

2015 LEGISLATIVE AGENDA

Advancing economic
prosperity as the Lynchburg
region's voice of business.



2015 Memorial Avenue ★ Lynchburg, VA 24501
Fax: (434) 522-9592 ★ Phone: (434) 845-5966
info@lynchburgchamber.org
www.lynchburgchamber.org

The Lynchburg Regional Chamber of Commerce (LRCC) works as a unified voice on issues that affect the business community. As a guiding principle, LRCC generally supports the public policies of the City of Lynchburg, Virginia West, the Virginia Chamber of Commerce, and the US Chamber of Commerce. Contained in this document are our legislative priorities for the 2015 Session with input from our members and regional stakeholders.

Sound Fiscal Practice

The Lynchburg Regional Chamber of Commerce believes that a guiding principle of sound governmental fiscal practice must be to structure governmental services to available resources. Sound fiscal practice also requires that fiscal balance be achieved by controlling non-essential spending before increasing tax rates or adding additional taxes and sources of revenue as outlined in our list of legislative priorities. Comprehensive tax reform that is equitable and broad-based fosters a favorable business climate, encourages economic development, and promotes prosperity for all Virginians. The LRCC believes that any state mandate on localities must be fully funded.

The Chamber supports:

- The retention of Virginia's AAA financial bond rating.

The Chamber opposes:

- Any policies that shift the tax burden onto the business community.

Transportation

The Lynchburg Regional Chamber of Commerce supports a transportation plan which assures that proceeds of the plan are dispersed equitably to all parts of the Commonwealth and that adhere to the intentions of the bi-partisan H.B. 2 prioritization process allowing for greater local determination of need. The LRCC encourages State leadership (General Assembly, Executive Branch and the Commonwealth Transportation Board) to protect current highway districts and current levels of service of air and rail. Further, we stand ready to work with policy makers on opportunities to expand transportation infrastructure that will spur economic growth, especially in rural areas of the Commonwealth.

The Chamber supports:

- The reauthorization of Federal Surface Transportation programs past the current authorization which ends on May 31, 2015.
- The staffing of the Lynchburg Region Transportation Group comprised of business, government and regional stakeholders and support its position paper which summarizes regional surface transportation priorities.
- Continued lobbying for an equitable solution to problems and the funding of a long term solution for US29 around Charlottesville as this section of US29 is a highway of national significance.
- The efforts of the TransDominion Express for the continuation of the Northeast and Crescent Amtrak services, an additional afternoon option, as well as the completion of a new passenger rail service to Roanoke and future funding to extend the service on to Bristol and into Tennessee.
- Continued funding and support of the Commonwealth Airport Fund and the Aviation Special Fund to help ensure the future safety, efficiency and growth of Lynchburg Regional Airport. Through these programs, Lynchburg Regional Airport is better able to maintain its standing as the region's premiere full-service airport, while fulfilling its role as a vital contributor to the local economy and the various economic benefits that entails. In addition, the Chamber encourages General Assembly support of greater flexibility in utilizing these various Commonwealth aviation programs to guarantee reliable, consistent funding for contract air traffic control services at Lynchburg Regional Airport in the event of federal abandonment of this critical aviation safety function.
- Public transit priorities of the Greater Lynchburg Transit Company (GLTC) as an important component of the area's overall transportation system. The Chamber supports increasing transit funding at all levels in order to expand transit services given the fragile economic state of travel and the need to support sustainable development.

Economic Vitality

The Lynchburg Regional Chamber of Commerce is strongly committed to regional efforts to enhance and support our business community. We advocate for programs which encourage investments in technology infrastructure, support regional economic development planning, promote regional workforce training, or otherwise promote cooperative regional efforts to maintain or attract businesses that are considered essential for the continued future economic development of our region.

The Lynchburg Regional Chamber urges Congress to look for an alternative to the Marketplace Fairness Act which considers factors which bring businesses on equal footing without the creation of new taxes, onerous compliance requirements, or regulation without representation. Congress should create solutions that require states to bear more of the administrative burden and continue to limit a state's regulatory reach to businesses that are located in the state and thus have recourse at the ballot box to protest unfair or overly-burdensome regulations. We support pro-business policies that nourish free enterprise and provide opportunity for all our member businesses to thrive and contribute to commerce and economic prosperity and request that Congress find an equitable solution to ensure fairness and the ability for ALL businesses to thrive in the US Economy.

The Chamber supports:

- The continuance of Virginia's Right to Work laws.
- Job creation as a priority for the state. National Government and our defense installations in the "crescent" portion of the state have an advantage in job creation. We need to continue to foster the realization that job creation needs to be distributed in a more balanced manner to include all areas of Virginia.
- Sustained funding and support for technology-based economic development initiatives to promote continued growth and diversification of the region's economy specifically, funding for the workforce development programs of Central Virginia Community College and community college satellite facilities. Additional support for Science, Technology, Engineering and Math Education (STEM) subjects in K-12 public schools may be achieved by engaging key stakeholders including business leaders in the proposal, implementation, and funding for programs and initiatives.
- Tourism efforts and further support of increased and ongoing funding of the Virginia Tourism Corporation (VTC) and its national and international marketing efforts on behalf of Virginia and its localities. We acknowledge the importance of Virginia's agri-tourism and film industry as growing drivers of visitation to the Commonwealth and offer our support to further their endeavors. We also offer support to the legislative and advocacy efforts of the Virginia Chamber of Commerce, the Virginia Hospitality and Travel Association; and the Virginia Association of Convention and Visitors Bureau as they work together to move this economically vital industry forward here in Virginia.
- The operation of effective enterprise zones within Lynchburg and, if eligible, surrounding counties.

