

Danville River District Association

Strategic Plan

2021



Danville River District Association

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*Strategic planning process and report
led by Jon Stover & Associates*
Fund Development plan led by District Bridges



Think Big

The theme of this strategic plan is Think Big, guided by the Danville River District Association's goals of being innovative, inclusive, creative, bold, having a regional impact, and helping our partners lead.



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The River District Association will continue moving forward in the transformation of Danville's River District as a welcoming and lively place for all, while inspiring and influencing social and economic development for the greater Dan River Region.

VISION STATEMENT

The River District Association's innovative approach strengthens the regional economy, allowing all to experience Danville's high quality of life.

MISSION STATEMENT

About the River District Association

The River District Association (RDA), formerly Downtown Danville Association, was formed in 1999 to coordinate efforts to revitalize the downtown Danville community, now called the River District. RDA is comprised of a volunteer Board of Directors which includes representatives from River District businesses and property owners, the City of Danville, and other community stakeholders.

Our city now enjoys accredited status under the Virginia Main Street Program. The program is over 20 years old and is recognized nationally as the most successful formula for downtown revitalization. We are committed to the Main Street Four-Point Approach™ of Organization, Promotion, Design, and Economic Vitality.

RDA follows the Main Street model to coordinate the public-private partnerships required to revive the River District. We work with the City of Danville, area businesses, and institutions to develop programs and events to get the community working together; to market the area's unique assets; to get the district in top physical shape; and to attract and retain businesses.

Our Values

Building on Main Street America's Main Street Four-Point Approach™ (Promotion, Design, Economic Vitality, and Organization), RDA has also adopted Main Street America's Guiding Principles for best practices. These eight principles are, essentially, a statement of values that aspiring Main Street partners uphold as they carry out their work, including a focus on developing quality programs, genuine partnerships, local leadership, and adaptive changes. To these eight principles RDA adds inclusivity, recognizing that our work should benefit a diversity of residents, workers, and visitors to the River District.

RDA's Board of Directors and staff understand that the revitalization of the River District is both a process and a journey. We accept the patience, persistence, and perseverance necessary to accomplish our goals and objectives.

Our Mission and Vision

As part of the strategic planning process, we have updated our organizational mission and vision statements to reflect our accomplishments and organizational growth to date, to be more inclusive of the needs of our full range of stakeholders, and to expand our geographic reach and impact as a catalyst for economic development. See the full statements on the preceding page.

About This Strategic Plan

From November 2020 through January 2021 RDA undertook a planning process that culminated in this three-year Strategic Plan. The purpose of this plan is to guide the ongoing rigorous growth of RDA by providing an operational framework that is aligned with the organization’s current capacity and the community’s conditions and needs.

The strategic planning process identified key organizational opportunities, created an updated organizational Vision Statement and Mission Statement, and helped develop consensus regarding when and how programmatic activities and fundraising efforts should be undertaken to best achieve organizational objectives. This initiative was undertaken along with the creation of a Fund Development Plan which identifies short-term and long-term fundraising strategies to diversify revenues and promote organizational sustainability.

Strategic Planning Process

Outreach & Information Gathering	RDA and its project partners developed a work plan, reviewed pertinent plans and studies, and conducted one-on-one phone interviews with RDA staff, Board members, and key stakeholders to vet organizational goals, priorities, and opportunities.
Strategic Planning Workshops	The above process informed three Strategic Planning Workshops, attended by RDA’s staff and board members (the third consisted exclusively of the Executive Committee). In these workshops, RDA refined its organizational goals and identified and built consensus around strategies to achieve them.
Organizational Mission & Vision	Updated mission and vision statements were created to reflect current RDA priorities.
Strategic Plan Development	Findings and strategies developed over the course of the strategic planning process are summarized in this Strategic Plan document. The Strategic Plan identifies action steps through which RDA can work towards executing targeted change and achieving organizational goals over the next two to three years.

Understanding This Document

This Strategic Plan serves as a road map for RDA over the next two and a half years – helping clarify its core goals and outline possible action steps for achieving them.

