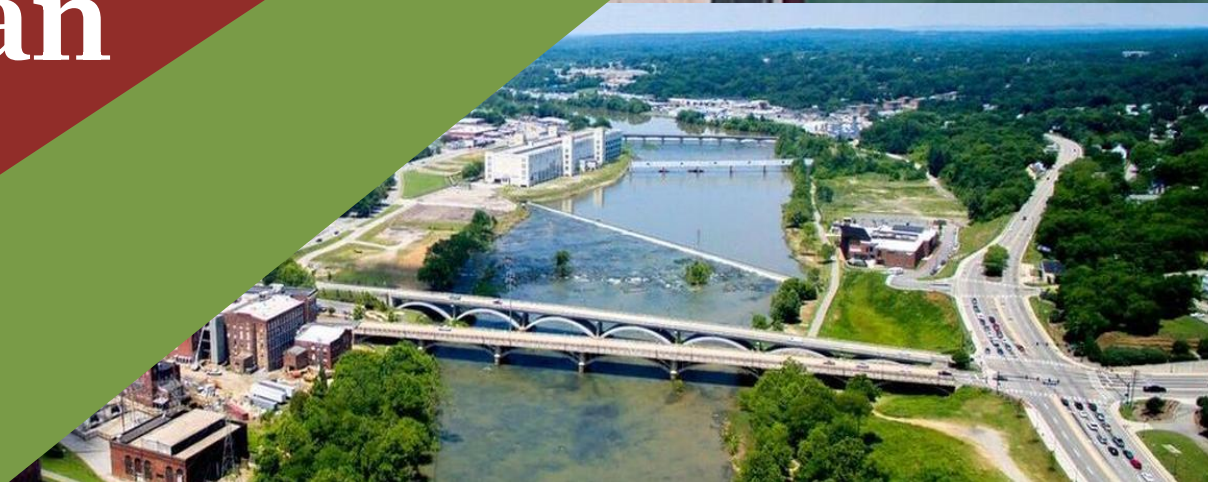




2025-2028 Strategic Plan





2025-2028 Strategic Plan Summary

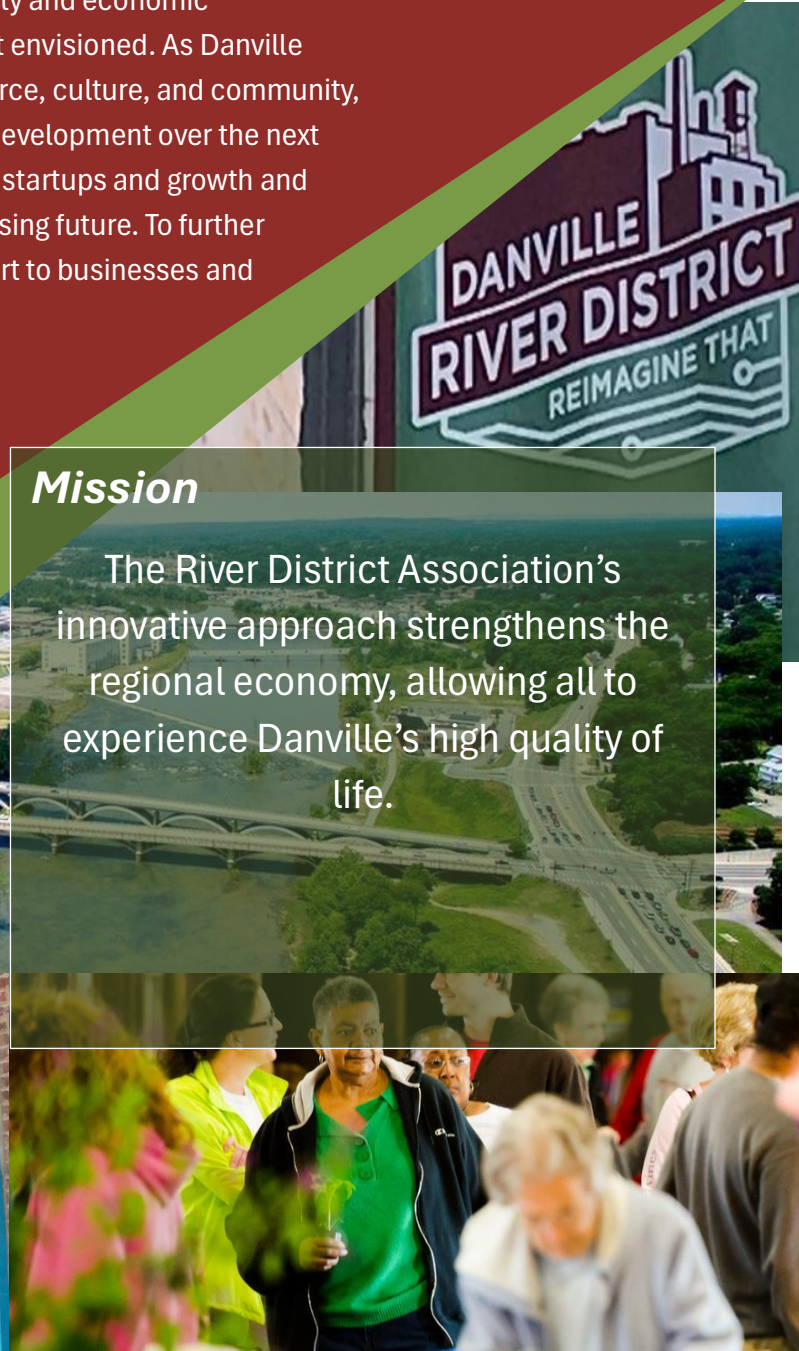
The River District Association (RDA) has been instrumental in Danville's transformation. After decades of building foundational blocks for community and economic development, Danville is experiencing the transformation it envisioned. As Danville continues its transformation into a dynamic hub of commerce, culture, and community, this plan serves as a compass for sustainable growth and development over the next three years. RDA remains committed to nurturing business startups and growth and creating spaces that reflect the District's history and promising future. To further support Danville's transformation, RDA will intensify support to businesses and organizations to ensure prosperity for all.

