SAM SHOGE FOR KENT COUNTY

EXPANDING OPPORTUNITIES

A FOUR-VOLUME PLAN FOR KENT COUNTY

VOL. 03



GROWING OUR LOCAL ECONOMY

Opportunity for workers and small businesses

SAM SHOGE

electsamshoge.com



A MESSAGE FROM SAM

More people should be able to work, build a business, and make their future in Kent County.

I want Kent County to be a place where residents can earn a living, build a business, and give their children a realistic opportunity to make a life here. Our employers, institutions, farms, and communities give us much to work with. We should be ambitious about what they could accomplish with sustained public leadership.

The State of the Economy report I previously published explains why I believe a different approach is necessary. This volume sets out how I would respond: prepare suitable places for investment, improve the decisions county government controls, and develop opportunities with the people already contributing to our economy.

Schools come first in my platform because education helps young people succeed and gives families confidence in choosing Kent. Housing comes second because those families and workers need attainable places to live. Expanding economic opportunity follows because employers need people, customers, and a practical place to operate.

These priorities belong together. We can improve schools and housing while helping existing businesses expand and preparing for additional investment. We should also preserve the landscapes and communities that make this county attractive and direct growth toward places equipped to serve it.

The proposals that follow are invitations to do that work. Their costs, responsibilities, and timing would be established through consultation, public input, and financial analysis. Some may need to proceed in stages. I want us to assess them with both ambition and discipline.

Please consider what successful action could mean for your family, your business, and our community. I welcome your ideas about how these proposals could help more people contribute, succeed, and make their future in Kent County.



SAM SHOGE
Candidate for Kent County Commissioner

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THE CASE FOR EXPANDING OPPORTUNITY

Kent County's future deserves an honest assessment of the opportunities our economy is creating. In my previously published State of the Economy report, I brought public records together so residents could examine growth, jobs, businesses, and income. Its findings establish the conditions this volume is intended to address.

Read the full economic record.

The report records an 8.1% decline in inflation-adjusted economic output between 2010 and 2024. It also records 7,553 covered payroll jobs in 2025, compared with 7,690 in 2000. These measures cover different periods, but both show that Kent has struggled to expand local activity over time. [1][2]

The workforce is part of that challenge. American Community Survey estimates put the population ages 25 through 64 at 9,735 in 2006-2010 and 8,679 in 2020-2024, a decline of 10.8%. Those are five-year survey estimates, rather than single-year counts. [3]

Recognize strengths and constraints.

The same report recognizes rising resident income, growth in some industries, and recent population gains through migration. We should acknowledge those strengths. They can coexist with limited growth in local jobs and a smaller working-age population.

I published the report because a visible new business or a prosperous household cannot, by itself, tell us whether opportunity is expanding across the county. We need to assess the broader record and ask what residents can realistically achieve through work and enterprise here.

KEEP OPPORTUNITY AT THE FOREFRONT

Kent faces a difficult task, but accepting weak growth would also be a choice with consequences. Fewer expanding businesses can mean fewer options for workers and less additional activity to support public services. I intend to keep those consequences in the public discussion and make expanding economic opportunity a continuing county priority.

[1] Sam Shoge, State of the Economy (2026), p. 3; BEA real GDP, 2010-2024

[2] State of the Economy, p. 4; BLS covered payroll employment, 2000 and 2025

[3] State of the Economy, p. 10; Census ACS five-year working-age estimates

SCHOOLS FIRST. HOUSING SECOND. ECONOMY THIRD.

The sequence reflects what families and employers need to build a future in Kent County.

First, give families confidence in our schools.

A family's decision about where to live includes the opportunities available to its children. Strong instruction, useful career experiences, and well-planned facilities can help retain current families and make Kent more attractive to people considering a move. Volume I addresses those investments in our young people. Their first purpose is to serve students well; their economic contribution is also substantial.

Second, give working households somewhere to live.

A family cannot move here without a suitable home, and an employer cannot assume that a new worker will find one. Volume II addresses attainable housing through local development capacity, infrastructure coordination, property preparation, and preservation of existing homes. Housing choices help people remain close to work and family and make recruitment more realistic.

Third, make business investment more achievable.

Companies need workers, customers, suitable buildings or sites, and dependable services. Schools and housing help establish those conditions. This volume adds specific proposals for permitting, employment sites, agricultural business expansion, freight rail, energy, college-based company formation, tourism, and resident recruitment.

These priorities form a connected strategy. School improvements, housing delivery, employer relationships, and investment preparation should advance together. Existing residents also need opportunities now. We should help businesses already operating here while preparing the conditions that could attract the next investment.

PREPARE THE CONDITIONS FOR INVESTMENT

Our focus should be how Kent County makes suitable investment possible.

Make the public decisions that investment requires.

Private businesses decide where capital can earn an acceptable return. County government can improve the conditions behind that decision: appropriate zoning, infrastructure capacity, energy, transportation access, and timely review. Recruiting a business becomes more credible when we can explain where it could operate and what it would take to begin.

Prepare for a range of compatible businesses.