RDA Priorities for Change

The Strategic Plan identifies three key areas for organizational strategic change:

- Programming:** Enhance the impact and geographic reach of business assistance, events, and entrepreneurship programs, and other programming by growing the capacity and collaboration of local implementation partners.
- Organization:** Streamline RDA communications, governance, and organizational decision-making; enhance board capacity and knowledge; and create a culture of advocacy.
- Fundraising:** Undertake a strategic, creative, and entrepreneurial approach towards expanding organizational revenue streams and strengthening RDA’s operational resiliency.

A Guiding Framework and Decision-Making Tool

Each of the next three pages is devoted to one of the three priorities for change. Each includes three or four Strategic Goals identified by RDA leadership, along with potential action steps that RDA may choose to undertake in order to achieve these Strategic Goals. This plan should serve more as a guiding framework than a rigid set of instructions. As such, RDA leadership and staff may choose to execute some -- but not necessarily all -- of the specific action steps and may incorporate additional strategies or measures not identified in this plan. Some of the strategies can be executed within FY2021 and most or all of the Strategic Goals are expected to be realized by the end of FY2023.

Definitions

- Strategic Goal:** Primary strategic objectives of RDA over the next 2-3 years.
- Strategic Action:** Recommended optional methods for achieving a given key strategic goal.
- Priority:** A “High” priority action item is a central piece of core strategic objectives; “Medium” or “Low” priority actions are less essential to RDA’s goals.
- Target Delivery:** The date at which Strategic Action should be completed
- Task Lead:** Primary group responsible for implementation of Strategic Action
- Partners:** Possible private, public, or nonprofit entities to involve in Strategic Action
- Expense/Capacity:** Change in RDA capacity and/or expense needed to achieve Strategic Action

PROGRAMMING

RDA currently implements a wide range of programs designed to increase the resiliency of local businesses, attract more visitors to the River District, and strengthen the greater entrepreneurial ecosystem of the Dan River region. These programs have been well-received by business owners and other local stakeholders, delivering tangible results and incrementally growing the reputation of the River District and Danville region as a quality place to shop, eat, play, and do business.

Over the next two years, RDA plans to continue its core business assistance programs to ensure the economic vitality of River District businesses. These programs will be particularly vital throughout 2021, as businesses continue to navigate the challenges created by COVID-19. Our programming will continue to support businesses, take advantage of available resources, and make strategic adjustments to keep up with changing commercial trends that have been accelerated by the pandemic.

Looking forward over the next three years, RDA aims to strengthen our role as an economic development driver of the River District and greater Dan River region. We will explore opportunities to expand our services to commercial areas located outside the River District, leveraging our experience in technical assistance, grant administration, and marketing to continuously work to make Danville a great place to live, work, shop, play, and do business.

Successes to Date

- **Developing Danville’s entrepreneurial ecosystem and supporting local startups through the popular Dream Launch Program.**
- **Improving the quality of retail signage and storefronts through the implementation of the Façade Improvement Grant Program.**
- **Increasing visibility, awareness, and customer traffic of River District businesses through Business Retention programs.**
- **Developing a COVID-19 Assistance Program to help businesses survive and thrive throughout the pandemic.**

