

Nelson County Comprehensive Plan Update

Draft Chapter 7: Creating a Resilient Economy

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INTRODUCTION

Nestled on the sunrise side of the Blue Ridge Mountains, Nelson County is home to a wealth of resources that have supported the community's evolving commerce profile. Once known primarily for its mineral and agricultural resources, the economic landscape has changed within a physical landscape that remains idyllic and rural. As traditional industries have evolved and scaled back, new trends in agritourism and remote work opportunities have been bolstered by a forward-thinking investment in broadband infrastructure. Nelson County is prime for fresh ideas and new investments while retaining the stunning rural character that makes it special for those who call it home. This chapter provides an overview of key issues and opportunities for economic development and recommends strategies to create a resilient economy.

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WHAT WE HEARD | The Big Ideas

PLAN + PROVIDE EQUITABLY FOR EVERYONE

At the heart of any workforce are real people who desire long-term financial stability. Community engagement indicates that residents seek more workforce training and career-oriented opportunities that can support the cost of living in Nelson County. Equitable economic development unlocks the full potential of the local economy by attracting quality jobs of all skill and education levels, creating new opportunities for workers, and providing career ladders for upward mobility. A workforce that feels valued and employable becomes the next generation of homeowners, community leaders, and entrepreneurs, laying the groundwork for a stable future for Nelson County.

DIVERSIFY + BOLSTER THE LOCAL ECONOMY

A resilient economy that diversifies its industries and services will be well-prepared to handle the unknown. As experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic, unpredictable global forces can greatly impact local markets – diversifying key industries will ensure that the proverbial eggs are not in one basket. Access to remote working positions as well as brick and mortar establishments both small and large are desired by the community to create options for workers and consumers, helping to spread the tax base and provide stable revenue for the local economy.

IMPROVE + EXPAND VITAL COMMUNITY SERVICES

A strong economy that creates jobs not only supports a healthy workforce – it also supports vital services that benefit the community, both public and private. Survey results indicate a need for better access to medical and emergency services, public transportation options, and recreation opportunities. The quality of healthcare, childcare, education, and outreach services reflect the quality of the local economy and investment back into the community.

PROTECT + CONNECT TO THE RURAL ENVIRONMENT

The community seeks to be stewards of the natural environment while also supporting economic development. Protecting and connecting to the rural environment in a 21st century world may seem counterintuitive at first, but investments in business and technology can actually protect the rural landscape from changing. Traditional agriculture has been bolstered by new trends in agritourism while remote workers seeking work-life balance have found refuge in Nelson's idyllic setting. Broadband and wireless connections have allowed farmers and small businesses to keep pace with the modern world without sacrificing the land they call home.



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WHAT WE KNOW | The Economy Today

Public engagement identified a need for enhanced workforce development and career opportunities to retain young professionals and middle-class families. The County's population is aging into retirement while the younger generations have declined in numbers. Tourism has become a backbone of the local economy, so it will be important to ensure that growth in tourism supports quality jobs for residents while retaining the integrity of the local resources that attract visitors. After experiencing the uncertainty of the COVID-19 pandemic, Nelson County is well-positioned to forge ahead with a renewed vision for a balanced, resilient economy that will set the stage for generational wealth and success.

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Support & Cultivate Today's Workforce

