



SUBMISSION FORM

All submission forms must include the following information. Separate submission forms must be turned in for each eligible program. **Deadline: July 1, 2025.** Please include this submission form as the first page of your 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: Prince Edward County
Program Title: An Innovative Partnership for Civic Problem-Solving
Program Category: Community Development, Economic Development & Land Use

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SIGNATURE OF COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR OR DEPUTY/ASSISTANT COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR

Name: Douglas P. Stanley, AICP, ICMA-CM
Title: County Administrator
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2025 VACo Achievement Award Nomination County of Prince Edward, Virginia



“Innovative Partnerships for Civic Problem-Solving”

Executive Summary

Over the course of three academic semesters, Prince Edward County forged a dynamic and innovative partnership with Longwood University through its Civitae Student Symposium — a capstone experience of the University’s four-year curriculum designed to cultivate citizen leadership. This collaboration offered a unique opportunity to help solve the persistent civic challenge of how to effectively attract and retain young professionals and families to reverse a forecasted decline in population in the County.

For one day during each of the last three academic semesters, senior students formed teams to discuss and develop strategies for attracting and retaining young professionals and families in Prince Edward County. Their findings, presented in formal symposium sessions and shared with County officials and planners, provided targeted, youth-driven recommendations in areas such as workforce development, housing, broadband access, and quality-of-life improvements.

The outcome was actionable input and a replicable model for localities seeking input from young adults on how to combat population decline. By embedding planning challenges into academic curricula and fostering sustained institutional collaboration, the County demonstrated how rural communities can work to turn civic engagement into a strategic tool for future-ready, youth-informed development.

This partnership exemplifies the power of intergovernmental and cross-sector cooperation. Longwood University, a public institution, and the County government worked hand-in-hand to align institutional goals around civic engagement and long-term community planning.

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Introduction

In Virginia, the comprehensive planning process is governed by §15.2-2223 of the *Code of Virginia*. All local governments — counties, cities, and towns — are required to adopt a comprehensive plan to guide future development. Reviewed at least once every five years, the plan is prepared by the local planning commission and adopted by the governing body.

These plans must address a broad range of topics, including land use, transportation, housing, public facilities, natural resources, and economic development. Public engagement through hearings and input sessions is a required component, ensuring that citizen voices shape the plan’s direction. Though not legally binding like zoning ordinances, the Comprehensive Plan serves as a critical policy tool — shaping future investments, aligning with state initiatives, and reflecting a vision for long-term community sustainability and resilience.

A key challenge facing many localities, particularly rural ones, is how to strategically solve declining population trends, frequently attributable to the demographic trend of post-graduate/young adult outmigration to suburban/urban areas of the Commonwealth.

As college-educated young adults leave for opportunities elsewhere, communities are left with declining populations and aging workforces. The comprehensive plan provides a valuable opportunity for local governments to identify strategies for reversing this trend by identifying ways to attract and retain young talent. However, doing so also requires innovative outreach strategies to obtain meaningful input from this often-overlooked demographic.

The Challenge/Problem/Situation

Rural Virginia faces a persistent and significant “brain drain” dilemma. Young adults — particularly college graduates — leave their hometowns in rural communities for greater opportunities in suburban and urban areas. This migration may be driven by a combination of factors, including the limited access to jobs, affordable housing, entertainment, and modern amenities in rural communities. As young talent departs, rural counties experience declining populations, aging demographics, and a shrinking workforce, making it harder to sustain local economies and public services. This cycle weakens long-term community vitality and hampers efforts to attract new investment and innovation.

The comprehensive planning process presents a critical opportunity to address brain drain, but rural localities often struggle to engage the very demographic they hope to retain.

Without input from young adults, plans may overlook key factors that influence the livability and economic opportunity decisions for this age group.

Reversing brain drain requires rural counties to rethink outreach and planning strategies — embracing inclusive, tech-savvy engagement methods and focusing on initiatives that improve quality of life, such as broadband expansion, workforce development, and downtown revitalization. By actively involving young adults in shaping their communities' futures, rural Virginia may begin to turn the tide and build places where the next generation chooses not just to grow up, but to stay, work, and thrive.

