

# ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PLAN

APRIL 2024

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# VIRGIN, UTAH ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PLAN

A JOINT PROJECT BETWEEN

VIRGIN, UTAH &  
SOUTHERN UTAH UNIVERSITY  
PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION PROGRAM

April 2024

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# MESSAGE FROM THE MAYOR



## VIRGIN TOWN

### MESSAGE FROM MAYOR KRAUSE

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The historically rural farming community of Virgin, Utah lies 12 miles away from scenic Zion National Park. Despite the fact that Zion National Park is the second most-visited national park in the national park system, Virgin has languished for decades with unrealized economic potential. Geology, hydrology, lack of infrastructure, and use of septic systems in proximity to the Virgin River have been and still are restrictions on development in Virgin.

In recent years businesses have finally come to Virgin, but it has been in a haphazard and uncontrolled manner focused solely on tourism. Guidance is needed over this growth through the use of a proper economic development plan.

An economic development plan is a comprehensive strategy used to foster economic growth and improvement in a community. The goal of an economic development plan is to enhance the standard of living, create jobs, and promote the economic well-being of the community.

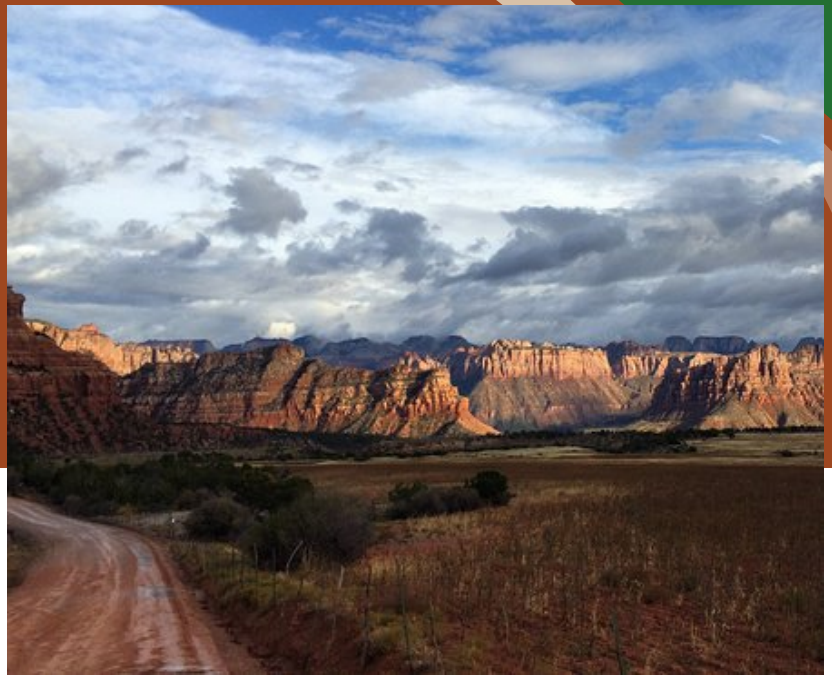
Virgin has never had an economic development plan. And so when the graduate students in the Masters of Public Administration program at Southern Utah University offered to prepare such a plan for Virgin as their Capstone project, I encouraged them to do so.

Although tourism is a great economic driver for Virgin given its proximity to Zion National Park, a proper balance between residents and tourists is needed. Therefore, I have encouraged the graduate students take into consideration the wants, needs and interests of town residents as they draft their plan.

Thank you to the graduate students at SUU for all the hard work they put in crafting this economic development plan for Virgin. It is hoped that this economic development plan in conjunction with Virgin's General Plan that is currently under revision will help guide a new vision and a new path forward for Virgin.

Mayor Jean M. Krause





## Town of Virgin<sup>1</sup> VISION STATEMENT:

We will create a community that promotes a safe, comfortable, neighborly environment that adds to the beauty and scenic surroundings by:

- Fostering a community with economic growth and stability for families to live in and enjoy.
- Providing opportunities for others from around the world to enjoy the atmosphere and beauty of the area.

