recent examples include businesses from Pennsylvania, New York, Maryland, Northern Virginia, and Hampton Roads.

The Eastern Shore of Virginia may be geographically isolated, but transportation access has never been a problem. Early in the modern history of the Eastern Shore of Virginia, sailboats and steamships moved passengers and freight between the region and cities across the bay. Towns at the head of the bayside creeks grew and prospered because of this waterborne trade.

The development of a railroad down the center of the peninsula made the ships obsolete and new towns on the railroad grew. In time a highway was built and the railroad diminished in economic importance. Commercial development began to sprawl along the highway. The Chesapeake Bay Bridge-Tunnel opened in the early 1960s and provides a quick, if expensive, way to get to the rest of Virginia.

## Industry Clusters

### Diversification of the Regional Economy

In past years, seven industry clusters were identified:

- Agriculture/food processing
- Aerospace
- Tourism
- Seafood/Aquaculture
- Education/Research
- Studio Businesses
- Retiree Services

Representative of these clusters are the employment figures by sector (p 28 of ED Summit Report):

- Manufacturing 29%
- Wholesale Trade 2%
- Finance & Insurance 3%
- Administrative Support & Waste Management 3%
- Other Services 4%

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Professional, Scientific, & Technical Services 6%  
Construction 6%  
Forestry, Fishing, & Hunting (less than 1%)  
Accommodations & Food Services 11%  
Retail Trade 15%  
Health Care & Social Assistance 17%  
Other 5%

Additional details are presented on pp 27-34 of the ED Summit Report. However, these seven industry clusters remain relevant today.

## Partners & Resources for Economic Development

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### Many Hands Make Light Work

#### *Regional Partners*

The Eastern Shore of Virginia is blessed with several organizations working on the many aspects of economic development.

The **Eastern Shore of Virginia Tourism Commission** has received additional funding in the last two years and now has paid staff. It has been busy with tourism research and branding of the Shore as a destination, participated in the many Jamestown 2007 activities, and is working with Northampton County and the Chesapeake Bay Bridge Tunnel Commission to build a visitor center at the northern terminus of the bridge tunnel. It has also helped to organize artist's studio tours and has held high-visibility events to attract more visitors.

The **Accomack-Northampton Planning District Commission** focuses on regional planning, housing, and community development issues.

The **Eastern Shore Defense Alliance** focuses on issues related to the federal BRAC closings and the needs of the Wallops Island organizations and facilities relative to land-use policy and perceived threats due to different types of encroachment.

The **Virginia Eastern Shore Economic Empowerment and Housing Corporation** operates a microenterprise revolving loan fund along with other community development programs including housing and debt consolidation loans.

The **Virginia Commercial Space Flight Authority** is a creation of the Commonwealth of Virginia, but its focus is on the **Mid-Atlantic Regional Spaceport** at Wallops Island. The Spaceport has been and will be the scene of commercial rocket launches and will benefit the regional economy with spin-off manufacturing businesses.

The **Small Business Development Center of Hampton Roads** has provided a part-time business analyst for the use of small businesses and entrepreneurs for many years. Assistance in developing business plans and financing packages has been especially important to start-up small businesses in our region.

#### *Federal & State Resources*

The **Economic Development Administration** has provided generous financial support to the creation of business parks, the commercial spaceport at Wallops Island, the Eastern Shore Community College Business Development and Workforce Center, and economic development planning in the region for many years.

**USDA Rural Development** is very active in providing funding for wastewater treatment, revolving loan funds and a variety of other economic development programs in the region.

The **Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development** has provided business financing, downtown revitalization, and business park development assistance to our region.

The **Virginia Department of Transportation** has provided much-needed funding over many years through the Transportation Enhancement Program for myriad projects involving museums, downtown revitalization, and community trails.

The **Virginia Foundation for the Humanities** has provided grants and staff assistance for tourism-related projects on the Eastern Shore.

