

Essex Business Retention & Recruitment Plan

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Essex
Community
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Overview

The Essex Business Retention and Recruitment Plan aims to better support and sustain current small businesses in Essex while offering recommendations for future business recruitment. It provides detailed action steps and strategies to ensure new and prospective businesses along Eastern Boulevard have reliable access to the resources they need to grow and thrive, which will in turn make Essex a more attractive environment for small businesses.

The plan's primary geographic focus is The Boulevard in Essex (hereinafter referred to as "The Boulevard"), which extends 1.3 miles from the Back River bridge to South Marlyn Avenue. While the recommendations concentrate on The Boulevard's opportunities, several broader market features impact business retention and recruitment considerations:

- **Essex Waterfront** – A driving feature of Essex's economy is its waterfront access. One local marina reported that approximately two-thirds of customers come from outside of Essex and Baltimore County, representing an untapped customer base for The Boulevard. Yet, local focus groups and interviews revealed that The Boulevard does not provide sufficient food and beverage options for visiting boaters that dock in Essex during the busy summer months. Residents interviewed and/or surveyed as part of this project expressed similar sentiments, stating a desire for more places to dine locally. Targeted food and retail investments along The Boulevard can capture more local and visitor spending and cement Essex as a destination.
- **Access to Business Services** – Many Baltimore County programs and points of contact intended to support businesses are concentrated in Towson, approximately 14 miles from The Boulevard. New and prospective business owners are typically directed to an online portal to initiate the permitting process, which can be confusing to navigate and can take years to complete. Furthermore, the US Small Business Administration and Community College of Baltimore County's Center for Business Innovation, among others, are excellent resources for businesses, but programs are often limited to specific populations (e.g., students, businesses open for more than three years, etc.). Current business owners expressed the need for more accessible business services and programs, which can include in-person points of contact and better marketing about available resources. These investments to support current businesses will improve accessibility for new businesses.



Overview (cont.)

- **Building Infrastructure** – Larger commercial centers, such as those in White Marsh and Middle River, draw many current shoppers who live in Essex. Eastern Blvd, and Essex as a whole, serve primarily as a convenience goods and services center for local households. The Boulevard’s abundance of pre-war, low density building stock; limited property for new development; and the need to navigate multiple property owners when assembling larger redevelopment projects make other shopping hubs in Baltimore County the natural choice for larger retailers. Enhancing Corridor sites for current and new small businesses, combined with placemaking efforts to attract visitors, will be important measures to usher Eastern Blvd into a new era.
- **Retail Gaps** – While other Baltimore County hubs are home to suburban strip malls and large retailers, there are a number of retail “gaps” in Essex based on local consumer spending patterns that new businesses along The Boulevard could potentially fill:
 - Limited-Service Restaurants
 - Full-Service Restaurants
 - Gasoline Stations with Convenience Stores
 - Clothing and Clothing Accessories
 - Snack and Nonalcoholic Beverage Bars
 - Pharmacies

Eastern Boulevard is primarily a convenience goods and services center for local households, which presents a strong foundation for future convenience retail and commercial office attraction. However, investments in business retention services will be an important first step to strengthening the Eastern Blvd economy.

These market observations, built on data analysis and local stakeholder engagement, surfaced three priority outcomes to guide business retention and recruitment efforts along Eastern Blvd and the surrounding area:

- A **food destination**, with a “food hub” (a cluster of food establishments and potentially a commercial kitchen as its anchor) that serves residents and workers while drawing visitors to The Boulevard;
- An **Essex-based business navigator** to serve as the face of business support service; and
- A **mixed-use development** along Eastern Blvd to increase housing stock while attracting tenants from industries that the local market can support (e.g., medical office and convenience retail).



This plan recommends that Essex CDC take the lead in establishing two programs – a **Business Retention and Expansion (BRE)** program and a **business recruitment** campaign – to execute on the three priorities above while enhancing other resources and services available to local and prospective businesses.

Business Retention and Expansion (BRE) Overview

The most effective way to ensure economic vitality along The Boulevard is by supporting the businesses that are already here.

