

Washington County Strategic Economic Development Plan

WASHINGTON COUNTY is contributing to, and sharing in, Utah's overall economic prosperity. Our current unemployment rate is 4.4 percent, with job growth of 4.1 percent, and future job growth over the next ten years predicted to be over 40 percent. As 2017 began, our current rate of employment expansion appeared to be more sustainable and manageable than the overheated rates of 2016. We are now in the "zone" of not-too-fast-not-too-slow job growth. While the unemployment rate has slightly edged up in recent months, there seems little cause for concern given the strong job growth and low levels of first-time claims for unemployment insurance. In fact, a slightly higher rate of joblessness could actually ease the pressure of a tight labor market.

Washington County added more than 3,200 jobs in the twelve months preceding March 2017, this was a gain of 5.4 percent. However, rates of growth moderated somewhat in past two quarters, but this is a positive development because our labor market showed slight signs of overheating. Construction, retail trade and healthcare/social services added the highest number of new positions, and no major industry lost employment. Our strong gains in wages and sales coupled with healthy construction permitting signals a robust Washington County economy.



One-Year Vision — 2018

1. The opening of the new Dixie Technical College (DTC) campus on Saint George's 150-acre Tech Ridge. This 30-acre campus is key to our workforce development efforts, especially in reducing intergenerational poverty.
2. The rollout of Dixie State University's Innovation Plaza. Our vision is for this new facility to play a major role in cultivating a skilled workforce while also helping to create jobs, and develop a stronger, more diverse economy.
3. Washington County Economic Development Council, with a diverse representation of key stakeholders from the public and private sectors. Over the next year, we envision this council becoming a resource for supporting the success of existing companies and assisting newly formed companies in further diversifying our economy. We believe the work of this council will leverage relationships and intensify collaboration across agencies to support entrepreneurs at every stage of their development; through education, experiential learning and mentorship. We are excited about these collaborations on the horizon:
 - USU Extension is taking over efforts to support entrepreneurs in writing for USDA SBIR grant funding. This comes at an opportune time as USU Extension and DSU partner on building out the makerspace at the new Innovation Plaza, which will be the hub for connecting innovators and helping them develop their ideas into patents and businesses. This partnership also involves connecting entrepreneurs with SCORE members to provide them with the guidance and expertise to be successful.
 - Our SBDC is being reorganized with new leadership and this could not come at a more opportune time as we work to support the influx of startup activity with our area chamber of commerce. We see the Saint George Area Chamber of Commerce and SBDC partnering very closely to build the capacity for the support of entrepreneurs at every stage of their journey—with education, experiential learning, and mentorship. We see these organizations working side-by-side to communicate the entrepreneurial character of our community, catalyzing the creation of new entrepreneurial programs, connecting entrepreneurs to community resources, and showcasing leading entrepreneurs as role models.
 - Our Five County Association of Governments is supporting an Area Sector Analysis Process (ASAP) to clearly identify the specific types of businesses that would gain a competitive advantage from locating in Washington County. Analyzing and clearly communicating this report will better assist our council in directing entrepreneurial efforts as well as attracting and recruiting the right businesses for the area. We believe this report will help our county, as well as the surrounding counties, in accomplishing Utah's #25kjobs rural initiative by providing the insight needed to focus our efforts.

4. People who visit and relocate their families to Washington County enjoy the scenery and recreation. We are working to resolve access to our public lands and to assemble enough utility so people can access what makes our area unique and special. As we do this, we believe we will begin to attract a niche market of people who identify with an active lifestyle.

Five-Year Vision - 2023

In five years, we see Washington County as a tenacious innovation hub for highly skilled, technical people, age 30-50, with children and an active lifestyle. The area will continue to attract retirees, but we also envision Washington County as a destination for young people who are seeking a polytechnic education, specialized graduate degrees, and unique professional opportunities to advance their careers.

Over the next five years Dixie State University (DSU) will have a new, state-of-the-art science building for its expanded offering of baccalaureate and master's degree programs. We predict DSU will also have a thriving mechanical engineering degree program based on the current size of our community's STEM talent pipeline and participation in competitive robotics programs. We anticipate the new Physician Assistant program, in partnership with the University of Utah, to flourish based on the growth of IHC's Dixie Regional Medical Center. DSU has also announced a masters degree in genetic counseling, which is designed to provide trained professionals needed for IHC's growing precision genomics lab. Furthermore, IHC's new Cancer Center and Genomics Lab will likely make the Saint George area a destination for cancer patients seeking high-quality care in five years. Over this span of time we also see the new Rocky Vista University college of osteopathic medicine to expand beyond its current campus in Ivins by adding more instructional buildings and student housing.