Business models and technologies change. A flexible commercial building might accommodate different uses, but each has its own power, water, traffic, and construction requirements. We should prepare sites for a defined range of suitable activities, verify their capacity, and remain responsive to actual demand.

Be realistic about rural conditions.

National rural employment research describes slower growth, population aging, and a declining prime-working-age population over 2010-2024, alongside gains in employment participation. Outcomes vary across communities. Kent cannot assume that its proximity to metropolitan areas will automatically produce a growing economy. [4]

Change how we respond to opportunity.

I want a county government prepared to evaluate growth on its merits, explain its benefits, and support projects that meet adopted requirements. Opposition deserves consideration through the public process, but continued disagreement should not substitute for a decision. Our plans should identify where growth belongs, and leadership should stand behind those choices.

The county should contribute ideas, coordination, and practical support alongside funding. Staff, towns, utilities, Washington College, employers, and other potential partners would help determine workable responsibilities. The aim is to strengthen their contribution and make promising projects more achievable, with clear public accountability.

[4] USDA Economic Research Service, Rural Employment and Unemployment (2026)

AMBITION WITH FINANCIAL DISCIPLINE

Begin with the opportunity, then establish what Kent County can responsibly deliver.

Establish the opportunity and the evidence.

These proposals identify a direction worth pursuing. Feasibility work, legal review, public input, and consultation would establish which ideas can deliver sufficient benefit. Employer commitments and demonstrated demand should guide major investments.

Account for startup and continuing costs.

Staffing, maintenance, administration, debt, and future replacement belong in the financial assessment. Additional revenue should be considered after incentives, infrastructure obligations, and the cost of public services.

Pursue resources and set a workable pace.

Eligible grants, philanthropy, business investment, utilities, and regional partnerships could help fund appropriate work. Their conditions and continuing obligations must be understood. If resources are insufficient, proposals should be refined, phased, or delayed.

Measure what is delivered.

Track completed investment, operating businesses, employment, paid opportunities, and county review times. Distinguish commitments from completed results. Staff and potential partners would help establish practical measures and report progress.

COUNTY INVESTMENT AND TIMING

These labels describe relative county costs and a proposed sequence. They are not approved budgets or fixed deadlines.

County investment
Low: limited county expense.
Medium: a more substantial commitment.
High: major capital or ongoing costs.
Ranges reflect uncertainty. Startup and continuing costs need separate analysis.

Timing
Sooner: an early implementation priority.
Later: after preparation and resources are in place.
Long term: sustained planning and investment.
Studies may begin earlier; delivery depends on funding, readiness, and approvals.

Work directly with our largest employers.

I propose a commissioner-convened Largest Employers Advisory Council for businesses and institutions employing at least 50 people in Kent County, with a focused assignment to identify expansion needs and supplier-recruitment opportunities.

The people responsible for substantial local employment should have a regular working relationship with county leadership. Direct conversations can identify shared obstacles, upcoming investment decisions, and business relationships that could create further opportunity here.

County staff would coordinate the council's work, with commissioners consistently participating and following through on appropriate county actions. Its role could complement the Economic Development Commission and Chamber of Commerce through a defined employer work program.

Question for employers	What the council would pursue
What could help you expand?	Identify workforce, infrastructure, energy, and county-process issues requiring follow-through.
Which suppliers should we meet?	Seek introductions to companies with a credible reason to serve Kent employers locally.
Where do your needs overlap?	Investigate purchasing or service demand shared by several employers.

Ask which businesses could succeed alongside them.

An employer's suppliers and business partners may have commercial reasons to locate nearby. The council would identify common purchasing needs, seek introductions, and test whether combined demand could support a local operation. Recruitment would begin with potential customers and a clear business purpose.



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Apply the supplier-location lesson at Kent's scale.

Bentonville and the wider Northwest Arkansas region offer a prominent example of suppliers establishing offices near a major customer. University of Arkansas research documents the supplier community that developed around Walmart. [5]

Kent's employers operate at a very different scale, but the question is worth asking: could their purchasing and business relationships make Kent a practical location for another firm? An introduction, followed by credible demand and suitable operating conditions, could give recruitment a stronger commercial basis.

I would begin with quarterly working sessions and assigned follow-up. The council would advise and identify opportunities; public decisions would remain with the responsible authorities. Establish clear participation rules, appropriate handling of sensitive information, and coordination with existing business services. Judge the effort by obstacles resolved, qualified introductions, investment, and employment.



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Putting the plan to work

COUNTY INVESTMENT: LOW; PRIMARILY STAFF COORDINATION

TIMING: SOONER: ESTABLISH THE WORK PROGRAM

Begin with existing county capacity and a manageable schedule of meetings and follow-up.

Planning question	Proposed approach
Who could lead implementation?	County commissioners would convene the council, with county staff coordinating outreach and follow-through.
What drives the cost?	Staff time, employer outreach, meeting coordination, and targeted follow-up with prospective suppliers.
How could we pay for it?	Use existing county economic development capacity initially; assess additional project costs separately.
How would we begin?	Identify eligible employers with 50 or more local employees, agree on participation and operating arrangements, and set a focused agenda.
What continues each year?	Quarterly working sessions, individual employer conversations as needed, supplier introductions, and reporting on agreed actions.
What would success look like?	Employer issues resolved, credible supplier prospects, shared investment opportunities, and businesses or employment retained and expanded.