Young adults — especially college graduates — are critical to long-term economic vitality, yet their voices are frequently underrepresented. Traditional outreach methods like public hearings may not resonate with this group. As a result, rural localities face difficulty obtaining actionable input on how to make their communities more appealing and livable for younger residents. Without this feedback, comprehensive plans risk overlooking perspectives of young adults which ensures the comprehensive plan reflects a vision that supports intergenerational sustainability, community vibrancy, and long-term resilience in Virginia's rural counties.

The Program

Over the course of three academic semesters, the County forged a dynamic and innovative partnership with Longwood University through its Civitae Student Symposium — a capstone experience of the University's four-year general education curriculum designed to cultivate citizen leadership. This collaboration offered a unique solution to the challenge of effectively engaging the college-age demographic in the County's comprehensive planning process to capture and better understand the strategies for attracting and retaining young professionals and families. College students are often transient residents with limited attachment to the locality and are unrepresented or underrepresented in traditional public input methods. Recognizing this gap, the County collaborated with Longwood University's Civitae program, leveraging the Student Symposium as a platform to gather meaningful, data-driven input directly from hundreds of students on community development strategies.

The Civitae Symposium, a day-long program held each semester, asks senior students to apply four years of interdisciplinary learning toward solving real-world problems. It proved to

be an ideal venue. Over the last three semesters (Spring 2024, Fall 2024 and Spring 2025), students engaged in discussion and analysis related to workforce development, housing availability and affordability, and quality-of-life amenities, to develop strategies for making Prince Edward County more attractive to post-graduation, young adults. Their findings were presented in formal symposium sessions and shared with County planners, elected officials, and community stakeholders.

While Prince Edward County has initially applied this student engagement opportunity to its Comprehensive Planning Process, which is now being utilized by the Town of Farmville, the County is exploring additional community development and planning initiatives that will benefit from this partnership, including potentially working with Hampden-Sydney College

A Model for Other Localities in Virginia

Prince Edward County’s collaboration with Longwood University can serve as a replicable model for other localities across Virginia — especially those with nearby community colleges, colleges or universities (public or private) — looking to deepen youth engagement and strengthen planning processes. Most localities face similar challenges in reaching the 18–24+ age group, a demographic critical to future workforce and population growth. By establishing structured partnerships with higher education institutions and tying local planning efforts to academic programs, other counties and cities can create sustainable pipelines for student engagement.

Key elements other localities can adopt include:

- Formalizing partnerships between local governments and college faculty or civic engagement offices.
- Aligning community needs with capstone courses, internships, or service-learning programs.
- Creating structured opportunities for students to present findings to elected officials and staff.
- Using student input not as one-off suggestions but as a valued part of the broader planning and policy development process.

The comprehensive plan collaboration between Prince Edward County and Longwood University was rooted in mutual alignment of goals: the County sought meaningful input from

the college-aged demographic, while Longwood’s Civitae curriculum aimed to cultivate citizen leaders through applied, real-world learning experiences.

Below is an outline of how the Prince Edward County - Longwood University collaboration was carried out:

1. *Establishing the Partnership Framework*

The initiative began with intentional coordination between County staff and Longwood University faculty overseeing the Civitae curriculum. The County identified a clear planning need — engaging younger residents and gathering input on how to attract and retain young professionals and families. University faculty, in turn, identified the Civitae Symposium capstone course as a suitable venue for this collaboration. Key early steps included:

- Setting shared objectives: civic learning for students and actionable input for planners.
- Developing input tied to the County’s goals, such as workforce development, housing affordability and affordability, public amenities, and quality of life. The format used for the three Student Symposiums involving the County was a departure from Longwood’s traditional format. Students were tasked with generating strategies and solutions versus voting on pre-determined options.
- Scheduling timelines to align with academic calendars and County planning milestones.