The first phase and strategies in this plan are designed to launch a modern BRE program for The Boulevard. BRE is the process of proactively engaging with the business community through a combination of in-person visits and other surveying methods, and ultimately asking, “How can we help?”.

A modern BRE program will achieve the following:

- 1. Connect** with the business community.
- 2. Understand** needs of businesses.
- 3. Identify** pervasive problems or trends.
- 4. Respond** with resources and information.
- 5. Report** trends, actions, and impact.
- 6. Track** trends over time.

The purpose of this program is to help local businesses stay and grow here in Essex, particularly along The Boulevard. The Boulevard BRE program will be a “smart” program, grounded in data and business intelligence and designed to be user-friendly and sustainable.



Business Recruitment Overview

Upon setting up the framework for a BRE program, this plan recommends a second initiative to launch a comprehensive business recruitment campaign. Attracting new businesses and entrepreneurs to The Boulevard will create jobs, increase tax revenues, and diversify the economy. The first phase of strategies in the pages that follow outlines the BRE steps that will serve as a foundation for future business recruitment.

The process of attracting new businesses and entrepreneurs to The Boulevard will require site preparation, branding and placemaking, and strategic marketing and communications.

The market analysis identified several potential opportunities for business attraction. In addition to the retail gaps listed on the previous page, other opportunities include:

- 1. Food and Entertainment.** Examples – fast casual restaurant, limited-service restaurant(s) (café, coffee shop, grab-and-go items), full-service restaurant(s) (midscale, family-friendly), additional bars/night entertainment (more limited opportunity)
- 2. Additional Convenience or Small-Scale Retail.** Examples – small neighborhood/commuter convenience retail, pet care, antiques and used goods
- 3. Fitness/Wellness.** Examples – small gym/fitness facility/indoor sports, fitness/sports retail (potentially combined with above; potential water recreation focus), medical office (outpatient/medical clinic/neighborhood serving)
- 4. Mixed Use.** Examples – retail and housing mixed use, hybrid businesses (can include medical office, small retail, apartments).

To be successful, business recruitment will require collaboration between multiple stakeholders – including Essex CDC, Chesapeake Gateway Chamber of Commerce, Baltimore County, and the State of Maryland – to coordinate around marketing, grants, incentives, and other resources.

Strategies

The following strategies lay the groundwork for business retention and recruitment activities.

Strategy Snapshot

Timeline	Strategy
<p>Phase I:</p> <p>Set the stage for retention and recruitment efforts (Year 1-2)</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Invest in a <u>customer relationship management tool</u> to support a BRE program and property inventory.2. Share <u>publicly available resources</u> for current and prospective business owners.3. Pursue <u>public-private partnerships</u> to redevelop sites and advance future business retention and recruitment.
<p>Phase II:</p> <p>Launch business programs and marketing initiatives (Year 2-3)</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none">4. Assemble a <u>Business Retention & Expansion (BRE) program</u>.5. Prepare a <u>recruitment campaign</u> to attract businesses in target industries.6. Develop a <u>brand and placemaking</u> effort to showcase The Boulevard's food scene.7. Solicit <u>development proposals from private sector developers</u> for a mixed-use project at the Park & Ride site.
<p>Phase III:</p> <p>Implement business recruitment campaign, food hub, and mixed-use development project (Year 3+)</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none">8. Partner with Baltimore County to launch a <u>targeted business recruitment campaign</u>.9. Leverage <u>local media</u> to spotlight the Essex business community.10. Formalize a <u>food hub, culinary incubator, and shared commercial kitchen</u>.