Vision

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.

Mission

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



Strategic Plan Goals

- Retain and Grow Businesses in the River District
- Continue Growth of a Vibrant and Welcoming River District
- Expand and Refine Communications
- Support North Main Business District Development and Work with Collaborators and Stakeholders to Consider Service Expansion to Additional Districts
- Continue to be a Best-Practice Community Development Organization

Dashboard: Metrics Aligned with Main Street Approach

Economic Vitality

- Building construction, renovation, vacancy
- Investment
- Businesses & Employment

Design

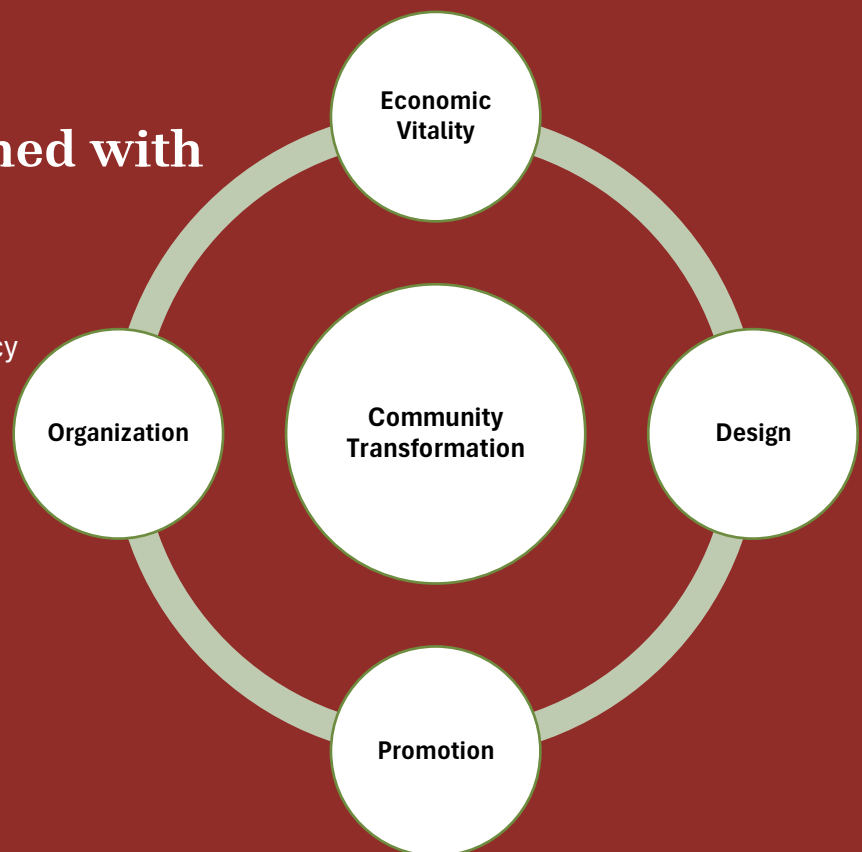
- Placemaking investments
- Facade Grant Program

