



SUBMISSION FORM

All submission forms must include the following information. Separate submission forms must be turned in for each eligible program. **Deadline: July 1, 2022.** Please include this submission form with the 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: Sussex and Surry Counties
Program Title: Shared Building Services Program
Program Category: Regional Collaboration

CONTACT INFORMATION

Name: Richard Douglas
Title: Sussex County Administrator
Department: _____
Telephone: 434-246-1000 Website: _____
Email: rdouglas@sussexcountyva.gov

SIGNATURE OF COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR OR DEPUTY/ASSISTANT COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR

Name: Richard Douglas Melissa Rollins
Title: Sussex County Administrator Surry County Administrator

Signature: Richard Douglas 6/28/22 Melissa D. Rollins, 6/27/22 Melissa D. Rollins

Executive Summary

In August 2021 the Sussex County Board of Supervisors and Surry County Board of Supervisors unanimously adopted a memorandum of agreement for shared building official and inspection services, creating what is considered to be the first shared building services program between two counties in Virginia. This shared program offers an innovative solution to the delivery of services, promotes intergovernmental cooperation, and provides a model for other local governments to consider in the provision of building services. The goal of developing a shared building services program was to: 1) combine the resources of both counties in order to offer increased compensation to attract experienced, qualified candidates; 2) share staffing in order to more flexibly meet building review and inspection needs; 3) reduce the building services operating expenses of each jurisdiction by sharing resources that would otherwise be duplicated in each jurisdiction; and 4) maintain a strong customer service presence in each jurisdiction's administrative office.

With Surry County serving as the fiscal agent, the counties share all program costs on a 50/50 basis, and the county administrators of both counties jointly supervise the shared building official position that oversees the program and administrative operations in both counties. By combining resources to offer more compensation than could be offered individually by one county, the two counties were able to hire Matt Westheimer, the City of Williamsburg Building Official and President of the Virginia Building & Code Officials Association, as the first building official for the shared building services program. The new building official was provided the flexibility to develop this new program, which was designed to provide for two shared building inspectors and administrative staff in both counties' administrative offices to process permit applications and complete necessary administrative functions (the Boards of Supervisors have adopted identical building services fee schedules). The shared building services program has been very well received by developers, contractors, residents, and government officials in both counties, and has sparked discussion of other shared services in the region.

Overview

Sussex County, with an approximate population of 11,000, and Surry County, with an approximate population of 6,500, are adjacent rural counties located south of Petersburg, and have limited operating budgets to offer necessary local government services. Like many small jurisdictions, both counties struggle to attract and retain well-qualified employees with professional certifications to provide these services. In addition, over the past several years the building services departments in each county, with minimal staff and growing workloads, were often criticized by developers, contractors, and residents for poor customer service, inconsistent application of building codes, and plan review and inspections response time, and often considered a detriment to attracting new development to each county.

With a need for both counties to hire certified building officials and fill vacant building inspector positions, the County Administrators and staff of both counties began discussions on possibly sharing a building services program, including input from current building services staff, and these discussions provided the framework for establishing a shared program and unanimous adoption of a memorandum of agreement for shared building official and inspection services by the Sussex County Board of Supervisors and the Surry County Board of Supervisors in August 2021 (the agreement was prepared by Sussex County Attorney Jeff Gore). The goal was to: 1) combine the resources of both counties in order to offer increased compensation to attract experienced, qualified candidates; 2) share staffing in order to more flexibly meet building review and inspection needs; 3) reduce the building services operating expenses of each jurisdiction by sharing resources that would otherwise be duplicated in each jurisdiction; and 4) maintain a strong customer service presence in each jurisdiction's administrative office.

Surry County serves as the fiscal agent for the program, the counties share all program costs on a 50/50 basis. Payroll (the building official and inspectors are technically Surry County employees), benefits,

insurance and other administrative costs are handled by Surry County finance staff and Sussex County is billed quarterly. The county administrators of both counties jointly supervise the shared building official position that oversees the program and administrative operations in both counties, to include two budgeted building inspector positions. By combining resources to offer more compensation than could be offered individually by one county, the two counties were able to hire Matt Westheimer, the former City of Williamsburg Building Official and President of the Virginia Building & Code Officials Association, as the first building official for the shared building services program. The building official and inspections staff generally split time between the administrative offices of each county, handling plan review and building inspections across both counties as needed. While these positions shift between the two counties as needed, it was decided to maintain existing administrative staff in both counties' administrative offices to process permit applications and complete necessary administrative functions (administrative/permit technician positions in each county have remained employees of their respective counties). However, a single contact number is being provided as needed, and staff from each county can support and provide backup to each other. In addition, the governing boards of each county have adopted identical building services fee schedules, which will be beneficial in the implementation of a program over both jurisdictions.

The shared building services program has been very well received by developers, contractors, residents, and government officials in both counties, and has sparked discussion of other shared services in the region. Each county has been able to reduce individual building services operating expenses, while committing savings to facility planning and maintenance and other needs, and has elevated customer service and professionalism in building services operations across both counties. According to Surry County Administrator Melissa Rollins, "the shared building inspections services program has exceeded the County's expectations. Building plans are being reviewed within 10 days at 100% of the time and inspections are conducted within 24 hours. This is a considerable improvement over previous metrics

where both reviews and inspection periods did not meet customer expectations.” The shared building services program developed by Sussex and Surry Counties provides an excellent example of two rural counties working together to share costs and improve the operations of a local government function, and can serve as a model for other local governments to consider in the provision of building services in the future.