



## APPLICATION FORM

All applications must include the following information. Separate applications must be submitted for each eligible program. **Deadline: July 1, 2020.** Please include this application form with electronic entry. If you do not receive an email confirming receipt of your entry within 3 days of submission, please contact [Gage Harter](#).

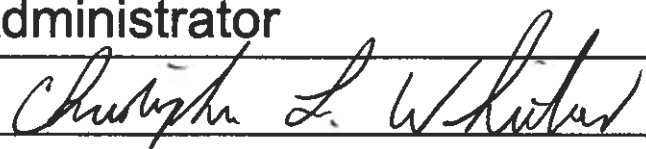
### PROGRAM INFORMATION

County: Franklin County  
Program Title: Summit View Business Park  
Program Category: Community and Economic Development

### CONTACT INFORMATION

Name: Christopher L. Whitlow  
Title: County Administrator  
Department: County Administration  
Telephone: 540-483-3030 Website: www.franklincountyva.gov  
Email: christopher.whitlow@franklincountyva.gov

### SIGNATURE OF COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR OR DEPUTY/ASSISTANT COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR

Name: Christopher L. Whitlow  
Title: County Administrator  
Signature: 

## **Virginia Association of Counties Achievement Award Submission**

### **Franklin County: Summit View Business Park**

#### **Overview / Executive Summary**

As Franklin County continues to recover its pre-Great Recession luster as one of the fastest growing communities in western Virginia, it is investing heavily in its economy, its businesses, and its people through an innovative approach to economic development and population attraction. The County boasts an enviable quality of life for those seeking a rural/suburban lifestyle but has seen its economy and population stagnate over the past decade. The vision of the Franklin County Board of Supervisors is to reinvigorate the community through a focused population attraction program centered on the one missing piece necessary for success: the creation of high wage jobs.

The Franklin County Board of Supervisors has invested approximately \$36 million to date in the creation of a new type of business park that is designed to attract companies and jobs of a higher caliber than were previously located within the community. The County's mission is to bring companies to the area that value the community and their employees and that reward both by providing high employee salaries and act as leading corporate citizens. These new companies will provide opportunities for more people to relocate to Franklin County without sacrificing income or job quality. The Summit View Business Park is designed to be the vehicle through which this is achieved.

The Summit View Business Park in Franklin County is the next generation of business park for Virginia and has seen incredible success to date. The County purchased the first of numerous parcels that make up the 550-acre park at the beginning of 2016 and made the first of three business announcements in 2018. In all, the County has announced three new businesses locating to the park

with total private investments of over \$50 million and nearly 200 new and saved jobs. Most striking is the success the park has had in raising wage levels locally. The average wage announced for the three incoming businesses to the park is \$25.39 per hour, a 55% increase over the prevailing wage in Franklin County!

## **Situation**

In the late 1990's and early 2000's, Franklin County was recognized as Virginia's fastest growing county west of Charlottesville. Growth centered around Smith Mountain Lake and consisted mainly of retirees moving to the area causing a population, housing, and retail boom. As the Great Recession took hold in 2008 and 2009, Franklin County's economic engines began to falter. Since that time, the housing and retail markets have struggled to get back to 2007 levels and population growth has stagnated. The Franklin County Board of Supervisors realized that the community had relied too heavily on a too narrow market (retiree attraction) for the economic well-being of the County. The Board determined to take a more holistic approach to community growth, continuing to court retirees to the County while expanding its focus to encompass population attraction of all age groups.

To be truly attractive to a wide range of potential new citizens, a community must have a number of enticing qualities. High quality of life in the form of low crime rates, excellent schools, recreational and shopping opportunities, and numerous other attributes is a central piece of such a population attraction effort. A strong tourism program is important to get the first visit from potential citizens. A varied and available housing stock is also needed. Franklin County is fortunate to be strong in all of these requirements and can provide an idyllic home to many different types of residents including retirees and families. The most glaring hole in this population attraction effort was the lack of high-

paying jobs that provided potential citizens with a comparable salary to the jobs they would be leaving behind. Franklin County's main employment sectors have historically been agriculture, retail, and manufacturing. While these jobs have long provided livable wages to a large number of County residents, the average wage of these positions have historically been significantly less than national averages and, thus, unattractive to many who might otherwise locate in Franklin County. The Board of Supervisors determined to make the creation of new, higher-paying jobs the centerpiece of the population attraction effort.