Promotion

- Promotional campaigns
- Events and participation

Organization

- Feedback surveys
- Volunteer hours
- Grants received



Vision

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.

Mission

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

Values

Inclusivity: Commit to being the model of equitable treatment for all by eliminating bias and embracing the transcultural diversity of our board, employees, and community.

Intentionality: Focusing on what is most important through maintaining a positive mindset, reaching goals, seeking more clarity, and being more present.

Courage: Take personal and persistent ownership for the ongoing success of our team and community.

Collaboration: Balancing the needs of ourselves and others with kindness, respect, and empathy toward healing action.

Excellence: The collaborative power to deliver the highest performance by deliberately pursuing success and refusing to tolerate less than one's best (demanding one's best).

River District Association Strategic Plan 2025-2028

The River District Association (RDA) has been instrumental in Danville's transformation. After decades of building foundational blocks for community and economic development, Danville is experiencing the transformation it envisioned. New businesses are opening. More tourists are visiting Danville. Private investors see opportunity in the market and are making substantial investments. The momentum is catching.

As Danville continues its transformation into a dynamic hub of commerce, culture, and community, this plan serves as a compass for sustainable growth and development over the next three years. RDA remains committed to nurturing business start-ups and growth, and creating spaces that reflect the District's history and promising future. To further support Danville's transformation, RDA will intensify support to businesses and organizations and support new ways to connect people to the District. The plan follows the Main Street Four Point Approach by expanding strategies for economic vitality, incorporating design to create community connection, expanding promotions of the District and surrounding areas, and strengthening the organization.

Strategic Plan Goals

- Retain and Grow Businesses in the River District
- Continue Growth of a Vibrant and Welcoming River District
- Expand and Refine Communications
- Support North Main Business District Development and Work with Collaborators and Stakeholders to Consider Service Expansion to Additional Districts
- Continue to be a Best-Practice Community Development Organization

Goal: Retain and Grow Businesses in the River District

RDA has been successful in supporting the startup of a wide range of businesses in the District. Some of RDA's most successful initiatives have been in the area of entrepreneurship. Shifting direct resources to retaining and growing businesses will support long-term stability and a consistent experience for visitors. RDA has the expertise to develop and implement a best-practice Business Support Program (BSP) aimed at deepening support for the small businesses that make the District vibrant.

