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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### INTRODUCTION

The City of Virginia Beach turned 50 in 2013. “Live the Life” was the tagline and there was much to be celebrated by citizens and city leaders regarding our young city’s many accomplishments up to that point in time. The then-recent list of accolades was indeed impressive and varied:



#### 2011

- ✓ Ranked as the “9th Top Digital City in the U.S.” (Center for Digital Government, April 2011)
- ✓ Named “5<sup>th</sup> Best City for Working Mothers” (*Forbes Magazine*, April 2011)
- ✓ List of “Family Friendly Cities” (*Ebony Magazine*, October 2011)
- ✓ “One of the Nation’s 100 Best Cities for Young People” (America’s Promise Alliance, December 2011)
- ✓ “Top 10 Best Walking Cities” (*Prevention Magazine*, December 2011)

#### 2012

- ✓ “One of America’s 50 Best Cities” (*Bloomberg Businessweek*, January 2012)
- ✓ “Best Run City in America” (*24/7 Wall Street Journal*, January 2012)
- ✓ “#2 Best City in America for Raising a Family” (*24/7 Wall Street Journal*, January 2012)
- ✓ “Seventh Healthiest City in America for Women” (*Women’s Health Magazine*, January 2012)
- ✓ “Best ‘Green’ School Division Nationwide” (U.S. Green Building Council)
- ✓ Louisville Award for Innovation in Government for Municipal Energy Resources Management (Government Finance Officers Association)

#### 2013

- ✓ William D. Sessoms, Jr. awarded “Policymaker/Elected Official of the Year” (Association of Defense Communities)
- ✓ “6<sup>th</sup> Happiest City in the Country in Which to Work” (Forbes.com declared, January 2013)
- ✓ Virginia Beach’s Parks System ranked “8<sup>th</sup> in the Nation” (Trust for Public Land, June 2013)
- ✓ “2<sup>nd</sup> Most Business-Friendly City in America” (CNNMoney.com Report, June 2013)
- ✓ “Fittest City in America” (Facebook’s Fittest Cities, July 2013)
- ✓ “One of the 10 Best Cities for Early Retirement” (*Kiplinger*, November 2013)

#### 2014

- ✓ “A Top 10 Beach Town for Retirees” (CBS News, May 2014)
- ✓ “One of America’s Top 10 Destinations for July 4<sup>th</sup> Celebrations” (Priceline.com, June 2014)
- ✓ “A Millennial Boomtown” (*Forbes*, August 2014)
- ✓ “One of America’s Best Cities for Global Trade” (*Global Trade Magazine*, October 2014)
- ✓ “One of 2014’s Most Searched Destinations on Yahoo!” (Yahoo!, December 2014)

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- ✓ 2014 Gold Excellence Award (Economic Development Council for Real Estate Redevelopment and Reuse)

#### 2015

- ✓ “2<sup>nd</sup> Hardest-Working City in America” (Wallet Hub, March 2015)
- ✓ “One of the 10 Most Beautiful Cities in the USA” (The Culture Trip, March 2015)
- ✓ “One of the Best 10 U.S. Beaches for Families” (Family Vacation Critic, April 2015)
- ✓ “One of the 10 Best Cities for Millennial College Students” (*USA Today*, April 2015)
- ✓ “One of America’s Most Literate Cities” (*USA Today*, April 2015)
- ✓ “The Most Affordable City in America in Which to Start a Family” (Wise Bread, May 2015)
- ✓ “Best Large City for Veterans to Live” (*USA Today*, June 2015)
- ✓ “One of America’s Best Boardwalks” (Fox News, July 2015)
- ✓ “4<sup>th</sup> Best City for First-Time Homebuyers” (Vox Business & Finance, July 2015)
- ✓ “A+ in Starting a Small Business” (Thumbtack.com, August 2015)
- ✓ “One of the 10 Best Cities to Live In” (WalletHub, August 2015)

These labels acknowledge what we already know about our city—that Virginia Beach is a great city that offers excellent choices for a variety of ages and lifestyles. We truly embrace our city motto, “*A Community for a Lifetime.*” We are, as the labels show, a “City of Choice” or, a choice city. Be it opportunities for young people, those just starting out as homebuyers and families, those who relish the outdoors and open spaces, small businesses and global companies, workers, the defense community and its veterans, retirees, and all who wish to recharge their souls within our beautiful natural landscape by the sea— we desire to be a place that people raise a family in, work in, and retire to.