Strategy Snapshot by Phase

Timeline	Strategy
<p>Phase I:</p> <p>Set the stage for retention and recruitment efforts (Year 1-2)</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Invest in a <u>customer relationship management tool</u> to support a BRE program and property inventory.<ol style="list-style-type: none">a) Capture all businesses, contacts, and outreach activity for the Essex Development Initiative.b) Develop a small business list to be efficient and strategic with outreach.c) Create and maintain a commercial space inventory to provide a current listing of available commercial spaces and properties along The Boulevard and serve as a primary recruitment tool for engaging desired businesses. 2. Share <u>publicly available resources</u> for current and prospective business owners.<ol style="list-style-type: none">a) Create an inventory of state and local business incentives and grant programs to support retail and food establishments.b) Create a calendar that consolidates in-person and virtual business service events in one place to expand technical assistance to current and prospective business owners in Essex.c) Develop a comprehensive packet that consolidates resources for business owners. Make this available in digital and print form. 3. Pursue <u>public-private partnerships</u> to redevelop sites and advance future business retention and recruitment.<ol style="list-style-type: none">a) Articulate a vision for a food hub to guide retention and expansion efforts for food establishments along The Boulevard.b) Engage County leadership to demonstrate the importance of property development and support, particularly around a mixed-use development at the Park & Ride site.c) Prepare a Feasibility Study for a mixed-use development of the Park & Ride site and, if appropriate, a culinary incubator with shared commercial kitchen space. The study can include considerations such as an overlay district and County regulations.d) Assess feasibility of creating new County incentive programs to support The Boulevard's commercial property owners and restaurants.

Strategy Snapshot by Phase

Timeline	Strategy
<p>Phase II:</p> <p>Launch business programs and marketing initiatives (Year 2-3)</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none">4. Assemble a <u>Business Retention & Expansion (BRE) program</u>.<ol style="list-style-type: none">a) Locate BRE team at a site on or near The Boulevard to make technical assistance services more accessible to current and potential business owners.b) Formalize an engagement process with The Boulevard’s businesses to connect more owners with technical assistance, grants, and other resources. 5. Prepare a <u>recruitment campaign</u> to attract businesses in target industries.<ol style="list-style-type: none">a) Launch grants, incentives, and/or other County and State programs to commercial property owners and businesses to incentivize opening or expanding businesses in Essex. See Phase 1 Strategy 3d for recommended programs.b) Create a Recruitment Information Package with print and digital marketing collateral. 6. Develop a <u>brand and placemaking effort</u> to showcase The Boulevard’s food scene.<ol style="list-style-type: none">a) Plan an annual food-related event to help brand The Boulevard as a unique dining destination for global cuisine and familiarize eventgoers with the existing restaurant businesses.b) Designate places for outdoor dining and food trucks clustered near other food establishments to shift The Boulevard to a dining destination.c) Pilot food and retail pop-ups at the food hub site confirmed in Phase I to build awareness of the site and gauge interest in demand for a commercial kitchen. 7. Solicit <u>development proposals from private sector developers</u> for a mixed-use project at the Park & Ride site.<ol style="list-style-type: none">a) Support the County with information about The Boulevard as it undertakes a RFEI/RFP process for the Park & Ride site.b) Negotiate and agree on a public-private partnership arrangement with the desired developer for the site.

Strategy Snapshot by Phase

Timeline	Strategy
<p>Phase III:</p> <p>Implement business recruitment campaign, food hub, and mixed-use development project (Year 3+)</p>	<p>8. Partner with Baltimore County to launch a <u>targeted business recruitment campaign</u>.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">a) Create targeted social media advertising campaigns to reach businesses and decisionmakers in target industries.b) Launch a mail campaign to target existing, independently-owned restaurants looking to expand to The Boulevard.c) Attend food and restaurant-related conferences and trade shows to build restaurant recruitment and expansion capacity and connect with new businesses. <p>9. Leverage <u>media</u> to spotlight the Essex business community.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">a) Identify key local media outlets to increase community awareness about Essex and The Boulevard.b) Identify digital marketing channels to enhance online presence of Essex businesses.c) Create or enhance an Essex CDC website with content to parallel media activities and capture interested viewers. <p>10. Formalize a <u>food hub, culinary incubator, and shared commercial kitchen</u>.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">a) Invest in physical and technological infrastructure at the culinary incubator and shared commercial kitchen.b) Identify additional partnerships to attract businesses looking to expand food and retail operations.

Phase I:

Set the stage for
retention and
recruitment
efforts

Year 1-2

Effective business retention and recruitment efforts demand a thorough comprehension of market characteristics, emerging local trends, the development environment, and the overall business landscape within the community. Phase I establishes this baseline understanding for CDC. This phase also focuses on cementing relationships with community partners and building on the momentum from the retail market analysis and planning process. This is an opportune time to amplify business service delivery, business recruitment, and site development; and jumpstart conversations with property owners to understand site feasibility and next steps for redevelopment.