	Target Delivery	Partners	Capacity Impact
Strategy: Develop and implement a proactive Business Support Program (BSP).			
Develop a BSP program that includes visitation, networking, advocacy, and appreciation.	2025	None	→
Conduct a BSP survey annually to inform RDA's BSP program of work.	Annually	None	→
Use the BSP survey to collect data on District businesses to identify market gaps and opportunities.	Annually	None	→
Continue to host "Mornings on Main" for networking.	Ongoing	None	→
Facilitate and support local businesses to hold B2B networking events.	Ongoing	Businesses	→
Build out an online resource guide for existing businesses including financing, market expansion, marketing/sales, etc.	2026	None	↑
Incorporate resources for succession planning in the online BSP Resource Guide.	2026	SBDC	→
Leverage partners to provide technical assistance to businesses.	Ongoing	SBDC	→
Continue the GET Boosted business assistance program with support from SBDC.	Ongoing	SBDC	→
Strategy: Gather input from businesses on policies, regulations, and investments needed in the District and communicate to partners.			
Facilitate a quarterly Merchant Promotions Workgroup to gather input on policies, regulations, and investments needed in the District.	Ongoing	None	↑
Use the annual BSP survey to gather input into a business advocacy platform.	Ongoing	None	→
Communicate business input to partners such as the City of Danville at regular partner meetings, City Council meetings, and an annual event that showcases the District's annual report.	Ongoing, Annual Report	City	→
Strategy: Engage businesses in the revitalization of the District.			
Engage the Merchant Promotions Workgroup in "idea" sessions to brainstorm ways they can support the District.	Ongoing	Businesses	→
Use the Merchant Promotion Workgroup to develop and implement shared and co-op marketing campaigns to attract visitors.	Ongoing	Businesses	→
Engage the Merchant Promotion Workgroup to create a "buddy system" for groups of businesses to stay open later to experiment with extended hours.	Ongoing	Businesses	→

Goal: Continue Growth of a Vibrant and Welcoming River District

The overwhelming response to the community survey was “**more**” – more events, restaurants, entertainment venues, recreation, public art, cultural venues, walkability, and open space. The River District is the heart and soul of Danville, and residents and visitors want more opportunities to engage with the District in a variety of ways.

	Target Delivery	Partners	Capacity Impact
Strategy: Grow downtown connections through partnerships and collaborations.			
Develop a toolkit on how a business can host a successful event to attract more foot traffic in District and promote to businesses.	2025	Businesses	→
Develop a similar toolkit for nonprofits on how to hold successful events in the District and promote to nonprofits.	2026	Nonprofits	→
As part of the toolkits, identify spaces that are ideal for more activation and promote them for events – farmers market, pocket parks, etc.	2026	None	→
Continue organizing Christmas on the Plaza.	Ongoing	None	→
Increase connections between residents of the District.	Ongoing	None	→
Strategy: Lead promotions that increase visitors and foot traffic in the District.			
Continue special event promotions such as Small Business Week, Small Business Saturday, and Holiday Gift Guide.	Ongoing	None	→
Partner with the City/Visit SoSi to promote itineraries at Caesars Casino through the planned new visitor center.	Ongoing	Tourism Partners	→
Use geofencing to promote the District to visitors of the casino and other area destinations, such as the Whitewater Park when open.	Ongoing	None	↑
Strategy: Advocate for public investments in placemaking.			
Continue to implement the City’s façade improvement grant program	Ongoing	City of Danville	→
Prioritize, develop, and execute placemaking opportunities through public investment and grant opportunities.	Ongoing	Businesses	→
Identify partners who can lead the placemaking projects with RDA playing a supportive role and potentially being a grant partner.	Ongoing	Placemaking Partners	→
Continue to seek funding to expand public art in the District.	Ongoing	City of Danville	→
Strategy: Full Participation in the Unlocking Capital Program.			
Develop an investment strategy that articulates a shared priority for capital investment.	2025	Main Street America & Virginia Main Street	↑
Identify a pipeline of potential projects and potential funding sources.	2026	Main Street America & Virginia Main Street	↑
Identify programs, policies, and relationships to advance community investment priorities.	2026	Main Street America & Virginia Main Street	↑

Goal: Expand and Refine Communications

As the District has grown and changed, rebranding can help align the RDA with current trends, attract new businesses and visitors, promote new connections to the district, and modernize marketing messages. A fresh brand can also signal positive change, differentiate the District and its programming, and support marketing efforts that highlight its unique activities and vision for the future.