<sup>1</sup> [https://virgin.municipalcodeonline.com/book type=plan#name=CHAPTER\\_1\\_GENERAL\\_PLAN](https://virgin.municipalcodeonline.com/book type=plan#name=CHAPTER_1_GENERAL_PLAN)



# HISTORY, DEMOGRAPHICS & ECONOMY

Documenting this history helps preserve the cultural heritage of the town and sheds light on the early settlers' way of life, their struggles, and triumphs. Demographics provide a snapshot of the town's residents, including their age, ethnicity, education, and income levels. The economic history of Virgin reveals the town's economic drivers, such as agriculture, tourism, and the construction industry. This information is invaluable for local governments, businesses, and organizations, as it helps them tailor services, plan infrastructure, and address the needs of the community effectively.

## History

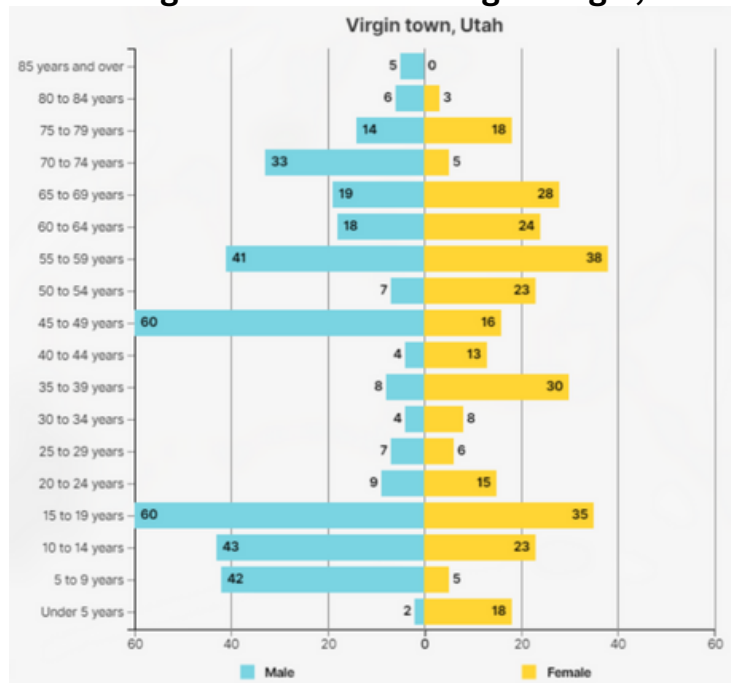
Located approximately 20 miles west of Zion National Park on State Route 9, Virgin Utah was established in 1857 by European pioneers settling in Southern Utah.<sup>2</sup>

Located in Washington County, Virgin was originally called Pocketville by Native Americans as the area was located in a low spot on the banks of the Virgin River. The Nuwivi Paiute people lived along the Virgin River in Southwest Utah, making the areas between Virgin and Santa Clara their home.<sup>3</sup> Settling pioneers first called the area Virgen City to distinguish the location from the Rio Virgin.

## Demographics

Virgin's land area covers 17.2 square miles of scenic desert landscapes. In 1864, the population of Virgin was 336, and throughout history, the population has grown to approximately 690 residents today. The historical growth rate of Virgin has grown steadily at 2.84%, but since 2020, during the COVID pandemic, the growth rate has increased to 11.54%. Due to the large number of retirees residing in the area, the median age in Virgin is 47.5, higher than the 32.1 median age in Utah.

Median Age of Residents Living in Virgin, Utah



<sup>2</sup> virgin.utah.gov

<sup>3</sup> utah.com - Native American Tribes

## Economy

Historically, Virgin, Utah settlers' main source of income fell within the mining and oil industries. Hugh Hilton brought his family from Lancashire, England, to Virgin in 1861 and made a living through farming and brewing. An early settler, William Beebe, moved to the Virgin Township to be one of the first blacksmiths. Many others moved to the area, working in the forestry and carpentry fields.<sup>4</sup>

The current median household income for Virgin is \$72,813 per year, which is a bit lower than the \$89,168 yearly median income of Utah. Due to the number of citizens living in Virgin that are of retirement age, the poverty rate of residents in Virgin is 23.4%, much higher than Utah's median poverty rate of 8.2%.