To date, our accomplishments as a city are the result of taking the risk of merger between the City of Virginia Beach and Princess Anne County in 1963 and hard work and diligence ever since by visionary leadership and a committed citizenry. These accomplishments are also the result of a city governance model that has relied on listening to our citizens and businesses, continuous long-range planning, strategic planning, and capital investment in order to be responsive to our changing conditions and needs. We do this with a steadfast commitment to growing in a sustainable and resilient manner—fiscally, socially, and environmentally. Our citizens are engaged, talented, fun-loving, creative, innovative, and passionate. They, along with our business community, hold the City’s leaders and public servants accountable to deliver the best services possible. *Living the life is what’s expected here.*

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# *A Community for a Lifetime*

## **A CHOICE CITY**

The strategic choices Virginia Beach has made over the years have set our course for the future. They also define who we are to the world. Clearly, the response has come back to us that Virginia Beach is a beach community in Coastal Virginia that offers many choices and is a choice city.

**Choices** have been made to grow in a safe, suburban pattern in the northern part of the city, yet retain our pristine and productive rural landscape and heritage in the southern part of the city. We have prided ourselves with building and nurturing stable suburban neighborhoods, commercial centers, schools, and community facilities. Our rural community has remained vibrant and protected for future generations to farm through effective land conservation programs, such as the Agricultural Reserve Program and historic preservation or open space easements. Our people highly value our natural resources and rural area and demand sound stewardship of them.

## **THE GREEN LINE**

**We choose to maintain the “Green Line”** as the linchpin of our growth management strategy. The preservation of the Green Line is reinforced by a variety of other land use policies and programs in the City’s Planning Areas. It has been 35 years since the Green Line was first introduced in the 1979 *Comprehensive Plan*. Although the City has grown and matured considerably during that time, the Green Line is still critical to our ability to properly shape our future in a sustainable manner. The SGAs and Special Economic Growth Areas (SEGAs) designated in the 2003 and 2009 *Comprehensive Plans*, respectively, address the need to keep the Green Line in place; yet, still provide for our city’s future population growth, economic growth, and tax base growth. Below the Green Line today is found both public and private development in larger-lot development patterns, with an emphasis

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on quality public open space and recreation, connected by a trails network and greenways. The land use and urban infrastructure policies associated with the Green Line remain unchanged; however, at this juncture, we have a need to re-evaluate the capacity of the area south of it to accommodate development as new revelations about changing environmental conditions and how we can develop land sustainably have come to light.

## PLANNING AREAS

How we want our land to be used in the future is described in **Chapter 1, Planning Areas**. Virginia Beach's Planning Areas and planned land use pattern offers many lifestyle choices. **Section 1.1** presents the City's **2040 Planned Land Use Map**.

## URBAN AREAS

Over time, due to the finite nature of land and its growing scarcity, coupled with a desire to effectively and efficiently manage growth and capital resources, yet grow in a more sustainable manner, choices were made to offer a third lifestyle choice to our citizens, businesses, visitors, and potential future residents—an urban form. Future urban form and development patterns are being directed to 8 strategic locations in our city, where existing infrastructure is located and has the capacity to absorb additional growth through infill development and both public capital investment and private redevelopment in the future. **Section 1.2 – Urban Areas** presents the guiding principles for and visions for the 8 Strategic Growth Areas (SGAs) -- at the Resort, Burton Station, Pembroke, Newtown, Rosemont, Lynnhaven, Hilltop, and Centerville. Collectively, the SGAs represent our city's "Urban Areas" and constitute only 2% of our gross land area.

All of the SGAs were master planned over a 6-year period between 2007 and 2013. Six of these areas are also where key transportation corridors are located that have the potential to become multi-modal in nature by introducing additional transportation choices. The SGA visions are long-range into the future, as it will take many years for our land development patterns to transform in this way, and for capital improvements and private investment choices to support them. Indeed, the SGAs have already begun to transform as the economy has rebounded since 2010, with the Burton Station, Newtown, Pembroke, and Resort SGAs experiencing most of the changes to date.