	Target Delivery	Partners	Capacity Impact
Strategy: Develop a new brand reflects the vision, mission, and goals of this strategic plan.			
Complete a branding process that results in a brand that reflects the vision, mission, and goals of the organization.	2025	None	↑
Socialize the new brand areas using all forms of communication.	2026	None	↑
Complete an overhaul of the website to reflect the new brand and program of work.	2026	None	↑
Deploy the brand in all RDA collaterals and communications.	2026	None	↑
Strategy: Expand and enhance RDA's communications to create more B2B and community connections.			
Monthly e-newsletters for community, businesses, and North Main.	Ongoing	None	→
Improve and elevate the use of social media channels for communications.	Ongoing	None	↑
Produce video content (in-house) focusing on merchants, events, partners, and RDA to be utilized in a variety of communications platforms.	Ongoing	None	↑
Explore leading edge communications tools and approaches to expand reach and awareness.	Ongoing	None	↑
Continue to produce RDA annual reports, blogs, news articles, and other external communications materials for the general public to understand RDA value.	Ongoing	None	→
Focus on novel opportunities to support and promote the business community.	Ongoing	None	→
Develop partnerships and invest in platforms to assist merchant community with promoting their businesses that do not require excessive time or resources.	Ongoing	None	↑

Goal: Support North Main Business District Development and Work with Collaborators and Stakeholders to Consider Service Expansion to Additional Districts

RDA has a wide range of experience and expertise that it can use to support further development in the North Main Business District and other districts. RDA will continue to provide technical support, facilitate collaboration, participate in resource development, and promote historic and commercial revitalization in the North Main business corridor and other districts as appropriate.

	Target Delivery	Partners	Capacity Impact
Strategy: To promote the viability of the North Main district and the vitality of the community and people who live, work, play, and invest in the district.			
Continue to produce and promote the “True North Series” to facilitate a greater appreciation of the residents and stakeholders in the district.	Ongoing	None	→
Work with a consultant and the North Main Visionaries to develop a brand for the district that centers history, arts, and culture.	2026	Consultants	↑
Continue to work with consultants to develop a Small Area Master Plan to outline the path forward for the district.	2025	Consultants	↑
Engage youth to have a voice in the continued growth and vision of the North Main District.	Ongoing	None	→
Hold community "Shine-Up" events at least twice per year.	Ongoing	Volunteers	→
Strategy: Continue facilitation of the North Main Visionary Collaborative to become an independent body that has the networks, information, and support systems to make authoritative decisions that will impact the district.			
Hire a consultant to develop Articles of Collaboration so all stakeholders have a voice in the formation of and guidance for the leadership, decision-making, and succession planning for the North Main Visionaries.	2026	Consultants	↑
Provide access to resources and technical assistance to support the work of the Visionaries.	Ongoing	Resource Partners	→
Provide back-office and accounting support to facilitate grants and grantmaking for the Visionaries.	Ongoing	None	↑
Continue to enhance networking opportunities and provide introductions to additional providers as appropriate.	Ongoing	None	→
Strategy: Support and promote the business community, activities, and events in the North Main Business District.			
Continue to provide GET Boosted Grants to help with small business support and expansion.	Ongoing	None	→
Hold an annual Juneteenth event that invites women-owned businesses to promote their products and services.	Ongoing	Businesses	↑
Produce a monthly e-newsletter to promote activities within the district.	Ongoing	None	→
Provide information and access to resources for small business support.	Ongoing	Resource Partners	→
Work on developing signage and wayfinding as the district grows.	Ongoing	None	↑

Strategy: Support placemaking, art, and culture in the North Main district.

Produce a mural at the entrance to the district reflective of the history and culture of the district that is led by North Main Visionaries.	2027	None	↑
Continue with the Facade Improvement Program to assist businesses and property owners with the visual presentation of the district.	Ongoing	None	→
Produce banners that reflect the District brand.	2027	None	↑
Continue to support holiday decor, beautification projects, and other initiatives that bring life to the corridor.	Ongoing	None	→

Strategy: Use RDA's staff and leadership capacity and organizational framework to support prosperity in other districts in Danville and the region.