## Vision

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### **The Future of the Eastern Shore of Virginia**

An excellent vision statement for the future of the Eastern Shore of Virginia was developed in an earlier planning process for the Eastern Shore of Virginia Regional Partnership. It was developed with the input of the entire Partnership, representing a cross-section of the community. Public hearings were held for input from the general public and the vision was approved by the localities. We have adopted that vision statement as our own.

#### *A Vision for the Eastern Shore of Virginia: Where We Are in 2020*

In 2020, the Eastern Shore of Virginia is a rural community, with thriving towns and villages and lots of open space, parks and trails. Our Eastern Shore is a prosperous region where all residents share in our economic well-being. We are proud of the abundance of safe, affordable housing throughout our region.

Our industrial parks attract industries which do not deplete our natural resource base or pollute our air or water. We have a sustainable, diversified economy, and an infrastructure which allows for an abundance of small and medium sized businesses, providing meaningful jobs with good wages and benefits - jobs which support our families. We provide job training opportunities for our adults and young people, enabling them to stay and have careers in our region.

The natural, cultural and historical beauty of our region is unique. We are a haven for artists. Our region is also a great place to retire; we have top notch retirement communities with new residential development and excellent health care facilities.

Tourism is a significant industry here. Tourists are attracted to our region because of our clean environment, open spaces and natural resources. Nature-based tourism is prevalent; learning tours are a big attraction. We also have other attractions which draw tourists to our region: museums, aquariums, and a convention center.

We are fortunate to have NASA and other federal agencies and the space port located in our region. We are world leaders in developing commercial space launch technology and other aerospace support activities. We have a renowned aerospace/marine resources learning center which attracts students from all over the United States.

Our natural resource base is well managed: we have prosperous agriculture and aquaculture industries. We provide an excellent educational base in aquaculture and agriculture, so that future generations may utilize these resources wisely and effectively.

We are confident in determining our future as we move forward into the 21st Century.

## Goals

### Landmarks on the Road to Prosperity

Taking information from previous plans, the new ED Summit Report, economic development organizations, and public comments, we began to and continue to develop strategies for the plan.

It became apparent that certain issues were surfacing over and over again. These common concerns became the basis for the strategic goals. The goals are fundamental to the plan, for while this report offers specific strategies for implementation, the lists is not necessary exhaustive. Sound goals provide a strong framework for future expansion of the lists of strategies.

#### *Strategic Goals:*

- *Create a positive environment for the growth of our seven industry clusters by providing the necessary public infrastructure (business parks, utilities, incubators) and by enhancing capital availability (revolving loan funds).*
- *Offer opportunities for lifelong learning and skill development related to our seven industry clusters, serving potential employees and entrepreneurs.*
- *Develop a regional identity that celebrates our competitive advantages and connects the communities o four region.*
- *Attract or grow businesses that provide living-wage jobs and don't harm the environment.*
- *Recognize the importance of our historic towns and villages to the overall economic health of the region and develop strategies to stimulate their revitalization.*

## Action Plan

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### PEOPLE:

*“The region must actively plan for and pursue opportunities to fully leverage the region’s existing and potential sources of human capital.”*

#### *Action Items:*

1. Recognize school quality as a prerequisite for successful community economic development and make school quality a priority in any agenda.
2. Consider models for marketing programs matching workers who’ve left the Eastern Shore with current and potential employers.
3. *Provide opportunities for high school students to focus on in-demand technical skills.*
4. *Look for innovative outlets to engage the energy of the Eastern Shore’s growing community of retirees.*

#### *Projects:*

1. Support development of the **Wallops Research Park** in order to grow high-tech living-wage jobs for more of the region’s citizens.
2. Support the **Eastern Shore Community College and county school system** efforts to expand the curriculum for technical and entrepreneurial training from primary school all the way through college.
3. Look for ways to identify and motivate citizens who would gain from **GED training**.
4. Work with the schools to set up a **mentoring program** to connect school-age kids with adults who can provide tutoring and encouragement in educational pursuits.