[5] University of Arkansas, Northwest Arkansas supply chain cluster (2021)

Make timely permitting a competitive advantage.

I propose hiring a dedicated commercial development planner to coordinate business applications, reduce avoidable county review delays, and make permitting more predictable for businesses investing in Kent County.

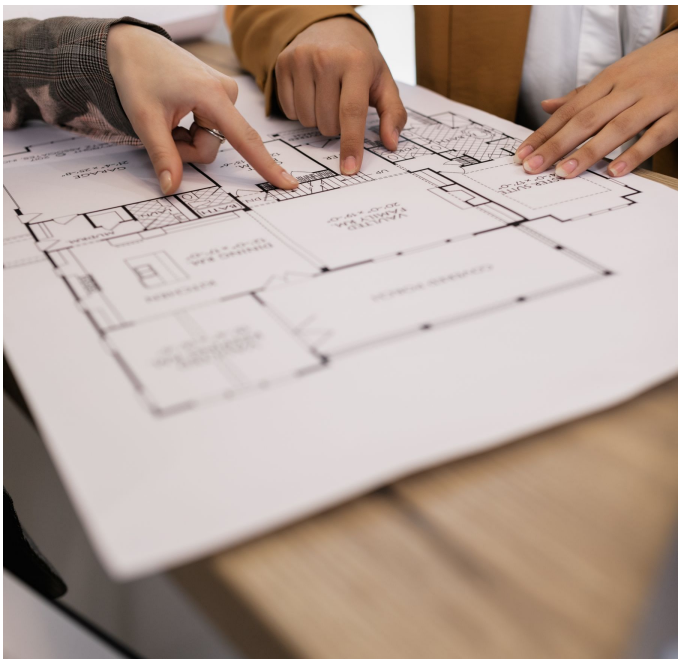
A business preparing to open or expand must make decisions about financing, property, equipment, contractors, and employees. Waiting for decisions can add costs and disrupt that schedule. Timely, predictable review should be part of what Kent County offers a business considering where to invest.

Additional staffing should produce a better process as well as more capacity. A dedicated commercial planner would provide a dependable point of contact, identify requirements early, coordinate county reviews, and help applicants understand what remains before a decision.

Give business applications consistent attention.

The position would focus on commercial and industrial projects, business expansions, and changes of use. Early consultation would identify zoning, utilities, access, and outside reviews before an applicant makes avoidable design expenditures. Where feasible, departments should review the same submission concurrently and provide coordinated comments.

Process improvement	Benefit for applicants
Early project consultation	Understand requirements and potential obstacles before completing detailed designs.
Coordinated review	Receive clear comments and know which person or agency must resolve each outstanding issue.
Published review targets	Plan around a visible schedule and receive an explanation when a target cannot be met.



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Measure the time government controls.

Evidence from housing development links complex regulatory processes with longer delays. That research is relevant to process reform, but Kent should measure its own commercial applications rather than assume a staffing change will deliver a particular reduction. [6]

The county should establish baseline review times, publish reasonable targets, and track results by application type. Reporting would distinguish active county review from time awaiting applicant changes, outside approvals, or utility decisions. Faster review should come from clearer requirements, sufficient staffing, and timely decisions against adopted standards.

The planner would also help identify recurring problems that warrant a checklist, procedural change, or ordinance amendment. Together with prepared employment sites, this would give businesses a clearer and more credible route from initial interest to an operating location.



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Putting the plan to work

COUNTY INVESTMENT: LOW STARTUP; MEDIUM RECURRING

TIMING: SOONER: PROCESS REVIEW AND POSITION DEVELOPMENT

The principal expense would be salary and benefits, with any supporting technology assessed separately.

Planning question	Proposed approach
Who could lead implementation?	The county planning department, coordinating with Economic and Tourism Development and other reviewing agencies.
What drives the cost?	Salary, benefits, training, application coordination, and any necessary tracking improvements.
How could we pay for it?	A recurring county budget commitment. Evaluate lawful fee support without assuming that application revenue will cover the full position.
How would we begin?	Review workload and delay causes, define the position, establish baseline times, and adopt initial coordination and review targets.
What continues each year?	Application coordination, early consultations, performance reporting, and improvements responding to recurring problems.
What would success look like?	Shorter avoidable county review periods, fewer preventable resubmissions, clearer decisions, and completed business projects.

[6] Richmond Fed, Unlocking Housing Supply (Feb. 15, 2024), residential research

Prepare places where businesses can invest.

I propose preparing a focused group of employment sites with appropriate zoning, verified infrastructure capacity, suitable transportation access, and as much advance authorization as county government can lawfully provide.