Workforce Characteristics

Commuting Patterns

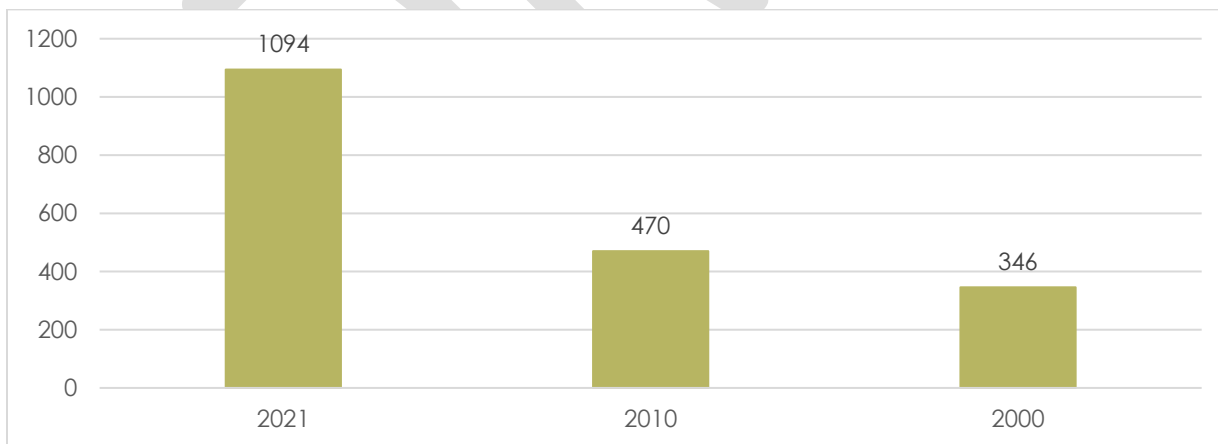
Fifty-seven percent of residents aged 16 and over are actively in the workforce, with an average commute of 31.7 minutes.¹ Most workers (56%) live in Nelson County and commute elsewhere for their jobs, primarily traveling to Albemarle County, Charlottesville, Amherst County, Lynchburg, and Augusta County. This number has remained stable since 2004, with only a 1% increase. Twenty-five percent of workers live elsewhere and commute into Nelson, representing a 24% increase since 2004. The remaining 19% live and commute within the County, which represents a 21% decrease since 2004. This may be partly attributable to the rise in home-based remote work, which is not captured in commuting data and has increased 133% since 2010 and 216% since 2000.

Table 7.1: Commuting Patterns

Commuters	2019	2014	2009	2004
People who live and work in the area	1,660	1,769	1,852	2,094
In-commuters	2,179	2,086	1,499	1,758
Out-commuters	4,837	4,755	4,705	4,785
Total Commuters	8,676	8,610	8,056	8,637

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, OnTheMap Application and LEHD Origin-Destination Employment Statistics, 2004-2019

Table 7.2: Remote Workers



Source: 2021, 2010 ACS 5-Year Estimates and 2000 Census

¹ 2021 ACS 5-Year Estimates

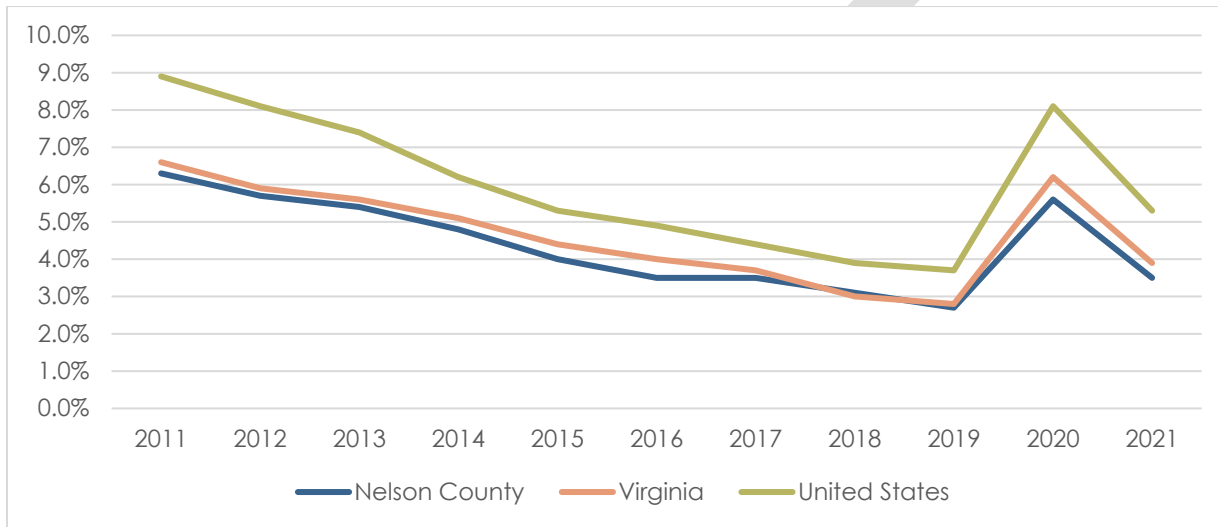
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Unemployment

