

# Talent Attraction and Retention for Economic Development in the City of Roanoke, Virginia



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August 2007

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## Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank the City of Roanoke, specifically Stuart Mease, for its support of this research project, as well as Dr. Heike Mayer and Dr. Shelley Mastran from Virginia Tech. Many thanks go out to the countless Virginia Tech and Roanoke College alumni who completed the survey, as well as the individuals who took the time to participate in one of the three focus groups.

## Executive Summary

The City of Roanoke is located in the southwestern portion of Virginia, approximately 170 miles southwest of Richmond and 230 miles southwest of Washington, D.C. Historically, the City of Roanoke's economy was based in heavy industry, including rail, textiles, and furniture manufacturing. However, as manufacturing continues to decline in the region, the City of Roanoke has become more focused on establishing a strong economy based in healthcare, insurance, and finance. With this new economy comes a variety of challenges, including how to attract young, educated adults to the region and keep them there. This study is about young people, their perceptions on place, and the differences in place perception among various generations.

One of the hottest debates in economic development is the argument of jobs versus amenities. Do jobs or amenities bring people to a place? The first section of this document outlines this debate and suggests how the study's findings might impact the City of Roanoke's economic development strategy. Secondly, the study investigates the differences among generations in their perception of place and overall importance of jobs and amenities. This document also provides background information on the City of Roanoke's economic history and existing amenities as well as information on comparative regions.

The study's findings indicate that while amenities are important, jobs are more important to young adults. Individuals will not relocate to a place based on the amenities alone. As is found in much of the research on economic policy, a combination of place elements and job opportunities is important for attracting the young and college educated. When looking at the differences between cohorts, the overall trend is that job opportunities become more important than location as young adults age; proximity to family also becomes more important. The findings indicate that young adults seek variety in their amenities and lifestyle choices, in addition to an environment that is welcoming to all walks of life.

The data gathered has been used to suggest what elements City of Roanoke officials might implement in their economic development strategy in order to attract and retain young adults.

**Recommendations for the City of Roanoke**

	<b>Finding #1</b>	<b>Finding #2</b>	<b>Finding #3</b>	<b>Finding #4</b>
	<b>Jobs are the Critical Amenity</b>	<b>The More Variety, the Better</b>	<b>Encourage People to "Come as They Are"</b>	<b>Study Comparative Regions</b>
<b>Strategy</b>	Provide opportunities for increased interaction between the local business community, college students, and native sons and daughters	Build upon existing amenities to enable a greater variety of experiences for young adults	Provide a welcoming environment for newcomers	Define the City of Roanoke's Sense of place
<b>Action</b>	Market Jobs and Affordability to Potential New Residents; Develop Programs that Connect Current College Students with the Local Business Community; Connect to Local College Alumni who Have Left the Region	Provide a Greater Retail Selection Focused on Young People's Interests; Capitalize on Natural Amenities in the Region; Increase Accessibility to Other Regions; Sponsor Free Events in the Downtown	Establish Groups that Support a Variety of Lifestyles; Increase Political Desire to Change	Become Known as the Home of Something Interesting

## Scope

This study explores the attraction and retention of young adults to the City of Roanoke and includes the application of concepts presented by several prominent leaders in the economic development field. This document includes the analysis of a series of focus groups and internet surveys, designed and executed by the author, intended to capture the thoughts of several different groups on location preference. It also explores two cities, Charlotte and Richmond, to discover what makes them attractive places to live. Recommendations for the City of Roanoke are then made from a combined analysis of current economic development theories, the focus group and internet survey findings, and the comparative regions.

## Background

*Brain drain*, a phrase coined in the 1950s by the Royal Society of London, is used to describe the emigration of talented and educated individuals to other nations or jurisdictions due to lack of opportunity where they are living. Brain drain is also referred to as the flight of human capital.

Today's economy focuses on the importance of human capital for economic development, as humans produce the knowledge needed to keep a place competitive. Economic development for today's economy has shifted, moving from a focus on place assets to a focus on knowledge. Economic development is no longer about viewing people as labor, but rather viewing the workforce as capital- the driving economic force. People have become the place asset that brings business and industry to a location.

In today's knowledge economy, the economic vitality of a place depends on the skills of the workforce, making workforce development a top priority for economic development. Highly skilled people generate and apply knowledge through their labor, and knowledge is what keeps a region competitive.

The human capital model proposes that a location's workforce drives economic development. It focuses on the importance of

educated workers and also indicates that labor may be very mobile and drawn to a city's local attractions. Jane Jacobs (1984) noted that cities are better able to attract creative people, and the presence of educated, creative people plays a primary role in the economic growth of cities. Those cities able to attract a stronger human capital base will produce more knowledge and as a result will experience a higher rate of development.

*On the Mechanics of Economic Development*, a study by Robert E. Lucas, focuses on human capital development and the role it plays in helping cities transform from a resource-based economy to a knowledge economy. Lucas transformed Jane Jacobs' theory into an economic development externality model, emphasizing that a growing economy depends heavily on the increase in the rate of accumulation of human capital.

Lucas emphasizes human capital investment as opposed to investment in a disembodied stock of knowledge, such as the application of new knowledge or learning-by-doing. His theory is rooted in the concept of positive externalities which are created through the exchange of knowledge between people. The greater the number of individuals located in a place, the greater number of externalities there will be. Lucas also focuses on the importance of externalities in the development of cities and discusses the idea that cities may play a major role in the facilitation of knowledge spillovers.

Ann Markusen writes on the importance of targeting occupations rather than firms as part of an economic development strategy. The ability of an economy to specialize and export is deeply based on talents and synergy in the local economy. By identifying talents embedded in local occupations, as well as researching firms



and industries, local governments can increase their economic abilities. In today's economy, firms now consider the quality of the existing workforce when making relocation decisions. Additionally, entrepreneurship is likely among members of certain occupations.

Markusen (2004) outlines how development is consistently less linked to natural resources and more heavily reliant on human capital. American economy relies on skilled labor for its success, and labor as an input is mobile. Mobile labor is drawn to particular natural environments, but in a new way- workers with choice select livable environments over exploited ones (Markusen, 2004). Firms are more reliant on regional labor pools in a labor market where employees are highly mobile. As a result, human capital development through training and education is important. Additionally, workers are more likely to be committed to the region in which they live than to a firm or industry, and will search for livability, amenities, and "lovability" (Markusen, 2004).

*The Young and Restless in the Knowledge Economy*, a study by Joseph Cortright and Carol Coletta, outlines the importance of college-educated individuals in cities. The study details how young adults are favoring certain metropolitan areas over others, and the growing concentration of talented young people in fewer and fewer cities makes those cities even more attractive places for talented people.

As cities prepare to attract young adults, it is important to note that this group is much more diverse than the overall U.S. population. Cities hoping to grow their economies based on these young adults need to welcome and accept diversity. Taken together, the *Young and Restless* report states that "this fundamental shift in labor markets, the growing demand for talent in our knowledge-based economy and the distinctive location preferences of young adults calls for

a new approach to metropolitan economic development in the years ahead. The focus of urban leaders must shift to the development, attraction and retention of talent. It is the critical resource driving and enabling metropolitan economic growth."

Localities need to invest in human capital in order to stay competitive; human capital is the future of economic development. In order to invest in human capital localities must understand what young, talented individuals desire in the place they live.

## Jobs versus Amenities

*One of the central debates in economic development resides in the issue of what really attracts talent to a place. Do jobs attract people, or are the place amenities what bring people to a region?*



## Amenities Drive Human Capital Movement

Richard Florida's Creative Capital Theory takes the basic parts of human capital theory a step further. His theory explores the supply side of human capital, focusing on the importance of amenities in attracting individuals to a place. Florida argues that the creative class is the core economic force of the 21st century. Members of the creative class are those who create knowledge: scientists, artists, engineers, and designers (Florida, 2002). The creative class now holds one-third of all jobs, and as a result cities need to provide places that attract and stimulate creative people. These highly skilled people generate more innovation, thus fueling the knowledge economy, which in turn makes the place more competitive. For communities to stimulate economic growth, they need more creative and talented people. Place matters to the creative class, and Florida believes that place is becoming the central organizing unit of our economy, replacing the role that used to be played by the large corporation.

To further explore the concept that place matters, Florida (2002) ran a series of focus groups. The people in his groups stated that lifestyle frequently trumps employment when choosing where to live. His research shows that people often move somewhere for the lifestyle and amenities, then seek employment in that place. People today expect more from the places they live and look for a balance between their work and recreation opportunities. Due to hectic and unpredictable schedules, people prefer to live in a place that has all their desired amenities close at hand. Instead of vacation homes, which can be far away, people want ready access to recreation on a "just-in-time" basis. Trails and parks close by are much more in tune with the creative class' lifestyle choice and preferred amenities.

Nightlife is also an important part of the amenities described by Florida, and nightlife is taken to mean "all entertainment activities that take place after dark." Music venues, art galleries, and other experiential options are highly desired, as is having a wide mix of options. Florida's survey on nightlife that examined what younger creative class people desire in urban nightlife found that cultural attractions ranked highly, in addition to late night dining options. A third of the survey participants stated that nightlife plays a role in where they choose to live and work.

Florida's argument for the creative class in cities hinges on the idea that once a creative class is established in a place, its cultural and entrepreneurial energies will activate and the place will grow a vibrant local economy. However, Alan Scott (2006) states that Florida's argument neglects the relationships that must be present in order for this to occur. In modern cities all dimensions of life evolve together. Any developmental program focused on building a creative city must deal with setting up a local production system, training or attracting a relevant labor force, programming urban space, and ensuring that all the elements involved work together. These elements cannot work individually.





report titled “Meds and Eds: The Key to Arizona Leapfrogging Ahead in the 21st Century” was commissioned by a group of CEOs in order to focus coordination efforts between health research and health care. The report called for Arizona to stay focused on attracting assets to help the state stay ahead in the fields that matter most. Meds and eds- the collection of medical and educational institutions- are proven generators of new ideas, smart people, and new companies, which are all important to economic growth. Arizona believes that jobs come first and people will follow, as individuals will be attracted to a place where good jobs, access to quality health care, and a strong educational system are available. There is interdependence present, and institutions, resources, assets, and talented people are seen as an intertwined community with common goals. The focus is on job creation and increased education, and through these efforts it is believed people will be attracted to a place.