The Burton Station SGA, comprised of the historic Burton Station community and the Northampton Boulevard Corridor, have begun to realize long-neglected capital and private investment that is both improving the quality of life for residents and creating more attractive corridor aesthetics. Recent improvements to Wesleyan Drive and its intersection with Northampton Boulevard have eased congestion on a heavily traveled arterial serving two academic institutions.

Since the *Northampton Boulevard Corridor Strategic Growth Area Implementation Plan* was adopted in 2009, a few significant changing circumstances have affected some central components of the plan. First, the buffer area/relocated golf course planned around Burton Station Village will no longer be a golf course. Norfolk has decided to close the Lake Wright golf course as it was too expensive to maintain. Second, the 332,000 square foot phase I of the Norfolk Premium Outlets opened in 2017. Third, the Norfolk Airport Authority secured a rezoning approval from City Council for 36 acres of land from residential to industrial. Finally, approximately a dozen single family residences remain on Burton Station Road and due to truncation of Premium Outlets Boulevard by Norfolk, Burton Station needs to continue to connect to Miller Store Road. Based on these changed circumstances, the Northampton Boulevard Strategic Growth Area Implementation Plan (now called Burton Station Plan update) was approved in July, 2018.

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*Regent University Quad and University Village Concept -  
Centerville SGA Master Plan*

The Centerville SGA is home to a rapidly growing institution of higher learning— Regent University— which has grown to become a 4-year college and a graduate school, and has an award-winning School of Law. Supported by corporate office development, the university’s master plan was shared with city planners to create the concept of a future university village that will enable the university to grow and address its growing student housing needs. It would also allow surrounding residents to take advantage of university offerings in employment, dining, services, and small shops. This SGA, due to its lack of environmental and other constraints, affords

an opportunity for economic development adjacent to the Interstate and a home to future Class A office space of a design that continues the architectural themes found on the campus. The municipal landfill at the western edge of the SGA will continue to operate into the foreseeable future, but the SGA plan envisions a new district park being designed there once it is closed, similar to the City’s beloved and well-used Mt. Trashmore Park.

The Newtown SGA sits at the eastern terminus of the first segment of the region’s light rail transit system, The Tide, with service only in Norfolk at present. In a landmark decision in 2015, City Council voted to continue developing plans to extend The Tide to Town Center through the Newtown SGA. Newtown’s proximity to Town Center has the potential to echo the Town Center’s vibrancy but at an appropriate scale and density adjacent to established residential neighborhoods. Historic Kempsville sits to the south of Newtown and is transforming into a mixed-use Suburban Focus Area that seeks to have a character that is reminiscent of Colonial Williamsburg, offering small shops and new housing choices. Intensive road and public space improvements have saddled its main intersection at Witchduck and Princess Anne Roads for a number of years, but private investment has begun as a result of these public investments.

The Pembroke SGA has become the City’s “Town Center” providing a much desired sense of place—and public gathering place-- as a Downtown. In just the past 15 years, a skyline has emerged that offers an exciting new residential, employment, shopping, and entertainment address. The City’s oldest shopping mall, Pembroke Mall, has received a facelift and re-orientation that is more pedestrian friendly. Formally dominated by vehicular travel lanes that made it unsafe for pedestrians to cross, the Virginia Beach Boulevard corridor has been somewhat tamed to enable pedestrians to travel more safely between the two major destinations within the Core Area—Pembroke Mall and Town Center. The arts scene thrives at the Sandler Center, showcasing with both celebrity and local talent year-round. An increasing number of outdoor festivals and events offer free entertainment in every season.



*“YNOT Wednesdays” Summer Concert Series -  
Sandler Center Plaza, Pembroke SGA*

Rosemont SGA, which lies immediately east of Pembroke SGA and the Town Center is planned to be a transit-oriented residential community for those who desire to live near Town Center but not in

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it. Transit extension is necessary for this vision to be fully realized, but commercial property owners already see that potential. They have begun to make improvements to attract new shoppers and enhance the shopping experience for existing customers.

The Lynnhaven and Hilltop SGAs have inherent redevelopment challenges as future growth areas, in that they are constrained by the presence of waterways, floodplains, wetlands, and aircraft high noise zones due to their proximity or adjacency to NAS Oceana. These SGAs have been carefully planned with our military facilities stakeholders. Planned land uses in these SGAs are compatible, yet also transit-ready should a decision be made in the future to extend public fixed-guideway transit east to the Oceanfront.