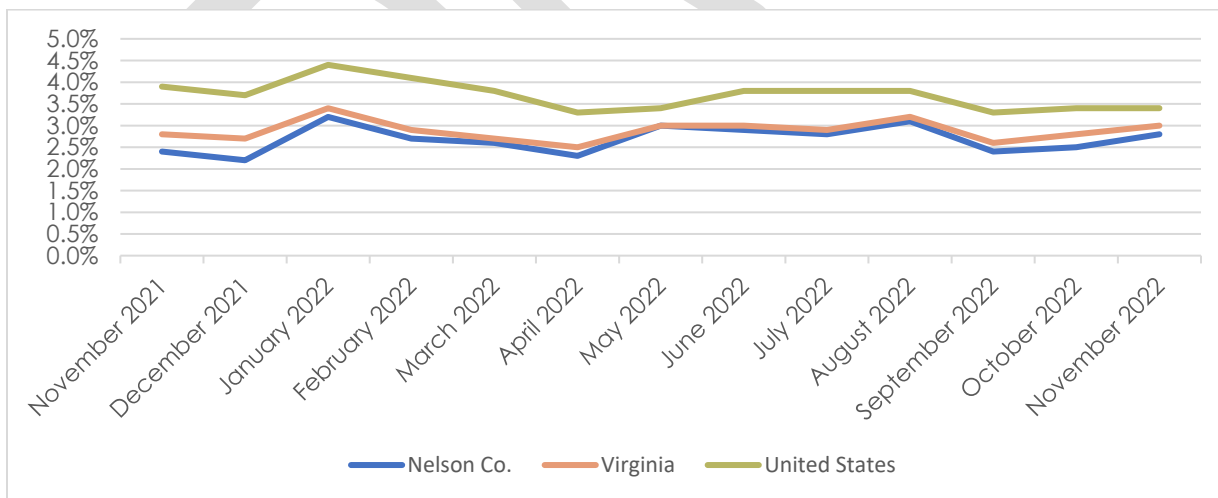
From 2011 to 2021, Nelson County's unemployment rate was consistently lower than both state and national averages each year. Unemployment saw a net decline from 6.3% in 2011 to 3.5% in 2021, even after a notable increase to 5.6% in 2020, a likely result of the COVID-19 pandemic. From November 2021 to November 2022, the unemployment rate fluctuated between a high of 3.1% (August 2022) and a low of 2.2% (December 2021).

Table 7.3: Unemployment Trends 2011-2021



Source: Virginia Employment Commission, Economic Information & Analytics, Local Area Unemployment Statistics

Table 7.4: Unemployment November 2021 - November 2022



Source: Virginia Employment Commission, Economic Information & Analytics, Local Area Unemployment Statistics

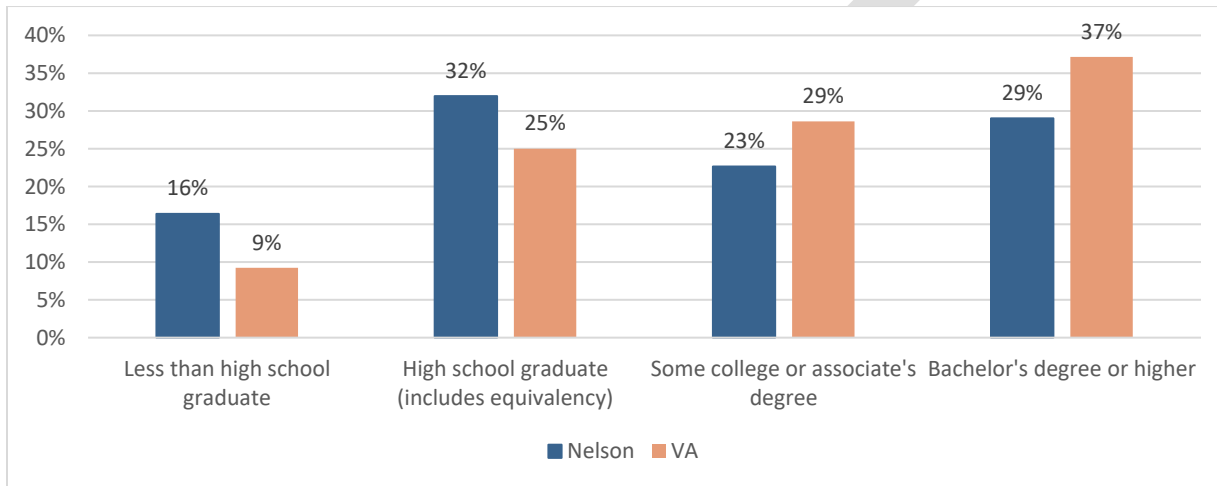
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Educational Attainment

Nelson County residents have access to several colleges and universities within an hour's drive, including the University of Virginia, Liberty University, Piedmont Virginia Community College, and Central Virginia Community College. 32% of the population are high school graduates, while 29% hold Bachelor's degrees or higher.