Strategies

1. Invest in a customer relationship management tool to support a BRE program and property inventory.
2. Share publicly available resources for current and prospective business owners.
3. Pursue public-private partnerships to redevelop sites and advance future business retention and recruitment.

1. Invest in a customer relationship management tool to support a BRE program and property inventory.

a) **Capture all businesses, contacts, and outreach activity** for the Essex Development Initiative.

Using a CRM tool (e.g., Salesforce, Microsoft Dynamics), begin capturing conversations with new and prospective businesses along The Boulevard and relevant partners across Baltimore County. The CRM should allow data storage, analysis, and action planning. Communication capabilities, such as email distribution and online forms, are also beneficial to support the needs of the program.

b) **Develop a small business list** to be efficient and strategic with outreach.

Using the list developed for this project as a starting point, build a comprehensive list of businesses that are located along The Boulevard. Work with partners like the County and Chamber to assemble as much information as possible from existing sources, such as existing email lists, permitting/licensing, etc. Assemble the data and clean the existing dataset into one master list. Keep this business list updated in the CRM and aim to connect with 20 businesses about business retention in Year 1.

c) **Create and maintain a commercial space inventory** to provide a current listing of available commercial spaces and properties along The Boulevard and serve as a primary recruitment tool for engaging desired businesses.

Collect the following attributes: lease/sale rates, size and condition, photographs, contact information, restaurant suitability (existing build-out of kitchen facilities or potential). Partner with commercial real estate brokers, property managers, and property owners to create the inventory and check it against Baltimore County's data available through CoStar. Consider a public interface for prospective businesses and entrepreneurs to access.

2. Share publicly available resources for current and prospective business owners.

a) **Create an inventory of state and local business incentives and grant programs** to support retail and food establishments.

Capture relevant County and State resources in single, user-friendly place so that is easy to educate current and prospective businesses. This will be foundational information for a Business Retention & Expansion (BRE) program.

- i. Baltimore County Department of Economic & Workforce Development
 - Finance Programs: Advanced Technology Loan Funds; Boost Fund; Building Improvement Loan Program; Tax Exempt Bonds; Waterfront Business Improvement Loan Program
 - Tax Incentives: Commercial Revitalization Program; Enterprise Zones; Maryland Job Creation/More Jobs for Marylanders; Partnership for Workforce Quality
- ii. Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development – Small Business Credit Initiative; Neighborhood BusinessWorks Loan Program
- iii. US Small Business Administration – Microloans

b) **Create a calendar that consolidates in-person and virtual business service events in one place** to expand technical assistance to current and prospective business owners in Essex.

Contact Baltimore County, SBA, community organizations, and higher education partners monthly to collect information on business service events (date, time, registration information, Eventbrite link, etc.). Work with County, SBA, and other partners to secure Spanish translation and interpretation services for events. Spread the calendar far and wide via posters, partner newsletters, cross-post on social media, and QR codes that link to the calendar from other documents.

c) **Develop a comprehensive packet that consolidates resources** for business owners. Make this available in digital and print form.

It will be important to have readily available information about The Boulevard, State and County resources, and the Essex CDC to continue building awareness among local business owners. Making this information consistent across digital and print materials will also help build familiarity with the programs and entities that are here to support businesses.

3. Pursue public-private partnerships to redevelop sites and advance future business retention and recruitment.

- a) **Articulate a vision for a food hub** to guide retention and expansion efforts for food establishments along The Boulevard.

As a physical cluster of food businesses and retailers that fill a local market need, The Boulevard's food hub will also amplify Essex as a dining destination. The food hub can build on The Boulevard's success launching several restaurants and markets offering Latin American food and products, as well as other global cuisines. To confirm the location of the food hub, identify one-to-two target locations that can accommodate several food-based businesses and potentially a commercial kitchen. Work with business owners in the food hub to shape their vision for the site, which might include programming to draw more customers.

- b) **Engage County leadership** to demonstrate the importance of property development and support, particularly around a mixed-use development at the Park & Ride site.