The Lynnhaven SGA has the potential to serve the city as an innovative industrial and service industry zone, while maintaining existing affordable housing for first-time homebuyers and seniors in the established neighborhoods of Eureka Park and Pinewood Gardens. Rediscovering the waterways that meander the Lynnhaven SGA by orienting our buildings toward them and creating more visual and public water access points along an extensive public trail system is an underlying design principle.

The long-range vision for Hilltop SGA, which is already a regional retail destination that features locally-owned restaurants, a plethora of grocery stores, and a variety of shops, builds on the area's strengths, yet introduces more greenspace. Incorporating greenspace through redevelopment opportunities can help address the SGA's stormwater management needs. In turn, this can create a healthier environment and visitor experience that welcomes more people out of their cars and outdoors as they move from place to place within the SGA. Industrial and commercial uses compatible with being in a military aircraft high noise zone have been relocated into this SGA at the southernmost end through the City's successful "YesOceana!" Program. The historic neighborhood of Oceana Gardens, which has a concentration of early 20<sup>th</sup> Century "Sears Kit Homes," is evolving with a new residential lot and density pattern that is more compatible with being located in a military aircraft Accident Potential Zone and high noise zone, while still trying to retain its character and charm.



*ViBe Creative District "First Fridays" Art*

The Resort Area SGA has received much capital investment in streetscape and utility improvements, including Rudee Walk, Pacific Avenue, and a new public parking structure on 25<sup>th</sup> Street. An innovative, flexible Form-Based Code is enabling new private development that provides a variety of housing types and a greater range of year-round shopping and entertainment for both residents and visitors, alike. An arts community has emerged in the Resort's ViBe Creative District and, as a result, more opportunities and choices are enabled in creative expression.

Now that master planning of the Strategic Growth Areas is complete, our focus has shifted to plan implementation and resourcing. In large measure, it

necessitates refreshing our zoning and development regulations and design guidelines to enable the visions set forth in each plan. In addition to retrofitting public infrastructure to support higher density development and replacing aging infrastructure, improvements to transportation, traffic management, stormwater management, and streetscapes are needed. So is creating new public and

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green spaces. Initial public investment to accomplish some of these things has been instrumental in catalyzing private investment. It is a proven recipe for success based on the numbers we're seeing for return on investment. However, we cannot provide public resources for all of the SGAs simultaneously and at the same levels of support. Instead, we must strategically implement each plan, such that the energy from one fuels the startup of the next. This will foster a synergistic relationship between all of them.

There are also symbiotic relationships between the SGAs and the rest of the city. Implementing the SGA plans allows us to maintain the current pattern of development and density in the adjacent lower-density, safe suburban neighborhoods that our city is known for. Implementing the SGA plans also allows us to preserve our Rural Area and enable the Princess Anne Commons and Transition Area to be a true buffer between the Suburban and Rural Areas. All of the City's "Planning Areas," as described in Chapter 1, are intended to be mutually supportive. Becoming successful in the SGAs means becoming successful at achieving our land use goals in all other areas of the city.

## SUBURBAN AREAS

**We choose to continue to preserve the suburban lifestyle** for those who seek it as the primary lifestyle choice in Virginia Beach. Safe and healthy suburban neighborhoods and world-class public schools are what our City is known for and why people move here to raise their families. The Comprehensive Plan's **Section 1.3 - Suburban Area** sets for land use policies that seek balance in the appropriate mix of residential neighborhoods within our Suburban Area communities in order to find compatibility in density and design. Striking such a balance can often be a divisive decision, as less and less land has become available for large-scale new neighborhoods. Infill development on smaller, remaining parcels of land has become the norm. Our Suburban Area neighborhoods are also aging. Virginia Beach has prided itself in the stability of its housing stock and neighborhoods over the years. Neighborhood-serving retail centers are experiencing a range of conditions, from thriving to obsolete to transforming, and it is important that reinvestment and new investment in both our housing stock and commercial centers be an ongoing pursuit to maintain the stability of our Suburban Area.