2. *Presenting Findings at the Civitae Student Symposium*

At the end of each Symposium, students presented their findings. County staff, elected officials, and other community stakeholders were invited to attend, ask questions, and provide feedback. These sessions function as:

- A formal platform for student voices.
- An opportunity for County staff to hear fresh perspectives.
- A civic learning environment where students engaged with real public officials and community leaders.

3. *Integrating Student Input into Local Government Planning Efforts*

After the Symposium, County planning staff reviewed and synthesized the student recommendations. The County treated student input as a valued part of its planning process — on par with insights gathered through traditional public engagement methods. Select

proposals were incorporated into the draft updates of the Comprehensive Plan. This integration process included:

- Identifying recurring themes across multiple student sessions.
- Assessing feasibility and alignment with existing local goals.
- Following up with students or faculty for clarification and deeper insight.

4. Sustaining the Collaboration and Expanding Engagement

Following the success of this first collaboration, the County and University wish to identify additional opportunities for future semesters. The model proved to be sustainable with minimal additional resources and strong institutional support. Faculty and County staff will continue to refine the partnership to align with evolving County priorities.

How Program Fulfills Awards Criteria

Ultimately, this collaboration offers a forward-thinking approach to cultivating the next generation of civic leaders while strengthening the planning capacity of local governments across the Commonwealth. The County embedded its planning needs directly into the academic curriculum of a major educational institution. This not only provided high-quality, structured input, but also encouraged deeper, sustained reflection from participants who were already learning to think critically about civic issues.

Students provided a range of innovative solutions — developing targeted incentives for young entrepreneurs, employers and remote workers; reimagining public spaces that foster community among younger residents; expanding transportation resources; and fostering stronger ties between the University and the community. Several strategies identified underutilized assets in the County that could be transformed into community hubs, maker spaces, or affordable housing models. This input is now currently informing multiple components of the County’s Comprehensive Plan Update.

Financing and Staffing

The model required no major new funding streams or bureaucracies — just coordination and commitment to partnership. The County tapped into a ready-made platform that encourages critical thinking, civic responsibility, and interdisciplinary problem-solving among students. As

part of its scope of services, the County’s comprehensive plan consultant, The Berkeley Group, assisted the County with the preparation and facilitation of the Symposium sessions.

Conclusions -- Tangible Results or Measurable Outcomes of the Program

The County’s partnership with Longwood University through its Civitae Student Symposium was carried out through a well-coordinated, multi-semester collaboration. By embedding its planning needs into an existing, for-credit academic requirement, the County ensured sustained engagement and higher-quality input than typical public outreach efforts. This approach flipped the script on how local governments typically engage with universities. Instead of treating students as passive or temporary residents, the County positioned them as partners in shaping the future.

This collaboration demonstrates how local governments can harness the energy, creativity, and insight of young adults and turn college students into valuable contributors to public policy while fostering the civic skills and local connection that might help retain young talent.

Prince Edward County believes this initiative represents a path forward for localities seeking to bridge generational divides, cultivate new leadership, and plan more inclusively for the years ahead.

On June 24, 2025, after an eighteen-month process, the Prince Edward County Planning Commission and Prince Edward County Board of Supervisors adopted **PEC 2045: Forward Together** — the 2025 update of the Comprehensive Plan. It includes input and strategies developed through the Longwood Student Symposiums.

It is only fitting that such a pioneering civic-academic partnership would take root in America’s first two-college community — a place where education and public service have long been cornerstones of community life and progress.