Discuss Essex CDC's vision for a mixed-use development stemming from the strategic planning process. Ideal ground floor tenants will include medical office, gym, café, and other small retail. Determine how this will impact current vehicles at the Park & Ride. Identify which data the County needs to effectively market the opportunity to potential retail tenants and housing developers. As early as possible, confirm a leaseholder of ground floor retail – this might be the Essex CDC or another trusted nonprofit partner who will advocate for community needs once property marketing to developers begins.

- c) **Prepare a Feasibility Study** for a mixed-use development of the Park & Ride site and, if appropriate, a culinary incubator with shared commercial kitchen space.

Partner with the County to host a community input process, such as a design charrette, to identify a feasible redevelopment concept for the Park & Ride site. Engage residents and business owners to create a vision for the site that aligns with market realities and the priority future uses of The Boulevard. Based on feedback from the community input process (e.g., design charrette), articulate a desired vision and development scenario for the site. As part of this study, identify desired community benefits and uses that should be integrated into the development. This can entail community benefits that will enhance the brand and identity of the The Boulevard as a food destination, which may include food-related co-retailing, a culinary incubator, and a shared commercial kitchen. A full feasibility study will then look at market potential, site capacity, design, and financial feasibility of a mixed-use development of the Park & Ride site. As part of this work, also complete a feasibility study for a culinary incubator with shared commercial kitchen if the community input process envisions this for the mixed-use development.

3. Pursue public-private partnerships to redevelop sites and advance future business retention and recruitment.

- d) **Assess feasibility of creating new County incentive programs** to support The Boulevard's commercial property owners and restaurants.

Incentive programs can be a helpful tool to support individuals looking to start a business or expand their business to Essex. Essex CDC and Baltimore County should explore not only how to better leverage current incentive programs, but also ideas to attract businesses to The Boulevard. Recommended programs include:

- Starting a restaurant incentive program to attract restaurateurs to The Boulevard.
- Eliminating registration and licensing costs for startup food establishments along The Boulevard in their first few years.
- Launching a Commercial Property Owner Assistance program that might include grants, low-interest loans, or other resources to support building rehabilitation.

Phase I Strategy Precedents



Food Hub Visioning: One of the goals of Reimagine Rutland was to create an arts, entertainment, and recreation destination in downtown Rutland, VT. Based on data and stakeholder engagement, Camoin recommended incorporating adequate space for outdoor dining uses as part of streetscape and roadway projects, conducting an audit of existing regulations and permitting processes to check for regulatory and administrative burdens for restaurants to expand outdoor dining, and providing space for food trucks.



Feasibility Study: In 2019, The Montgomery County Economic Development Corporation (MCEDC) commissioned Camoin Associates to evaluate the feasibility of a food co-packing facility for these expanding food businesses in Montgomery County. We completed an analysis of Montgomery's food supply chain; an overview of what co-packing is and its various models; a supply and demand analysis to ascertain how much revenue can be generated from such a facility; and a model of a potential facility with examination of operational variables. In addition, we completed a survey from Montgomery County value-added food producers to supplement a statistical need for a future facility. The study concluded that the best fit for Montgomery County would be a small-scale co-packer that caters to small producers of specialty food products.

Phase II:

Launch business
programs and
marketing initiatives

Year 2-3

Phase II translates the information gathering and partnership building from Phase I into action. These include a place-based approach to business service delivery to reach more current and prospective business owners. At the same time, this phase aims to generate awareness of Essex as a great place to visit and start a business. While many objectives in this phase center on business retention, they will help Essex CDC and partners sustain business engagement and lay the groundwork for future business recruitment.

Strategies

4. Assemble a Business Retention & Expansion (BRE) program.
5. Prepare a recruitment campaign to attract businesses in target industries.
6. Develop a brand and placemaking effort to showcase The Boulevard's food scene.
7. Solicit development proposals from private sector developers for a mixed-use project at the Park & Ride site.

4. Assemble a Business Retention & Expansion (BRE) program.

- a) **Locate BRE team at a site on or near The Boulevard** to make technical assistance services more accessible to current and potential business owners.