*Virginia Beach suburban neighborhood form*

Careful consideration must be paid to the extent to which our market can support additional retail uses, in addition to where they should be strategically located and of what type and design to best support planned growth areas and reflect local character. Adaptive reuse and reinvestment in neighborhood commercial centers are becoming a priority to ensure the continued viability of our Suburban lifestyle. Our challenge is to continue to allocate resources to code enforcement and home rehabilitation programs that have helped maintain strong neighborhoods, especially in light of historical reliance on federal and state housing assistance programs no longer being our current reality.

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*The Virginia Beach Sportplex, located in Princess Anne Commons, hosts many sporting events.*

## PRINCESS ANNE COMMONS & TRANSITION AREA

**Section 1.4 - Princess Anne Commons & Transition Area**, describe two key Planning Areas in Virginia Beach that are situated below the Green Line and north of the Rural Area. Princess Anne Commons, also referred to as Princess Anne Commons Strategic Economic Growth Area (SEGA), has evolved as a choice new destination for academic and medical institutions, sports and entertainment venues. Our planning for this area has been strategic because of its location under a military aircraft overflight area. Our economic

development strategies have cultivated a strong alliance between these three industries to create a thriving community. Of recent note is our new target sector in biomedical research and development. Planning and resourcing public infrastructure to support continued strategic economic development in Princess Anne Commons is a high priority. Using a balanced approach between hard infrastructure and softer green infrastructure, we choose to continue to be able to meet a variety of desired stewardship, as well as federal and state-mandated environmental resource quality outcomes, including stormwater management and wetlands protection.

The Transition Area remains the penultimate buffer between the more densely populated and intensive land uses in the northern part of the city and the City's Rural Area to the south of Indian River Road. This area offers a choice for those who want to get away from the more densely-populated areas and into more open spaces, yet remain close to the conveniences of the Suburban Area. There is intended to be a noticeable difference here-- a transition-- as one travels from north to south through it and into the Rural Area.



*Stormwater management features designed as open space amenities and an interconnected multiple-use public trail system are essential residential design elements in the Transition Area.*

Open space is the primary consideration in site design, with a goal of achieving 50% cumulative open space at ultimate buildout. Context sensitivity is desired for building design and materials. Ideal uses are neighborhood-serving in both type and scale, not regional retail destinations and commerce centers as found in the Suburban Area. A vast network of public open space and multi-purpose trails is planned, and in part, is already built throughout the Transition Area, enabling access to public recreation areas and individual mobility without reliance on the automobile.

Despite the designation and planning of the Strategic Growth Areas, development pressure in the Transition Area continues. This is in part due to the fact that it will be many years before the Strategic Growth Areas transform into their intended new pattern of more dense development. The Transition Area's low elevation and location at the headwaters of the Back Bay and North Landing

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River watersheds create a complex development landscape, however. A high groundwater table, documented sea level rise and recurrent flooding from wind-driven tides make stormwater management very challenging. We have come to realize that development must be treated differently here and that it may not be as developable as originally envisioned in previous Comprehensive Plans. Techniques for managing stormwater and other environmental quality goals that have worked well in other parts of the City have been found not to work as well in this area. As a result, new land use and development policies, design techniques, and regulations must be considered.



*Multi-generational families farming in Virginia Beach.*

## RURAL AREA

The Rural Area and the rural way of life that has been present here for generations is described in **Section 1.5 - Rural Area**. The Rural Area offers yet another lifestyle choice for our residents. It is home to our vibrant agricultural industry—the third major element of our predominantly three-legged economy of tourism, the military, and agriculture. It is also a growing segment of our tourism industry.

The economic impact of the Rural Area is not limited to Virginia Beach, however; it is also a heavy user of the Port of Virginia, bringing our agricultural bounty to the world. It's big business for Virginia Beach. Preservation of our

prime agricultural lands with long-established public utilities urban service boundaries and a successful Agricultural Reserve Program (ARP) has been effective. Although participation in the ARP has waned from its initial levels, reflecting an amassing of enrolled properties and retiring of stale residentially-zoned land, it remains a valuable and important growth management tool.