## Cohort Differences

A segment of the jobs versus amenities debate seeks to uncover the differences in location preferences between cohorts.

The U.S. Census published a special report titled *Migration of the Young, Single, and College Educated: 1995-2000*. This report outlined

### Generation X:

While generation X is defined differently by numerous sources, we use the term to describe those born in the 1960s to the late 1970s.

### Generation Y:

Refers to the those born in the 1980s and 1990s- years following Generation X.

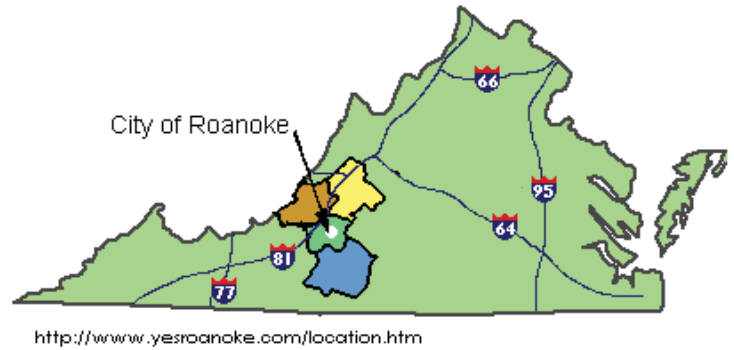
that different segments of the young adult population find different amenities important. It states that young adults, defined here as those between the ages of 25 and 39, constitute a large share of migrants. This may be due to the group having less opposition to risk and a longer timeline to recover any investment in migration. Furthermore, young, single, college-educated adults may be more willing than married individuals to relocate in order to meet lifestyle demands, as those who are married may be constrained by location desires of a spouse. Those who are educated not only benefit from having a variety of job opportunities, but they also bring the intellectual resources to the place they locate, helping to raise the area’s human capital.

Research shows that although educated individuals are the most mobile, mobility changes with stages of life. As we age, we move less frequently, and the likelihood of moving across state or metropolitan lines falls by half between ages 25-35 and continues to decline through retirement age (U.S. Census, 2003). Individuals may become less mobile with age as they become settled, making business contacts, enrolling children in schools, and purchasing homes. As a result, a region should design policies that focus on retaining these young adults during these critical years, which increases their likelihood of staying in the region permanently.

A March 2007 study (Ferguson, 2007) looked at the very issue of jobs versus amenities, and the varying degrees of importance within different cohorts. The study found that rural and urban communities are influenced to different degrees by amenity, economic, and urban scale groupings of variables and that there are variations among age cohorts in urban and rural areas. The findings indicated that economic variables are the most influential among rural cohorts, but their importance diminishes with age. In urban areas, amenity and economic variables have equal importance across different age cohorts. Overall, amenities play a more important role in urban (as compared to rural) population growth, although they are second to economic factors in overall importance. Moreover, among all young adult cohorts, economic factors are the most influential in rural areas, but amenities rank over economic factors in urban areas.

Why is this important to economic developers? Localities need to invest in human capital in order to stay competitive; human capital is critical for economic development. In order to invest in human capital, localities must understand what young, talented individuals desire in the place they live. With the changing economy, it is important that economic developers understand the driving forces behind human capital movement, as well as the tools needed to keep their region competitive.

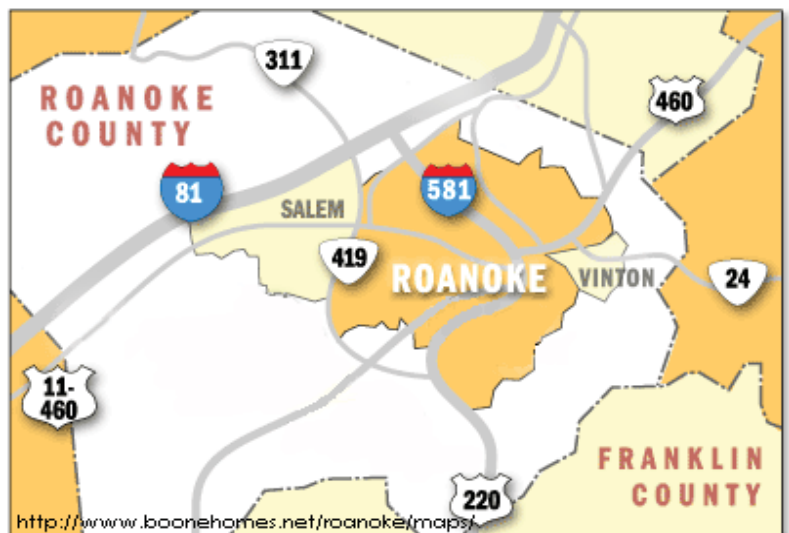
The City of Roanoke, Virginia, has realized the importance of investing in human capital. In January 2006, the City of Roanoke hired Stuart Mease to create programs and events, both social and professional, to retain and attract young adults to the city and its surrounding region. This study provides the City of Roanoke with guidance on future economic development policy relating to the attraction and retention of young adults.



## History of the City of Roanoke

### Location

The City of Roanoke is located in the Roanoke Valley, approximately 168 miles southwest of Richmond, 233 miles southwest of Washington, D.C., and 198 miles northeast of Charlotte, NC. This location in the Blue Ridge Mountains between Maryland and Tennessee made the City of Roanoke the transportation hub of western Virginia and contributed to its rapid growth. Although it was settled in 1740, Roanoke didn't become an independent city until 1884. The city, named after the river that flowed through it, became a railroad junction for the Norfolk & Western Railroad, which transported Virginia and West Virginia coal.



## Economic History

The City of Roanoke's economy developed around the Norfolk & Western Railroad and heavy manufacturing, as the railroad's presence in the region was very attractive to manufacturing companies. For many years, area residents worked in prosperous manufacturing industries, including the largest rayon mill in the world and the largest railroad shop, structural steel plant and tin can factory in the South.

However, as railroad technology led to the diesel railway in the 1950s, the City of Roanoke's economy began to decline. The city's largest factory closed, and Norfolk and Western Railway converted from steam to diesel power. Over the years, many other industrial jobs in textile

The City of Roanoke's downtown has been recognized by *Southern Business & Development* magazine as one of the best downtowns in the south. The article states that they City of Roanoke has "the right balance. It is a great place to visit and a great place to live. Long a hub for commerce, business and entertainment, the 65-block area is well on its way to becoming a 24-hour downtown where you'll find something to do anytime."

Source: *City of Roanoke website*

In 2004, the City of Roanoke was ranked one of America's "Most Livable Small Cities" by Partners for Livable Communities.

Source: *America's Most Livable Communities website*

and furniture manufacturing have been lost to outsourcing. Today the economy is rooted in service industries and higher technology manufacturing, such as night vision goggles. Additionally, the banking and health care industries are strong.

## The City of Roanoke's Amenities

While the economy in the City of Roanoke has changed, it is still considered the cultural and recreational center for southwest Virginia. With access to great outdoor recreation in the Blue Ridge Mountains and a thriving downtown, it's no wonder that the City of Roanoke was listed as one of America's most livable cities by Partners for Livable Communities. Through a revitalization of the downtown and the creation of Market Square, the City of Roanoke is alive with festivals, a farmers' market, and upscale restaurants and shops. The City of Roanoke has undergone a transformation in the last several years, focusing on technology and higher education development.

The City of Roanoke is committed to higher education, which is evident by the establishment of the Roanoke Higher Education Center. Through appropriations by the Virginia General Assembly in 1998 and 1999 and funds contributed by the city, the former headquarters

“Known historically as the “Capital of the Blue Ridge,” the City of Roanoke continues to be the region’s crossroads for commerce. Its revitalized downtown core is all big city bustle with an impressive array of arts, recreation and cultural amenities as well as an aggressive economic strategy to ensure that the city continues to develop and attract high-tech and manufacturing businesses in its burgeoning biotechnology, optics, information technology and transportation sectors.”

*Source: America’s Most Livable Communities website*

building of Norfolk Western was renovated. The historic building is now home to fifteen higher education institutions, and training and education are provided to citizens. Established through a number of private and public investments, the center provides a new model for collaboration in education and training. It provides the skills needed to keep the workforce competitive while meeting the training needs for employers across the region.

The City of Roanoke has shown its commitment to environmental quality through establishing an Urban Forestry Plan in 2003. The plan calls for the city to increase its tree canopy over the next ten years, and more trees will help increase air quality through the removal of pollutants. Roanoke is one of the few metropolitan regions that offers close access to the Blue Ridge Parkway, one of the most popular attractions in the National Parks System. The City of Roanoke

has an established greenway network that helps link residential neighborhoods to the downtown and the beautiful Blue Ridge Parkway. The City of Roanoke is home to seventy-one parks, eight recreation centers, seventeen golf courses, and six public pools. Nine hiking trails are found locally, in addition to a horse trail and bird and wildlife trails. Watersports, including whitewater rafting, canoeing, boating, and fishing. During higher water levels, the Roanoke River, which meanders through urban areas, can be paddled by canoe and kayak. ATV trails, caving, cross-country skiing, rock climbing, camping, and horseback riding are just some of the activities possible for the region’s residents.

Furthermore, the City of Roanoke established a WiFi project in 2003 to give residents access to free wireless internet in the downtown area. The project was designed to help spur technology growth.