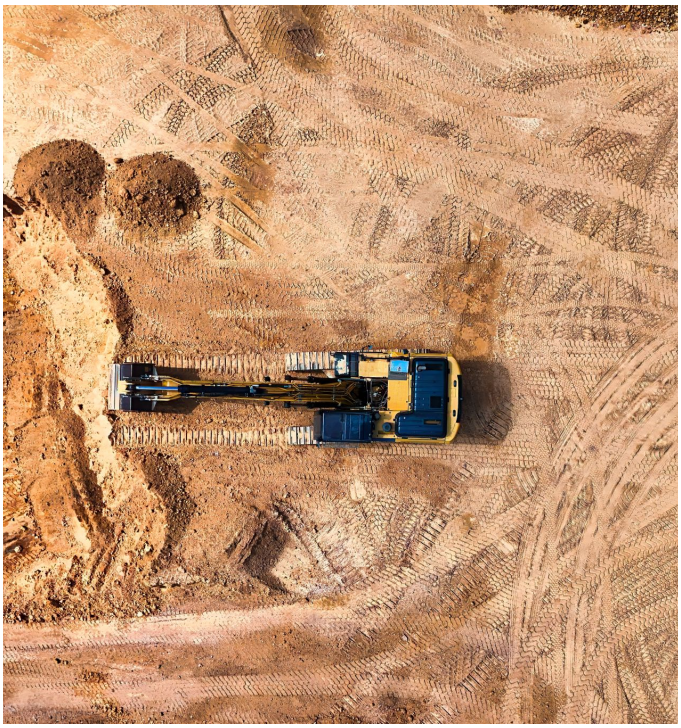
A property advertised for business use should come with dependable answers about what can be built, what services are available, and which decisions remain. Investors need to understand the time, cost, and requirements before committing to a location.

I would concentrate county preparation on selected sites in appropriate growth areas, emphasizing towns, villages, and locations served by infrastructure. The work would address the conditions government can influence before a company begins its own project design.

Resolve avoidable uncertainty in advance.

Preparation would begin with willing property owners, realistic land costs, and suitable uses permitted by right under adopted zoning. For each site, the county would establish utility capacity, access requirements, development constraints, and the public improvements needed. Available infrastructure must be distinguished from infrastructure that still requires funding or construction.

Site requirement	What should be established
Land and permitted use	Owner participation, availability, cost, and uses allowed under adopted zoning.
Infrastructure and access	Electricity, energy options, water, wastewater, highway and road access, and commercially useful rail access where relevant.
Approvals and delivery	Completed advance reviews, remaining permits, responsible agencies, expected schedules, and improvement costs.



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Stand behind the places we designate for growth.

Public planning should result in decisions that mean something. Once a location has been deliberately designated for employment and a proposal meets adopted requirements, county leadership should publicly support it, explain its economic benefits, and make timely decisions despite organized opposition.

Preservation and conservation organizations have a right to participate, as every resident does. Their opposition should not become an additional, unwritten approval requirement. I would defend lawful county decisions and reject the expectation that a compliant project should be abandoned simply because opposition persists.

By-right uses still require applicable permits and compliance with substantive standards. The county would coordinate and accelerate the decisions it controls, while clearly identifying outside approvals. Prepared sites would accommodate a defined range of uses and operating requirements; different businesses need different levels of power, water, transportation, and building capacity.



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Putting the plan to work

COUNTY INVESTMENT: MEDIUM PREPARATION; HIGH WHERE UTILITIES REQUIRE EXPANSION

TIMING: SOONER: SITE SELECTION; LATER: PHASED IMPROVEMENTS

Each site would need its own cost, demand, ownership, and infrastructure assessment.

Planning question	Proposed approach
Who could lead implementation?	County economic development and planning staff, working with willing owners, municipalities, utilities, and transportation agencies.
What drives the cost?	Due diligence, engineering, environmental review, utility commitments, access improvements, and any authorized property investment.
How could we pay for it?	Owner and developer investment, utility participation, eligible site-development assistance, and justified county capital contributions.
How would we begin?	Select a small group of credible sites and document ownership, allowed uses, capacity, constraints, cost, and readiness.
What continues each year?	Update site information, advance agreed improvements, coordinate prospects, and report outstanding decisions.
What would success look like?	Verified usable sites, shorter preparation periods, completed private investment, and employment and net fiscal benefits.

Make agricultural business expansion someone's responsibility.

I propose establishing an Agricultural Business Expansion Specialist to help farm-related businesses reach new markets, attract processing investment, and increase the value of agricultural activity in Kent County.

Agriculture should be part of our economic expansion strategy through the businesses it can sustain, the products it can supply, and the investment it can attract. That requires dedicated attention to commercial opportunities and the conditions that make them viable.

The proposed specialist would concentrate on business investment, customers, processing, and market development. Working with existing agricultural organizations, the position would connect producers and prospective businesses with the resources needed to evaluate and advance real projects.

Commercial priority	Proposed work
Existing farm-related businesses	Identify expansion opportunities, additional customers, and barriers to investment.
Processing and production	Evaluate potential buyers and facilities that add value to agricultural products.
Markets and partnerships	Connect producers with purchasers, processors, researchers, and suitable funding sources.

Pursue additional value from agricultural products.