Designate an Essex-based point person for entrepreneurs, startups, and small businesses interested in navigating the complexities of starting, running, and growing a business. Start with semi-weekly office hours at a County-owned building where Essex community members may already be accessing services. Vary the timing of office hours to accommodate a wider range of community members' schedule. Partner with the Hispanic Chamber to deliver programming for Spanish speakers.

- b) **Formalize an engagement process with The Boulevard's businesses** to connect more owners with technical assistance, grants, and other resources.

In Year 2, administer an annual Business Engagement Survey (approximately 20 questions max) to the full small business list as well as in-person site visits to select businesses. Couple the survey with in-person visits and retain an interpreter for visits with Spanish-speaker owners.

5. Prepare a recruitment campaign to attract businesses in target industries.

- a) **Launch grants, incentives, or other County programs to commercial property owners and businesses** to incentivize opening or expanding businesses in Essex. See Phase 1 Strategy 3d for recommended programs.

Identify a point person for grants and incentives information and run a pilot for new programs. Establish an application process, set eligibility criteria, implement a monitoring and feedback system, and evaluate the programs after Year 1.

- b) **Create a Recruitment Information Package** with print and digital marketing collateral, including:

- i. **Market Profile** - Highlight the positive market characteristics of The Boulevard. The market profile should be a brief piece. It should include household income and spending information, results of the retail market analysis, traffic count information, and other key pieces of information that make the case for locating a business to The Boulevard. The market profile should be geared towards the type of business being targeted (retail, restaurants, entertainment, etc.).
- ii. **Business Profiles** - Highlight the most successful businesses along The Boulevard. Prospective businesses want to know what the existing business mix is and to see that other similar types of businesses are being successful. Focus on providing a few quality examples over quantity, with quotes from existing business owners if possible. Recruit a handful of local business leaders to be "on-call" to meet with prospects and coach these business owners on how to help sell the community as opportunities arise.
- iii. **Space Profiles** - Provide brochures, or "one-sheets" on available commercial spaces that are suited to target businesses. Involve the property manager or property owner in this process. Information for space profiles can be pulled from the commercial space inventory (discussed separately).
- iv. **Essex Maps** – Create maps for prospects that may be unfamiliar with Essex. Include both a reference map and a map showing The Boulevard's trade area.
- v. **Area Vision and Future Projects** – As Essex CDC solidifies project plans for The Boulevard, include them in marketing collateral to create a buzz within and outside of the community. Communicate the vision for The Boulevard as a community-informed, transformative process that will reinvigorate Eastern Baltimore County and offer expanded options for visitors, especially those who dock boats in Essex over the summer.
- vi. **Essex CDC website or landing page** – Create an online hub of BRE resources to mirror on-the-ground BRE efforts (see Strategies 2 and 4). Incorporate keyword research and SEO optimization around target industries once a website or landing page is available for marketing. Partner with business service providers (e.g., US SBA) to host and advertise webinars and events that provide technical assistance to businesses.

6. Develop a brand and placemaking effort to showcase The Boulevard's food scene.

- a) **Plan an annual food-related event** to help brand The Boulevard as a unique dining destination for global cuisine and familiarize eventgoers with the existing restaurant businesses.

Confirm a site for the event and invite local restaurateurs and home-based caterers, bakers, and chefs to participate. Ideally, the event will take place during boating season to attract an optimal number of attendees and showcase food establishments to out-of-town visitors who may be seeking new places to eat. Essex CDC can work with local marinas and waterfront businesses to advertise the event.

- b) **Designate places for outdoor dining and food trucks clustered near other food establishments** to shift The Boulevard to a dining destination.

Partner with Baltimore County to approve outdoor dining at or near the target food hub and other locations with available pavement or sidewalk space. Essex CDC may begin with a one-off event or event series to test proof of concept for outdoor and sidewalk dining. Consider launching a public art visioning competition for local artists and art departments to create visual interest around outdoor dining spaces and build the community's identity as a food hub.

- c) **Pilot food and retail pop-ups at the food hub site confirmed in Phase I** to build awareness of the site and gauge interest in demand for a commercial kitchen.