The City of Roanoke also facilitated a \$2.3 million renovation of two historic buildings on what is known as Warehouse Row. The renovated structure, the Warehouse Row Business Center,

*Delicious Living* magazine selected the City of Roanoke as a 2006 impressive city for its environmental friendliness. Specifically mentioned were city efforts to revitalize its neighborhoods through programs such as Southeast by Design, its encouragement of environmentally friendly architecture, and its C2C competition for the latest in green-building design.

*Source: City of Roanoke website*

“The City of Roanoke offers something unique—unexpected balance. Roanoke has the amenities that you’d expect from a dynamic urban center, without losing the charming feeling of a smaller place. Roanoke is a city that encourages you to make things happen because it’s big enough to provide multiple opportunities, but small enough so you can make an impact.”

*-City Manager Darlene L. Burcham*

*Source: America’s Most Livable Communities website*

is flexible space designed to support emerging technology companies, encouraging the clustering of technology businesses.

The Art Museum of Western Virginia located in the City of Roanoke is undergoing a multi-million dollar expansion project in order to house the museum’s growing collection.

Additionally, the City of Roanoke is home to a number of festivals and events throughout the year that cater to a variety of interests. The most well-known is the City of Roanoke’s Festival in the Park, which features artworks, concerts, and performances. Other events include Festival on

the Market, First Fridays, Art by Night, Dickens of a Christmas, Music for Americans, the City of Roanoke Art Show, Virginia Mountain Peach Festival, Henry Street Heritage Festival, the Harvest Festival, the Virginia Chili Cook-off, and the Strawberry Festival.

Demographically, the City of Roanoke and the New River Valley are home to thousands of college students. College enrollment tops 60,000 students attending a number of area universities, including ECPI Technical College, Ferrum College, Hollins University, Jefferson College of Health Sciences, National College of Business and Technology, New River Community College, Radford University, Roanoke College, the Roanoke Higher Education Center, Virginia Tech, and Virginia Western Community College.

The Charlotte Chamber of Commerce boasts that the city has ranked second for “Hot Cities for Entrepreneurs,” and fourth in “Best City for Singles Relocating.”

*Source: City of Charlotte and Mecklenberg County website*

**Table 1: Demographic Indicators for the Cities of Roanoke, Charlotte, and Richmond**

	Roanoke	Charlotte	Richmond
<b>Demographic Indicators</b>			
Percent White	69.8%	58.3%	38.3%
Percent Black/African American	26.7%	32.7%	57.2%
Percent Female	53.1%	51.0%	53.5%
Total Percent Generation X Population	15.2%	19.1%	16.6%
Total Percent Generation Y Population	15.3%	17.1%	15.1%
Location Quotient: Generation X	0.94	1.18	1.03
Location Quotient: Generation Y	0.72	0.81	0.71

Source: US Census (2000)

The City of Charlotte's Economic Development Office has put a focus on developing within a smart growth framework to make the community more livable and productive.

Source: City of Charlotte and Mecklenberg County website

## Current Economic and Employment Conditions in the City of Roanoke

The City of Roanoke offers a diverse employment base, with large number of employees in the manufacturing, service, and retail trade sectors. The highest percentage of employment is in Sales and Service occupations, while Managerial, Professional, and Related Occupations are also high. The largest employers in the region span a variety of industries, including health care, retail sales, distribution centers, and manufacturing. Some of the largest employers include Carilion Health Systems, City of Roanoke Schools, Advance Auto Parts, Wachovia Bank, Allstate Insurance, ITT Industries, and General Electric.

The cities of Roanoke, Richmond, and Charlotte all ranked in the 2004 list of "America's Most Livable Communities," by the Partners for Livable Communities.

Source: America's Most Livable Communities website

Table 2: How do They Measure Up?

	City of Roanoke	City of Richmond	City of Charlotte
<b>Residents</b>			
Median Age	38	34.2	33.1
Completed at Least Some College (% of residents)	49.3%	56.2%	53.3%
Married	41.3%	29.1%	45.5%
<b>Quality of Life</b>			
Air Quality Index (% days AQI ranked good)	51.8%	100.0%	47.1%
Personal/property crime incidents (per 1,000)	131	230	209
<b>Culture</b>			
Movie Theaters (within 15 miles)	7	17	19
Restaurants (within 15 miles)	635	1890	2777
Bars (within 15 miles)	6	17	109
Museums	5	6	4
<b>Housing</b>			
Median home price	\$130,800	\$145,000	\$153,000
Home price gain (2004-2005)	8.9%	7.4%	3.4%
<b>Financial</b>			
Median Household Income	40,761	41,075	63,082
Job growth	-3.87%	-4.16%	6.58%

Source: Best Places to Live (2006)

Many existing manufacturing companies in the area are undergoing expansion, and the Roanoke Valley Economic Development Partnership works to attract new businesses and industries to the region. A recent effort has been designed to promote the life sciences sector, including companies in biomedics and biotechnology. Several industrial properties have been developed with the life sciences in mind, and Carilion Health Systems has put money into expanding life sciences business in the area. Two business parks have been developed to attract biotech and biomedical firms to the region. Riverside Centre is a 75-acre redevelopment area just south of the Downtown Roanoke business district, and Roanoke County's Center for Research & Technology is already home to Novozymes Biologicals.

In order to connect individuals with job opportunities in the region, the City of Roanoke has developed an online job database, RoanokeConnect. Users sign up through an online profile, and existing employment opportunities are matched to the profile. This database helps to link employers with potential employees, and both entities can see the opportunities available in the region.

The City of Roanoke has established a number of incentives to attract employers to the region. Enterprise zones, grants, technology zones, infrastructure assistance, training assistance, and loan programs are just a few of the incentives designed to encourage business development in the area. These and other programs work to attract small and large businesses in a variety of sectors.

The Roanoke Valley has a 3.8% unemployment rate, but the broader region has a higher underemployment rate. Over 28,000 people in the Roanoke Valley are underemployed, working jobs they are overqualified for due to the need for steady employment. These workers are not using their full talents and are likely not currently doing the jobs they had formal education for. The large number of educational facilities in the Roanoke region shows a commitment to education, yet such a large number of the population is left underemployed. The unemployment rate and the underemployment rate indicate that the City of Roanoke needs to focus its attention on jobs and providing the types of jobs that residents and potential residents are searching for.

## Comparative Regions

The author researched two regions that are comparable to the City of Roanoke. Charlotte and Richmond were studied to find out why young adults are choosing to locate in these areas. The information found was used to support the City of Roanoke's efforts in attracting young adults. Charlotte was selected due to its proximity to the City of Roanoke, its banking and industry history, and its rank as one of the top metropolitan areas that is home to young adults. Richmond was chosen due to its proximity to the City of Roanoke, its role as a commercial center, and the City of Roanoke's staff recommendation.

Richmond is the state capital of Virginia, and its young adult population is more diverse than the typical U.S. metropolitan region. Richmond ranks 40th of the 50 largest U.S. metros in percentage of the population that is white, and also ranks 4th in proportion of young African Americans. Additionally, Richmond is above average in college attainment, and the young adult population is proportional for its size (14.3 percent compared with the 14.5 percent average for metropolitan areas). Richmond has a lot to offer, including a variety of restaurants and unique shopping. Walkable, distinct neighborhoods which eliminate the need for an automobile are present just outside the downtown. Richmond has many outdoor activities, including parks, mountain biking, and rapids in the downtown.

Although Richmond has a lot to offer, Cortright and Coletta discovered some drawbacks to the city. While the city has a rich history, its history may not be favorable to some people. The city is viewed by some as having a close-minded attitude towards newcomers, and the lack of diversity is a drawback for many people. The local government is not viewed as progressive, and can be considered very conservative and unwilling to change.

Richmond's economy is based in government and services, with jobs in these sectors accounting for more than 50% of all jobs in Richmond. Richmond also has a diverse manufacturing base, including information technology and semiconductor manufacturing firms. The Virginia BioTechnology Research Park offers 575,000 square feet of research and development space to emerging biotech companies. Richmond is head of the Fifth Federal Reserve District, making it a financial center for a five state region. Items and goods produced in Richmond include tobacco products, toiletries, processed foods, aluminum, chemicals, textiles, paper, printing, and over-the-counter

pharmaceuticals. The Richmond area has a higher percentage of white-collar professional, technical, sales and clerical workers than both the South Atlantic Region and the United States as a whole. Cutting edge technology makes Richmond a hub for innovation and entrepreneurship in the biotechnology and information technology fields.

Charlotte, although having less diversity than Richmond, has a much higher percentage of Generation X and Y members. In fact, it is one of the top five metropolitan areas with the largest share of the population ages 25 to 34. Not only are these individuals young, but they are well educated. Charlotte has increased its number of college graduates roughly five times faster than the U.S. as a whole. Charlotte has been able to attract these young adults without a major university or a strong identity that helps put cities on the map. Through North Carolina's liberal banking laws, Charlotte has become a financial capital. Although Charlotte continues to grow, it is still considered affordable, and housing in the downtown area reaffirms the city's interest in attracting young people.

Charlotte's location makes it accessible to a wide variety of markets, and this has led to the city's development as the sixth largest wholesale center in the United States. The Charlotte region attracts industries such as microelectronics, metal working, and vehicle assembly. Research and development, high-technology, and service-oriented international and domestic firms are also prominent. Charlotte has also become a major area of defense-related industries, with four of the nation's top ten defense contracting companies located in Charlotte. Knowledge-based industries are plentiful, and there are an abundance of jobs in these industries.