## MILITARY INSTALLATIONS AND SUPPORT

Decades ago, our federal government chose to make Hampton Roads and Virginia Beach, in particular, a large home for its military commands and support services. The importance of this mission and federal resourcing of the various installations in Virginia Beach has only grown; Joint Expeditionary Base Little Creek-Ft. Story is now the City's largest public employer. Virginia Beach offers a training environment unparalleled elsewhere along the East Coast, enabling military personnel to train locally and remain with their families prior to deployment. Virginia Beach appreciates and chooses to support the military presence by ensuring that our land use policies are aligned with the missions of the various commands. This commitment and the various land use policies and cooperative land use review tools we use to achieve it are described in **Section 1.6 – Military Installations & Support**.

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Learning from the past, we have reduced incompatible land use encroachment through partnership efforts between the City, the Commonwealth of Virginia, and the U.S. Navy such that we have now become a model defense community. Mutual cooperation on “beyond the fence line” issues have become institutionalized on a daily basis through memoranda of understanding, routine communication, and collaborative planning between city planners and their federal planning counterparts. The choices we have made in recent years have better positioned us, along with our state and military partners, to be a more resilient community, region, and state, should there be additional recommendations from Base Realignment and Closure Commissions in the future.



*The U.S. Navy's Blue Angels in formation over Boardwalk during Neptune Festival.*

## TRANSPORTATION

The majority of our citizens have said they support pursuing additional transportation choices. Lifestyle choices for living, working, playing, and in-buying preferences are changing as the City's demographics shift to reflect a larger majority of Millennials (those born just prior to the Year 2000) and Baby Boomers (those born immediately after World War II). The Millennial generation is on track to outpace the number of Baby Boomers for the foreseeable duration. The mobility needs and choices of these two generations at opposite ends of the spectrum are strikingly similar in that they prefer greater mobility that doesn't require an automobile. As a choice city for both young professionals and retirees, our city is changing in response to this.



comprehensive plan.

*Example of "Complete Streets" safe intersection design for a variety of users*

The *2009 Comprehensive Plan* introduced the concept of multi-modality— offering choices in transportation modes including vehicular, walking, biking, and mass transit—and presented a Master Transportation Plan inclusive of all of these modes. The desire to establish a Complete Streets Policy, or street design that is friendly to all users, was also a concept planted in the *2009 Comprehensive Plan*. **Section 2.1 - Master Transportation Plan**, presents the City's multi-modal transportation plan and is a state-mandated element of the local

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Key transportation planning decisions that have affected not only our city, but the region as a whole, have been made since then. These include the opening of a starter light rail transit line in Norfolk and re-introduction of passenger rail service to Southside Hampton Roads in Norfolk. Planning for high-speed rail continues to be a focus at the state level through the Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation. A *Complete Streets Administrative Directive* was established in Virginia Beach through public involvement that mandates consideration of all users in all new street design and retrofit projects to the greatest extent practicable. Greater community connectivity, or the ability to move from place to place with ease and not necessarily in an automobile, is something that our citizens have also said is desirable for our city. The 2015 General Assembly asked localities to consider the needs of our most vulnerable citizens— our seniors and disabled persons—in our transportation and land use planning. Often being transit-dependent, it is vital they are enabled to be valued and active members of our community for a lifetime.

## ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP

In addition to transportation, Virginia Beach citizens place the highest value on stewardship of our greatest asset—our natural landscape, with its extensive waterways and shorelines. Sixty-percent of Virginia Beach residents today were born here. They have chosen to remain, in part, because of our City's natural beauty. We are a tourist economy for the same reason. Businesses choose to locate here for the coastal lifestyle that is offered for their employees to live in, work, and play. An economic development spirit that celebrates our natural environment and is a sound steward of it is being cultivated and nurtured by our new *A Community Plan for a Sustainable Future*, adopted by City Council in 2013. This new plan seeks a triple bottom line of fiscal, social and environmental sustainability in all of our decisions.



*The North Landing River system is part of the City's "Green Sea."*

New comprehensive planning legislation passed by the General Assembly in 2015 requires localities to plan for sea level rise and recurrent flooding. This topic is also heavy on the minds of our citizens, who have been experiencing repeated nuisance or more severe flooding events. Even before this state mandate, Virginia Beach had chosen to begin addressing these issues primarily through floodplain regulations, beach nourishment, and stormwater system retrofit projects. We realize now that, as new technology emerges to gather additional data that allows us to analyze our current and projected conditions, it will take something more extensive than that. We must add a greater array of tools to our toolkit that covers the spectrum of response measures, inclusive of mitigation, adaptation, and where necessary, retreat. We choose to be a resilient city. We can also choose to be a model for environmental stewardship and make reinvention a defining characteristic. **Section 2.2 - Environmental Stewardship Framework** describes how we intend to address our challenges and be resilient.