Education and Workforce Development

The Lynchburg Regional Chamber of Commerce recognizes that the quality of the region's workforce and economic well-being largely depends on the effective and efficient education of primary, secondary, and higher education students as well as the maintenance of an exemplary public education system and private education options. Our region must maintain and develop new and innovative workforce development concepts to prepare local unemployed/underemployed citizens for job opportunities associated with the knowledge economy.

The Chamber supports:

- Increased funding for the Virginia Tuition Assistance Grant (TAG) program to maintain the current award amount. Virginia students attending private, nonprofit institutions of higher education in Virginia currently receive a \$3,100 TAG award (undergraduate students) and \$1,550 TAG award (graduate students in health professions programs). The combination of these grants for the four area private colleges and universities totaled \$20 million last year for the 7,300 TAG recipients who attend these colleges. These funds have a significant economic impact on our region – over 9000 people (November 2014 data) are employed at Liberty University, Lynchburg College, Randolph College and Sweet Briar College. In addition, approximately 2,400 families living in the Lynchburg region have students receiving a TAG award at a Virginia private college.
- The Virginia Community College System's "PRODUCED in Virginia" education effort to aid Virginia's community colleges, that include Central Virginia Community College as well as eight other colleges.
- Unemployment Compensation with the purpose of providing adequate and temporary financial assistance to employees who become unemployed through no fault of their own. We oppose benefits to workers, who through their own actions or choices become unemployed. This includes employee initiated lockout or an employee strike.

The Chamber opposes:

- Converting the Virginia Tuition Assistance Grant from a benefit for all Virginia's students to only those with a particular level of financial need.
- State-mandated minimum wage laws (under guise of any name), which surpass the federally mandated rate.

Healthcare

The Lynchburg Regional Chamber of Commerce supports efforts to reduce healthcare costs, including pooling to increase buying strength, medical savings accounts, flexible spending accounts, and other affordable means. The Chamber also supports tax incentives and other ways to encourage employers to engage in wellness programs.

The Chamber opposes:

- Mandated Costs: Mandated percentage of healthcare costs to be paid by businesses for their employees.
- Mandates that dictate that insurance products include certain benefits.

Energy

The Lynchburg Regional Chamber of Commerce supports the development of cost-effective, alternative, and renewable energy sources while keeping Virginia competitive in the energy market. The Chamber further supports the expansion of nuclear energy, the continued development of clean coal technology, and the exploration for oil and natural gas off of Virginia's coast.

Environmental Stewardship

The Lynchburg Regional Chamber of Commerce encourages responsible use of regional environmental assets in order to provide a better community for the area's citizens.

The Chamber supports:

Continued funding for Water Quality Improvement Fund (WQIF) grants. WQIF funding improves the qualities of our streams and rivers by upgrading Wastewater Treatment Plants (WTPs). Upgraded WTPs have more capacity to support the creation or expansion of manufacturing and water dependent businesses while protecting the health of the Chesapeake Bay.

Local Government

The Lynchburg Regional Chamber understands that local governments face challenges as the 2015 session of the Virginia General Assembly convenes.

The Chamber supports:

- Amherst County's desire to find an alternative use for the Central Virginia Training Center and the surrounding parcel that would spur economic growth for the region.
- The following City of Lynchburg Legislative Agenda items:
 - Educational Funding: Jobs are the key to economic recovery and adequate education is essential for preparing the current and future work force. The State should fully fund the Standards of Quality (SOQ), including support staff costs and categorical incentive funds for At-Risk students and restore funding from cuts to education over the last biennium. The state has a constitutional duty to meet its education funding obligations and should refrain from changes in methodology and the division of financial responsibility that result in a further shift of funding responsibility from the state to localities. These shifts do not change what it actually costs to provide education but simply transfer additional costs to local governments, and ultimately to the local real estate tax base.
 - Odd Fellows Road Funding: The City is seeking additional State funding to provide access, including pedestrian facilities, to the new interchange that will be constructed on Route 460/29 at Odd Fellows Road. Without improvements to the intersection of Odd Fellows Road and Mayflower Drive and to Odd Fellows Road from the Lynchburg Expressway (Rt. 29 Business) to the interchange, access to the new interchange will be constricted, limiting the effectiveness of that facility.
 - Economic Development: Provide \$2 million for the Virginia Brownfield Redevelopment Assistance Fund, to continue the redevelopment of brownfield sites. (land previously used for industrial purposes or some commercial uses).
 - Enterprise Zones Funding: Support the restoration of funding for this important economic development grant program. Due to the state budget shortfall, \$2 million per year was cut from this successful business development program which assists distressed communities. The Department of Housing and Community Development's (DHCD) latest report for grant year 2013 (before the \$2 million reduction) showed that a proration of approximately 10% was required for businesses participating in the program. This means that businesses counting on a return on their investment were shorted 10% of what they were promised. Such shortages reduce the incentive power of the program. Distressed communities rely on Enterprise Zones as a tool for business attraction and redevelopment in their locales.
 - Taxes on Local Services: Oppose the imposition of a state fee, tax or surcharge on water, sewer, and solid waste or on any other local government funds or services.
 - TransDominion Express: Support the extension of passenger rail service from Lynchburg to Roanoke as part of the TransDominion Express.

Note: The Lynchburg Regional Chamber of Commerce thanks our Legislative Affairs Committee for their on-going lobbying efforts and contribution to the legislative process.