Richmond and Charlotte are both engaged in creative class discussion, yet it appears there is no formal strategy in either place to attract and retain young adults. The Richmond community

seems aware of the issues they face in regards to talent attraction, but the pace of change appears slow. The city has developed a center that caters to the creative community, providing office space and internet access. However, there seems to be little change in the region's approach to economic development. Revitalization projects in the downtown are happening but do not appear to be driven by the desire to attract young adults. Charlotte has done well at attracting the creative class without any strong identity. Tony Crumbley, Vice President for research at the Charlotte Chamber of Commerce, said the city and state had done a lot of things right without realizing it, like establishing liberal banking laws and redeveloping downtown in the 1980s.

What lessons can the City of Roanoke learn from Richmond and Charlotte? Richmond and Charlotte are attractive to young adults because they provide plentiful jobs in a variety of sectors. While the City of Roanoke is diversifying its economic base, Richmond and Charlotte are already diverse and have a better chance at attracting the creative class. Richmond provides stable employment through government work, and Charlotte has many jobs in the banking arena. Both regions offer cultural diversity and lifestyle amenities, making them attractive places to live. The cost of living is also low in both areas as compared to other metropolitan areas, helping young adults build an economic base for the future.

Taking into consideration the things happening in the Cities of Richmond and Charlotte, what can the City of Roanoke implement to retain and attract Generation X and Y to work, live, and play in the City of Roanoke?

## Research Methods

This study researches five segments of the population, asking questions that explore the location decisions of each group. The groups include: native sons and daughters who no longer live in Roanoke, current young professionals, current college students, local college alumni who no longer live in Roanoke, and those with no association with the City of Roanoke. In addition to determining whether it was jobs or amenities that attracted young adults to a place, the study examines any differences between the groups based on their stage of life.

The five groups were selected in order to test the findings of the Ferguson study which detailed rural and urban communities and the differences found among cohorts in each. A variety of groups were chosen in order to gather the perceptions of current college students versus young adults who were already members of the workforce to see if desires changed with age. The study also tested the urban-rural dichotomy by collecting information on age and location as well as conducting focus groups in Alexandria, Blacksburg, and Roanoke, VA.

An internet survey and a series of focus groups were conducted. The internet survey was larger in scope, producing a greater number of responses. Smaller, more in-depth focus groups were conducted to add depth to the data collected through the internet survey. Focus groups were conducted for the segments of the population that were in close proximity to the City of Roanoke, and an internet survey was used to collect data for the segments of the population dispersed throughout the country.

An internet survey was conducted for the native sons and daughters and local college alumni groups. The questions presented in both the focus groups and the internet survey were designed to establish the person's connection to the Roanoke region, desired amenities, the amenities the City of Roanoke and/or the New River Valley region may lack, and why the person left the region. Other questions included how often the person visited the region and his/her likelihood of returning. These questions were asked to uncover each group's lifestyle

**Table 3: Group Information**

Group Name	Definition	Group Demographics	Data Gathered	N = Number of Respondents
Native Sons and Daughters	Those born and raised in Roanoke/New River Valley region who are no longer living in the region	An even mix of generations X and Y, ages mid 20s to late 40s	Internet survey	77
Local College Alumni	Young adults who attended a university or college in the region and are no longer living in the region	Mostly Generation X, ages late 20s to mid-late 40s	Internet survey	525
Current College Students	Students currently attending a college or university in the region	Generation X, ages 21-23	Focus group held at Virginia Tech on August 4, 2006	10
Current Young Professionals	Young adults currently working in the Roanoke/New River Valley region	An even mix of generations X and Y, ages mid 20s to late 40s	Focus group held in the City of Roanoke on August 4, 2006	16
No Association	Young adults who never lived or attended college in the Roanoke/New River Valley Region	Generation X, ages 24-28	Focus group held in the City of Alexandria on August 17, 2006	6

preferences. Focus groups were conducted for the current college students, current local young professionals, and the group with no association. Once the surveys and focus groups were complete, responses were compiled into a series of charts and graphs. The data was analyzed for trends and correlations between the groups.

The author designed the internet survey with the assistance of Stuart Mease and Dr. Heike Mayer from the Department of Urban Affairs and Planning at Virginia Tech. The survey link was distributed to local college alumni and native sons and daughters and included an e-mail explaining the intent of the survey. E-mail list serves were used for distributing the survey, with the help of Stuart Mease, Jan Wilson, Assistant Director of Alumni Relations for the College of Architecture and Urban Studies at Virginia Tech, and Erin Grant, Roanoke College Alumni Chapter President for the Washington, DC area. The e-mail directed participants to an internet survey hosted by the internet survey company [surveymonkey.com](http://www.surveymonkey.com). For ease in producing the survey and to obtain the most accurate results, the survey was designed to capture the thoughts of both groups while being able to filter out the responses of the individual groups. The survey was designed using internet survey research guidelines. The local college alumni group includes graduates from Virginia Tech-Blacksburg, Roanoke College, Radford University, and Hollins University. 611 surveys were completed.

Both focus groups were designed and facilitated by the author, with the assistance of Stuart Mease, Special Projects Coordinator for the City of Roanoke. The focus group for those with no association with the City of Roanoke was conducted at the Virginia Tech Center in Alexandria, VA. Participants were invited through an email sent by the Center Area Student Planning Association of Virginia Tech, and the

snowballing method gained further participants. The focus group for local college students was conducted at Virginia Tech in Blacksburg, VA. The students were members of undergraduate level marketing class, and the majority of the students were preparing to graduate. The focus group for the current young adults living in the Roanoke region was conducted at the City of Roanoke offices. Materials including information on using focus groups for research were used to design and facilitate the focus groups.

One of the primary benefits to using two methods of data collection is that the internet survey was able to reach individuals across the country, and there was no limit to the number of responses that could be collected. The focus groups also provided more in-depth thoughts on the topics at hand. One drawback is that although the internet survey received a high number of responses, it is unknown what the response rate was for the survey. Due to the snowballing method as well as the nature of list serves, it is unknown how many individuals actually received the survey and perhaps did not respond.

# Findings

## Group 1: Native Sons and Daughters, all Having Left the Region

The native sons and daughters group responded well with seventy-seven total surveys collected. The primary reason most individuals in this group left the region was due to jobs. The amenities identified reflect the desires of the majority of those taking the survey, namely young and single adults or those married with no children.

When asked what the top reasons for not staying in the Roanoke region were, 66 percent of the responses related to lack of job availability in the Roanoke region or a job offer/job opportunity in another location. Other common responses included the desire to experience a new place, the draw of cultural offerings/amenities in another place, and lack of activities for young people in the Roanoke region. When asked if a job offer or location was a more significant factor in deciding where to move, almost 48 percent of the responses indicated they were both equally significant factors. Over 21 percent responded that a job offer was more significant, and approximately 20 percent responded that the location was a more significant factor.

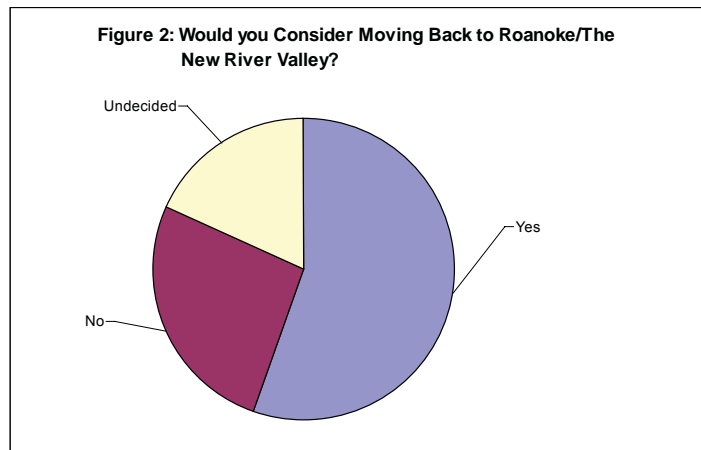
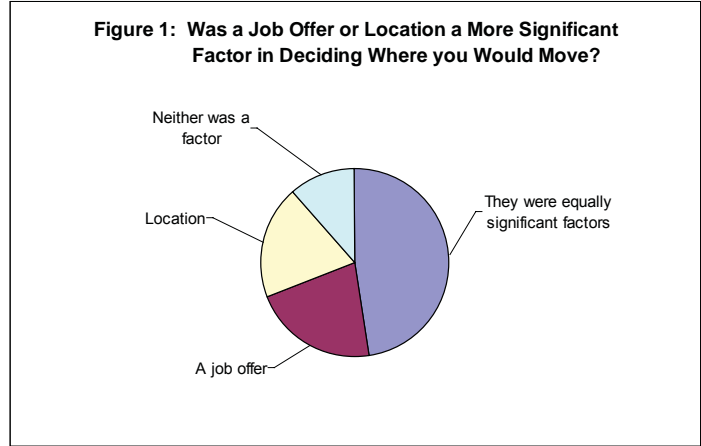


Table 4: Reasons for Moving Back to the Roanoke Region- Why or Why Not <sup>1</sup>	
Why?	Why Not?
Family is there	Lack of jobs/career opportunities
Great Place to Raise a Family	Enjoy the opportunities here
Beautiful Scenery	I have settled outside the area
Good quality of life	Area is too conservative
Would move if I had a good job offer in the area	Amenities are limited
Would consider Roanoke for retirement	Prefer a more metropolitan region
Roanoke has good community feel	Area is too isolated
Roanoke has good amenities for a city of its size	Region needs more amenities for children
New River Valley has high quality natural amenities	Lack of housing
The slower paced lifestyle	Climate

<sup>1</sup> These are the top ten most frequent responses given by internet survey participants. The question was open-ended.

When asked what local and regional amenities are important, culture and the arts and outdoor recreation opportunities were the top two responses, totaling 10.9 percent each. Other common responses included many job opportunities/ a thriving economy, sports teams, retail shopping, a variety of dining options, airport access, nightlife, and entertainment options. Parks and open space, a strong sense of community, public transit, a large population of young people, good highways, and environmental awareness were other popular responses.