### Virgin Annual Household Income

Virgin Annual Household Income

	Households
<b>Total</b>	<b>216</b>
	<b>Estimated percent of total</b>
Less than \$10,000	2.8%
\$10,000 to \$14,999	6.5%
\$15,000 to \$24,999	1.9%
\$25,000 to \$34,999	10.6%
\$35,000 to \$49,999	16.7%
\$50,000 to \$74,999	14.8%
\$75,000 to \$99,999	12.0%
\$100,000 to \$149,999	20.8%
\$150,000 to \$199,999	10.2%
\$200,000 or more	3.7%

Source: 2020 American Community Survey, 5-year Estimates

The most common professions of Virgin residents are construction-related professions, at 21.3%. Other common professions fall within the Art, Entertainment & Recreation, Retail Trade, Office & Administrative support, and Production fields.

## Summary of Town of Virgin General Plan

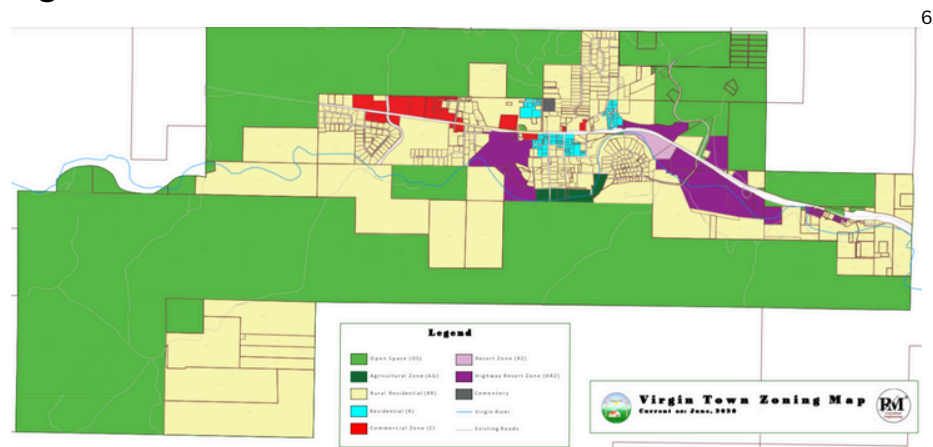
The General Plan of a community is a living document, constantly being updated to reflect the current codes and desires of the population. Understanding a community's vision is critical to decision-making as Virgin decides how to move forward. Striking a balance between preserving the current lifestyle and environment while increasing economic opportunity will require careful consideration and public support.

### Priorities and Values

- Private Property Protection
- Highway Commercial and Non-highway Commercial
- Orderly and Environmentally Friendly Growth
- Responsible Economic Enhancements
- Pedestrian Friendly and Walkability
- Safe and Efficient Transportation System
- Infrastructure Upgrades, specifically wastewater
- Preservation of historical structures, dark/night sky areas, natural land beauty

## Town of Virgin Zoning Map & Town of Virgin Zoning Codes<sup>5</sup>

The Zoning Map shows what structure can be built and who can occupy those buildings in each area of the town of Virgin. Zoning codes can enhance or minimize growth in residential and commercial areas. Planning Commissioners and City Leadership work to develop zoning codes that ultimately decide the allowable developments in each area of a community. Many factors contribute to the economic development of a community. The age of residents, current expertise, and education play important roles in potential businesses and growth. Below is the zoning map and current list of businesses in the area, as well as details about the labor force in Virgin.



5 <https://virgin.municipalcodeonline.com/book?type=landordinances#name=PREFACE>

6 <https://www.utah.gov/pmn/files/622199.pdf>



# Infrastructure, Transportation, & Economic Structures

Infrastructure lays the foundation for a community and possibilities for future development. Housing structures provide a summary of those who currently reside in the area and those who may potentially move to Virgin. Roads, parks, and walkways allow for connectivity, providing accessibility, or a lack thereof, to greater community connection. Water and sewer infrastructure offer the basic requirements for living in modern society. Growth and development depend on adequate infrastructure to provide quality of living, safety, and the ability to handle growth.