	Priority	Target Delivery	Task Lead	Partners	Impact on RDA Expenses/Capacity		
					2021	2022	2023
Develop partnerships and collaborations to build capacity to manage and implement programming that creates vibrancy in the River District and serves local businesses.							
» Continue to make introductions and develop collaborations with new area businesses and upcoming Caesars Casino	High	Ongoing	Staff & Board	Caesars Casino & others	↑	↑	↑
» Leverage talent to provide technical assistance to businesses, assist in promotional initiatives, and volunteer for applicable events.	Low	Ongoing	Staff	Longwood SBDC	↔	↔	↔
Grow downtown events through partnerships and collaboration while decreasing RDA staff involvement.							
» Ensure RDA staff works to collaborate in logistics, marketing, and organization of community events in order to focus on long-term economic development priorities.	High	2021	Staff & Board	Various	↔	↔	↔
» Identify local partner(s) to play leading role in the organization of River District Festival	High	2021	Staff & Board	Various	↔	↔	↔
» Continue organizing annual Christmas on the Plaza event	Medium	Ongoing	Staff & Board	Various	↔	↔	↔
Expand entrepreneurship program impact while empowering strategic partners.							
» Continue showcasing Dream Launch as a central piece of RDA’s brand and mission and expand entrepreneurship programming	High	Ongoing	Staff	Various	↔	↑	↑
» Identify local partners that can utilize existing Dream Launch programming to support additional entrepreneurship efforts.	High	2022	Staff	DRBDC; DCC; Chamber of Comm.	↔	↑	↑
» Assess feasibility of development of new small-scale manufacturing incubator/accelerator	Medium/High	2022	Staff	Local development partner(s)	↑	↑	↑
Increase scale and geographic footprint of business assistance programs.							
» Implement Bricks & Clicks program as funding allows while continuing to add other business support workshops	High	Ongoing	Staff	Local businesses	↔	↑	↑
» Continue COVID-19-related assistance and help businesses adjust to shifting commercial trends	High	Ongoing	Staff	Various	↔	↓	↓
» Implement expansion of Façade Grant Program	High	Ongoing	Staff	City of Danville	↑	↑	↔
» Apply for VA Tourism Corp.’s DRIVE 2.0 grant funds to leverage Danville’s designation as a Tourism Zone	Low	Ongoing	Staff	VA Tourism Co.	↔	↔	↔
» Move forward with opportunities to expand business assistance programs to commercial areas located outside of the River District	Very High	2022	Staff	DRF, City of Danville; community orgs;	↑	↑	↔

“DRF” refers to Danville Regional Foundation

ORGANIZATION

As RDA continues to grow and evolve, it will be increasingly critical to ensure that staff members and Board members are empowered to carry out the organization’s mission and continue building strong relationships with stakeholders.

The Board of Directors has added several new members over the past several years that have added a more diverse range of perspectives, following one of the key priorities established in our previous Strategic Plan. With a younger, more racially and geographically diverse board, with a more balanced mix of long-time and newer residents, RDA is strongly positioned to form stronger partnerships with a wide range of communities across the city and region.

Moving forward, RDA’s Board of Directors aims to transition away from a management role and towards a greater orientation around strategic governance. This will allow members to focus more on special projects, advocacy, and ensuring that programming aligns with strategic priorities and objectives.

Successes to Date

- **Strong reputation amongst a wide range of stakeholders**
- **New, more diverse, and highly capable board with mix of representation.**
- **Recognized by Virginia Main Street for innovative partnerships across public, private, and nonprofit sectors.**

Build Board capacity and institutional knowledge through training and integrating clear systems and processes.

	Priority	Target Delivery	Task Lead	Partners	Impact on RDA Expenses/Capacity		
					2021	2022	2023
» Establish (and adapt over time) clear staff-board communication channels to ensure consistent information-sharing with board	High	2021	Staff	None	↑	↔	↔
» Utilize new Board of Directors Portfolio to onboard new members, clearly communicate expectations for involvement, and maintain member accountability	High	Ongoing	Board	None	↔	↔	↔
» Integrate new project management and decision-making tools, such as Entrepreneurial Operating System (EOS), Strategy Screen, and Means Test.	Moderate	2021	Staff and Board	None	↑	↔	↔

Focus the Board’s role on oversight and governance and continue to leverage the Working Groups as the channel for active Board management and implementation.

» Continue empowering RDA staff to make day-to-day operational decisions, while staying focused on meeting established strategic goals	High	Ongoing	Board	None	↔	↔	↔
» Finish the official committee charters	Moderate	2021	Board	None	↑	↔	↔
» Continue Working Groups to leverage board capacity and engage non-board members from community	Moderate	Ongoing	Board	Community members	↔	↔	↔

Hire additional RDA staff and delegate within staff to spread capacity and ownership.

» Aim to hire 2-3 additional full-time staff members over the next two years	High	2022	Staff	None	↑	↑	↑
» Incrementally transition day-to-day operational responsibilities from Executive Director to other Staff, to allow ED to focus on longer-term strategies and organizational sustainability	Moderate	Ongoing	Staff	None	↔	↔	↔
» Continue to streamline accounting processes	High	2022-2023	Staff	None	↑	↔	↔

Create a culture of increased board advocacy in promoting and supporting RDA.