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Excerpts of the Prince Edward County Comprehensive Plan



LONGWOOD STUDENT SYMPOSIUM

Longwood University Campus | Source: Prince Edward County

In the Spring of 2024, Longwood University (LU) held its Student Symposium, the capstone of the four year “Civitas” curriculum which is focused on developing citizen leaders. Throughout the day, students collaborated on strategies to attract and retain young professionals and families in Prince Edward County. Two students concluded the event by presenting two main ideas, which are summarized below:

1 The first idea aims to develop community center amenities, supported by the following strategies:

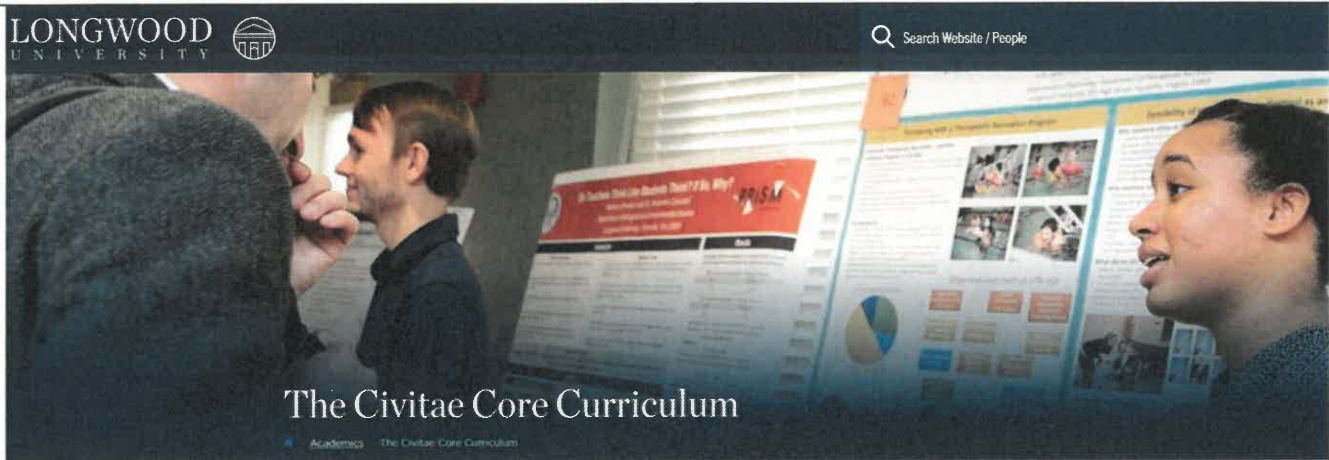
- Create a community center serving as a hub for athletics and recreation.
- Partner with LU and Hampden-Sydney College for shared services and events.
- Hold regular forums to engage university students.
- Develop mentorship programs linking businesses with university and high school students.
- Establish a technical center for trade skills.
- Offer internships to university students with local businesses to encourage local employment.

2 The second idea focuses on incentivizing educators and providing adequate support, outlined in these strategies:

- Create and implement a five-year incentive program to retain educators in the County, with a focus on housing and tuition benefits.
- Provide subsidized housing options for LU students who commit to teaching for Prince Edward County Public Schools for a certain timeframe after graduation.
- Offer college tuition breaks for students who agree to live and work in the County for 5 years after graduation.

SEPTEMBER 2024		Two additional symposium sessions were held in September 2024 and February 2025, where students presented the following strategies as outcomes:		FEBRUARY 2025	
1. Build Local Success: Support families with housing, jobs, and education; showcase community assets.	6. Promote Existing Resources: Expand existing programs and visibility; strengthen campus-community ties.	1. Engage Young Professionals: Form a student advisory board to connect LU students with the community.	6. Expand Transportation: Create rail links to boost jobs, attract residents, and support tourism.		
2. Revitalize Longwood Village: Reuse infrastructure to retain residents and grow.	7. Attract Young Families: Engage and support young families to grow the community.	2. Expand Medical Access: Grow medical manufacturing and enhance facilities.	7. Coursework & Community: Tie LU classes to local projects; boost the County's image.		
3. Foster Community Ties: Strengthen ties between LU, post-graduates, schools, and hospitals.	8. Affordable Housing: Support diverse, affordable housing options for young workers.	3. Strengthen PECPS: Renew teaching partnerships and supplement housing for graduate students and new teachers.	8. University Outreach: Reuse LU campus housing and grow job-focused outreach.		
4. Attract Major Employers: Develop workforce pipelines to draw industry.	9. Grow Teacher Pipeline: Incentivize student teachers to work in PEC and provide them with supporting resources.	4. Improve Access to Farmville: Expand FAB service, add Amtrak, and improve mobility.	9. Mixed-Use Town Square: Blend housing and retail to support business and vibrancy.		
5. Expand Outreach: Create an outreach hub, promote events, and attract families.	10. Career Accelerator Program: Provide clear pathways and training.	5. Attract Medical Manufacturing: Use local crops and incentives to attract manufacturers to the County.	10. Revive Longwood Village: Renovate housing and implement price caps; promote investment through local events and fairs.		