Table 7.5: Educational Attainment



Source: 2021 ACS 5-Year Estimates

Household Income and Weekly Wages

As shown in Table 7.6, median household income ranks third highest among surrounding counties at \$67,707. This is about 16% lower than the state median of \$80,615. Average weekly wages by industry are shown in Table 7.7.

Table 7.6: Regional Median Household Incomes

Locality	Median Household Income
Albemarle County	\$90,568
Augusta County	\$69,082
Nelson County	\$67,707
Amherst County	\$60,876
Rockbridge County	\$57,828
Appomattox County	\$55,268
Buckingham County	\$49,841

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Source: 2021 ACS 5-Year Estimates

Table 7.7: Average Weekly Wages by Industry

Industry	Wage
Total, All Industries	\$899
Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing and Hunting	\$675
Mining, Quarrying, and Oil and Gas Extraction	*
Utilities	*
Construction	\$916
Manufacturing	\$786
Wholesale Trade	\$979
Retail Trade	\$456
Transportation and Warehousing	\$877
Information	\$1,143
Finance and Insurance	\$1,438
Real Estate and Rental and Leasing	\$795
Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services	\$1,627
Management of Companies and Enterprises	\$2,864
Administrative and Support and Waste Management and Remediation Services	\$1,176
Educational Services	\$1,020
Health Care and Social Assistance	\$914
Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation	\$352
Accommodation and Food Services	\$676
Other Services (except Public Administration)	\$770
Government Total	\$1,177
Federal Government	\$1,645
State Government	\$1,040
Local Government	\$846
Unclassified	\$982

Source: Virginia Employment Commission, Economic Information & Analytics, Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages (QCEW), 3rd Quarter (July, August, September) 2022

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Workforce Trends

Residents aged 55 or older comprise 44% of the County's population, a sharp rise from 2000 when the same age group accounted for 29% of the population. Workers aged 55 or older comprise approximately 29% of the current workforce and are likely to retire by 2035. The next age group, ages 25-54, represents 31% of the County's population and 57% of the current workforce. The youngest age group, aged 24 and under, represents 25% of the population and 14% of the current workforce.

Table 7.8: Population Trends

Age Group	% Current Workforce	% County Population 2020	% County Population 2010	% County Population 2000
0 to 24	14%	25%	25%	28%
25 to 54	57%	31%	37%	43%
55+	29%	44%	38%	29%

Source: 2020, 2010, and 2000 Census

As older workers enter retirement, a knowledge gap is created when fewer skilled workers are prepared to take their place in the workforce. Since this age group also represents the largest portion of the population, Nelson County should prepare for the needs of the next workforce generation to attract new workers and families. The knowledge gap can be closed with improved access to job training and trades programs, as well as more direct partnerships with nearby colleges and universities. Both traditional higher education and vocational trades will be beneficial for cultivating a versatile, capable workforce.

The primary age demographic for working families in the County (ages 25-54) has declined from 43% in 2000 to 31% in 2020. Marketing Nelson as an ideal community for work-life balance could incentivize younger generations of workers to relocate permanently to the area with their families, which would help stabilize Nelson's population and strengthen the future tax base. Diversified business opportunities, job training, and improvements to amenities, parks, and schools will help make Nelson attractive to working families.

Nelson County has already made significant improvements to broadband access, making remote work a viable option for many employees. While the full impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic on employment trends are still being experienced and analyzed, the paradigm shift to remote work will likely remain a permanent fixture of the working landscape. Attracting remote workers is one significant step that Nelson County has already taken to maintain a steady population.

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Diversify & Enhance Local Industry

Industry Characteristics

Top 10 Employers²

Leading employers in Nelson County reflect the community's culture and assets – public schools, recreation and tourism, and local businesses top the list of major employers.

1. Nelson County School Board
2. Wintergreen Resort
3. Devils Backbone Brewing Company
4. Nelson County
5. Blue Mountain Brewery
6. Blue Ridge Health Care Center
7. Artisanal Brewing Ventures (Bold Rock Cider)
8. Saunders Brothers
9. Veritas Vineyard & Winery
10. Wintergreen Property Owners Association

Employment by Industry

The total number of working residents has remained consistent since 2000, with a net increase of 0.3%. As shown in Table 7.8, manufacturing, retail, and information have seen the largest employment decreases since 2000. Information, which includes publishing, broadcasting, and telecommunications, is distinct from information technology, which is categorized under professional services. Notable industry increases include professional and related services, finance and real estate, and education and health care.