Talk with County and owners of vacant properties or underutilized parking lots about opportunities for pop-ups (short-term business openings at temporary locations). Discuss Essex CDC's vision for a food hub stemming from the strategic planning process. While pop-up locations along The Boulevard are ideal, another option is to partner with local marinas and waterfront businesses during busy summer months to more easily connect entrepreneurs to new customers and increase consumer spending with Essex-based businesses.

7. Solicit development proposals from private sector developers for a mixed-use project at the Park & Ride Site.

a) **Support the County as it undertakes a RFEI/RFP process for the Park & Ride site.**

The feasibility study completed in Phase 1 (see Strategy 3c) will identify a desired vision and development scenario for the property. The County should use this vision as the foundation for a Request for Expressions of Interest (RFEI) and Request for Proposals (RFP) process to solicit interest from private developers.

An initial RFEI process will allow the County to explore developer interest in the site, identify potential challenges or deterrents to private involvement, and provide an opportunity to refine the development vision for the property if needed. By doing this process first, the County will be offering a less intensive process for developers to provide input and interest prior to an RFP process that involves a full bid process, including drawings, financials, extensive qualifications, and other materials. The RFP should clearly articulate the county's goals for the site as well as available incentives available to support development.

As part of the process, the County should consider a developer summit where the County's vision is presented to the development community along the due diligence research and analysis from the feasibility study. Site tours should also be provided to the extent possible. Secure ground floor tenants for the mixed-use development during this phase as well.

b) **Negotiate and agree on a public-private partnership arrangement with desired developer.**

The County should consider the disposition of the property below market value to support development feasibility and secure desired public amenities and services. For example, in exchange for a reduced land cost, the developer could be required to reserve a portion of first-floor space for a public use to support revitalization such as incubator space or co-retailing space.

Phase II Strategy Precedents



MacKenzie Commercial Real Estate | Village Center at Stadium Place | Baltimore, MD

Mixed-Use Development: Developed through a partnership between Commercial Development and Investments, LLC and the Govans Ecumenical Development Corp (GEDCO), Village Center at Stadium Place in Baltimore City is a mixed-use office and retail property with 70 age-restricted apartments on the upper levels. With 30,000 sf of ground floor retail space, it is part of a broader master plan for Stadium Place Campus on the ground of the former Memorial Stadium. Current ground floor tenants include a Dunkin Donuts and MedStar Health Physical Therapy office. The property line extends to the curb with parking behind the building, creating a pedestrian friendly experience for residents, customers, and passersby.



City of Nampa, Office of Economic Development | Downtown Nampa Restaurant Incentive Program | Nampa, ID

Restaurant Incentive: The Nampa Development Corporation's Restaurant Incentive Program aims to create jobs, attract new food-related establishments, and advance economic growth in downtown Nampa, ID. Applicants receive incentives on a first-come-first-served basis until funds are depleted, and they are also eligible for expedited plan review which is completed in 21 days. Nampa Development Corporation considers projects submitted for any one of three designated locations.

Phase III:

Implement business
recruitment
campaign, food hub,
and mixed-use
development project

Year 3+

Phase III is the culmination of the first two phases. When Essex CDC successfully moves through Phases I and II, Phase III is the time to break ground on developments and formalize the food hub and commercial kitchen. This phase also entails becoming more assertive with business recruitment through proactive outreach to prospects and media outlets that showcase Essex and The Boulevard's success.

Strategies

8. Partner with Baltimore County to launch a targeted business recruitment campaign.
9. Leverage local media to spotlight the Essex business community.
10. Formalize a food hub, culinary incubator, and shared commercial kitchen.

8. Partner with Baltimore County to launch a targeted business recruitment campaign.

- a) **Create targeted social media advertising campaigns** to reach businesses and decisionmakers in target industries.

Utilize demographic targeting options to tailor campaigns specifically for decision-makers and key stakeholders within restaurants, medical facilities, and fitness/wellness businesses. Consider a campaign through LinkedIn Sales Navigator, an online platform that can create targeted outreach lists based on industry and geographic parameters. Make the Recruitment Information Package accessible online. Highlight Essex's unique advantages and relevant Baltimore County economic incentives.

- b) **Launch a mail campaign** to target existing, independently-owned restaurants looking to expand to The Boulevard.