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Civitae, the set of classes that form the foundation of a Longwood education, is the cornerstone of academic life on campus. Built on timeless principles that form citizen leaders, students work creatively across disciplines to connect ideas and think about the world in a deeper, more complex way.



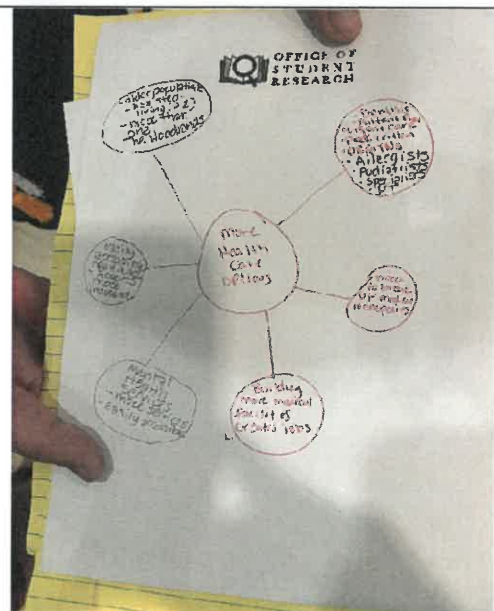
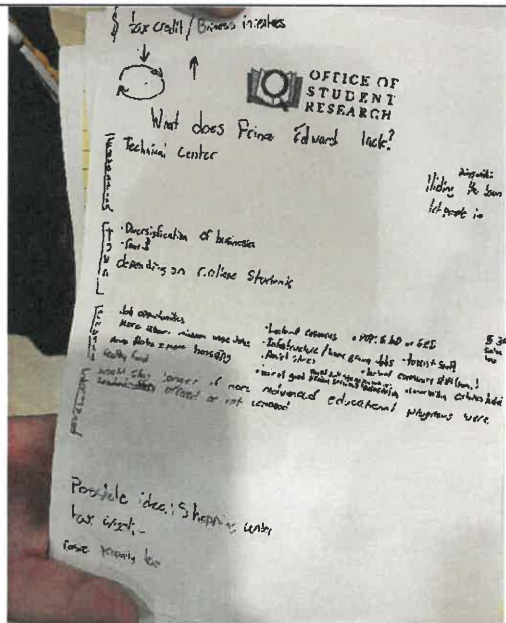
Symposium

The *Symposium on the Common Good* is the culmination of Civitae and your Longwood general education.

Through research, discussion, advocacy, and reflection, students deliberate on citizenship and the issues citizens face in their communities. The symposium is organized around a broad theme, and culminates in a campus-wide Symposium Day to motivate students to move from investigation to action.

Images from the Longwood University Student Symposium





Letter to the Editor of The Farmville Herald

The week prior to the joint meeting of the Board of Supervisors and the Planning Commission to hold the final public hearing on the Draft Comprehensive Plan, local resident, Edward Strickler, submitted the following Letter to the Editor to *The Farmville Herald* . . .

Comprehensive Plan gives a road map

Prince Edward County's new draft Comprehensive Plan describes the community's planning vision and goals for the next 20 years—out to the year 2045.

If you plan or hope to be here in 2045 – or if you hope your children/grandchildren will be here, or you expect your business to be here – you should be interested enough to be at least a casual reader. The plan is beautifully formatted with many photos, maps and outlines that help casual readers understand highlights. So, please – at least – be a casual reader.