## Housing

- Single-family developments.
- No town-designated trail systems that could add to connectivity.



## Water Systems

- Wastewater is currently all septic
- Clean water obtained through Springs, Wells, Water Rights
- Floodplain and drainage plans are important due to flood history

## Roads

- SR-9 connects with I-15 approximately 20 miles to the west
- U.S 89, approximately 40 miles to the east through Zion National Park
- North Kolob Road (County)
- Local roads

## First Responders

- Law Enforcement: Virgin currently uses the Washington County Sheriff's Department for its law enforcement.<sup>7</sup>
- Fire: Virgin is a member of the Hurricane Valley Fire District. Virgin does not yet have a dedicated building for Police/Fire

## City Buildings & Parks<sup>8</sup>

- Heritage Town Square
- Virgin Town Park
- Falls Park
- Pocketville Park
- BMX Track (in progress)

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.virgin.utah.gov/public-safety-0>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.virgin.utah.gov/parks-and-recreation>

**Businesses that currently (2024) exist in Virgin (or Virgin Area)**

**Food**

- Raised in Sunshine Restaurant
- The Cactus Room Restaurant
- Balcony One Restaurant
- Desert Smoothie
- Black Sage Restaurant  
(located outside Virgin town limits)

**Lodging**

- Zion Wildflower Resort
- Auto Camp Zion
- Zion White Bison Resort
- Fairfield Inn and Suites
- Zion on the 9 Bed and Breakfast
- Several Airbnb rentals
- Zion River Resort RV Park & Campground  
(located outside Virgin town limits)

**Souvenir Shops**

- Buffalo Trails Trading Company  
(authentic Native American)
- Fort Zion  
(also includes a cafe and petting zoo)

**Tours and Recreation:**

- Zion Tubing
- Stargazing Zion
- Zion Adventure Company (based in Springdale but with an additional location opening soon in Virgin)
- Zion Canyon Trail Rides at Jacob’s Ranch

**Other:**

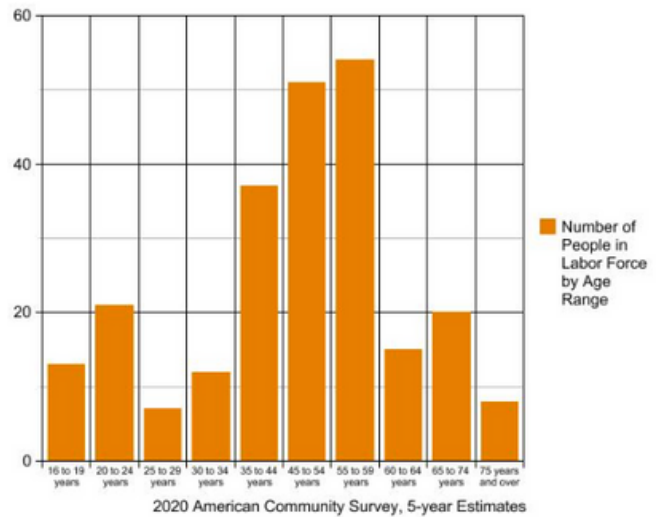
- Gaia Tree Yoga Shala
- 101 Custom Meats Butcher Shop
- Falcon Ridge Ranch (residential treatment center for girls)