A crop or agricultural product may support additional economic activity when it is processed, packaged, stored, or incorporated into another product locally. The specialist would investigate where sufficient demand, supply, and infrastructure make those activities practical. The work should begin with commercial needs and prospective customers.



Illustrative stock photograph; not a Kent County project.

Turn interest into workable projects.

The specialist would help assemble the information a business needs before investing: product supply, customer demand, site suitability, energy, water, wastewater, transportation, and workforce requirements. Those findings would inform the county's site-preparation and agricultural energy initiatives.

Potential partners would include producers, agricultural businesses, Washington College, lenders, utilities, and organizations already serving the agricultural community. The position's responsibilities should be established with those organizations so the county adds commercial capacity and supports their existing expertise.

I would begin with a dedicated specialist and a clear annual work program. Any later decision to establish a larger agricultural department should follow demonstrated workload and results. The public should be able to see which investments advanced, which businesses gained customers, and what local economic activity followed.



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Illustrative stock photograph; not a Kent County project.

Putting the plan to work

COUNTY INVESTMENT: LOW STARTUP; MEDIUM RECURRING

TIMING: SOONER: DEFINE ROLE; HIRE AS FUNDING ALLOWS

The principal continuing commitment would be salary, benefits, and operating support.

Planning question	Proposed approach
Who could lead implementation?	A dedicated specialist working with Economic and Tourism Development, with placement and responsibilities settled through county planning.
What drives the cost?	Staffing, business outreach, market information, and targeted project feasibility work.
How could we pay for it?	A recurring county staffing commitment, supplemented by eligible agricultural and economic development funding for specific projects.
How would we begin?	Consult producers and existing organizations, establish the position's commercial focus, and identify a manageable set of initial opportunities.
What continues each year?	Business outreach, buyer introductions, project coordination, and review of investment and sales outcomes.
What would success look like?	Farm-related businesses expanded, new purchasing relationships, processing investment completed, and additional employment or sales where verifiable.

Put our freight rail assets to greater economic use.

I propose a freight rail economic opportunity and feasibility study to identify how Kent County can make greater use of its existing line to support employers, attract compatible businesses, and advance practical infrastructure investments.

Rail access can be valuable when it connects a business to the materials, customers, and shipping arrangements it needs. The county should establish where that value exists today and what changes could make the line useful to additional employers.

This work would build on investment already made. Maryland's transportation program reports completion of a $5 million Chestertown freight-line rehabilitation project in 2024. [7] A county study should identify the commercial opportunities that existing infrastructure and targeted additional improvements could support.

Start with customers and shipping economics.

The study would review existing users, businesses that could shift suitable shipments to rail, and prospects whose operations require it. It would establish service frequency, rates, connections, reliability, shipment requirements, and the costs of loading and unloading. A line beside a property is only useful if service works commercially.

Study component	What we would establish
Current and prospective users	Document shipping needs and barriers among existing businesses and credible prospects.
Sites and connections	Identify suitable properties, sidings, loading areas, and necessary infrastructure improvements.
Shared loading facilities	Test whether rail-to-truck transfer could let businesses use rail without a private siding.



Photo: Brett Sayles / Pexels
Illustrative stock photograph; not a Kent County project.

[7] MDOT, FY2025-2030 transportation program, freight section

Identify investments that businesses would use.

A shared loading facility, often called transloading, could allow goods to move by rail for part of a journey and by truck between the facility and a business. The study would test demand, handling costs, suitable cargo, access, and neighborhood effects before recommending a location or investment.

Agricultural products, feed ingredients, building materials, and selected manufacturing inputs would be examples to investigate. Coordinate the work with prepared employment sites and the energy study, including any proposed utility use of railroad property. Corridor permissions and operating requirements would need verification.

Maryland is pursuing a public-private arrangement for Eastern Shore freight corridors. [8] Kent should coordinate with the state and operator and produce a ranked list of projects with customer interest, costs, responsibilities, and potential funding. The result should guide investment and recruitment, including a decision against projects without sufficient demand.



Photo: Talena Reese / Pexels
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Putting the plan to work

COUNTY INVESTMENT: MEDIUM STUDY; CAPITAL WORK ASSESSED SEPARATELY

TIMING: SOONER: SCOPE AND CONSULTATION; LATER: JUSTIFIED IMPROVEMENTS

Any construction recommendation would require a separate business case, funding plan, and approvals.

Planning question	Proposed approach
Who could lead implementation?	County economic development staff with MDOT, the rail operator, existing and prospective shippers, owners, and qualified freight advisers.
What drives the cost?	Demand and logistics analysis, service and site assessment, preliminary engineering, and financial evaluation.
How could we pay for it?	Explore shared planning costs, county support, and eligible rail assistance. Later projects would identify state, operator, customer, and county contributions.
How would we begin?	Review existing studies and rail investments, consult customers and the operator, and commission a focused opportunity assessment.
What continues each year?	Advance justified projects, maintain shipper relationships, and track demand and service changes. Assign maintenance before investment.
What would success look like?	Commercially credible projects, additional businesses served, private investment, and measurable local benefits from any improvements.