**PLACES:**

*“The region should carefully study market opportunities and constraints facing ideas to develop the region’s natural assets.”*

*Action Items:*

1. Undertake careful analysis of markets and organizing strategies for entering new and exciting markets for agriculture and aquaculture.
2. Explore and implement appropriate best practices in e-commerce and new “niche” tourism marketing strategies.

*Projects:*

1. Continue to support **community development projects** such as:
  - a. Chincoteague Downtown Revitalization
  - b. Exmore Downtown Revitalization
  - c. Cheriton Downtown Revitalization
  - d. Northampton County Gateways project (collaboration between Eastern Shore Tourism Commission and the County) that includes highway signage and a new Visitor Center at the north toll plaza of the Chesapeake Bay Bridge Tunnel.
2. **Eastern Shore Trails:**
  - a. Bicycle Trail
  - b. Heritage Trail
  - c. Seaside Water Trail
3. Support efforts of the **Eastern Shore Tourism Commission** to “brand” the Shore, encourage cooperative marketing, and increase tourism to our region.
4. The **broadband** planning efforts include recommendations for training and assistance for those who want to either enter the e-commerce arena or increase their business’s web-presence and utility. Coordination and cooperation between offering agencies such as VecTec, the ESCC, and others could enhance course offerings and provide a wider spectrum of training for all area businesses.
5. **Conduct research on new markets for agriculture and aquaculture** by working with the US Department of Agriculture, the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services,

the Eastern Shore Farmers Market, the regional food initiative, local food processors and distributors, and the aquaculture industry.

## **INFRASTRUCTURE:**

*“Recognize the quality of infrastructure as important to both community and business/industry and act on it.”*

### *Action Items:*

1. Support community clean-up programs and other efforts to improve the quality of the physical environment.
2. Carefully examine capital investments in infrastructure, such as water and sewer, and recreational facilities, with recognition of their significance for community economic development.
3. Recognize addressing the problems of substandard housing will be beneficial for community economic development.
4. Promote expansion of commercial-speed broadband infrastructure options.

### *Projects:*

#### ***Broadband Expansion for the Eastern Shore***

1. A-NPDC to continue coordination for buildout of the new fiber backbone, distribution loops off the backbone, and organization of last mile service providers on an open-access network until such time as a permanent agency to continue the project is named or created.
2. A-NPDC to provide support for a new regional telecommunications planning study for Northampton County/Cape Charles to prepare for expanded broadband network.

#### ***Water and Wastewater Projects***

1. Provide assistance as requested to those towns needing expanded water and wastewater infrastructure.

- a. Continue to support Parksley as it moves forward on a wastewater collection and treatment system for its commercial business district.
  - b. Provide support as requested by Cape Charles and Cheriton as they explore options for new water and wastewater systems.
2. As feasible, improve water quality through land-use policies.

### ***Housing***

1. Look for ways to improve the housing programs administered by the A-NRHA and Housing Rehabilitation Corporation.
  - a. Conduct extensive research of success stories in other communities to see if those methods could be applied here.
2. Research the current stock and feasibility of building homes for middle-income folks such as teachers, nurses, public safety employees, and young people buying their first homes.

### ***Recreation***

1. Assess interest in and feasibility of expanding recreational offerings and sites in the region.
2. Develop relationships with recreational agencies, faith-based organizations, and others who have an interest in providing recreational outlets for area youth.

## **BUSINESS & INDUSTRY:**

*“Carefully study the commitments required to realize the potential for research and development activity in the region.”*

### ***Action Items:***

1. Encourage state support for activity at Wallops Island, including the Mid-Atlantic Regional Spaceport (MARS).
2. Pursue development strategies in aerospace/spaceflight and marine sciences, and conduct thorough research into the competitive picture in these areas.
3. Recognize the distinction between the immediate economic impact of research and the long term commitment required to see the benefits of commercial development.