**Virgin Labor Force, by Industry**

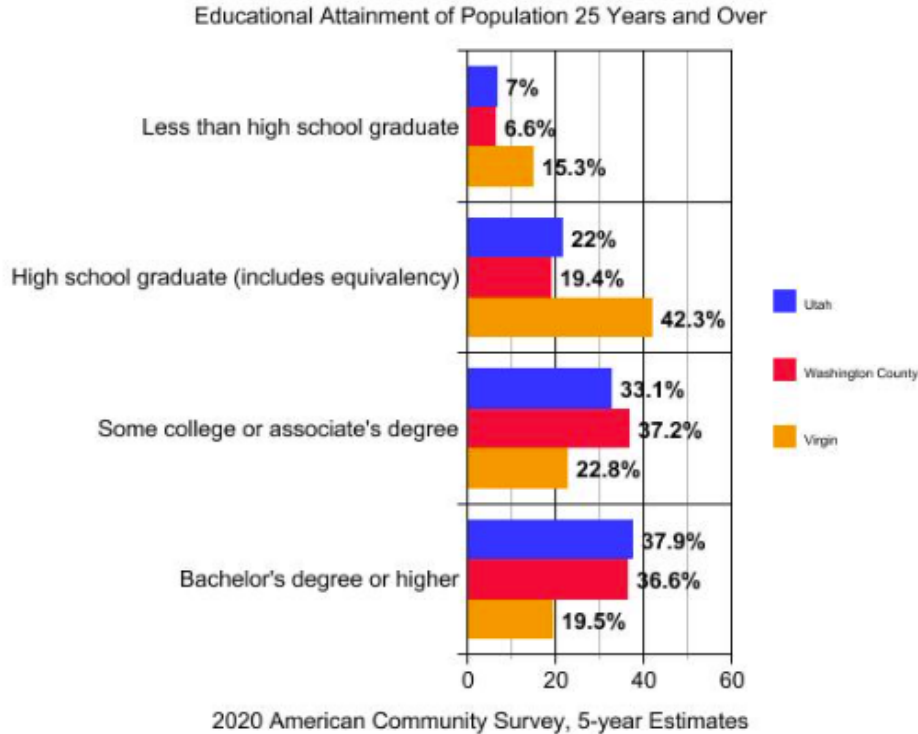
Industry Type	Number of Workers
Construction	55
Arts, entertainment, and recreation, and accommodation and food services	44
Retail trade	40
Manufacturing	24
Educational services, and health care and social assistance	16
Transportation and warehousing, and utilities	12
Professional, scientific, and management, and administrative and waste management services	10
Finance and insurance, and real estate and rental and leasing	9
Other services, except public administration	6
Information	0
Wholesale trade	0
Agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting, and mining	0
<b>Total civilian employed population 16 years and over</b>	<b>228</b>

Source: 2020 American Community Survey, 5-year Estimates

**Virgin Labor Force, by Age Range**



## Virgin Educational Attainment Comparison Chart to State and County



### Summary

Detailing the history, demographics, and economic situation of Virgin, Utah, is crucial for understanding the town's development and identity, as well as past and current challenges. Understanding this history is essential for analyzing the town's economic strengths and weaknesses, identifying growth opportunities, and developing sustainable economic strategies. The future of Virgin will require an understanding of the past and the support of the people who currently live in Virgin. The changes necessary for economic growth can be uncomfortable, but the public and town leadership can stay true to the vision while moving forward. A continuing dedication to providing a good quality of life for current families and to sharing the beauty of the town with people around the world will be a crucial guide as tough decisions are made to grow Virgin's economy. The future is as bright as the stars under a dark sky for the beautiful Town of Virgin.

# CONSTITUENT INPUT

## Summary

Residents are directly affected by the success or failure of any economic development plan, and a good economic development plan includes constituent feedback to determine short and long-term priorities for growth. A survey was developed to solicit input from residents, area locals, and visitors that assessed the current business market in Virgin and gauged the desire for growth in different sectors. Additionally, local business owners and town council members were interviewed to gain a more in-depth perspective on existing businesses, town infrastructure, zoning, and the desires of residents and visitors.

The insight derived from survey data and interview information represents diverse perspectives within the population and provides clear preferences for Virgin's future. When creating goals, objectives, and a plan that will positively help Virgin's growth, it is imperative that the voices of residents and locals be respected and honored.

### **Methodology**

The survey questions were developed jointly by a team of SUU MPA students supervised by Dr. Roger Carter and were reviewed by Mayor Krause. Questions incorporated concerns about the balance between preserving the natural environment and the growing number of tourists traversing through Virgin. Data was gathered between February 24, 2024, and March 6, 2024. The online survey link was distributed by the town of Virgin and posted on Virgin's social media outlets. The survey received 149 responses, most of which were locals or residents of Virgin. Thirty-four participants were business owners.