PEC2045: Forward Together – its name – is well organized by chapters and tables, graphs, figures and other data displays, to help dedicated readers know as much as possible regarding planning decision making. If you are dedicated to improving our community— as a local club, as a congregation, as a neighborhood, as a business, etc – be a dedicated reader. If you want your business to survive and grow, be a dedicated reader. If you want to keep our rural hospital and health providers – when hundreds of hospitals and clinics and services are closing

across rural America every year – be a dedicated reader. If you want more opportunities for youth, your children, young families be a dedicated reader.

A Comprehensive Plan is required by Virginia law to consider land use planning, transportation planning, community services and community assets planning (e.g. housing, education, etc.) to "best promote the health, safety, morals, order, convenience, prosperity and general welfare of the inhabitants, including the elderly and persons with disabilities." (p11). It is very useful to see that the PEC2045 takes Virginia law seriously and includes consideration of community health and safety, shared social resources and good social order, and our shared prosperity. PEC2045 has an entrepreneurial vision supporting its vision of a prosperous community. PEC2045 acknowledges that 'employers are looking for a workforce with 21st century skills in communities that provide a high quality of life'; and that we need to 'attract and retain businesses ... add commercial choices for residents ... a base of job creators'.

One key takeaway (p19) from public engagement is that local 'livability' includes 'strategic

growth areas that will be attractive to families and young professionals' while 'maintaining a rural lifestyle and character' that makes the community 'inviting to all'. This rural character is highlighted in a display (p33) that shows county land to be 64% in forest 14% in pasture, and another 10% in tree canopy and/or in commercial free factories. But our community also does not want only to be farmland.

We want improvements with 'public schools and workforce development', 'housing affordability' and 'access to high speed internet'. Desirable new jobs include 'healthcare services, trades, and professional services'. Engagement with Longwood University students (p23) added specific information about what young professionals/families expect: effective pipelines into local jobs to attract to new graduates and that attract new employers who want to hire LW's talented graduates; a variety of affordable housing options for young people starting a work career, in locales that are attractive to young(er) demographics; small scale advanced manufacturing – e.g. medical technologies – and connected transportation – e.g. better

access to Amtrak service (at Lynchburg, Petersburg) are especially attractive.

Sure, it is fashionable and profitable for 'MAGA'/'Woke Right' media to call all college/university students elite lazy bums, 'social justice' anarchists, and Tiktok-addicted boobs, but, of course, that is mostly a propaganda grift, in the same realm of self-serving stupid as 'Woke Left' propaganda grift. Young(er) workers and families are a population leading edge. Right or wrong. Right or Left.

Population growth or decline is destiny. We only need to drive through once thriving towns of Southside to see that. PEC2045 data displays data displays show expectations of no substantial population growth for the County through 2050 while adjacent counties south of PE – the vast agricultural region of Southside – are expected to have steep population declines (most likely from the deaths of the disproportionately high rural elderly population without young replacements). This threatens PE's prosperity as a regional hub for hospital and health care, for government and other professional services (e.g. banking, insurance, etc.), for retail, commercial and other business development. Appomattox – suburban to Lynch-



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EDWARD STRICKLER

burg – and Amelia – suburban to Chesterfield – are expected to grow steeply: will those populations come to Farmville to get things done? Not very likely since their metro areas will have more choice, competition and lower costs, and are better connected to national transportation systems (Amtrak, airports, etc.).

So our local planning had better respond to what young professionals and families, what new 21st century businesses, what national and global markets are demanding, if we want to keep a hospital, keep a strong downtown Farmville, keep successful businesses and good jobs throughout the County. So, are you going to be a dedicated reader?

EDWARD STRICKLER is retired from University of Virginia School of Medicine, is an active volunteer with FACES palsy, Beaver Angels a national civil society/civic renewal organization, and with Piedmont Health District Medical Reserve Corps.