*Projects:*

1. **Wallops Research Park** - continue supporting efforts to develop by:
  - a. Serving on the Marketing Committee
  - b. Preparing grant applications as needed
  - c. Providing support to the Project Manager and others as requested.
2. **Eastern Shore Defense Alliance** - Support efforts by assisting them in identifying funding sources for their projects and serving as a liaison with Accomack County and other potential funding partners as they focus on creating new jobs for the region through growth of US Navy operations at Wallops.
3. **Develop new Public/Private Partnerships for business support –**
  - a. Creating school and after-school program to help youth learn about business and career opportunities.
  - b. Engaging senior business leaders to help attract companies to the counties and as a business resource for the community.
  - c. Creating a business retention and expansion program for existing businesses.
  - d. Look for ways to fund a business support position.
4. **Accomack Airport Industrial Park** – provide support to the Industrial Development Authority as requested to recruit companies to locate in the Park.
5. **Broadband** – again, Internet access at >100 MBPS is a critical factor in attracting high-tech industries and educational institutions that develop new products and processes from research. In addition, military operations and research are dependent upon reliable, redundant, high-speed connections. All the military and civilian activities at NASA/Wallops are dependent upon this infrastructure.

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## Prioritized List of Projects

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### 1. BROADBAND

- a. The **broadband** planning efforts include a strategy for training and assistance for those who want to either enter the e-commerce arena or increase their business's web-presence and utility. Coordination and cooperation between offering agencies such as VecTec, the ESCC, and others could enhance course offerings and provide a wider spectrum of training for all area businesses.
- b. A-NPDC to continue coordinate buildout of the new fiber backbone by Mid-Atlantic Broadband Cooperative, distribution loops off the backbone, and organization of last mile service providers on an open-access network until such time as a permanent agency to continue the project is named or created.
- c. A-NPDC to provide support for a new regional telecommunications planning study for Northampton County/Cape Charles to prepare for expanded broadband network.
- d. Support development of affordable Internet access at >100 MBPS as a critical factor in attracting high-tech industries and educational institutions that develop new products and processes from research. In addition, military operations and research are dependent upon reliable, redundant, high-speed connections. All the military and civilian activities at NASA/Wallops are dependent upon this infrastructure

### 2. WALLOPS RESEARCH PARK

- a. Support development of the **Wallops Research Park** in order to grow high-tech living-wage jobs for more of the region's citizens.
- b. Continue supporting efforts to develop by:
  - i. Serving on the Marketing Committee
  - ii. Preparing grant applications as needed
  - iii. Providing support to the Project Manager and others as requested.
- c. **Eastern Shore Defense Alliance** - Support efforts by assisting them in identifying funding sources for their projects and serving as a liaison with Accomack County and other potential funding partners as they focus on creating new jobs for the region through growth of US Navy operations at Wallops.

### 3. EDUCATION

- a. Support the **Eastern Shore Community College and public school systems'** efforts to expand the curriculum for technical and entrepreneurial training from primary school all the way through college.
- b. Look for ways to identify and motivate citizens who would benefit from **GED training**.
- c. Work with the schools to set up a **mentoring program** to connect school-age kids with adults who can provide tutoring and encouragement in educational pursuits.

### 4. BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT & EXPANSION

- a. **Conduct research on new markets for agriculture and aquaculture** by working with the US Department of Agriculture, the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, the Eastern Shore Farmers Market, the regional food initiative, local food processors and distributors, and the aquaculture industry.
- b. **Develop new Public/Private Partnerships for business support – Ideas include:**
  - i. Creating school and after-school programs to help youth learn about business and career opportunities.
  - ii. Engaging senior business leaders to help attract companies to the counties and as a business resource for the community.
  - iii. Creating a business retention and expansion program for existing businesses.
  - iv. Look for ways to fund a business support position.
- c. **Accomack Airport Industrial Park** – provide support to the Industrial Development Authority as requested to recruit companies to locate in the Park.
- d. **Webpage presence for the Eastern Shore** – identify an existing or create a new website or “portal” for the Eastern Shore to ensure a regional web presence; find funding to maintain it as a top-flight product that reflects well on our region.