[8] MDOT, Freight Railroad Public-Private Partnership

Give agricultural processing the energy it needs.

I propose an agricultural energy infrastructure feasibility study, with natural gas expansion as a specific option, to determine how Kent County can support additional processing and farm-related industry.

Expanding agriculture's economic contribution means examining what it takes to process more products here. Some facilities need substantial, dependable supplies of heat for drying, concentrating ingredients, generating steam, and other production tasks. Energy availability can therefore be a practical question about which businesses a site can accommodate. [9]

I would use agricultural processing as a concrete starting point for evaluating natural gas expansion. The purpose would be to determine whether identifiable business demand and public benefits justify advancing an extension, while comparing the cost and performance of other energy options.

Start with the businesses and their requirements.

The study should recover earlier county and utility work, then update customer demand, connection options, infrastructure costs, and financing assumptions. It should examine existing employers as well as prospective processors. Expressions of interest would need to be distinguished from commitments to use and help finance service.

Illustrative opportunity	Energy question to investigate
Dairy and food-ingredient drying	What reliable heat supply and annual energy use would a concentration or drying facility require?
Grain drying and handling	Would seasonal demand justify connection and infrastructure costs?
Feed and crop processing	Could dependable process heat make an otherwise suitable project more competitive?



Photo: Anna Shvets / Pexels
Illustrative stock photograph; not a Kent County project.

[9] U.S. DOE, Transformative Pathways for U.S. Industry (2025), food processing

Establish the business case before construction.

These are examples to investigate, not identified recruitment commitments. Each prospective facility would also need appropriate land use, water, wastewater, road or rail access, and a workable supply of workers and agricultural inputs.

The study would include other potential anchor users and large businesses, as well as residential subdivisions that might benefit from an extension. Their demand, connection costs, alternatives, and willingness to participate would need separate assessment. Agricultural processing would establish the public purpose, while the full customer mix would determine the economics.

Compare pipeline gas with feasible alternatives and account for equipment, delivery charges, maintenance, environmental requirements, and future policy. The result should identify a viable investment, a smaller project, or a better energy solution. Public support should depend on credible customer participation and measurable benefits.



Illustrative stock photograph; not a Kent County project.

Putting the plan to work

COUNTY INVESTMENT: MEDIUM STUDY; HIGH IF CONSTRUCTION IS JUSTIFIED

TIMING: SOONER: ASSESSMENT; LONG TERM: POSSIBLE DELIVERY

Study costs and construction obligations would be evaluated separately. No construction commitment is proposed at this stage.

Planning question	Proposed approach
Who could lead implementation?	The county with agricultural businesses, other large users, prospective residential developers, utilities, and qualified engineering and financial advisers.
What drives the cost?	Demand analysis, route and capacity studies, engineering, customer connections, and any later infrastructure investment.
How could we pay for it?	Explore shared study costs and eligible planning assistance. Any construction package would identify utility, customer, and public contributions separately.
How would we begin?	Recover previous studies and assess agricultural, commercial, institutional, and residential demand alongside feasible energy alternatives.
What continues each year?	During development, customer coordination and funding work. Any operating or maintenance obligations must be assigned before investment.
What would success look like?	A defensible investment decision and, if implemented, energy service that supports verified business investment and local economic benefits.

Turn college expertise into new companies.

I propose building a strategic partnership with Washington College to pursue technology transfer, support entrepreneurs, and help promising ideas become independent companies in Kent County.

Kent County and Washington College can pursue a shared opportunity: use the institution's expertise and the Innovation Plant to develop commercially useful ideas, recruit students, provide internships, and establish additional sources of local employment.

The Geospatial Innovation Program offers a practical example. Students work alongside professionals on real projects for clients, including nonprofit organizations and government agencies. It demonstrates how college expertise can support client-facing work and student experience. The proposal would apply that commercial discipline to other suitable opportunities, including technologies and research that could become independent enterprises. [10]

Pursue technology transfer intentionally.

Technology transfer puts knowledge and technology to practical use, including commercialization. [11] I would make it an explicit focus of a county-college partnership centered on the Innovation Plant. Its planned entrepreneurship center, makerspaces, and community kitchen provide a setting for testing products and supporting entrepreneurs. [12] The Center for Environment and Society could contribute relevant research and technical capabilities. [13]

Proposed approach	What it would accomplish
Research and special initiatives	Pursue support for applied work that addresses a real need and has a credible commercial application.
Endowed expertise	Explore philanthropic and other eligible support for professorships aligned with teaching, research, and economic opportunity.
Entrepreneurship and technology transfer	Help develop products, establish companies, and pursue appropriate licensing or spinout arrangements.



Photo: Mikhail Kramor / Pexels
Illustrative stock photograph; not a Kent County project.

[10] Washington College, GIP student opportunities and client projects
[11] NIST, What Is Tech Transfer? (2022)
[12] Washington College, Innovation Plant, planned facilities
[13] Washington College, Center for Environment and Society

Connect college opportunity with local employment.