We envision the majority of job growth in Washington County coming from the growth of existing businesses and especially within our startup and tech entrepreneur community. In five years, we will begin to see buildings on Saint George's Tech Ridge owned and occupied by our homegrown tech businesses, but also by larger tech companies from Silicon Slopes, and other cities from around the world, who will invest in satellite offices because they have noticed the gem that will be our overflowing STEM talent pipeline. In order to for all this to happen, it is critical that we support the investment in infrastructure upgrades that allow internet service providers to offer faster and cheaper broadband speeds.

As we lead efforts to bring our tech and entrepreneurship community together, we anticipate new innovations, patents, and startups forming or relocating to Washington County in such fields as: precision agriculture, autonomous vehicles, and unmanned aerial vehicles. We anticipate this because of our area's distinct climate, open spaces, and quiet downtown nightlife which can provide innovative companies with a competitive advantage.

With new NHL and NFL teams coming to the Las Vegas metro area along with the city's bids to host the SuperBowl and World Cup, Washington County is well-positioned to capitalize on tourism by creating travel packages that will attract those who seek to add adventure and recreation on their trips to the southwest.

With the existing, and anticipated, population growth in Washington County over the next five years we expect to see the beginning of the construction for the Lake Powell pipeline.

Ten-Year Vision - 2028

In ten years, we see Washington County as an established innovation hub and prime living location for highly skilled, technical people, age 30-50, with children and an active lifestyle. We see the Saint George area becoming the top choice for satellite offices among tech companies along the Wasatch Front who seek to utilize our growing talent pipeline, expanding technology presence, fiber internet, and quick escape from traffic, pollution, and distractions. As the features of our community become more widely known, we also expect to see an influx of highly paid, remote working professionals choosing to relocate to the area as more organizations allow their workforce the freedom to work from wherever they choose.

We have a handful of success stories that claim Saint George as their homebase. We expect to 5x this number within 10 years. We see more events, more tech companies, more satellite offices, more opportunities for our kids to prosper down here and up north. We see our STEM pipeline overflowing with talent, more than DSU and DTC could possibly contain. With the increasing rate of patents, startups, and population growth, we expect our economy to draw statewide, even national attention. As a result we can see our construction industry prospering as builders scramble to provide office space for businesses and homes for families.

By 2028, Tech Ridge will almost be completely built out, becoming the beacon for economic diversity and prosperity. We envision Tech Ridge as an economically and socially vibrant area which will combine educational facilities, technology companies, professional businesses, and recreation with living opportunities all at one location. We believe that in ten years the entire 150-acre mesa will become a mixed-use development that will accomplish the following goals:

- Expand and promote a technology focused economy
- Create higher paying technology jobs from major tenants
- Facilitate world-class healthcare and research
- Promote the Saint George area as an outdoor recreation destination
- Support higher learning
- Increase quality of life

We see a robust STEM talent pipeline with educational opportunities and experiences that flow from K-12 into applied technology at DTC, advanced degree programs at DSU, internships with industry and high paying jobs. We see our children having a variety of opportunities for a prosperous future should they choose to stay and raise their families in Washington County. By

this time, the Washington County School District will even have built a technology focused open-enrollment high school. We anticipate DSU becoming a nationally recognized polytechnic institution with a close-knit relationship with UNLV's medical school.

Also during this time, we see the city of Hurricane growing to become the center of our county and one of the best places in the state to live and raise a family. We envision Washington County becoming known as the trails capital of the world among cyclists, mountain bikers, and ATV enthusiasts. We anticipate more people riding bicycles as part of their everyday routine and commute to work, especially in the downtown area of Saint George as the area is re-developed to accommodate higher density.

With the population of Washington County estimated to reach over 470,000 by 2050, over the next ten years we will begin to see the infrastructure and systems in place to reduce traffic congestion and meet the increasing demand of water. The construction of the Lake Powell Pipeline is the only option to providing enough water for our population growth and we need to proceed in this direction.

We also recognize that with the projected growth in Washington County, reasonably priced housing options will be a challenge for our young people just beginning their careers and starting their families. We plan to be fully engaged to find solutions to this issue over the next ten years so we can keep our pipeline of STEM talent here to continue bolstering our economy.

St. George Area Chamber of Commerce
136 N. 100 E. St George, UT 84770 [435-628-1658](tel:435-628-1658)
www.StGeorgeChamber.com