### 5. TOURISM

- a. Develop **water, wastewater, and infrastructure** in order to increase tourist-holding capacity and expand business growth, provide affordable and attractive workforce housing, and foster downtown development.
- b. **Eastern Shore Trails:**
  - i. Bicycle Trail – [www.a-npdc.org/esbicycleplan2004.pdf](http://www.a-npdc.org/esbicycleplan2004.pdf) - Adopted by both counties in 2004, the plan will improve bicycling access on the Eastern Shore, enhance bicycle safety, encourage bicycle facility development, and improve and diversity the Eastern Shore’s tourism economy.

- ii. Heritage Trail – [www.eastershore.org/trail](http://www.eastershore.org/trail) - The Trail is a driving tour of the historic, scenic, birding and natural sites in Accomack and Northampton Counties, Virginia, the "land between two waters." The Atlantic Ocean and the Chesapeake Bay surround our beautiful peninsula and many of our little towns are on the waterfront. Get out of your car and explore the towns and parks on foot.
- iii. Seaside Water Trail – [www.a-npdc.org/seasidewatertrail.html](http://www.a-npdc.org/seasidewatertrail.html) - The Planning Department of the A-NPDC has been working since 2003 to develop the Seaside Water Trail and improve access at public boat ramps and docks.
- c. Support efforts of the **Eastern Shore Tourism Commission** to “brand” the Shore, encourage cooperative marketing, and increase tourism to our region.

## 6. INFRASTRUCTURE

- a. Provide assistance as requested to those towns needing expanded water and wastewater infrastructure.
  - i. Continue to support Parksley as it moves forward on a wastewater collection and treatment system for its commercial business district.
  - ii. Provide support as requested by Cape Charles and Cheriton as they explore options for new water and wastewater systems.
- b. As feasible, improve water quality through land-use policies.
- c. Look for ways to improve the housing programs administered by the A-NRHA and Housing Rehabilitation Corporation.
  - i. Conduct extensive research of success stories in other communities to see if those methods could be applied here.
- d. Research the current stock and feasibility of building homes for middle-income residents such as teachers, nurses, public safety employees, and young people buying their first home.
- e. Assess interest in and feasibility of expanding recreational offerings and sites in the region.
- f. Develop relationships with recreational agencies, faith-based organizations, and others who have an interest in providing recreational outlets for area youth.

## 7. COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

- a. Continue to support **community development projects** such as:

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- i. Chincoteague Downtown Revitalization –continued streetscape improvements, complete waterside park and renovations to public restrooms, continue improvements for boat pump and haul facilities.
  - ii. Exmore Downtown Revitalization – continue with improvements including construction of a new parking lot between Broad and Main streets.
  - iii. Cheriton Downtown Revitalization – assist as needed with streetscape improvements, parking lot paving, lighting and relocation of utilities. Cheriton also was awarded a grant for water and wastewater planning.
  - iv. Northampton County Gateways project (collaboration between Eastern Shore Tourism Commission, the Chesapeake Bay-Bridge Tunnel District, and the County) that includes highway signage and a new Visitor Center at the north toll plaza of the Chesapeake Bay Bridge Tunnel.

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## Evaluation

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### **Annual Review of Progress**

In 2005, decisions made by both counties to withdraw funding from the Economic Development Commission made it necessary to create a new avenue for pursuing economic development goals in our region.

This CEDS resulted from a 2007 Economic Development Summit and report funded by US EDA and both counties. It includes several projects from the previous CEDS (2005), but focuses more on core economic development “bricks & mortar” projects such as broadband deployment, development of the Wallops Research Park, and business development and expansion.

The CEDS committee is composed of the Accomack-Northampton Planning District Commissioners who are representative of the Shore’s demographics. They will conduct a yearly review and update of the CEDS.

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