» Strengthen ties with lower-income communities and communities of color	High	Ongoing	Staff & Board	Local churches and comm. orgs.			
» Establish an External Relations working group to conduct business and property owner outreach	Moderate	2022	Board	None	↔	↑	↑
» Establish Advocacy working group or subcommittee to build stronger relationships with local, state, and federal officials and better understand policy and regulatory landscape	Moderate	2022	Board	None	↔	↑	↑
» Expand volunteer pool through recruitment at RDA-sponsored events and digital outreach/sign-up	Low	Ongoing	Staff & Board	Community orgs., local institutions	↔	↔	↔

FUNDRAISING

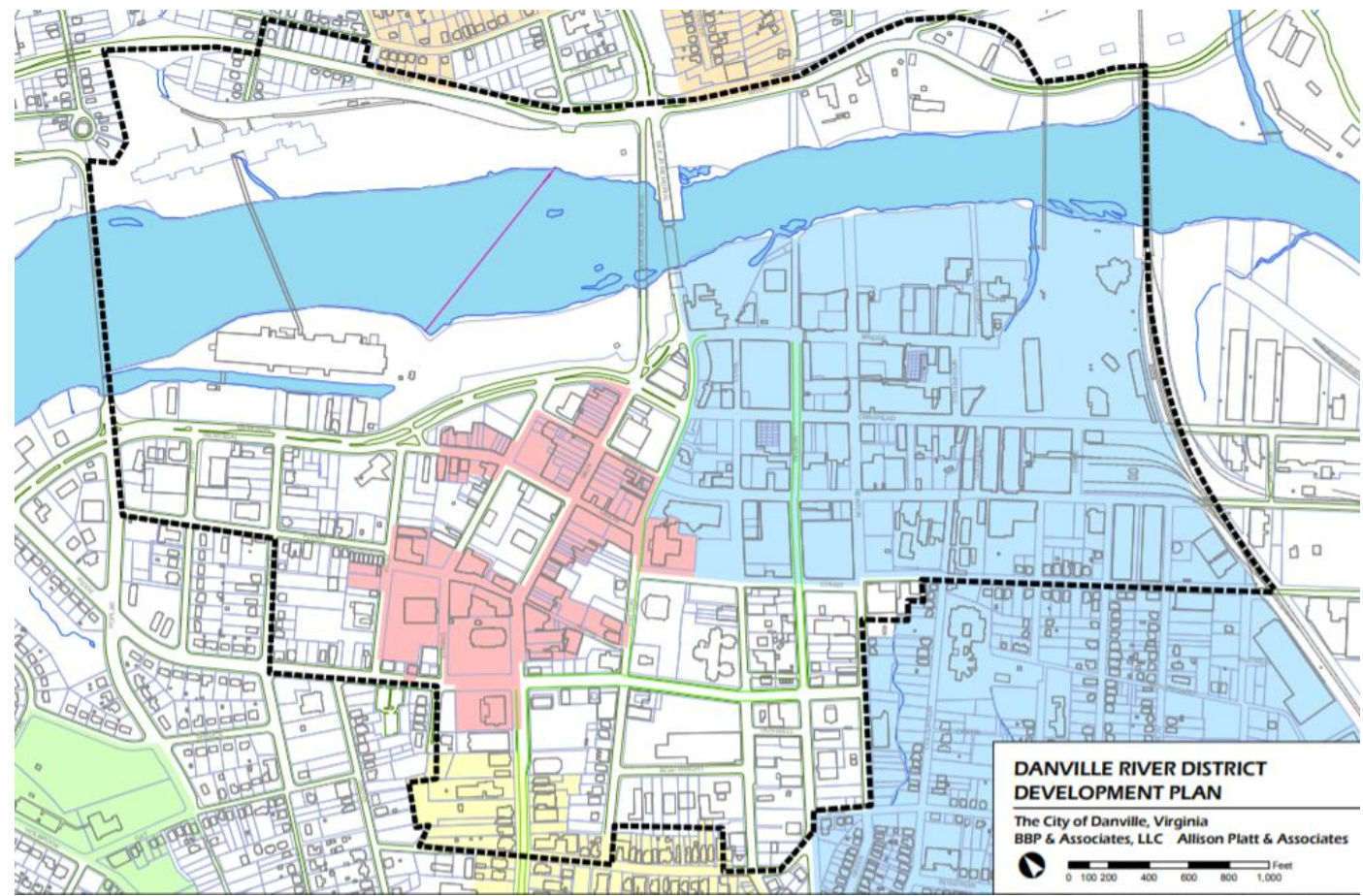
Organizational sustainability is one of RDA's top strategic priorities over the next two years. To date, RDA has been supported in large part by the City of Danville and the Danville Regional Foundation (DRF). These partners have been critical to the development of RDA as an effective, respected economic development organization. Moving forward, RDA plans to maintain and strengthen these partnerships while identifying new institutional and corporate partners that can provide the organization with additional resources and organizational sustainability.