## **Solution**

The Summit View Business Park became the County's answer to the lack of high-paying jobs in the community. One of the main hurdles to the attraction of new companies that provide high wage jobs was the lack of available sites within Franklin County and the Roanoke Region. Today's economic development prospects are characterized by a highly compressed timetable from realization of the need for additional capacity to the time such capacity must be producing. This compressed timeline makes the availability of ready to go sites a requirement for most prospective businesses. As the County ramped up its plans to create a new business park to handle this issue, the idea of creating a different kind of business park came into focus. The Franklin County Board of Supervisors determined that the new park had to be a new kind of product to entice companies that have never seriously considered the County or region before. This led Franklin County to try something different and politically risky. It would invest heavily in quickly creating a new type of business park that would attract new kinds of companies that paid significantly higher wages than the community was accustomed to. The Board determined that the new park would only be open to companies that paid an average wage of least \$20

per hour (\$41,600 annually). This would be a 22% increase over the current average salary in Franklin County of \$16.38 per hour (\$34,070 annually). If successful, the County would not only motivate new families to move to the community it would keep many current citizens from traveling out of the County to work and would increase County revenues without overly burdening local citizens by increasing the tax base. While the effort might take a couple of decades to fully come to fruition, the Board of Supervisors decided that it was the right path for Franklin County's future.

The goal had been decided but the County still needed to figure out how to achieve it. It understood that every business requires a potential site to have all of the traditional attributes and infrastructure as a critical first step. The County paid above market price to purchase several farms in the northern part of the County alongside four-lane U.S. 220 and close to existing utilities. These parcels formed the 550-acre park that could easily and relatively inexpensively offer all the required utility infrastructure and the best transportation access the County would be able to provide as no interstate runs through the locality. However, the County understood that the types of companies that would provide the jobs it coveted required something more. These firms were as interested in the environment in which they and their employees would work as they were with the specific attributes of a given site. A high quality of life factor was a must if the County was to be successful in attracting the high paying jobs it wanted. The Supervisors also knew that this quality of life could not just be an amorphous idea of how great it is to live in the community. It had to be tangible. The targeted companies would not be attracted to the normal, run-of-the-mill industrial park with sterile metal buildings standing side by side. They would want a vibrancy to the place where they built their facility and a sense of community. Therefore, the Board of Supervisors decided to inject that quality of life factor directly into the park itself. The master plan determined and approved by the Board included at its heart a full recreational park and an event/festival center. Biking and walking trails would run along

roads and through every conceivable area with varying degrees of difficulty, length, and surface. Retail and public services facilities would also be included. All of these components were designed into the park as a perk for the employees who would eventually work there, but also as a draw for the community at large. The mixing of employers, employees, and the citizenry would add a vibrancy to the business park that would transform it from a place that people came to work into a place where people worked, played, and congregated. If Franklin County could pull it off, the Summit View Business Park would be a model for other rural communities attempting to transform their economies with higher-paying jobs and companies that wanted to be a major part of the community.

After the creation of the master plan, Franklin County commissioned a Return on Investment study by Chmura Analytics to determine what the expected results of the project would be. It was found that the Summit View Business Park should conservatively create 3 million square feet under roof, \$300 million in new private investment, and 1,500 new jobs (2,221 counting indirect and induced jobs). A twenty-year goal to fully occupy the park was set. It was estimated that, at full build out, the Summit View Business Park would have an annual impact of \$8.30 for every dollar invested by the County in the creation of the park.

