

QUARTERLY SUMMARY OF ACTIVITIES
FY20 Q4

STAFFORD COUNTY, VIRGINIA ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT & TOURISM

This summarizes the activities and work of the Stafford County Department of Economic Development & Tourism for the fourth quarter of FY20. This outline follows the County’s 2015 Economic Development Strategy updated by the November, 2018 Economic Development Implementation Plan (“I-Plan”).

OUR MESSAGE: MARKETING STAFFORD

ED&T is the marketing and sales arm for Stafford—to encourage business expansion and investment. As we launch into our new fiscal year, challenged by Covid-19, we have revisited and prepared a detailed Marketing Plan that further integrates our Message for Stafford. Our Message is that Stafford offers compelling advantages for businesses and tourists. Our tourism continues focus on corporate meetings, sports tourism, and on our leisure market. With a new shift in leisure market traveling post-coronavirus, we will follow the State Tourism’s plan and target individuals looking for road-trips, weekend getaways, and drivable destinations.

As part of the ED&T marketing strategy, we deliver our message in various ways, many highlighted in the chart to the right. COVID-19 has directly impacted our message options. For example, tourism messaging shows a decline, while economic development messaging is rising to meet new requests for business assistance.

In the midst of COVID-19:

- Director John Holden spoke to the Fredericksburg Area Association of Realtors highlighting the business opportunities in Stafford.
- Manager of Economic Development Rick Cobert, was a panelist speaker at a CAPRE (data centers) webinar focused on COVID-19 and Mid-Atlantic market updates.
- Tourism launched Threshold360, a virtual tour platform integration experience on the

www.ToGoStafford.com to create a virtual tour directory for restaurants in Stafford so the community and visitors could see who was open.

- Tourism launched social media campaigns as part of the [National Travel and Tourism Week](#) May 3-9, 2020 put on by the U.S. Travel Association.
- Tourism launched social media campaigns as part of the [Virginia Tourism Corporation’s “We’ll be waiting for you”](#) social media campaign.
- ED&T team produced and published a [“What’s Next? Stafford.” video](#) for local businesses and visitors to remind them we are here when covid departs.

The quarter comes to a close we have launched a new, exciting program for entrepreneurial development.

THE MESSAGE	FY20 TARGET	FY20 Q4	FY20 YTD	% GOAL
Tourism Newsletter (+PR)	12	3	9	75%
Econ Dev Newsletter (+PR)	12	14	26	216%
Tour Stafford Website Page Views	218,197	33,501	175,767	81%
Tour Stafford Website Users	116,210	18,509	97,536	84%
Go Stafford Website Page Views	70,257	17,957	86,667	123%
Go Stafford Website Users	34,304	7,397	42,258	123%
Business events (ours)	4	0	7	175%
Networking Events	4	0	12	300%

SIGNIFICANT AND GROWING CYBER AND TECH SECTOR

MOST AFFORDABLE BUSINESS LOCATION IN THE DMV

HOME TO 2,826 BUSINESSES

WITHIN ONE DAY’S DRIVE OF 60 PERCENT OF THE U.S. POPULATION

545, 992 TOURISM VISITORS EACH YEAR

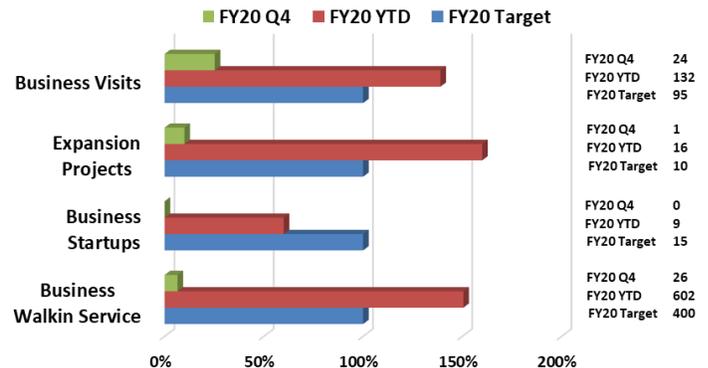


EXPAND BUSINESS: BUSINESS RETENTION AND EXPANSION (BRE)

ED&T is the customer service arm for businesses in Stafford. The most significant business retention and expansion effort this past quarter was, of course, our response to Covid-19. In the span of four weeks, ED&T and the Stafford EDA stood up and launched its first round of business grants. A Round Two of grants addressed business concerns expressed in the first round and, in total, over \$450,000 of grant funds were released to over 120 small businesses in Stafford County. We also developed plans for the release of a “Round 3” of grants funded by CARES Act dollars.

The EDA closed on its first Covid-19 loan. This loan program is still accepting [applications](#). Program guidelines can be found [here](#).

As this Quarterly Summary goes to print, the EDA is finalizing a new round of grant programs funded by the CARES Act allocation to Stafford County. Input and guidance for these programs was discussed at the joint Board of Supervisors and EDA meeting on July 7, 2020.



ENTREPRENEURIAL DEVELOPMENT

As reported previously, ED&T and the EDA secured Go Virginia grant funding to attract and secure entrepreneurial development programming in Stafford and our region. The program makes use of [RIOT](#), a successful non-profit economic development program focused on technology and entrepreneurship.

We launched and successfully hosted a [Virtual Town Hall](#) to get customer input on entrepreneurial development in Stafford and our surrounding region on July 30. Our attendance was 100 participants.