The partnership would target funding for special projects, research, and initiatives that could ultimately be commercialized. It would also explore endowed professorships where a lasting funding commitment could strengthen expertise, attract students, and support commercially relevant work. Each funding source would need to fit the proposed activity and its conditions.

For the college, distinctive projects and paid experience could strengthen student recruitment. For students, internships could connect learning with professional responsibilities. Over time, a successful company spun out from the institution could become an additional place of employment in Kent County.

I would prioritize opportunities that fit Kent's culture and scale, including appropriate applications of geospatial tools, environmental technology, and agricultural innovation. Begin with a few projects with credible customers, capable leadership, and workable budgets. The aim is a partnership that benefits the institution, students, and the wider community.



Photo: Washington College

Putting the plan to work

COUNTY INVESTMENT: LOW-MEDIUM STARTUP; SCALE AFTER TESTING

TIMING: SOONER: PARTNERSHIP AND INITIAL PROJECT SELECTION

Initial costs would depend on coordination, technical assistance, and the scope of selected projects.

Planning question	Proposed approach
Who could lead implementation?	County economic development staff and designated Washington College representatives, with responsibilities established through a joint agreement.
What drives the cost?	Coordination, research and project development, commercialization expertise, entrepreneur support, and any contribution toward endowed expertise.
How could we pay for it?	A defined county contribution, college resources, philanthropy for endowment opportunities, eligible research and commercialization awards, and business investment.
How would we begin?	Agree on a strategic partnership, identify culturally compatible opportunities, and target appropriate funding for projects, research, and endowed expertise.
What continues each year?	Entrepreneur support, funding applications, customer testing, and review of participating ventures.
What would success look like?	Student recruitment benefits where measurable, paid internships, commercial products, companies spun out, and sustained local employment.

Give more visitors a reason to explore our region.

I propose pursuing a joint tourism campaign with Queen Anne's County and potentially Talbot County to attract Western Shore visitors and encourage trips that include Kent County businesses and destinations.

The proposed new Bay Bridge crossing creates a long-term tourism opportunity for the Eastern Shore. The state's recommended alternative would add capacity and improve reliability. [14] We should begin joint marketing before construction so Kent and neighboring counties are already familiar destinations when a better crossing becomes available.

I would pursue a shared Cross the Bridge marketing campaign with Queen Anne's County and potentially Talbot County. It would encourage visits now and build recognition over time, positioning the region to benefit from future improvements in access. A larger bridge would not itself guarantee more visitors; we need to give people reasons to come.

Make Kent part of the itinerary.

A joint campaign should direct people toward specific places and purchases. Advertising would connect to useful itineraries, participating businesses, events, and overnight options. Kent's share of the work should make its destinations visible and encourage visitors to spend time and money here.

Proposed focus	Visitor experience
Waterfront and small-town visits	Combine dining, shops, lodging, and time in participating communities.
Culture and outdoor activities	Plan trips around events, history, boating, paddling, and other suitable experiences.
Longer and repeat visits	Offer itineraries across county lines and reasons to return in different seasons.



Photo: Downrigging Weekend in Chestertown

[14] MDTA, Chesapeake Bay Crossing Study, recommended alternative

Build a campaign around experiences available now.

The campaign would introduce travelers to the region well before the proposed new crossing opens. As people discover destinations and return, the counties could build an established visitor market. If the project delivers more efficient travel, the partnership would already have a recognizable offer to promote.

I would begin with a limited pilot and agree on how each county's investment produces exposure for its businesses. Local operators should help shape offers that are realistic for their staffing, hours, and visitor capacity. Weekday and quieter-season visits could be tested where businesses see an opportunity.

Performance should be assessed through attributable visitor interest, bookings where trackable, participating business feedback, and visitor spending evidence. Advertising impressions alone would not demonstrate that Kent's economy benefited. Expansion would follow results and the partners' ability to sustain the work.



Photo: Ron Lach / Pexels
Illustrative stock photograph; not a Kent County project.

Putting the plan to work

COUNTY INVESTMENT: LOW-MEDIUM PILOT; SCALE WITH RESULTS

TIMING: SOONER: PARTNER DISCUSSIONS AND CAMPAIGN DESIGN

Costs would depend on the campaign's reach, media purchases, and participating counties' contributions.

Planning question	Proposed approach
Who could lead implementation?	Participating county tourism teams, with Kent's role developed through its existing economic and tourism staff.
What drives the cost?	Creative work, destination content, advertising, visitor research, and campaign measurement.
How could we pay for it?	Shared county marketing contributions, eligible tourism assistance, and appropriate business participation.
How would we begin?	Agree on objectives, identify participating experiences, establish contribution and exposure arrangements, and launch a limited pilot.
What continues each year?	Content updates, seasonal campaigns, business coordination, and evaluation of visitor response.
What would success look like?	Additional visits and overnight stays, spending at Kent businesses, repeat visitation, and a partnership that earns continued investment.

Invite working households to make Kent County home.

I propose developing a You Should Live Here marketing campaign to attract working households from surrounding urban and metropolitan areas, including remote and hybrid workers, by presenting Kent County's lifestyle strengths alongside realistic information about living here.