Develop a suite of services to offer to these districts. Services could include grant writing and compliance, funding source identification, fiscal agency, leadership development, and communications.	2027	None	↑
Develop the financial model that will support the sustainability of providing services to these districts.	2027	None	↑
Annually assess RDA's capacity to provide support to other districts.	Annually	None	→
Continue outreach through Working Groups.	Ongoing	None	→
Continue advocacy Working Groups to build stronger relationships with local, state, and federal officials to be aware of and influence policy and regulatory landscape.	Ongoing	None	→
Explore aligning entrepreneurship strategies and the Unlocking Capital Program.	2027	None	→

Goal: Continue to be a Best-Practice Community Development Organization

The River District Association is a best-practice organization heralded by Virginia Main Street and peers across the state. It has been instrumental in the transformation of Danville since its formation in 1999.

RDA will continue to implement a strategic vision of transformation and ensure successful implementation of initiatives, supporting long-term growth and sustainability of the District.

	Target Delivery	Partners	Capacity Impact
Strategy: Continue to develop board leadership capacity.			
Provide opportunities for board training in the areas of community, neighborhood, and economic development.	Ongoing	Board Members	→
Continue onboarding programs to ensure alignment of expectations.	Ongoing	Board Members	→
Continue Working Groups to leverage board expertise and capacity and engage non-board members from the community.	Ongoing	Board Members, Volunteers	→
Engage the board in fund development strategies.	Ongoing	Board Members	→
Conduct an annual board self-review.	Ongoing	Board Members	→
Conduct an annual review of the bylaws, policies, procedures, job descriptions, and pay scale.	Ongoing	Board Members	→
Strategy: Strengthen RDA's partnerships and collaborations.			
Continue regular meetings with Danville's Office of Economic Development and Tourism.	Ongoing	City Office of Economic Development and Tourism	→
Continue regular engagement with Danville/Pittsylvania County Chamber of Commerce, The Advancement Foundation, Longwood SBDC, and Community Investment Collaborative to support entrepreneurship initiatives.	Ongoing	Chamber, Foundation, RISE, CIC	→
Participate in strategic community and regional events where many of RDA's partners are present to reinforce relationships.	Ongoing	None	→
Continue engagement with Caesars Virginia, White Mill developers, and other significant development projects in the region.	Ongoing	Major Developers	→
Continue engagement with the Danville Regional Foundation and other significant funders of community, neighborhood, and community development.	Ongoing	Funding Partners	→
Strategy: Ensure RDA has capacity to implement the strategic plan.			
As the program of work expands, continually assess RDA staff resources for implementation of the strategic plan.	Ongoing	None	↑
Launch a fund development initiative and implement an investor relations model to retain and grow organizational sustainability.	2025	None	↑
Develop a detailed written collaborative agreement with the City of Danville that clearly outlines funding for the program of work.	2025	City	→
Develop a collaborative agreement for expanded services to support additional historic districts.	2026	None	↑

Metrics

The River District Association does a great job at tracking its activities and outcomes. The metrics below are organized into the Main Street’s Four Point Approach of economic vitality, design, promotion, and organization. We recommend pulling a few of these to create a dashboard to regularly report externally to stakeholders and report a broader set in the annual report.

Economic Vitality

- New construction
- Revitalized buildings
- Building vacancy
- Public investment
- Private investment
- Businesses opening/closed
- Employment
- Residential units

Design

- Placemaking investments (public and private)
 - Signage, murals, banners, etc.
- Facade Grants awarded/completed
- Shine Up, Holiday Decor, beautification projects

Promotion

- Promotional campaigns, including collaborative marketing initiatives
- Marketing impressions (likes, shares, page visits, etc.)
- Events and participation

Organization

- Feedback surveys-board, merchants, work groups
- Feedback surveys of North Main, Schoolfield, Five Forks, and Mechanicsville districts
- Volunteer hours
- Grants received
- Funding stability