Highlight sites with robust infrastructure that can support the demands of food-related businesses. Share details on commercial real estate costs and utility expenses, which will factor into an owner's decision to expand the business. Offer insights into local regulations, licensing processes, and zoning laws. Streamlining these processes and providing guidance on compliance requirements can make the location more attractive to restaurants looking to expand.

- c) **Attend food and restaurant-related conferences and trade shows** to build restaurant recruitment and expansion capacity and connect with new businesses.

Attend local, regional, and national events as a forum to highlight Essex, engage with potential restaurant owners and franchisees, and learn what other organizations and communities are implementing around business retention, recruitment, and placemaking. Example events include the Mid-Atlantic Food, Beverage & Lodging Expo, and the National Restaurant Association Show).

9. Leverage local media to spotlight the Essex business community.

a) **Identify key local media outlets** to increase community awareness about Essex and The Boulevard.

Research and identify local newspapers, magazines, television stations, and online media outlets with a significant reach and influence within the Chesapeake region. Build relationships with journalists, editors, and producers who cover business and economic development beats. Craft compelling story pitches that highlight success stories within the targeted industries—restaurants, medical facilities, and gyms/physical fitness businesses. Emphasize the positive impact of these businesses on the local economy and community. Tailor the pitches to align with the interests of each media outlet. Offer exclusive access and interviews - provide local media outlets with exclusive access to key events, groundbreaking ceremonies, and interviews with influential figures involved in economic development. Exclusive content creates a sense of importance and makes the media outlets more inclined to cover and promote Essex's initiatives.

b) **Identify digital marketing channels** to enhance online presence of Essex businesses.

Essex CDC can work with target industry publications, newsletters, and online magazines to create a cohesive digital presence and highlight both businesses and the programs designed to support them. Example publications can include Baltimore Magazine, Charm City Table, and Maryland Sip and Savour.

c) **Create or enhance an Essex CDC website with content** to parallel media activities and capture interested viewers.

Develop a content calendar outlining the schedule for featuring industry-specific success stories. This ensures a consistent flow of positive narratives and maintains the attention of the local audience. Enhance storytelling by incorporating multimedia elements such as high-quality images, videos, and infographics. Write Community Impact Stories to highlight the impact of Essex CDC efforts on the local community. Share stories of job creation, community engagement initiatives supported by businesses, and the overall improvement in quality of life.

10. Formalize a food hub, culinary incubator, and shared commercial kitchen.

a) **Invest in physical and technological infrastructure** at the culinary incubator and shared commercial kitchen.

After assessing the feasibility of a commercial kitchen and confirming a site for the food hub, work with the County to ensure that the commercial kitchen is connected to utilities. Once the infrastructure is in place (e.g., commercial-grade kitchen equipment), set up a booking and scheduling system to help food businesses coordinate use of the kitchen. This can be automated system online or through a staff member.

b) **Identify additional partnerships** to attract businesses looking to expand food and retail operations.

Partner with the Community College of Baltimore County's Center for Business Innovation, local culinary programs, and catering businesses to attract food and retail startups, connect with qualified staff and volunteers, and offer training to new and prospective business owners. Work with local waterfront business to sell products from entrepreneurs onsite, especially during the busy summer season, to grow visitors' awareness of local food and retail destinations.

Phase III Strategy Precedents



B-More Kitchen | Baltimore, MD

Shared Commercial Kitchen: B-More Kitchen is a 10,000 sf commercial kitchen located in Baltimore City that offers equipment, prep and storage areas, and shared office space for food entrepreneurs. Once a business is accepted as a member, entrepreneurs can reserve spots on the kitchen's website. In addition to space, B-More kitchen provides resources for entrepreneurs looking to grow their businesses.



*Community College of Baltimore County
Center for Business Innovation | The
Collective | Owings Mills, MD*

Shared Retail Space: Founded by the Community College of Baltimore County's (CCBC's) Center for Business Innovation, The Collective offers both a meeting space and a shop for locally made retail goods. With funding from CCBC and the Ratcliffe Foundation, small businesses can apply to sell products and services at The Collective and, if accepted, receive a one-year contract with the option to renew.