² Virginia Employment Commission, Economic Information & Analytics, Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages (QCEW), 3rd Quarter (July, August, September) 2022

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Table 7.9: Employment by Industry

Industry	Estimated Number of Workers 2021	Percent Change From 2010	Percent Change From 2000
Civilian employed population 16 years and over	6,797	-5.6%	+0.3%
Agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting, and mining	320	+15.5%	+11.5%
Construction	758	-10.9%	-7.4%
Manufacturing	345	-47.4%	-59.6%
Wholesale trade	136	-6.8%	-17.6%
Retail trade	408	-26.4%	-29.8%
Transportation and warehousing, and utilities	208	-5.5%	-49.5%
Information	56	-39.8%	-58.5%
Finance and insurance, and real estate and rental and leasing	454	+1.6%	+117.2%
Professional, scientific, and management, and administrative and waste management services	789	+19.0%	+53.8%
Educational services, and health care and social assistance	2,044	+21.8%	+30.8%
Arts, entertainment, and recreation, and accommodation and food services	705	-24.4%	+16.1%
Other services, except public administration	323	-16.8%	-17.4%
Public administration	251	-14.9%	+5.9%

Source: 2021, 2010 ACS 5-Year Estimates and 2000 Census

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Industry Trends

Manufacturing & Processing

Mineral mining and processing was a successful venture for the County after the world's largest deposit of architectural soapstone was discovered near Schuyler, sparking an economic engine that thrived throughout the late 19th and 20th centuries. According to the Central Virginia Partnership for Economic Development, Nelson County is a prime location for manufacturing and industrial-related businesses such as food processing and wood products. The abundance of forest cover presents opportunities for timbering, which can be successfully managed as a renewable product while preserving the majority of remaining forest.

Industrial and manufacturing jobs offer an important alternative for a rural workforce. However, community engagement also indicated that the least desired land uses in Nelson County are industrial and timbering-related. The County strives to manage a positive balance between manufacturing jobs and the community's desires by focusing industrial development within specific areas, such as Colleen Business Park, and ensuring that facilities can adequately connect to public utilities without disrupting undeveloped rural parcels. Infill and adaptive reuse of vacant sites can also be targeted for manufacturing. Timbering should be done with thoughtful consideration to prevent unnecessary destruction of pristine forests. Appropriate rotation, erosion mitigation, and replanting schedules can ensure that timbering remains a reliable, environmentally conscious industry. The Virginia Department of Forestry can assist with forest management plans that implement best practices to protect the environment while maximizing the profit potential of wood resources.

Agriculture & Agritourism

Nelson County has been anchored by traditional agriculture for generations. Prime agricultural soils account for only 12% of the County's soils,³ but farmers have successfully maximized the growing potential of both prime and non-prime soils for cattle grazing, grains, orchards, and vineyards on lands of varying terrain. According to the 2017 Census of Agriculture, there are over 67,800 acres of land currently being used across 409 farms. This represents a decrease in farming lands of 10% and 15%, respectively, since 2012. Despite the decrease in land area, market value of products sold increased 69% between 2012 and 2017, and 115% from 2007 to 2017. By comparison, state sales as a whole increased by 6% and 36%, respectively, during the same time periods. These trends show that the value per acre has increased 131% from 2007 to 2017.

³ Soil Survey of Nelson County

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Table 7.10: Agriculture Trends

	2017		2012		2007	
	County	State	County	State	County	State
Total Farms	409	43,225	455	46,030	462	47,383
Total Land in Farms (acres)	67,841	7,797,979	79,981	8,302,444	73,149	8,103,925
Avg. Size of Farm (acres)	166	180	176	180	158	171
Total Cropland (farms)	319	32,091	358	34,525	365	35,954
Total Cropland (acres)	20,163	3,084,067	22,429	2,990,561	22,898	3,274,137
Total Market Value	\$26.72 mil	\$3.96 bil	\$15.81 mil	\$3.75 bil	\$12.45 mil	\$2.91 bil
Total Market Value % Change Since 2012	69%	6%	-	-	-	-
Total Market Value % Change Since 2007	115%	36%	27%	29%	-	-
Total Market Value per Farm	\$65,328	\$91,625	\$34,741	\$81,540	\$26,937	\$61,334
Total Market Value per Acre	\$394	\$508	\$198	\$452	\$170	\$359

Source: 2007, 2012, and 2017 Census of Agriculture

While there has been some decline in the farming footprint in Nelson County and throughout Virginia, agriculture remains a foundational component of local economic identity and cultural heritage. Challenges facing today's farmers include increased production and supply chain costs, recovery after severe weather or drought events, adapting to new technology, and inspiring the next generation of farmers to carry on the land's agricultural legacy. When farmers face economic burdens and uncertainties about the long-term viability of their business, there is increased pressure to sell the land for financial stability.