Strategic Planning Process

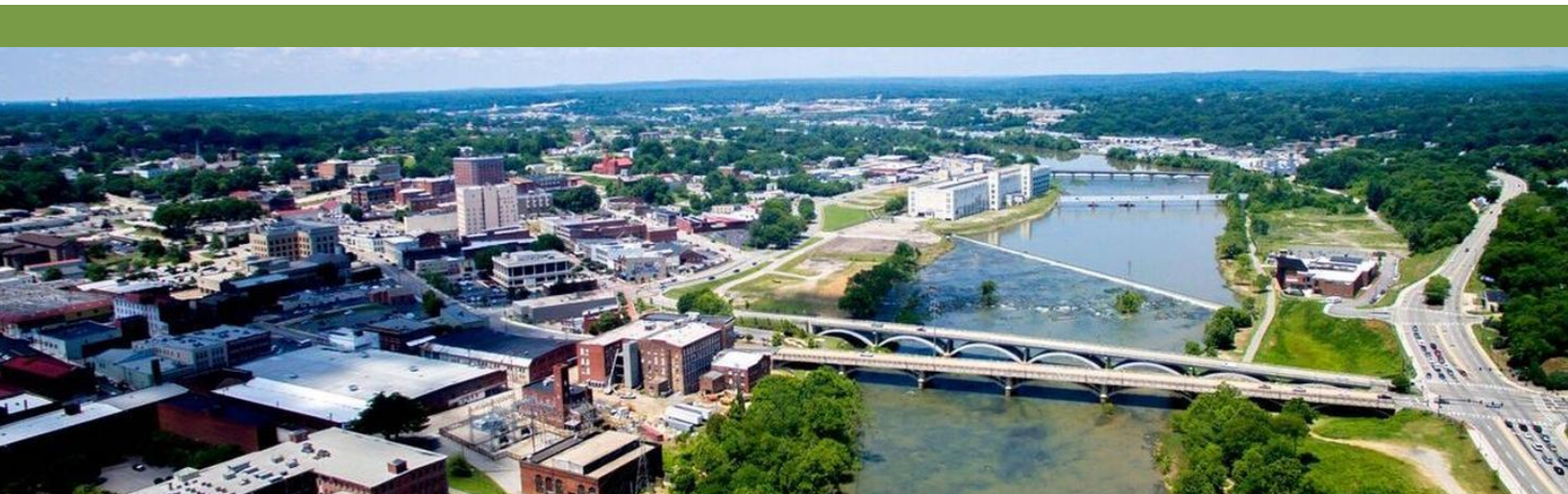
Engagement for the strategic plan included input sessions with businesses, interviews with RDA's community and economic development allies, and surveys of citizens and businesses.

The RDA Board of Directors was engaged throughout the strategic planning process providing input, vetting strategies, setting goals, and determining measures of success.

- Emma Sellers, President, IALR
- Kunal Patel, Vice President, Caesars Virginia
- Austin Bunn, Treasurer, Aoss Ventures
- Rachel Covington, Immediate Past President, Epstein Clark Consulting
- Christy Harper, Danville Pittsylvania Chamber of Commerce
- Drew Herring, West Main Baptist Church
- Dr. Andrew Hessler, Danville Dental Associates
- Dr. Danielle Montague, Virginia Rural Health Association
- Steven Osborne, International Mission Board
- Rachel Timm, Ruby B. Archie Public Library

RDA staff were instrumental in the development of the strategic plan. Staff provided supported community and business engagement and shared background data and information.

- Diana Schwartz, CEO
- Lashawn Farmer, Director of Design and Expansion
- Alyssa Turner, Director of Business Services



Study Sponsor and Consultant



The River District Association (RDA), formerly Downtown Danville Association, was formed in 1999 to coordinate efforts to revitalize the downtown Danville, Virginia 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.

Danville 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. RDA is committed to the Main Street Four-Point Approach™ of organization, promotion, design, and economic vitality. riverdistrictassociation.com



Creative EDC is the “Go-To” economic development consulting firm for innovation, creativity, and implementable solutions. We deliver unique approaches to economic development challenges that help our clients reach their goals. creativeedc.com