While these partnerships will continue to be critical over the next several, RDA plans to strategically diversify its revenue sources, expand its budget, and grow staff capacity by 2023. By exploring new revenue-generating opportunities, better showcasing the regional economic and social impacts of our programming, and implementing a newly created Fund Development Plan, RDA is confident that it can achieve greater organizational resiliency and programmatic impact by 2023.

Successes to Date

- **Successful track record of winning grants and gaining public contributions for the organization.**
- **Strong, long-lasting support from the City and Danville and Danville Regional Foundation.**
- **Strong track record of administering City grants to local businesses, with \$150,000 in grants awarded in 2020.**

	Priority	Target Delivery	Task Lead	Partners	Impact on RDA Expenses/Capacity		
					2021	2022	2023
Strive towards long-term financial sustainability.							
» Build stronger relationships with potential new institutional and corporate donors by communicating growing role of RDA as regional economic development driver	High	Ongoing	ED & Board	Various	↑	↑	↑
» Leverage upcoming DRF grant to expand staff capacity, explore new revenue-generating initiatives, and further catalyze regional economic activity; strive to create a positive return on investment for DRF	High	2021	Staff	DRF	↑	↑	↑
» Implement recommendations within the Fund Development Plan	High	2021-2023	Staff & Board	Various	↑	↑	↑
» Continue to work with City and DRF to ensure their needs and investment goals are met	High	Ongoing	Staff	None	↔	↔	↔
» Track and share key accomplishments with DRF Ongoing duration of grant	Moderate	2021-2022	Staff	None	↑	↑	↔
» Explore capacity to hire branding firm to develop updated logo, color scheme, and promo materials	High	2022-2023	Staff	Branding firm (if needed)	↔	↑	↑
» Test feasibility and utility of CRM system	Moderate/High	2022	Staff	None	↑	↔	↔
Be creative and entrepreneurial with revenue generation.							
» Administer mission-related City and State grant programs	High	Ongoing	Staff	City of Danville; State	↔	↑	↑
» Monitor opportunities for additional revenue-generating real estate partnerships with City or other partners. Lean on board capacity to help evaluate opportunities or conduct market analysis	High	Ongoing	Staff	City of Danville; Prop. Owners;	↑	↑	↑
» Vet receptivity and opportunities for collaboration with stakeholders from neighboring commercial nodes within possible expansion area	Very High	2022	Staff & Board	Local community organizations	↑	↑	↑
Vet opportunities to integrate new sources of revenue							
» Emphasis on traditional fundraising channels such as grants, philanthropic giving, and business contributions	High	Ongoing	Staff & Board	None	↑	↑	↑
» Monitor opportunities for mission-related fee-for-service opportunities from City or State	Moderate	Ongoing	Staff	None	↔	↔	↔
» Monitor future property owner and city receptivity of potentially creating a BID rev. structure and integrating BID services; do not pursue unless major parties express interest	Low	2022	Staff & Board Chair	City of Danville	↔	↑	↔



Let's Partner Together

The work outlined in this strategic plan relies on strong partnerships and collaboration with a wide variety of stakeholders. If you would like to learn more about how you can get involved, please contact RDA at 434-791-0210 or RiverDistrictAssociation@gmail.com.



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