Utilizing land preservation tools as discussed in Chapter 6 can help sustain agricultural properties for the long-term and maximize their economic impact. Other methods to assist farmers include streamlining local permitting processes to remove unnecessary procedural barriers and connecting farmers to programs such as the Virginia Department of Agriculture's Farm Link Program, which links farm owners interested in exiting agriculture with those seeking farms and farm business. In addition to supporting farmers directly, community engagement indicated a need for more agriculture education programs for students.

Agritourism provides new opportunities for historically agricultural lands, breathing new life into business models while retaining the pristine condition of the land itself. Breweries, wineries, cideries, and distilleries have taken advantage of Nelson County's mild climate to grow their own ingredients for craft beverage production, which evolved into popular tourist trails along Routes 6, 29, and 151. Traditional farms and orchards have diversified and

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expanded their services, ranging from hosting events to supplying local restaurants. Preserving traditional agriculture while also supporting evolving agritourism opportunities will ensure that this vital industry remains a permanent fixture of Nelson’s economic identity.

Tourism

Historically, Nelson County’s economy has been driven by agriculture and raw materials processing, but in recent decades it has shifted to one centered more around tourism. Offering a perfect balance of picturesque beauty, outdoor recreation, shopping and culinary destinations, and unique lodging opportunities, Nelson County has something to offer for every interest. While the initial impact of the COVID-19 pandemic caused revenue losses in the County’s tourism sector, there was a remarkable post-pandemic comeback. As shown in Table 7.11, tourism revenues fell 18% between 2019 and 2020, then grew 28% between 2020 and 2021. Not only did this return Nelson’s tourism revenue to pre-pandemic levels, it actually increased by 4% over 2019 and 13% over 2017.

Table 7.11: Tourism Revenue

Economic Impacts	2021	2020	2019	2018	2017
Travel Employment	603	583	717	709	709
Traveler Spending	\$82,958,644	\$64,983,266	\$79,507,426	\$75,301,895	\$73,560,223
Travel Payroll	\$16,534,933	\$15,075,139	\$17,458,901	\$16,876,763	\$16,735,219
Local Travel Taxes	\$3,253,347	\$2,661,802	\$3,259,226	\$3,097,122	\$3,143,045
State Travel Taxes	\$1,793,439	\$1,477,333	\$1,960,126	\$1,865,255	\$1,830,124

Source: Virginia Tourism Corporation

Diversification is important not only between industries, but within industries as well. As outdoor recreation tourism becomes more popular, there is a risk of overwhelming rustic trails and rural roads. The development of new physical trails, such as rail-to-trail conversions and blueways, has helped spread out visitors to relieve congestion. Expanded options for craft beverages, local dining, and retail also provide a well-rounded experience that prompt tourists to visit multiple areas of the County.

Wintergreen Resort, a key tourist destination and major employer for Nelson County, can also benefit from diversification. As temperatures trend warmer, artificial snow-making equipment may struggle to keep up with demand. The ski resort industry has proactively prepared for potential climate challenges by diversifying recreational offerings in summer months and

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upgrading facilities with warm-weather amenities such as water parks and mountain bike trails. Wintergreen has already successfully incorporated year-round resort offerings with outdoor recreation, spa amenities, and dining, while also having capacity to host large professional conferences and events. Continuing to evolve with industry and climate trends will ensure that Wintergreen Resort will remain a tourism and employment powerhouse for Nelson County.

DRIVE 2.0

In 2019, Virginia Tourism Corporation (VTC) completed a long-term strategic plan, titled “DRIVE 2.0,” to help increase tourism visitation and spending across the Commonwealth. DRIVE 2.0 positions Virginia communities to grow in directions that provide greater economic opportunities. The DRIVE 2.0 initiative can help Nelson County get funding to implement strategies that will increase tourism. Components of DRIVE 2.0 include:

- DRIVE 2.0 Statewide Strategic Tourism Plan
- DRIVE 2.0 Regional Plan specific to Central Virginia
- How-To Guides to assist with implementing DRIVE 2.0 recommendations
- DRIVE Outdoor Grant Program providing up to \$20,000 for outdoor recreation development projects

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Craft Beverage Producers

- 12 Wineries
- 10 Breweries
- 3 Cideries
- 3 Distilleries

Tourist Trails

Nelson 151 – Virginia Route 151 is a state-designated scenic byway on the sunrise side of the Blue Ridge Mountains that is home to the Nelson 151 community. The Nelson 151 trail offers seven wineries, four breweries, three cideries, and two distilleries.