Similarly, interview questions were developed by Dr. Carter and the SUU student team. Topics discussed included economic development, Virgin's business environment, collaboration, support, and financial priorities. Though the themes of the questions asked during interviews were similar to the survey, the questions were distinctly different for business owners and town council members. All town council members and all businesses in the town of Virgin were contacted by students for an interview. Nine interviews were completed.



# Overview of Constituent Feedback

*This section summarizes the feedback from both the survey and interviews. For complete survey results and a broader summary of interview data, please take a look at the Appendix.*

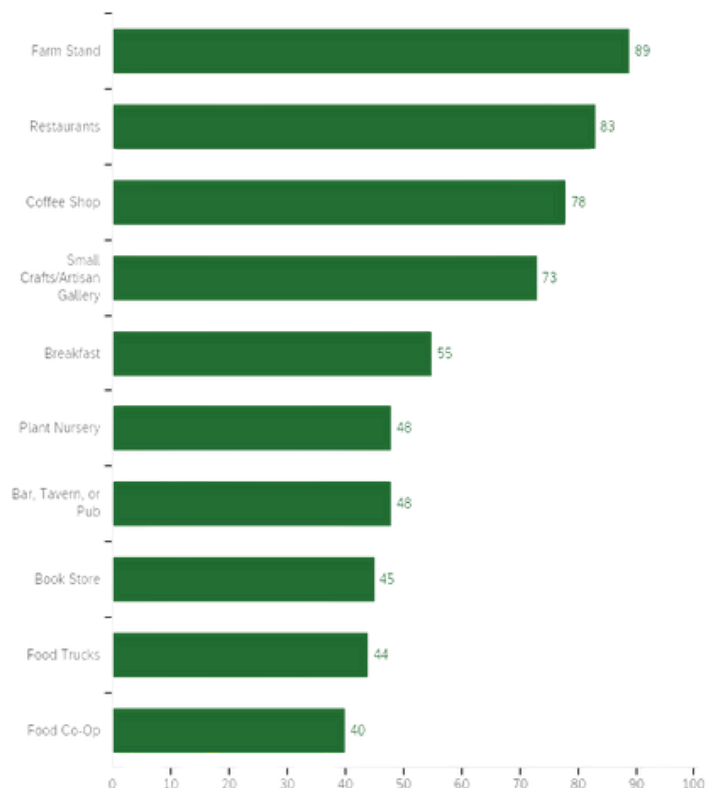
## Business

As Virgin plans for growth, it must prioritize what types of businesses will enrich the quality of life for residents while also meeting the needs of the millions of visitors traveling through Virgin on their way to Zion National Park. Questions regarding the business community focused on what businesses residents patronize and what they wish existed in the town. We asked questions such as "Would you prefer to see new locally-owned businesses or franchises?" Most constituents want to see small businesses owned by locals, rather than franchises or big box stores. A common theme among constituents was the desire to strike a balance between catering to tourists and meeting the needs of residents. Survey respondents' top businesses are a farm stand, restaurants, a coffee shop, and a small crafts/art gallery. Interview data supports the idea that residents are eager to buy groceries or eat at a restaurant in town, and they want to be able to spend more time together in local businesses.

## What additional services, facilities, or businesses would you like to see in Virgin?

The phrase “third spaces” refers to places people spend time besides home and the workplace. The need for more “third spaces” for both community members and visitors came up repeatedly in the survey and interviews. During interviews, business owners brought up the need for a community gathering place that is open in the evenings, such as a bar. The post office was a heavily utilized third space, which sadly has closed; bringing back the post office is a significant desire of the community.

Q3 - What additional services, facilities, or businesses would you like to see in Virgin? Please select all that apply.



In their responses, community members noted that many local resources, including the parks, the town square, and the historic downtown area, could be better utilized. These community assets could be leveraged to create the "third spaces" needed to gather the community.