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## HOUSING & NEIGHBORHOODS

People have chosen to make Virginia Beach their home for a variety of reasons. By the numbers and accolades, many find it an affordable and safe place to raise a family or as a retirement destination. Our neighborhoods are strong. **Section 2.3 - Housing & Neighborhoods**, presents our plan for maintaining the best things our housing and neighborhood choices have to offer and improving them over time, as needed. Home construction has slowed considerably since 2000, due to the combined effects of market oversaturation, finite land, aggressive growth management policies, and a period of severe economic recession in more recent years. Our demographics are diversifying with the large presence of Baby Boomers and Millennials, and the growing presence of minority populations. Their housing preferences, along with the period of economic recession, have resulted in a surge in new multi-family housing (apartments and townhomes). This type of construction has recently outpaced the more traditional single family-residential home construction in our Urban and Suburban Areas for the first time in the City's history. On the other hand, and from another perspective on the numbers, housing that is affordable to the largest segment of our population—our working residents and our younger generations-- is becoming scarce or has become unattainable in large measure.



*Families enjoying one of many neighborhood and regional parks.*

According to the most recent five-year forecast, both residential and commercial real estate assessments are expected to grow slowly at 2.5% each year over the forecasted period. Our housing market has necessarily hit the proverbial “reset” button. These new realities call on us to make concerted choices in order to continue to have healthy neighborhoods and be a choice city for a lifetime.

## ECONOMIC VITALITY

**Section 2.4 - Economic Vitality** presents the City's land use goals and policies for ensuring that our city thrives economically and sustainably into the future. After many years of prosperity, we now find ourselves emerging from what has been an uncertain and volatile economic environment. The regional economy was affected by a significant decline in the housing market – the city's primary source of revenue. Defense spending, federal and state aid and consumer spending are not as strong as we have experienced prior to 2008. Future growth will depend on the city's ability to focus on the greater diversification of its economy, such as a focus on the biomedical and healthcare

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fields while growing and retaining our existing tourism industry as well as hallmark employers and our base of small businesses.



*Virginia Beach has an emerging bio-medical research industry.*

We have made strategic choices to enhance and diversify our economic vitality such that Virginia Beach can be a place where all citizens and businesses can prosper in 2040. We are able to create our own future because we are less dependent than ever before on the state and federal governments. The economy is again vibrant, growing, and more sustainable. We attract, retain, and grow high-caliber companies offering good salaries to employ our young adults and attract creative youth from other markets. This talented workforce lives and thrives in our city. There are rich opportunities for people of all ages to participate in our vitality. New and existing businesses benefit from a well-trained, diverse, and available workforce, even as those businesses' needs

continually change. We have realized more than ever, the value of our small businesses and have become a leader in the new business growth and development of minority-owned firms.

We maximize our investment in infrastructure by developing our land so that it preserves our quality of life and physical environment and serves the needs of generations to come. The future growth or “regrowth” strategy underpinning the Strategic Growth Areas is where this will manifest the most in the future. Development is more sensitive to the environment, enabling us to attract more sustainable businesses. This sensitivity is valued highly by our citizens, the business community, and visitors. As an early leader in strategic partnerships, Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM), and entrepreneurship innovation opportunities between Virginia Beach City Public Schools, Economic Development, and our institutions of higher education, Virginia Beach is yielding young people or those just starting their careers that are choosing to remain here and contribute productively to our community. They are the new generation of our workforce and they work differently.

Our ability to retain these bright minds is due, in part, to the high quality of life we continue to enjoy. These highly qualified STEM workers have, in return, served us well and given us the potential to become a national and international hub for the biomedical and healthcare industry. We also have a unique workforce development and transitioning opportunity with veterans, who are exiting service and choosing to remain here, by offering them training to adapt their unique skill sets to the civilian workforce. And, as primarily defines our city, we will continue to retain and grow our existing tourism industry, as well as hallmark employers and our wealth of small businesses.



*Workforce development education opportunities thrive at Tidewater Community College's Virginia Beach campus in Princess Anne Commons and in Virginia Beach City Public Schools.*