Brew Ridge Trail – Virginia's original beer trail, three Nelson County breweries are featured on the Brew Ridge Trail, which shares some overlap with Nelson 151.

Nelson 29 – Nelson's newest craft beverage trail situated along Virginia Route 29, Nelson 29 includes three wineries, three breweries, and one distillery.

Fruit Loop – From May until December, taste and tour the places that grow the freshest fruits and berries in Nelson County.

Outdoor Recreation

- Appalachian Trail
- Blue Ridge Parkway
- Blue Ridge Tunnel
- Crabtree Falls
- Fortune's Cove Nature Preserve
- Henry Lanum Memorial Trail and the Mt. Pleasant Spur
- Humpback Rocks Trail
- James River State Park & Wildlife Management Area
- Kids in Parks TRACK Trails at the Blue Ridge Railway Trail and Rockfish River Trailhead
- Love Mountain Ridge Wildlife Loop
- Lower Rockfish Valley Wildlife Loop
- Mau-Har Trail
- Montebello Nature Trail
- Montreal Park
- Nature Foundation at Wintergreen
- Nelson County Wayside
- Nelson County Wilderness Area
- North Fork of the Piney River
- Rockfish Valley Loop Trails
- Rockfish Gap Hawk Watch
- Rockfish Ruritan Park
- Virginia Blue Ridge Trail
- White Rock Falls

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Bolster & Promote Economic Growth

Economic Development

Business Support Services

Economic development is guided by the Nelson County Economic Development Authority, whose mission is to promote the diversity and growth of the County's economic base. Support for business owners includes small business toolkits and checklists, cashflow worksheets, and sample marketing outlines. Local businesses are also supported by the Nelson County Chamber of Commerce, a membership-based non-profit organization that provides resources to area businesses. Regionally, the Thomas Jefferson Planning District Commission was awarded a grant in August 2022 to create a Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) plan. The timeframe for completion is typically 18 months. Strategies and recommendations from the CEDS plan that positively impact Nelson County should be implemented along with the economic development strategies from this chapter.

Other support agencies include:

- **Central Virginia Partnership for Economic Development** is a 501(c)6 non-profit, public-private partnership formed in 1995 to help create new jobs and investment in Central Virginia. The Partnership has integrated staff and resources with GO Virginia Region 9 and Virginia Career Works-Piedmont Region to expand its services for existing businesses, entrepreneurs, job seekers and employers.
- **SCORE** is a nonprofit association dedicated to educating entrepreneurs and helping small businesses start, grow, and succeed nationwide. SCORE is a resource partner with the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA), and has been mentoring small business owners for more than forty years.

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Incentive Zones

Currently, there are no incentive zones in Nelson County. An Enterprise, Opportunity, or Tourism zone may be a good fit in areas that would benefit from new investment. These zones provide access to grants and tax incentives to increase investment by job creators in targeted areas, and can also provide tourism marketing. Pursuing a zone application, particularly around the Route 29 and 151 corridors where growth is targeted, could be a worthwhile investment with long-term returns.

- **Virginia Enterprise Zones** – The Virginia Enterprise Zone (VEZ) program is a partnership between state and local government that encourages job creation and private investment. VEZ accomplishes this by designating Enterprise Zones throughout the state and providing two grant-based incentives, the Job Creation Grant and the Real Property Investment Grant, to qualified investors and job creators within those zones, while the locality provides local incentives.
- **Tourism Zones** – Much like traditional business enterprise zone, a tourism zone allows businesses to take advantage of state and local tax incentives not available to businesses elsewhere. The goal of these incentives is to stimulate business attraction, growth, and increased employment opportunities within certain areas of a locality. This can include, but is not limited to: hiring credits, sales and use tax incentives, expense and interest deductions, discount utilities hook-up and payment plans, sewer facility hookup payment plans, and reduced parking requirements.
- **Opportunity Zones** – Opportunity Zones are a federal economic development and community development tax benefit program to encourage long-term private investment in low-income urban, suburban and rural census tracts. This is an economic and community development tax incentive that provides an avenue for investors to support communities that have experienced uneven economic growth and recovery. The tax incentive offers three benefits; tax deferral, tax reduction through long-term investment, and exclusion of certain capital gains tax.
- **Technology Zones** - Virginia localities have the ability to establish one or more Technology Zones to attract growth in targeted industries. Establishing a technology zone allows localities to create special incentives for qualified businesses locating or expanding operations in a zone.