Kent County's open space, landscapes, waterfront communities, and access to metropolitan areas are strengths worth preserving. They can also help attract people who want to make a life here, support local businesses, and contribute their skills and income to the community.

This marketing campaign would target people living in surrounding urban and metropolitan areas whose work and circumstances fit Kent, including remote and hybrid workers. It would present an honest picture of housing choices, schools, connectivity, services, and travel requirements.

Connect lifestyle with a practical decision to move.

The You Should Live Here marketing campaign would provide a clear starting point for people considering Kent. Useful information and direct inquiries should guide prospective residents from general interest toward understanding whether the county meets their needs.

What we would present	What prospective residents need to know
Lifestyle and surroundings	The communities, landscapes, recreation, and everyday experiences that distinguish Kent.
Homes and family life	Real housing options, school information, local services, and opportunities to participate in community life.
Work and connectivity	Verified connectivity at a prospective address, practical travel expectations, and opportunities to operate a business.



Photo: Sam Shoge

Preserve the qualities that attract people.

Resident recruitment should be coordinated with the school and housing investments described in the first two volumes. Families need confidence in their children's education and an attainable home before a marketing campaign can translate into a lasting move.

Growth should reinforce the communities and landscapes we are inviting people to enjoy. Directing new homes toward appropriate towns, villages, and serviced growth areas would help accommodate households while protecting the open space that contributes to Kent's appeal. We should describe that relationship explicitly.

I would test a modest marketing campaign before committing to a large advertising budget. Its value should be measured through qualified inquiries and households that choose to move and remain here, with privacy-respecting follow-up. Increased demand also makes continued housing production essential, especially for residents already trying to find a home.



Illustrative stock photograph; not a Kent County project.

Putting the plan to work

COUNTY INVESTMENT: LOW-MEDIUM PILOT; SCALE WITH RESULTS

TIMING: SOONER: PREPARATION; LAUNCH WITH CREDIBLE HOUSING OPTIONS

Marketing should be coordinated with housing availability and verified information about services and connectivity.

Planning question	Proposed approach
Who could lead implementation?	County tourism development staff, consulting housing, school, business, and municipal partners on accurate information and coordinated messaging.
What drives the cost?	Audience research, campaign content, website work, advertising, inquiry management, and evaluation.
How could we pay for it?	A limited county marketing allocation and appropriate partnerships, with clear public ownership or use rights for funded materials and services.
How would we begin?	Verify the offer, identify audiences, establish measures, and test a modest marketing campaign.
What continues each year?	Maintain accurate information, respond to inquiries, coordinate housing updates, and evaluate households attracted and retained.
What would success look like?	Working households choosing and remaining in Kent, additional local spending and participation, and fiscal benefits assessed alongside added service costs.

WHAT THESE IDEAS COULD MAKE POSSIBLE

A growing economy, a larger tax base, and more resources for schools, facilities, and public services.

Reverse years of economic decline.

My goal is to grow Kent County's gross domestic product (GDP), reversing the years of decline documented in my previously published State of the Economy report. [1] Success will mean more goods and services produced here, more businesses investing, and more residents earning a living in Kent County. Companies formed through Washington College, agricultural processing, stronger supplier relationships, and prepared employment sites can contribute to that growth. We should expect these efforts to produce measurable gains in our local economy.

Expand the tax base and invest in our future.

A growing economy should expand our tax base through additional business investment, jobs, and working households. That additional revenue can allow Kent County to fund public services at higher levels and help pay for the construction of new schools and other public facilities. I want growth to strengthen our ability to invest in the services and places residents depend on. We should assess the revenue growth generates alongside the cost of serving it, then direct the additional capacity toward clear community priorities.

Create more opportunity for residents.

The purpose of a larger economy is to improve what people can achieve here. A young person could begin a paid internship and move into a local career. An existing worker could find another employer or a chance to advance. A business owner could expand, and local trades and suppliers could gain work from investments that reach completion. These are the outcomes I want residents to see: greater earning potential, more business opportunity, and a county better able to invest in its people.

[1] Sam Shoge, State of the Economy (2026), p. 3; BEA real GDP, 2010-2024

CONSIDER THE POSSIBILITY

A Kent County where strong schools, attainable homes, and economic opportunity help more people build a future.

A place where more households choose to stay.

I want families to see strong schools, suitable homes, and an economy with room for their abilities. A prospective resident could discover Kent through thoughtful marketing, find a home that fits, and contribute to the community. A young person already here could see a more realistic future close to family. Those outcomes connect all three volumes.

Growth that respects what makes Kent distinctive.

Our open space, landscapes, and communities are strengths to preserve. We can invite people to enjoy them while preparing suitable places for homes and employment. A county that makes those choices deliberately can be clear about the development it supports and the responsibilities that accompany it.

An invitation to consider what comes next.

These proposals require examination, resources, and sustained leadership. Their final form would reflect public discussion and the work needed to establish costs and responsibilities. I ask residents to consider both those questions and the opportunities successful action could create. We can make thoughtful decisions that give more people a meaningful place in Kent County's future.

EXPANDING OPPORTUNITIES



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