When asked what amenities could be improved on in the Roanoke region, the most common response was more high quality jobs, taking 15 percent of the total responses. A larger selection of restaurants and more entertainment options for adults were the second and third most common responses, indicating the need for variety. When asked if they would consider moving back to the Roanoke region, 55 percent of those surveyed responded yes, 26 percent said no, and 18 percent were undecided. Common reasons for moving back included being closer to family, a great place to raise a family, and beautiful scenery. Overall, this indicates that proximity to family becomes more important as individuals age. 7.8 percent of those responding would move back if they received a job offer in the area. 19.2 percent of individuals listed lack of jobs/career opportunities as a reason for not moving back,

**Table 5: What Local and Regional Amenities are Important to Have<sup>1</sup>?**

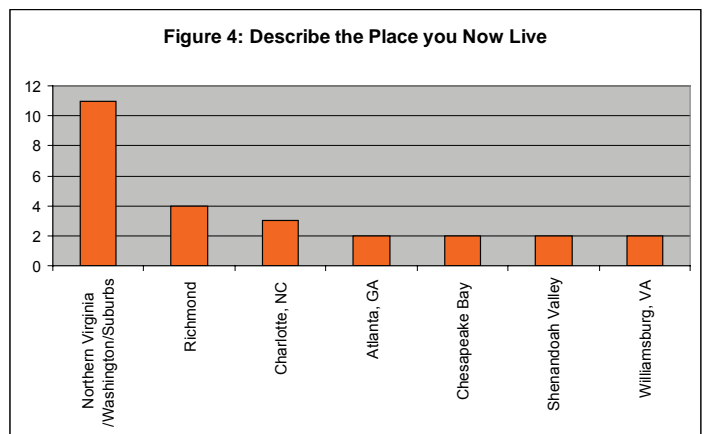
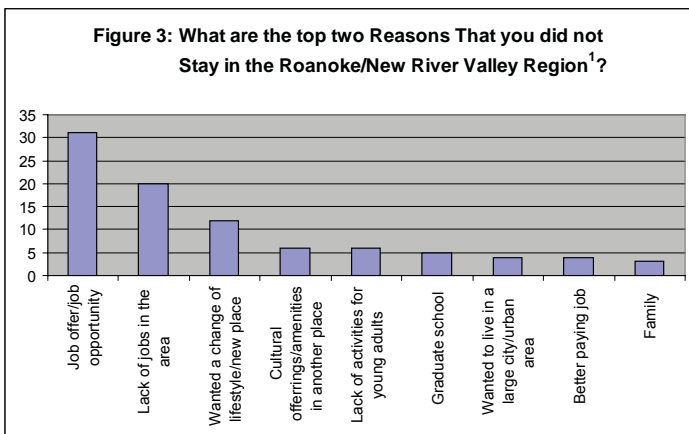
Response	Number
Culture and the arts	20
Outdoor recreation opportunities	20
Many job opportunities/thriving economy	13
Sports teams	12
Retail shopping	11
A variety of ethnic dining options	10
Airport access	9
Entertainment	9
Nightlife	7
Parks/open space	6
Diversity	6
Affordable housing	6
Strong feeling of community	6

<sup>1</sup> These are the top ten most frequent responses given by internet survey participants. The question was open ended.

**Table 6: What Amenities Could be Added or Improved in Roanoke/The New River Valley<sup>1</sup>?**

Response	Number
More high quality jobs	11
A larger selection of restaurants	9
Entertainment options for young adults	8
Larger retail selection	6
More nightlife	5
More arts	4
An updated mall	3
More sports	3
More specialty shops	3
Better airport access	3
Affordable housing in the downtown	3

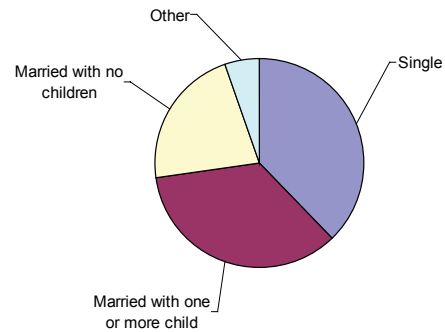
<sup>1</sup> These are the top ten most frequent responses given by internet survey participants. The question was open ended.



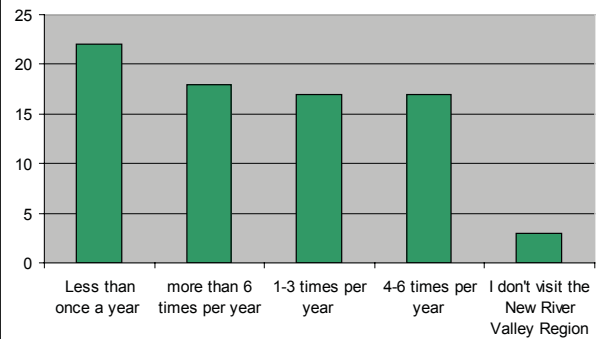
as there is a perception that the Roanoke region does not have a thriving job market. As the Census study mentioned, as individuals age, it becomes less likely that they will relocate once roots have been established, and this is evident by the one third of respondents who would not move back because they are settled in their current locations (settled as defined by children in school, established business ties, and/or being happy in current location).

The majority of the individuals surveyed now live in Northern Virginia, Washington, D.C., or Richmond, and it is apparent this is largely due to the job market in these areas or proximity to family. Approximately 32.4 percent visit the area less than once per year, 44.2 percent visit one to six times per year, and 23.4 percent visit more than six times per year. Of those visiting the area, likely reasons are Virginia Tech football or to visit family and friends located in the Roanoke region. Surely, with over one third of the respondents not visiting the area regularly, they are likely unaware of the changes happening in the City of Roanoke and may be surprised to see the opportunities that currently exist.

**Figure 5: Which Best Describes You?**

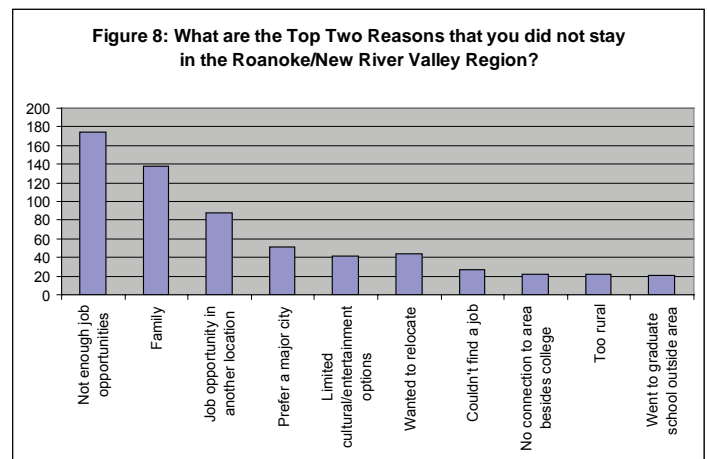
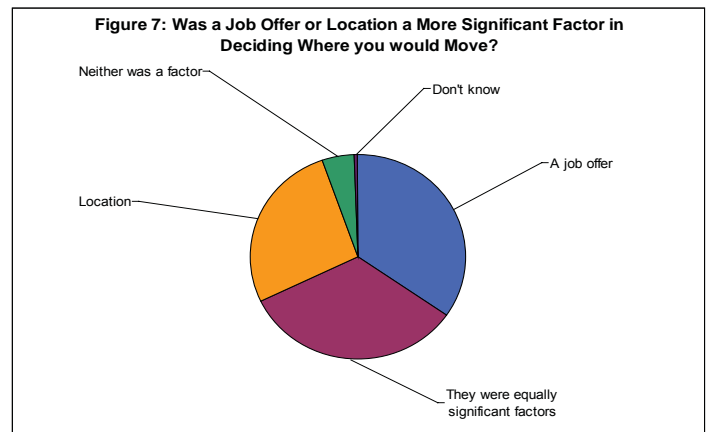


**Figure 6: How Often do you Visit the New River Valley Region?**



## Group 2: Local College Alumni, all Having Left the Region

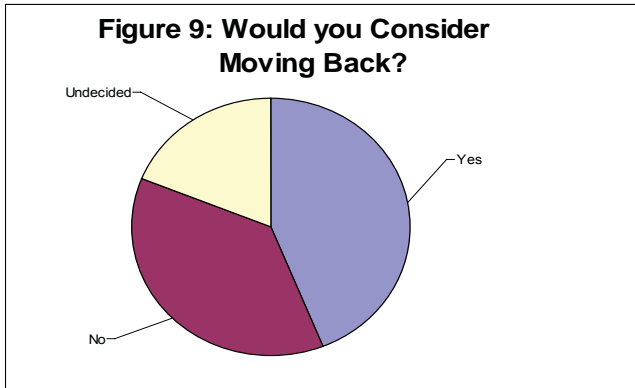
Local college alumni were also contacted to participate in the survey, and 525 individuals completed it. Of the responses to the question as to why they did not stay in the region, 26.4 percent of the responses stated there were not enough job opportunities. 19.4 percent mentioned family in another location, and 12.4 mentioned a job opportunity in another location. Again, job opportunities are the main factor as nearly 40 percent of the total responses mentioned jobs in some way as a factor for not staying in the region. Nearly 6 percent mentioned limited cultural and entertainment options, and 7.2 percent stated they prefer a major city. 34.7 percent of those surveyed listed a job offer as more significant than location when deciding where to relocate, 33 percent stated they were equal factors, and 26.9 percent listed location. 4.7 percent that said neither was a factor; however no further data was collected on those responses.