This was the start of a 12-month journey of customer discovery for us and the region, exploring how we might foster an entrepreneurial ecosystem in our region. We believe Stafford is well positioned to be the host and leader of such a program, notably for the use of cyber, smart technology, and the Internet of Things (IoT). We hope to foster the expansion of existing businesses and growth of new enterprises. The foundations for such an ecosystem exists—it is based upon the wide range of well-established business leaders willing to give back to foster new business growth. Our partners in this overall program include Intuit, Harkcon, GCubed, CASK Government Services, and many others. We explored the following subjects through virtual breakout rooms:

- Cybersecurity
- Business Post-COVID
- Entrepreneurship
- Smart Cities
- Business Innovation
- IoT and Technology

This program was secured by the Stafford EDA from a grant from Go Virginia Region 6. Pending our input from across “Region 6” we intend to seek out a follow-up grant to secure a program designed by all.



ED&T WALK-IN CUSTOMER SERVICE

The Department has a walk-in service that fields questions and input on tourism and starting or expanding a business in Stafford. For start-ups, staff provide our “starting a business checklist” and direct them to appropriate departments or agencies. In Q4 FY20, we had 26 Walk-ins.

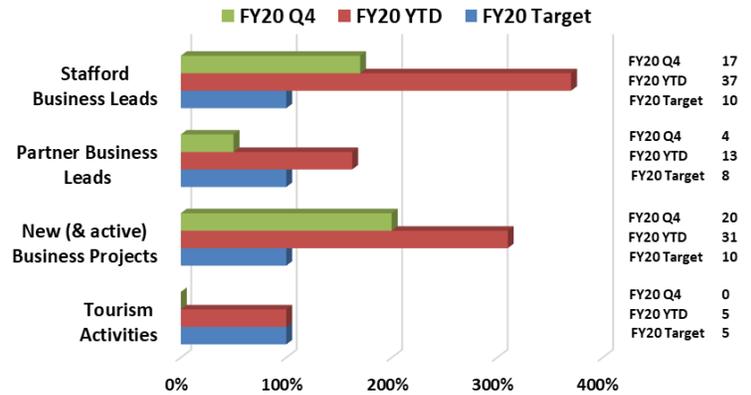
ATTRACT INVESTMENT

ED&T works to attract new business and visitors to Stafford. The identification, nurturing, and “closing” on new business, tourism events, and meetings often takes months, if not years.

NEW BUSINESS

Interest in new (and active) business investment in Stafford did not slow in this quarter—in fact it grew. We attribute the continued interest in our messaging and marketing over the last two years that Stafford is the lower-cost opportunity south of Northern Virginia and serves as a market from Richmond to the DMV.

Currently, ED&T is engaged and working with two major developers or companies that are considering millions of square feet of distribution and high-tech manufacturing space.



NEW TOURISM ACTIVITIES

Stafford Tourism continues to support plans to make the most of Stafford’s designation as the exclusive Destination [and Hotel Sponsor for the Marine Corp Marathon Race Series](#).

In response to COVID-19, the Tourism Program initiated or participated in a number of activities to promote continued spending in area hotels and restaurants.

- Stafford Tourism created and launched on March 28 and continues to populate and market a [To-Go Stafford website](#) of Stafford restaurants that are open for takeout or delivery services.
- Stafford Tourism created COVID-19 response social media campaigns and videos.
- Participated in Virginia Restaurant Week March 30th – April 5th.
- Created our FY21 Tourism and Economic Development Marketing and Media Plan
- Stafford was the first place to host a sports (and leisure) event in Northern Virginia (and possibly Virginia) after the Covid-19 outbreak. Visit [this link](#) for a sneak peak video on Kayak Bass Fishing Tournament Owner and TV icon, Chad Hoover.
- Hosted the Kayak Bass Fishing Trail Series Tournament



INITIATIVES

Initiatives include continued review and update of our economic development “tool box” and major development projects across Stafford.

CARES ACT FUNDS

CARES Act funds were authorized for a “Round 3” of Covid-19 business grants. At the same time, other CARES Act funds may be finding their way to Stafford. The CARES Act dedicated funding to a number of federal (and state) programs. ED&T is working on three other programs that are funded by CARES Act:

- A U.S. Economic Development Administration Grant to fund “smart technology” infrastructure in Downtown Stafford.
- A Virginia Community Development Block Grant program to provide meal or gift cards to local restaurants for families in need.
- A regional Go Virginia Grant to foster further economic development planning and collaboration for cyber and other business development along the “Potomac Corridor” from Fairfax County to the City of Fredericksburg.

SMART STAFFORD - HOW IT ALL WORKS TOGETHER

Community Economic Development is often about “leveraging” and overlapping projects or programs into a significant initiative. That is the case for “Smart Stafford.” By leveraging the Board’s vision of Downtown Stafford, we have:

- Developed a new and burgeoning partnership and opportunity with Virginia Center for Innovative Technology (CIT) to become the Virginia “Smart City” Testbed.
- Leveraged Smart Stafford into our entrepreneurial development program around technology and the Internet of Things (IoT)—securing the grant to bring the RIoT program to Stafford.

ED&T continues to explore opportunities to further leverage this program into federal grants to help “build out” the Testbed into Downtown Stafford.

This entire effort and “messaging” around Downtown and Smart Stafford is fostering new business and development interests.