Beginning with the initial purchase of the land that now makes up the business park and through the roads, pads, and infrastructure constructed to date, the Franklin County Board of Supervisors has spent \$8 million in general fund dollars plus \$28 million in borrowed funds to create its vision for this transformational park. The County has moved aggressively to construct two pad sites; extend water, sewer, electric, and fiber utilities; construct two access roads; build multi-use trails and a 6,000 square foot recreational pavilion; and various other associated expenses. Plans are currently underway for the construction of additional building pads, further road and utility extensions, and recreational fields/trails using the final remaining unused borrowed dollars. In addition to the \$36 million in local dollars

invested to date, the County has worked with various funding partners to bring in millions more in grant funds for specific projects. The amount of money invested by a rural county such as Franklin shows a true commitment by the Board of Supervisors to the vision of creating a new and brighter future for coming generations of Franklin County residents.

## **Results**

The results to date have been extraordinary. In 2018, just as the first road and utilities were under construction, Franklin County was able to attract two companies into the park. The first was the administrative campus/headquarters of ValleyStar Credit Union. Landing a bank headquarters in Franklin County was previously unthinkable and was the perfect way to start the Summit View Business Park. ValleyStar has announced a \$7 million investment and forty jobs coming to Summit View at an average wage of \$65,000 per year. Later in the year, Stik-Pak Solutions announced the construction of a 100,000 square foot facility in Summit View for their new packaging plant. The company was located in a multi-tenant facility in the southern part of the county with its sister company. Both companies had run out of space to expand at their current site. Stik-Pak relocated and expanded its operations to Summit View, creating and saving ninety jobs and making a \$14 million investment. The average wage of these positions is \$45,760. In addition, Franklin County will also soon get another announcement as the sister company expands into the space vacated by Stik-Pak. Finally, in January 2020, Franklin County was able to announce the location of Traditional Medicinals to the final remaining developed pad at Summit View. Traditional Medicinals will invest \$30 million and hire 56 workers at an average wage of \$47,682. It was this announcement that best proved the success of the concept of the business park. The company made clear that it was the design of the park and its quality of life attributes that

helped them decide to come to Franklin County. As a California company, the vitality and interconnected amenities spoke to them and they have commented on numerous occasions that they believe it will do so for other West Coast firms looking for an East Coast location.

The results to date have been promising and have put Franklin County ahead of schedule on its mission to fill the park and transform the local economy. Due to the success of the County in quickly filling each building pad that has been created, the Board of Supervisors is currently designing the next building pad and hopes to have it available for a new company in early 2021.

## **Summary**

It is hoped that the above discussion of the history, vision, and results to date of the Summit View Business Park proves the innovativeness of the park. The tying together of so many economic development and community attributes into a single project that now has a proven track record of success is special and, hopefully, can be a model for other rural and suburban communities throughout Virginia. Any community that views economic development siting in a holistic sense and has the commitment to invest in a project that may not be totally understood or appreciated by the public for years to come can use this model to transform or just enhance its economic base.

As noted above, the Franklin County Board of Supervisors has demonstrated its commitment to the project through the investment of \$36 million in local funding for the park. In addition, the County has worked with the Virginia Tobacco Commission, VEDP, VDOT and others to leverage the County investment for millions in additional grant dollars for pad site grading, road construction, and utility extensions. The County is currently working with local community groups and the public school system on small but needed projects within the park. Examples include the local Rotary club donating proceeds



from its 4th of July event for the construction of a hard surface walking track at the park and current planning to allow the building trades classes at Franklin County High School to build picnic shelters and benches for small pocket park areas within Summit View. The Summit View Business Park is quickly becoming a truly community-wide project.

Franklin County thanks the Virginia Association of Counties for reviewing this nomination and for its consideration. Receiving such a prestigious award would be solid validation to the Board of Supervisors that their hard work and investment is paying off and should be continued. To find out more about Summit View, please visit: <https://www.yesfranklincountyva.org/228/Summit-View-Business-Park>.