**Table 7: Reasons for Moving Back to the Roanoke Region- Why or Why Not<sup>1</sup>?**

Why?	Why not?
Scenic beauty of area	Settled in current location
To retire	No family in the region
If there was a job opportunity	Lack of career opportunities
Nice area	Too small, not a large city
Enjoy the slower pace of life	Area is too isolated/not accessible
Good, moderate cost of living	Too close minded/conservative
Great place to raise a family	Lack of activities for young adults
Good recreational opportunities	Lack of ocean
Close to alma mater (VT, Roanoke College)	Undesirable climate
Family is in the area	Don't want to live in a college town/atmosphere
For an academic position	Lacks a large concentration of young professionals
People are nice	Inadequate airport access
Good educational opportunities	Lack of quality medical care

<sup>1</sup> These are the top ten most frequent responses given by internet survey participants. The question was open-ended.



On the question of important amenities, the top five responses did not relate to jobs or the economy. The top five responses were cultural opportunities, a diverse selection of entertainment, restaurants, and shopping, high quality shopping/retail options, a variety of dining options, and recreational facilities. When asked what amenities could be improved in the Roanoke region, the most common response was more job opportunities and better salary. Many people responded that they didn't know or they had been away too long to say, which sparks interest in discovering what would bring these individuals back to visit the area and perhaps rediscover it. Other popular responses included a more vibrant downtown, improved airport service, improved shopping, and better dining options. Better public transportation, more cultural diversity, more nightlife, and more cultural events round up the list of top responses.

**Table 8: What Local and Regional Amenities are Important to Have in the Place you Live<sup>1</sup>?**

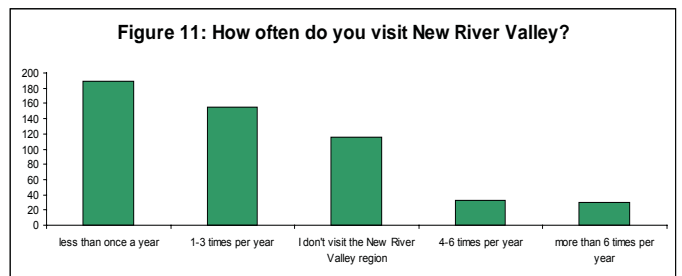
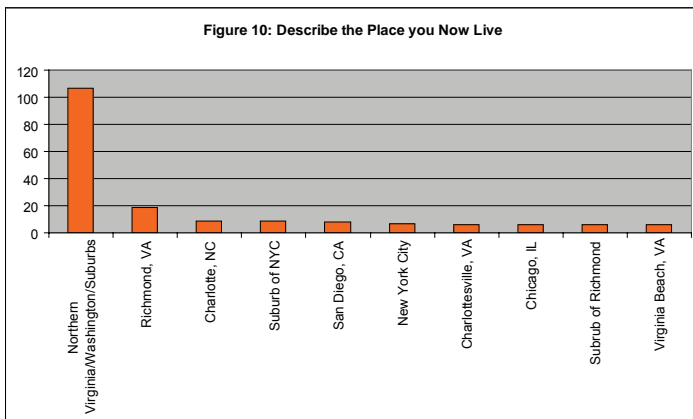
Response	Number
Cultural opportunities	116
Diverse selection of entertainment, restaurants, and shopping	79
Good shopping/retail options	78
Restaurants/ many dining options	73
Recreational facilities	71
Job and career opportunities/Strong economy	70
Strong/quality schools	66
Airport access (major airport with direct flights to major cities)	60
Good parks and open space	45
Professional sports/sports teams	39
Affordable quality housing options	39

<sup>1</sup> These are the top ten most frequent responses given by internet survey participants. The question was open ended.

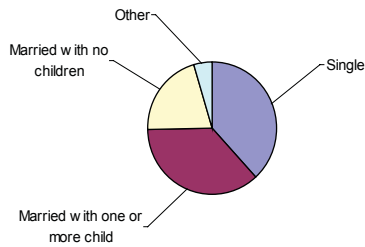
**Table 9: What amenities could be added or improved in Roanoke/the New River Valley<sup>1</sup>?**

Response	Number
More career opportunities and better salary	58
I don't know	52
I've been away too long to say	48
A more vibrant downtown	29
Improved airport service	28
Nothing	23
Improved shopping	22
More dining options	20
Better public transportation	19
More cultural diversity	16
More nightlife	16

<sup>1</sup> These are the top ten most frequent responses given by internet survey participants. The question was open ended.



**Figure 12: Which best describes you?**



Of those surveyed, 44 percent would consider moving back, while 19 percent are undecided. Common reasons to move back include the scenic beauty of the area, for retirement, and if there was a job opportunity. Common responses for not moving back include being settled in current location, no family in the region, and a lack of career opportunities in the region. Of those taking the survey the largest percentage currently reside in Northern Virginia. Other locations with a large number of alumni include Washington, D.C., Richmond, and Charlotte. Almost 30 percent of those surveyed visit the area one to three times per year, and 58.3 percent visit less than once per year. The majority of those taking the survey were single, indicative of the desire for more nightlife and opportunities to meet other young professionals.

### Group 3: Current Young Professionals

The focus group for the current young professionals living and working in the City of Roanoke had sixteen participants, ranging in age from early twenties to late thirties. The group was mixed between single, married, and married with children. Responses varied for the opening question on whether a job offer or location was a more significant factor in determining where the person would move. Several individuals stated a job offer as the reason, while others said both were important. Many had family in the area and actually came back to be closer to them, but said they could not have done so without a job offer in the Roanoke region. One participant specifically mentioned that he received a job offer out of college and decided to stay in the area. Many of the participants mentioned that they chose the City of Roanoke based on the slower

pace of life, affordable cost of living, good place to raise a family, close proximity to family, and affordable housing costs. It was mentioned that the City of Roanoke has a great small town feel and offers all necessary amenities. Good access to outdoor recreation was a major reason several people located in the Roanoke region, including the hiking, kayaking, and fishing opportunities available in the nearby mountains. Specific amenities desired in the City of Roanoke include more live music venues, a piano bar, and more dining options. The group agreed that affordable housing, a low cost of living, and a number of outdoor recreation options were important on a regional scale. The majority of the group planned to stay in the Roanoke region, but the primary reason to leave would be lack of work in the area. Overall, several group members identified their inability to tap into the local job market. The main feeling given was that these individuals were not natives and were not connected to the

**Table 10: Focus Group Responses for Current Young Professionals**

Question	Responses <sup>1</sup>
1. Was a job offer or location a more significant factor in deciding where you would move?	job offer both were important
2. Why did you choose the City of Roanoke as a place to live?	Slower pace of life Low cost of living To be close to family
3. What are the attractive qualities or amenities that the City of Roanoke already has?	Affordable housing Low cost of living Access to outdoor recreation Small town feel, but has all necessary amenities
4. What amenities would you like to see in the City of Roanoke?	More live music venues A piano bar Better corporate marketing to young adults
5. What regional amenities are important to you?	Low cost of living Affordable housing Access to recreational opportunities
6. Do you see yourself staying in the area a long time?	Yes- no plans to move Yes- children are in school here Yes- I can live here and work remotely making a Washington, DC salary Yes- as long as there is work in the area Undecided- depends on marriage
<sup>1</sup> Generalized responses from focus group participants.	

proper networks. One participant opened the conversation on better marketing to young adults still in college, making them aware of the great opportunities available in the City of Roanoke. Other issues addressed were the inability to influence local government policy changes that would allow activities that young adults are interested in, such as festivals. These events would often include alcoholic beverages and outdoor music, and the general consensus is that local policy inhibits these events from occurring or growing. Generally, the group felt that the lack of hospitality to newcomers and a lack of willingness to change make the City of Roanoke unappealing to the younger demographic.

## Group 4: Current College Students

The focus group for the current Virginia Tech college students asked a series of questions designed to capture the thoughts of those preparing to enter the workforce. This demographic is exactly what the 2003 Census study looked at: the young, single, and college-educated. This focus group was run during a marketing class comprised of ten students preparing to graduate. When asked why they chose to attend Virginia Tech, the responses centered around family history with the university, proximity to family, affordability, Virginia Tech football, and a change of pace from city life. When students were asked about amenities in the region, the majority of the group response was a desire for more cultural amenities. Several

students also mentioned a movie theater would be a great addition to the amenities available. A notable response was the desire for better transportation to get to the City of Roanoke; students felt the current bus service was not sufficient or convenient enough. Students were excited to learn about the cultural and music events happening in the City of Roanoke and stated that they never really heard much about what was going on in the City of Roanoke. Overall, students desire a larger number of activities within walking distance, with a greater selection of amenities available. The students in the focus group found retail shopping in the area inadequate; the mall does not meet the needs of young adults. More upscale retail shops and

**Table 11: Focus Group Responses for Current College Students**

<u>Question</u>	<u>Responses<sup>1</sup></u>
1. Why did you choose to attend Virginia Tech?	To get away from city life Because of family history with the university Affordability Proximity to home Hokie football
2. What regional amenities would you like to see in this region?	More cultural opportunities A grocery store A larger downtown area A movie theater More amenities within a closer distance A bigger mall Skiing/snowboarding recreation area A bakery More specialty shops A sandwich shop A bagel shop A swimming pool in the downtown for public use Better transportation opportunities to get to Roanoke
3. When you are preparing to graduate, is the job offer or the location of the job a higher priority?	Location is more important, you can find another job
4. Would you consider staying in this region after college?	Yes- family is here No- wages are low in the area No- there is a lack of career opportunities in the region No- education standards for children are not high enough No- salaries seem low No- housing options are limited No- but would consider moving here later in life to raise a family
<sup>1</sup> Generalized responses from focus group participants.	

clothing stores are desired. A suggestion was made to advertise events in the City of Roanoke better to students, and possibly provide bus transportation to and from the event. Specific amenities included a grocery store, a bakery, a sandwich shop, a bagel/quick breakfast shop, and a public swimming pool in the downtown area.

One student in the focus group said, “You can always find another job.”