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Additional Economic Drivers

Workforce Development

Community engagement responses indicated that there are few career-oriented economic opportunities for residents, leading to fewer families and young professionals staying in Nelson County. Training and maintaining a capable workforce is key to sustaining major employers. Workforce development in Nelson County is supported by the Virginia Career Work-Piedmont Region (VCW-P). Programs in VCW-P's workforce system include adult education and literacy support, vocational rehabilitation, and veteran employment assistance. Workforce development programs are also offered through Piedmont Virginia Community College and Central Virginia Community College. Advocating for a local community college branch would help provide more direct access to training for Nelson County residents, who must currently commute to Amherst, Lynchburg, or Charlottesville for the nearest campuses.

Broadband Infrastructure

Thanks to a proactive approach by the Nelson County Broadband Authority and funds leveraged from grants and local investments, Nelson County has unparalleled access to high-speed internet. Over 6,200 homes and businesses have access to more than 450 miles of fiber and active circuits along the Route 6, 29, and 151 corridors, along with four towers extending wireless service to more remote areas. The investment in broadband allowed Nelson to be uniquely prepared for the unforeseen challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020.

Nelson County's idyllic setting, quality of life, and access to world-renowned outdoor recreation has made it attractive for professionals and families who value work-life balance. Prior to the pandemic in 2019, Nelson County was ranked #1 in Virginia for remote work with 11.74% of its labor force working from home. In 2021 this increased to 16.8%, although the ranking is now lower relative to other counties who also saw increases in remote work.⁴ Brick and mortar businesses have benefitted from the broadband investment, which has made essential processes much more reliable and efficient. The targeted installation along major corridors supports development in planned growth areas. While working conditions have stabilized since the height of the pandemic era, Nelson's forward-thinking broadband investment means that businesses and workers have options and can adapt quickly to future situations.

⁴ 2021 ACS 5-Year Estimates

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HOW WE MOVE FORWARD

Nelson County is committed to attracting and retaining quality businesses and a qualified workforce. Implementing the following strategies will stimulate economic development and enhance the community's quality of life.

Goal Statement

Nelson County will create and maintain a strong, resilient economy that promotes workforce development and diversifies business and tourism opportunities while supporting traditional agriculture.

Strategies

Support & Cultivate Today's Workforce

1. Prepare for the needs of the next generation of workers by supporting both traditional higher education and vocational education opportunities.
2. Support Nelson County Public Schools and regional partners in expanding or creating workforce training programs.
3. Support dual enrollment programs for high school students that contribute to college- or vocational-level programs.
4. Work with the Virginia Community College system to consider a local branch in Nelson County.

Diversify & Improve Local Industry

5. Continue to support the tourism industry while being mindful of over-tourism; diversify tourism assets across the County to distribute traffic and prevent negative impacts to local quality of life.
6. Review the DRIVE 2.0 initiative and consider pursuing DRIVE Outdoor grant funding to implement recommendations of the related DRIVE 2.0 strategic and regional plans to increase tourism.
7. Support expansion and diversification in the agricultural and forestry industries while maintaining and encouraging environmentally friendly and sustainable practices.
8. Expand water access, trails, and bike infrastructure that promote outdoor recreation and tourism.

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9. Support organizations and initiatives that provide agricultural assistance, community education, marketing strategies, information on agricultural support businesses, and information about alternative agricultural uses.
10. Assess local permitting, licensing, and fees for agricultural producers and streamline processes where practical to remove unnecessary procedural barriers.
11. Support multiple revenue streams for farmers by reviewing and amending ordinances to better allow farmers to host complementary agritourism uses on agricultural properties.
12. Proactively market Colleen Business Park for industrial development.

Bolster & Promote Economic Growth

13. Explore opportunities to establish Enterprise, Tourism, Opportunity, and/or Technology Zones to increase business investment in targeted areas.
14. Continue to extend high-speed internet and cellular service throughout the County with bandwidth capable of serving businesses and maintaining viability during technological advances.
15. Support regional economic development partners that provide local business support services.
16. Work with TJPDC to implement recommendations from the regional Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy.