

LOUDOUN COUNTY CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

2009 Public Policy Positions

The Loudoun County Chamber of Commerce is committed to serving as the advocate and “voice of business” on behalf of its more than 1,200 members on issues that impact businesses in the County. The Chamber’s positions are based on the following principles that we believe are critical to continue Loudoun County’s economic success and the quality of life our residents enjoy and businesses demand:

- It is imperative that state and local laws, regulations and tax policy be considered in a way that recognizes the importance of maintaining a strong, pro-business environment that enhances the County’s economic competitiveness, cultivates growth in all segments of our economy, and ensures adequate access to critical business resources.*
- It is our view that the County’s commercial tax base should be grown through expanded economic development, not through increasing taxes on existing businesses.*
- Critical infrastructure investment must be maintained and expanded to meet our growing needs, particularly in the areas of K-12 education, higher education and workforce development, transportation, technology, and energy.*
- A greater percentage of the revenue generated by Loudoun County should remain in Loudoun County. It is important that state and local government be responsive to the needs of the citizens and businesses, and accountable for the funds entrusted to their stewardship.*
- While the Chamber recognizes the importance of large- and mid-sized businesses, the Chamber believes that small businesses and sole proprietors are essential to Loudoun County’s continued prosperity and must have access to the resources that are necessary for their success, including affordable healthcare and insurance, and technology infrastructure.*

The following outlines the Chamber’s specific public policy positions on the priority issues of its members.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND TOURISM

The Loudoun County Chamber supports making Loudoun County highly competitive in the global marketplace through aggressively promoting the retention and expansion of existing businesses, and by creating an environment that is conducive to the formation and attraction of new ones, thus assuring the County’s continued prosperity. The Chamber supports increased public and private economic development efforts focused on encouraging the growth of appropriate, quality businesses in the County in order to increase the current ratio of the County’s commercial tax base relative to the residential tax base.

To foster successful economic development, the Chamber strongly recommends that adequate land areas be designated and carefully reserved to meet the long-term needs of future business development, including developing the full potential of transit station areas. The Chamber also believes that top priority should continue to be given to reviewing and revising, as appropriate, the processes by which development plans, building permit applications, and other related government processes impacting businesses are considered and evaluated, as well as the associated fees that are assessed. Existing codes and procedural requirements that do not contribute to meaningful improvement of the application or proposal under consideration must be streamlined or completely eliminated where appropriate, and fees assessed should be consistent with the actual cost to the County to facilitate the process. The Chamber specifically supports efforts to encourage business growth through streamlining the development review process, annual updates to the zoning ordinance, regular updates the community’s comprehensive plan and incentives for energy efficiency. It is among our highest priorities that changes be made to the sign ordinance to ensure it is competitive and business-friendly.

The Chamber believes Loudoun County should invest additional financial and personnel resources to fund a more aggressive and comprehensive national and international marketing program that leverages the County’s strongest economic assets, including industry sectors where Loudoun possesses a clear competitive advantage. To promote and properly evaluate the effectiveness of the County’s economic development program, the Loudoun County Chamber supports the development and implementation of measurable performance goals and metrics that ensure the appropriate level of accountability for the County’s elected leaders and professional staff.

Because of the unique and invaluable contributions that small businesses offer Loudoun’s economic prosperity, the Chamber strongly supports increased state and federal funding for the Loudoun Small Business Development Center, while maintaining the financial support currently offered by Loudoun County and the Town of Leesburg.

To ensure that Loudoun County's tremendous potential is not diminished, the Chamber opposes arbitrary efforts to limit or suspend growth. The Chamber believes that elected officials must be mindful that excessive and inconsistent restrictions placed on new business development or expansion that do not contribute materially to improving the quality and effectiveness of that development send a negative signal to prospective businesses considering our County as a place to locate and grow. The Chamber believes it is critical that commitments made in the course of any economic development negotiations always be fully honored by both government and the business.

Tourism: The Loudoun County Chamber recognizes the quality of life and economic benefits that a thriving tourism destination contributes to Loudoun County. The Chamber also strongly believes that visitors of all types – business, leisure and groups – should be encouraged to visit Loudoun and be greeted warmly by businesses and residents alike.

Because of the economic advantages offered by a robust visitor and conference industry, from both business and leisure travel, the Chamber supports an integrated, well funded approach to marketing Loudoun as a visitor destination. We believe the County's destination marketing and funding strategy must place high priority on those activities that generate the most tax revenue, while creating economic opportunities for County businesses in the visitor and conference industry.

In addition, the Chamber supports inclusion of high value business sectors and corridors beyond those traditionally associated with tourism in the County's destination marketing strategy. These would include, but not be limited to, educational facilities like universities or training centers that attract large meetings and groups. In addition, the Chamber recommends that the County's strategy target corporate travel decision makers in order to generate more room nights from the County's high value business sectors.

Given the opportunities to leverage Loudoun's unique tourism assets to benefit business expansion, while generating more leisure trips from the business travel market, the Chamber advocates that the County adopts a more integrated approach to economic development and its visitor/conference marketing that is also driven by measurable performance goals and metrics that ensure the appropriate level of accountability.

The Chamber also supports efforts to ensure regulations, taxes and zoning ordinances enable tourism to prosper and to distinguish Loudoun County as a preferred destination.

TAX AND REVENUE POLICY

At the local level, the Loudoun County Chamber supports sound taxation policies that effectively balance the County's ability to finance the vital government services and operations that businesses and residents require, with the need to maintain a strong, pro-business environment that enhances the County's economic competitiveness.

To serve this goal, the Chamber strongly supports a comprehensive taxation strategy that carefully considers all available revenue options, and then implements the appropriate options, at the appropriate levels, to meet the County's resource needs. This comprehensive taxation strategy must also be accompanied by a stringent, business-like analysis of all County programs and service levels, to effectively align the investment of limited business and residential taxpayer resources with those government operations that serve the most vital interests of the County.

In addition, we urge that all tax policies be assessed against the potential impact on Loudoun's economic competitiveness and quality of life, not just on the revenues that are anticipated. The Chamber will oppose those tax policies, both existing and proposed, that will have a demonstrably adverse impact on net business and job growth.

The Chamber also strongly urges County leaders to actively engage the Chamber and other business leaders in every stage of consideration and development of new tax and revenue policies that impact the business climate in Loudoun County.

At the state level, the Loudoun County Chamber supports the substantive reform of the Virginia's tax and revenue system to more closely align the source of the Commonwealth's tax revenues with the spending priorities of state and local government. For the past decade, northern Virginia has experienced unparalleled economic prosperity, which has generated increasingly higher income tax revenues for the state government. Meanwhile, northern Virginia's local governments have become increasingly dependent upon local property tax revenues to fund schools, public safety, human services and even transportation improvements. The Chamber believes high growth areas, like Loudoun County, should have greater access to the income tax revenue generated by its citizens to support the increased costs associated with that growth, such as building new schools and roads, and paying the salaries of teachers and public safety personnel.

The Chamber believes the state must invest in essential infrastructure that is critical to the economic health of the revenue-producing regions in Virginia in order to continue the success in these regions that benefits the entire Commonwealth. We specifically support rebate of a percentage of the state individual income tax back to the locality from which it was collected to help address this issue. The Chamber encourages business-friendly tax policy that considers policies in other states, to ensure Virginia businesses can remain competitive in national and international markets. The Chamber encourages full consideration of the overall economic impact of a business or industry's presence in Virginia prior to awarding or removing any business sales tax exemption, as well as before considering any other significant change to business tax policy.

INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENT

The Loudoun County Chamber supports managed, thoughtful growth in the County. This includes support for well planned commercial growth and development that will bring additional resources to the County to help address the infrastructure challenges we face. The Chamber supports use of public-private partnerships and other creative initiatives to encourage the availability of resources to invest in critical infrastructure, including schools, transportation, technology, parks and recreational facilities, and public safety, to meet the needs of today's Loudoun County businesses and residents. The Chamber also supports a consistent dialogue and improved coordination between the County and Loudoun's towns on development and infrastructure issues.

Transportation: The Loudoun County Chamber assigns top priority to securing new, sustainable regional and statewide transportation funding. To that end, restoring regional funding (without prejudice) and addressing the Commonwealth's growing statewide maintenance deficit should be a major priority of the 2009 General Assembly session. Responsibility for enacting new regional funding rests with the General Assembly, not local governments.

To better direct transportation allocations, the Chamber supports development of a performance-based statewide transportation plan focused on existing and new corridors of statewide and regional significance. Such a plan should include a short list of strategic priorities deemed most essential to the Commonwealth's long-term prosperity, safety, security and quality of life.

The Chamber supports continued reforms within the Virginia Department of Transportation and use of public private partnerships, but believes that such initiatives are no substitute for new funding required to address the growing backlog of unfunded priorities.

At the local/regional level, the Loudoun County Chamber supports construction of a comprehensive transportation grid. The Chamber urges the Northern Virginia Transportation Authority to be regional in its approach above all else, to establish regional priorities based upon performance-based criteria and to select Technical Advisory Committee members with strong professional credentials and regional perspectives. The Chamber further urges the Authority to leverage and invest new local, regional and state revenues in regional solutions that move the most people in the most cost-effective manner. The Chamber supports use of debt financing at the state, regional and local levels, accompanied by a dedicated revenue source for debt service, as an important tool to invest in transportation infrastructure.

The Chamber also supports more efficient use of current transportation dollars, including a re-examination of the state transportation allocation formula to provide for more emphasis on population, vehicle miles of travel and other congestion standards that would net a more equitable distribution of money for our region. The Chamber opposes using revenue from the Transportation Trust Fund for non-transportation purposes.

In terms of specific projects, the Loudoun County Chamber supports:

- Completion of Route 28 Phase 3 and 4 of Route 28 to convert this facility into an eight-lane limited access freeway between I-66 and Route 7;
- Restoration of the Western Transportation Corridor to the County's Comprehensive Plan and completion of the Draft Environmental Impact Study;
- Connection of the re-located Route 659 with the extension of the Route 234 Bypass (Prince William County Parkway) north of I-66;
- Upgrading the Route 606 and Route 50 corridors around Dulles Airport, completing a high capacity "Dulles Loop;"
- Expansion of Route 50, and improvements to the collector road network and interchanges in Dulles South area;
- Improving the road network around the Town of Leesburg, including completion of the Battlefield Parkway;
- Improving and re-locating portions of U.S. Route 15 between Leesburg and Point of Rocks and establishing a new location for the future replacement of the Point of Rocks Bridge;

- Improving and re-locating portions of Route 9 to enhance connectivity with Route 7 and divert interstate traffic from the Town of Hillsboro;
- Upgrading Route 7 to a limited access roadway between Leesburg and Tysons Corner, with an emphasis on the Route 7/Route 659 interchange;
- Identification of rights of way for and construction of additional Potomac River crossings;
- Acceleration, including identification of additional funding, for the completion of the Loudoun County Parkway and Tri-County Parkway along the County's Comprehensive Plan alignment; and
- Acceleration of the Dulles Corridor Metrorail Project to Washington Dulles International Airport and eastern Loudoun County, and completion of the transfer of the project and the Dulles Toll Road to the Metropolitan Washington Airports Authority.

The Loudoun County Chamber also supports consideration of graduated tolling along the Dulles Greenway in order to encourage increased utilization of an existing transportation corridor and reduced use of alternative, congested routes. The Loudoun County Chamber has long supported a sustainable revenue source for transit construction, operation and maintenance needs and urges that a portion of new regional revenues be dedicated for such purpose. We also support local transit to serve the major businesses and job centers in the County and the use of advanced technology and integrated communications, as well as teleworking, to help alleviate traffic congestion.

The Chamber acknowledges that the increase in the cost of fuel places a premium on efforts to conserve and ensure the efficient use of the fuel we have, which we support. In addition, with regard to the environment, the Chamber believes the greatest reductions in greenhouse gases in the transportation sector will be achieved through the development of higher mileage and alternative fuel vehicles, and supports greater investments in these and other carbon dioxide reducing technologies.

The Loudoun County Chamber recognizes the economic and tourism value of both Washington Dulles International Airport and Leesburg Executive Airport.

Therefore, the Chamber supports continued infrastructure investment at Washington Dulles International Airport, including the automated airport train system and new security area, construction of two additional runways, and expansion of concourses to provide additional aircraft gates and amenities. Further, the Chamber strongly supports maintaining compatible land uses in the areas surrounding the airport.

With regard to Leesburg Executive Airport, which is the second busiest General Aviation airport in the Commonwealth of Virginia, the Chamber supports maintaining compatible land uses near the airport, within the Town of Leesburg and the County, in order to maximize the airport's value. The Chamber also supports efforts by the Town of Leesburg to attract more compatible businesses to and around the airport and supports Loudoun's efforts to work cooperatively with the Town to attract more business travel and activity at Leesburg Executive Airport.

Technology: In recognition of the importance of universal availability of broadband for creating jobs, growing our economy, attracting investment, facilitating telework opportunities, establishing communications infrastructure for public safety, and providing access to educational and training resources, the Loudoun County Chamber supports policy that encourages continued growth of Loudoun's broadband infrastructure. The Chamber encourages investment in the necessary infrastructure to enable cutting-edge wireless and other Internet infrastructure in Loudoun, and supports cooperation between government and commercial interests to maximize broadband access throughout the County.

To encourage a vibrant information technology industry and the use of technology in all businesses in Loudoun, the Chamber supports the following public policy initiatives:

- Adoption of public policies that encourage continued expansion of private-sector broadband services throughout the County, including strategic location of towers to support wireless access (broadband and voice) in the western part of the County;
- State initiatives to develop strategies to enable deployment of broadband in underserved areas of the County;
- Policies that encourage and sustain development and deployment of very high speed connectivity between business parks and Loudoun's core data centers as a strategy for future growth;
- Appropriate consideration of broadband deployment as an integral part of the County's transportation strategy;
- Creation of measures to enhance capital formation and investment opportunities in Loudoun County;
- Adoption of state legislation to enhance e-commerce;
- Adoption of state legislation to provide adequate deterrents and commensurate punishment for computer and Internet-related crimes in recognition of their detrimental impact on the use of technology in business;

- Development of technology programs at our colleges and universities to support our region as a global technology center and develop the talent pool necessary to sustain this vital economic engine here in Loudoun; and
- Full integration of technology in our community, including increased technology in the schools, and broader use of e-government to increase efficiencies and lower costs for services.

Energy: The Loudoun County Chamber recognizes that as the County grows, its energy requirements will increase as well. These additional needs cannot be met by the current sources of energy. The Chamber acknowledges the solution must include a diverse mix of options, including increased conservation and energy efficiency, renewable energy, new generation and new transmission infrastructure. Reliable, affordable energy is required to support the needs of business and to sustain the community's high quality of life.

The Chamber supports the development of statewide goals for energy conservation and renewable energy sources, consistent with the goals outlined in the Virginia Energy Plan. However, a responsible energy plan for the Commonwealth should emphasize the importance of a reliable energy supply to support the continued development of technology and information-based commerce in Loudoun County.

The Chamber strongly encourages its member businesses, Loudoun County government and schools, and County residents to be more aggressive in the area of conservation and energy efficiency, especially in this era of rising energy prices.

EDUCATION AND WORKFORCE

K-12 Education: The Loudoun County Chamber believes state and federal education funding should more appropriately reflect the cost of education mandates in addition to basic education costs. The Chamber has long advocated the reformulation of the State Education Funding Composite Index because it currently places Loudoun County Public Schools at a disadvantage and does not account for our County's special needs, nor does it accurately reflect revenues local governments' access to pay for education. The Loudoun County Chamber also supports legislation that requires increasing state funding of Standards of Quality by 3 percent per year until the local share of education costs does not exceed 65 percent and the state share is equal to 35 percent of total costs. In addition, the Chamber supports offering competitive compensation to attract and retain quality teachers.

The Chamber recognizes the current economic uncertainty will likely result in less revenue being available for education from all levels of government. With this in mind, the Chamber believes now is the time for Loudoun County Public Schools and the Loudoun County Board of Supervisors to work together to implement cost reduction and operational efficiencies within our school system. To that end, the Chamber calls on Loudoun County Public Schools to implement the recommendations of the efficiency review conducted by MGT of America. The report identified a \$2.2 million projected net savings over five years if the recommendations are fully implemented. The Chamber stands ready to assist the school system and Loudoun County government in establishing a work plan to achieve these results.

The Chamber also calls on the Loudoun County Board of Supervisors and Loudoun County Public Schools to continue their efforts to outline a new framework for school site selection and land use permitting that streamlines the process and locates new schools in a manner that supports both the education and economic development mission of our community. The Chamber opposes use of commercially zoned land for school sites, given the importance of preserving this land for future economic development opportunities.

In addition to supporting efficient use of current resources by Loudoun County Public Schools, the Chamber also supports creative approaches to maximize and supplement traditional education funding. The Chamber encourages school-business partnerships as a way for businesses to provide valuable resources of time, energy and funding to support the schools.

Accordingly, the Chamber supports the recent establishment of The Governor's Career and Technical Academy in Loudoun. This new institution, housed within the C.S. Monroe Technology Center, represents a significant partnership with Northern Virginia Community College and a number of regional industries and businesses. The Chamber supports development of innovative efforts like these which help raise Loudoun's K-12 efforts to K-14, providing a pathway for Loudoun students to further education or immediate employment in the region's high skill, high demand, and high wage employment sectors.

In recognition of the vital link between schools and the region's potential skilled workforce, the Chamber further supports:

- Strong business-education partnerships to develop training programs for specific industries;
- Educational assistance for current workers facing career advancement and/or transitions;

- Expanded skills development education in areas such as English-as-a-second-language, business and management; and
- Strong partnerships between the business community and Northern Virginia Community College to support workforce needs.

Higher Education and Workforce Development: The Chamber recognizes the importance of and supports all of the colleges and universities, both public and private, which provide high quality undergraduate, graduate and professional education to Loudoun's residents. The existing need for life-long education and training demands a higher education infrastructure that is accessible, both online and on campus, that is dynamically changing to meet the demands of the times and the diverse workforce, and that is supported by adequate state funding, loan guarantee programs and other financial means. The Chamber also supports measures that will expand the research capabilities of the institutions and facilitate technology transfer.

With regard to our publicly funded institutions, the Chamber is very concerned that the current economic downturn will result in budget balancing action that would undermine the Commonwealth's ability to provide adequate per pupil state funding for George Mason University and Northern Virginia Community College. The long-standing funding inequity limits the ability of both institutions to meet the education and workforce development needs of the Commonwealth and our region. Should the Governor and the General Assembly reduce operational funding for either institution, the Chamber opposes any action to cap tuition increases as that will only exacerbate the reduction in funding. In addition, it could also force the institutions to take actions such as relying more on tuition from out-of-state-students, which would result in less space for in-state students at our Virginia schools. The Chamber believes that each institution must be provided the flexibility to address any fiscal shortages by balancing the needs of mission-critical activities against student affordability. The Chamber continues to support an increase in Tuition Assistance Grants to \$3,500 for both undergraduate and graduate students, and notes that the need for a Cost of Living (COLA) adjustment for college and university employees has not been fully addressed.

The Chamber congratulates the General Assembly and Governor Kaine on establishing the 21st Century Capital Improvement Program to systemically address the programming and financing of capital projects for higher education and state agencies. The Chamber looks forward to the work of the Six-Year Capital Outlay Plan Advisory Committee and others in full implementation of this dynamic process and the resulting new, and much-needed, facilities for George Mason University and Northern Virginia Community College.

The Loudoun County Chamber specifically supports the establishment a full-service, four-year university campus in Loudoun County, along with an expanded presence for Northern Virginia Community College in the County.

Workforce Housing: The Loudoun County Chamber supports state and local policies, as well as private-sector initiatives, directed at increasing the availability of a wide range of housing options to meet the needs of Loudoun's growing population and workforce. The Chamber believes the lack of housing options for all ranges of household income is an impediment to sustaining a sound economy. The Chamber supports regional programs to ensure that all localities adopt inclusionary housing policies and programs, and provide housing opportunities near centers of employment and commercial services. The Chamber believes federal, state and local programs supporting workforce housing should be utilized and leveraged to the maximum extent practical. These programs should afford housing-related opportunities to a broad range of businesses, occupations and sectors of employment.

At the local level, the Chamber supports the investigation and potential implementation of creative solutions that will increase the availability of affordable housing alternatives for our workforce, especially for professionals in the healthcare, public safety, government and service industries. Examples of potential solutions include:

- Continuing support for the conclusions and recommendations of the Housing Advisory Board, including efforts to secure a single housing trust fund and leverage this fund to provide the highest possible impact;
- Promoting the use of County-owned land and/or assets to be used or exchanged for the creation of affordable housing units;
- Improvements to the County Affordable Dwelling Unit (ADU) ordinance that would provide a higher number of overall units available for sale;
- Use of property tax credits, down payment programs, low interest loans, an expedited approval process, and other programs by the County to increase home ownership to low-income households;
- Use of the Industrial Development Authority (IDA) to investigate alternative project solutions, attract nonprofit developers, provide financing alternatives for potential projects, and potentially act as a housing authority;
- Alignment of local County policies as incentives to landlords to keep rental housing available to the workforce;

- Encouragement of our major employers to adopt housing assistance programs.

Immigration: Immigrants have played a key role in the prosperity and growth of northern Virginia, filling key jobs in every sector of our economy and contributing to the rich cultural and intellectual experience that characterizes our region. Businesses increasingly depend on foreign workers to fill jobs to remain competitive, and grow to meet future demands for products and services.

The Chamber supports efforts by the Federal government to strengthen national security by providing thorough screening of foreign workers and creating strong disincentives for illegal immigration. The Loudoun County Chamber also advocates that all businesses strictly comply with state and federal labor laws regarding the screening of citizenship documentation provided by employees, to avoid the hiring of individuals who are not lawfully residing in the U.S.

The Chamber, however, opposes increased penalties on employers who unknowingly hire undocumented aliens until a consistent, reliable process for worker verification systems is established.

The Chamber supports comprehensive immigration reform that, along with border security measures, will:

- Ensure an adequate supply of workers to support businesses in this region, including a limited guest worker program to fill gaps in our workforce;
- Continue and expand visas for professionals and highly skilled workers, and programs that support seasonal industries and small businesses;
- Consider policies to require undocumented workers already contributing to the economy to meet specific conditions and obligations in order to earn the legal right to remain in the U.S.; and
- Address delays, backlogs, and disruptions in our immigration and border management systems that impede the movement of legitimate cargo and travelers across U.S. borders.

HEALTHCARE

The Loudoun County Chamber supports the continued introduction and expansion of healthcare facilities in Loudoun County to increase the availability of quality healthcare services for business owners, employees and their families.

The Chamber supports collaborative efforts between healthcare stakeholders, including providers, purchasers, insurers and consumers, to ensure continued innovation and creativity in the private marketplace. The goals of these efforts should include the following:

- Expand healthcare infrastructure (both inpatient and outpatient);
- Manage healthcare costs impacting businesses;
- Increase accessibility of healthcare and insurance;
- Diminish complexity in healthcare;
- Enhance choice;
- Plan appropriately for emergency preparedness; and
- Expand services offered by safety net healthcare providers, such as the Loudoun Community Health Center and Loudoun Free Clinic, so all Loudoun's residents have access to healthcare.

The Chamber specifically supports legislation that ensures access to group health insurance for all businesses, including sole proprietors and businesses with few employees. The Chamber supports legislation that reduces state burdens and provides tax incentives to help small businesses offset the staggering increases in health insurance costs. The Chamber opposes any legislation that threatens access to coverage, and opposes legislation that mandates coverage of specific benefits as this contributes to increased health insurance premiums. In our community, the Chamber supports exploration of opportunities to provide affordable healthcare to members of the business community, including those without health insurance, through the Loudoun Community Health Center.

For more information about the Loudoun County Chamber of Commerce's advocacy efforts, please call 703-777-2176 or visit the Chamber web site www.loudounchamber.org.