Overwhelmingly the students agreed that location was more important than a job offer. One student said, “You can always find another job.” One student was adamant about staying in the Roanoke region due to his family ties with the region. However, most students in the group were not native to the area and had plans to move to larger cities in the U.S. Boston, Charlotte, New York City, and Northern Virginia were popular destination cities for the students. Many students were moving to these areas whether they had secured employment or not. To them, location is so important that they would move without a job and deal with finding employment once in the location. The majority of the students in the group would not consider staying in the region, and approximately a third of the students mentioned that they felt salaries were low and there was a lack of career opportunities. Another student felt there was a lack of adequate housing. Students did state that it would be a good place to raise a family, and they would consider coming back later in life, but at this stage they did not feel there was adequate career opportunities.

## Group 5: No Association

The group with no association with the City of Roanoke was comprised of young adults currently living in the Washington, D.C., metro area. The focus group was held at the Virginia Tech Alexandria Center, with six individuals present. When asked the question on why they

located in the Washington area, most responses listed the variety of cultural activities and large number of things to do. Other responses included the strong arts community, the vast amount of outdoor recreation opportunities, the sports teams, the large number of jobs available, and

Question	Responses <sup>1</sup>
1. Why did you choose to locate in the Washington, DC metro area over other areas?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Many job opportunities</li> <li>Chose DC because of friends, job was secondary</li> <li>Close to family</li> <li>Close to where I went to school for bachelor's degree</li> <li>The city is relatively affordable for what it is- many activities are free</li> <li>It is a good place for young people to be</li> <li>The area has sports teams</li> <li>The culture and the landscape</li> <li>Strong arts community</li> <li>The variety of heritage and cultures in the area</li> <li>Interest in the political and non-profit aspect of the city</li> <li>Many activities for young people</li> </ul>
2. What were the other regions you considered?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Considered going west (Colorado, California) but the jobs didn't compare</li> <li>Considered Philadelphia but the job market didn't compare</li> <li>Minneapolis because it also has a lot to offer and it is in the Midwest</li> <li>Considered Denver and San Diego because they are large cities with sports teams, have access to the outdoors and a large young population</li> </ul>
3. Do you see yourself staying in this area indefinitely, or are you planning to move in the next five years?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Plan to stay in this area about two years then move somewhere more rural; great place to be right after college but the traffic is bad</li> <li>Will stay about five years for work and graduate school; will likely move west after that</li> <li>Will move in about two years when ready for children</li> <li>No plans to move- job market is good here</li> </ul>
4. If you plan to move away from this region, what type of place would you like to move to? Are there any specific locations that stand out?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Midwest- people are different here, DC is transient</li> <li>Will move to be closer to family</li> <li>Climate is important</li> <li>A place with historic architecture</li> <li>Jobs and nightlife are important</li> <li>A place with outdoor recreation opportunities</li> </ul>
5. In the future would you consider moving to a smaller "third tier" city such as Roanoke? Why or why not?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Yes- but it depends on the amenities available</li> <li>Yes- would consider it later in life because of lower cost of living</li> <li>No- too small</li> <li>No- too isolated, lacks airport access</li> </ul>
6. What are some of the regional amenities that are important to you when selecting a place to live?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Outdoor recreation opportunities</li> <li>Airport with direct flights to major cities</li> <li>Concerts</li> <li>Sports teams</li> </ul>
7. What local amenities are important to you?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A grocery store</li> <li>Parking</li> <li>Public transportation</li> <li>Free events for the public in the downtown</li> <li>Walkability</li> <li>A range of stores in the downtown area, access to music and fashion</li> <li>Restaurants and shops in the downtown that cater to young adults</li> <li>A lively downtown</li> </ul>
<sup>1</sup> Generalized responses from focus group participants.	

the place being a good location for young people. The majority of the participants foresee staying in the Washington area about two to five years but will then relocate when ready for children or to have a slower pace of life. When asked where they would relocate to, the participants contributed a variety of responses, including a place with warmer climate, to an area closer to family, a place with great outdoor recreation, and a place with good jobs and nightlife. Half the participants would consider a smaller city like the City of Roanoke, but would have to see the amenities available before making a decision. One participant would consider moving there later in life but not in the near future. Reasons individuals gave for not considering a smaller city were lack of airport access and the place seeming too isolated. Participants mentioned it would be difficult to visit family located outside the Roanoke region without adequate air or train service to surrounding metropolitan areas. Consequently, important amenities include adequate airline service, outdoor recreation opportunities, concerts, and sports teams. Local amenities of importance include sufficient parking in the downtown, public transit options, walkability, a lively downtown, free events, and restaurants and shops in the downtown that cater to young adults.

## Common Themes

There are several common themes found among the groups. Cultural amenities were important within all the groups, and those who were in or had recently graduated from college found different amenities important than those who had been out of school for several years. The current college students looking to relocate after graduation will likely choose a place based on the amenities the place has to offer, such as nightlife and a variety of entertainment options, while young adults at least a few years out of college will likely choose a place based on its family friendliness, quality of the schools, and health care. They are still interested in the amenities offered, but the availability of jobs and the strength of the economy become more important factors as these individuals move from college into adulthood.

It is interesting that climate was mentioned within all groups except the current local college students. Most of those who mentioned climate desired a warmer climate close to water, although some mentioned the desire to be in a colder climate where skiing and other outdoor activities could take place.

**Table 13: Location Factors and Group Importance**

	Group				
	Native Sons and Daughters	Local College Alumni	Current Young Professionals	Current College Students	No Association
<b>Location Factors<sup>1</sup></b>					
Importance of Job Opportunities	● ● ●	● ● ●	● ●	●	● ●
Importance of Place Amenities	● ●	● ●	● ●	● ● ●	● ● ●
Importance of Affordability	●	● ●	● ● ●	●	●
Importance of a Welcoming Environment	●	● ●	● ● ●	●	● ●
Importance of Proximity to Family	● ●	● ● ●	● ●	● ●	● ●

<sup>1</sup> The importance of each location factor was determined by the frequency in which each group discussed issues involving the location factors and the factor's importance in deciding on location.

Overwhelmingly, individuals found a combination of place/location and job opportunities to be important. Although location is important, job opportunities have to be plentiful in the region. A place without substantial work or career potential will not draw individuals to the region. There needs to be stable, plentiful jobs in addition to the lifestyle elements. Like much of the research in economic development stated, a combination of place elements and job opportunities is important for attracting the young and college educated.

The only exception to this finding is the current college students, as the majority in the focus group responded that location was more important; some young adults in the study were even moving to locations without employment. The overall trend is that job opportunities become more important than location as the young adult ages; proximity to family becomes more important as well. Many individuals chose their current location based on its proximity to family and would not consider relocating. Generally speaking, family is important within all the groups, but those out of college find it more important when making location decisions. Overall, the majority of groups mentioned that access is important and stated that the City of Roanoke needs better airport access with direct flights to major cities.

Many individuals responded that more high quality jobs were needed in the Roanoke area. There is a general feeling among all five groups and in all stages of life that the City of Roanoke lacks job opportunities, and this is the primary reason people would not locate there. Based on the region's high underemployment rate, these individuals may have a difficult time finding a job to match their skills in the City of Roanoke. Whether or not there are the types of white-collar jobs these individuals are looking for is not the focus of this study, but there is the perception that these jobs do not exist.

It is interesting to note how the current young professionals mentioned government and placed an emphasis on the government's role in helping to attract young adults. While other groups did mention that a supportive local government was important, it was not as common a theme as it was for the population that is currently living there.

## VI. Recommendations

The bottom line resulting from this study is that while place is important, jobs are just as important to young adults. The perception of job importance changes with age, and as students graduate from college and spend time in the workforce they realize the importance of cost of living, job opportunities, home ownership, and proximity to family. While many out-of-state students do not even consider staying in the Roanoke region upon graduating from college, it may be because they are unaware of existing opportunities. In order to attract college graduates to stay in the area, the City of Roanoke has to increase marketing to these individuals; designing events so that they can visit the region while still in college may help to increase familiarity and the chances they will stay after graduation. The four primary findings, in addition to strategies and actions to support each finding, are outlined below.

### ***Finding #1: Jobs are the Critical Amenity***

This study finds that jobs are important to young adults; therefore the City of Roanoke needs to provide the types of jobs that members of the creative class want, such as positions in the design and information technology fields. While amenities are important, most young adults would not move to a place that does not have a variety of job opportunities. For the City of Roanoke, while there are good jobs in the region, there may not be *enough* good jobs. The City of Roanoke should focus on business development and providing a greater number of high quality jobs in order to attract young adults. Once businesses and jobs are in place, the City of Roanoke can begin marketing those jobs, targeting college graduates before they become rooted in another place.

	<b>Finding #1</b>	<b>Finding #2</b>	<b>Finding #3</b>	<b>Finding #4</b>
	<b>Jobs are the Critical Amenity</b>	<b>The More Variety, the Better</b>	<b>Encourage People to "Come as They Are"</b>	<b>Study Comparative Regions</b>
<b>Strategy</b>	Provide opportunities for increased interaction between the local business community, college students, and native sons and daughters	Build upon existing amenities to enable a greater variety of experiences for young adults	Provide a welcoming environment for newcomers	Define the City of Roanoke's Sense of place
<b>Action</b>	Market Jobs and Affordability to Potential New Residents; Develop Programs that Connect Current College Students with the Local Business Community; Connect to Local College Alumni who Have Left the Region	Provide a Greater Retail Selection Focused on Young People's Interests; Capitalize on Natural Amenities in the Region; Increase Accessibility to Other Regions; Sponsor Free Events in the Downtown	Establish Groups that Support a Variety of Lifestyles; Increase Political Desire to Change	Become Known as the Home of Something Interesting

**Strategy: Provide opportunities for increased interaction between the local business community, college students, and native sons and daughters.**

***Action 1. Market Jobs and Affordability to Potential New Residents***

Overall, a primary need is to break the thought that there are no jobs in the Roanoke region and that salaries are not comparable to other regions. While salaries are lower compared to major cities, the cost of living in the City of Roanoke is much lower. Home ownership in Roanoke region is a possibility within a few years of graduation, while it will likely take much longer in a major metropolitan area. Affordable housing is an important amenity for young adults out of college. 7.8 percent of the native sons and daughters and local college alumni would move back if there was a good job opportunity in the region; there is a need to market current job opportunities to these individuals.

***Action 2. Develop Programs that Connect Current College Students with the Local Business Community***

Overall, programs developed should be designed to help local college students tap into the local economy. A primary recommendation would be to develop mentorship programs between the prominent members of the City of Roanoke's business community and local college students. During our focus group, many of the students, both in and out of state, commented about the lack of networking available to them. Most did not even know how to look for a job in the Roanoke region without the use of the internet. Students feel they do not have adequate connections to the business world outside their classrooms, and a mentorship program would allow students to see what's really happening with City of Roanoke

business. Furthermore, a program offering internships (school-year and summer) to college students with City of Roanoke businesses will increase student exposure to the local economy. Having an internship while in school and the possibility of a full time job offer after graduation could be very attractive for those who wish to stay in the area. For example, the Cleveland, Ohio, region has several programs designed to help expand its talent base. An organization called (i)Cleveland is a network of area graduate students and professionals who want to retain students in the region. The organization serves as a source of local internship information geared toward local college undergraduate students.

Having local businesses make greater connections with the universities is another critical component of talent retention and expansion. These individuals could serve as guest lecturers in university courses to increase student awareness of the opportunities available in the City of Roanoke. Moreover, getting these students into the City of Roanoke will expose them to the amenities available and change perceptions that there "isn't anything going on" in the downtown.

***Action 3. Connect to Local College Alumni who have Left the Region***

While those who are married with children are not likely going to relocate because they are settled in their current location, graduates need to be targeted before they settle in another location. Cities that do not attract these individuals now will be hurting in a decade, as chances of relocating drop (Dewan, 2006). Having alumni fairs and gatherings in the City of Roanoke can help target these individuals before they get older and begin to lay down roots. Many individuals surveyed do not visit the region at all, but this is a great opportunity to invite these individuals back to an event such as "Rediscover Roanoke."

Additionally, booths at Virginia Tech sporting events, sponsored by the City of Roanoke, could increase awareness of the opportunities available in the region. The City of Roanoke should capitalize on the popularity of Virginia Tech football, as several individuals mentioned they would move back for that reason alone. Another method to target local college alumni would be to sponsor contests that offer a free night's stay in the City of Roanoke for a college sporting event.

## ***Finding #2: The More Variety, the Better***

Overall, young people desire a multitude of amenities and things to do. They want places to go out and meet other people, places to shop, places to eat, and places to hear music. They want variety, regardless of their age. While those closer to college age desire more night clubs and places to meet other young professionals, those married with children find affordability and quality health care and schools to be larger priorities.

The creative class seeks cultural diversity and a vast number of options in dining, shopping, and entertainment. In the case of the City of Roanoke, it seems to be an issue of the types of options available, not necessarily the number that exist. The key is to create a unique identity for the City of Roanoke, capitalizing on the amenities that currently exist. Natural resources can be seen as an amenity to be preserved, promoting the City of Roanoke as a place where the environment is cared about, both politically and socially. With its location in the mountains that provide a host of outdoor recreational opportunities, the City of Roanoke can use these natural amenities as a way to attract the creative class. While the new art museum is a great start, the City of Roanoke needs to build off of the buzz created by it. The City of Roanoke needs an identifier, whether it is a strong music scene or great outdoor amenities.

**Strategy: Build upon existing amenities to enable a greater variety of experiences for young adults.**

### ***Action 1. Provide a Greater Retail Selection Focused on Young People's Interests***

In addition to increased marketing to current college students, the study found that young adults want a greater selection of retail. More specifically, high end retail shopping is desired, including grocery, clothing, and home interior. These stores are desired in the downtown and at Valley View Mall. A greater variety of both chain and local restaurants is desired, with local restaurants primarily located in the downtown to give the streets unique character. Greater nightlife, including bars and clubs, is also desired by the young adult population. Taxis or bus options available during closing time would give young adults a safe way to get home after a night out on the town.

### ***Action 2. Capitalize on Natural Amenities in the Region***

The fact that most segments found outdoor recreation and scenic beauty important is notable, because the City of Roanoke's location in the mountains provides these amenities. The Blude Ridge Parkway provides numerous opportunities for recreation, and the City of Roanoke's greenway system provides scenic, active, and passive recreational options. Capitalizing on these amenities and marketing the great outdoor recreation opportunities available in the Roanoke region will help attract these individuals.

### ***Action 3. Increase Accessibility to Other Regions***

One major reason people do not relocate to the City of Roanoke is lack of access. The transportation issue needs to be addressed as it is a hindrance for many people. Desired transportation modes include airport, passenger train and bus access to surrounding areas. Many people desire to live in a smaller community but want access to major metropolitan areas. The City of Roanoke should consider expanding bus or train service for better access to major metropolitan areas. On a local scale, regional transportation networks should be expanded to make travel between Blacksburg and the City of Roanoke, specifically the downtown area, more convenient for students.

### ***Action 4. Sponsor Free Events in the Downtown***

For those with no association with the City of Roanoke, free events in a downtown are important for city life. The word free is attractive to young adults, who are often on a reduced budget. Hosting festivals that are free to the public, sponsored by local businesses, can help make the City of Roanoke a more attractive place to live. Events like the “Taste of Roanoke” or historic architecture tours are also suggested. As music and the arts were mentioned repeatedly among all the groups, free or inexpensive opportunities to hear all types of live music can be developed.

### ***Finding #3: Encourage People to “Come as They Are”***

Although amenities are important, they alone will not solve the problem. Creating a place that is friendly to outsiders and provides the sense of

place that individuals of the creative class are looking for is needed to encourage young adults to relocate to an area.

### **Strategy: Provide a Welcoming Environment for Newcomers**

#### ***Action 1. Establish groups that support a variety of lifestyles***

Many people mentioned they felt unwelcome in the Roanoke region as non-natives, and had or would have a difficult time fitting into the existing social fabric. Note that the individuals who mentioned this were primarily members of the African American and gay communities, who play a large role in the existence of a creative class. A way to attract young adults to the region may be to incorporate singles groups into community activities, either through local churches or other social organizations. This could help overcome the perception that the City of Roanoke is not geared to young people or accepting of alternative lifestyles.

#### ***Action 2. Increase political desire to change***

The City of Roanoke needs to change the stereotypes that currently exist about its political and social nature. There is a need to address the willingness of political leaders to accept change. The City of Roanoke will not be able to retain or attract young adults without some form of adaptation to their needs and desires in a place. The support of political leaders and the existing community to welcome and support new residents is needed. As Joseph Cortright put it, the real issue is having a city open to the ideas of young people, and the wish to realize their dream or objective in your city (Dewan, 2006).

## ***Finding #4: Study Comparative Regions***

While Richmond and Charlotte are different places, they each have unique qualities of place that make them attractive to college educated young adults. Both areas are also highly accessible by multiple modes of transportation. Both are served by an international airport with carriers offering direct flights to other regions, as well as Amtrak stations that help connect the regions to the grid. This connectivity is critical, and the City of Roanoke seems to fall short in this area. One of Richmond's strengths is that it has distinctive, walkable neighborhoods. Richmond, like the City of Roanoke, is also affordable. Home ownership is within reach for young adults. Also notable are Richmond's unique shopping and restaurants. Young adults are attracted to the cultural diversity found in Charlotte, as well as the existence of a music scene.

### **Strategy: Define the City of Roanoke's Sense of Place**

#### ***Action 1: Become known as the home of something interesting***

The Young & the Restless study led a series of focus groups examining Richmond, and some of the major concerns were the perceived conservatism, uptightness, and a lack of concern for the environment (Impresa, Inc., and Coletta & Company, 2004). Where Richmond falls short in these areas, the City of Roanoke could become the destination that individuals find to be a better match for their lifestyle choices. Overall, the City of Roanoke needs greater identity and a sense of uniqueness. This unique character can be focused on music, affordability for families, or outdoor recreation, but it is important that the City of Roanoke has a clear vision of what

it wants to be. A place will never be able to be attractive to all people, but by providing a strong sense of place and the feeling that great things are happening, the City Of Roanoke can attract young adults. The City of Roanoke can appeal to college educated young adults if it listens to their needs and truly wants to be a place that has the amenities young adults want.

## VII. Conclusion

The City of Roanoke's economic development strategy should focus on creating jobs that members of the creative class want. Economic development literature focuses on the jobs v. amenities debate, and both sides make valid arguments as to how young people choose to locate. While both arguments have merit, this study concludes that jobs are what bring individuals to a place, while the amenities keep them there. An economically sound job market attracts people to a place, and the amenities in the place are important in meeting lifestyle needs. Generally speaking, individuals will not consider a place without a strong economic base.

Taking into account the findings offered by this study, which are most feasible? First and foremost, the City of Roanoke should focus any efforts on the low-hanging fruit, such as those with existing ties to the City of Roanoke. Given an existing connection, these individuals may be the easiest to attract back to the region.

Creating a welcoming environment may be the most difficult task to undertake, as it involves changing established political views. A welcoming environment is also not something an economic developer can typically plan for, as it is rooted in the patterns and views already in place.

Nationally, cities like the City of Roanoke face fierce competition from the cities across the nation. Cities are competing for a relatively small pool of young talent, striving to discover what will bring individuals to their city. If smaller cities like Roanoke are open to change and truly listen to the desires of young people, they stand a chance at attracting them. However, if political norms continue and potential residents do not see a place where they fit into the existing social fabric, newcomers will likely move on to the next city where they feel they can excel.

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