However, 12% of survey respondents do not want to see any new businesses in Virgin. It is important to note that locals are interested in preserving how Virgin looks and feels as it is now and that there will be resistance to new businesses. During interviews, business owners expressed concerns that locals need to support new businesses in town. On the other hand, many companies in town are designed for tourists, including many transient lodging establishments, which makes it hard for locals to support a business with their dollars. Additionally, those interviewed emphasized the importance of collaborative efforts between the council, residents, and other stakeholders to shape Virgin's future business development to align with the community's values and aspirations.

### **New Businesses**

In order for an economy to grow, new businesses are necessary. Part of the goal of an economic development plan is to assess what is and needs to be fixed when it comes to starting a new business in the community. When asked about the barriers to starting a new business or the idea of starting a new business, constituents reported confusion around zoning issues, property rights, and changing rules to be deterrents for prospective business owners. Some constituents also felt that decisions were made arbitrarily regarding which conditional use requests were approved. Constituents noted the high cost of land and the lack of spaces to rent as barriers to starting a new business. Again, the need for more support from residents for new businesses came up in both survey responses and interviews.

### **Initiatives and Incentives**

The survey asked if respondents would support initiatives or incentives for new businesses. 68% of residents surveyed were in favor of supporting local businesses through initiatives such as educational training or related programs. However, residents were split if they were willing to support financial incentives that, in turn, support businesses. Thirty-three survey respondents were interested in starting a business in Virgin, and when asked, the top responses of what types of businesses people would like to begin were restaurants, cafes, a farm stand, bars/brewery, or shopping options.

Approximately 47.11% of respondents who are Virgin residents support providing financial or land use incentives for new businesses, while 52.89% do not. These results indicate a notable split in opinions among respondents regarding these incentives. However, 68% of residents were in favor of educational training or programs that would support local businesses.

## Public Relations

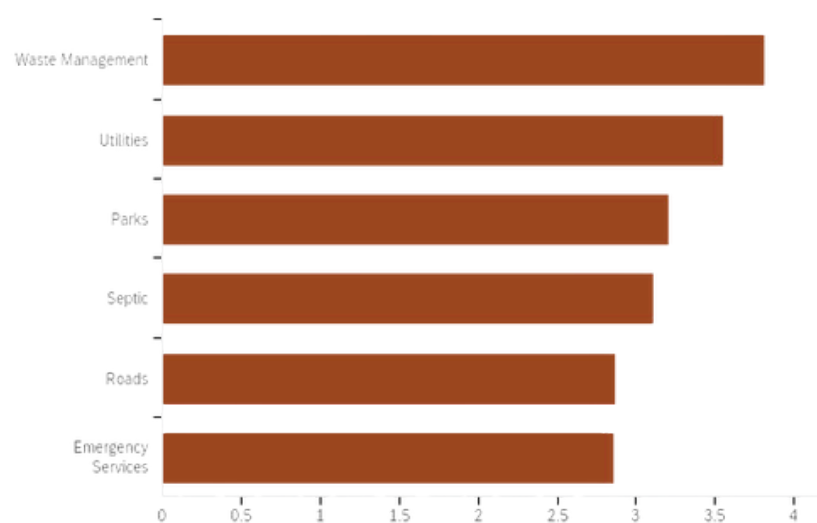
During interviews, locals expressed the desire for more communication between businesses, the town government, and community members. They expressed frustration that accurate information is not readily available to the public and that rumors about what is being built or could happen to aggravate the public. It was suggested that the town provide a regular newsletter that includes community happenings and information about development. Similarly, the town could utilize local bulletin boards or social media.

A business council or downtown alliance is an idea to help existing business owners and may provide a conduit for such information. A business council would help build camaraderie between business owners, who would be able to support each other through joint marketing efforts or during large events. Ultimately, a business council may help strengthen Virgin's economy. However, when asked if they would be interested in joining a business council, business owners emphasized the need for a strong, neutral leader.

## Infrastructure

Infrastructure improvements could help businesses grow in Virgin. In the survey, respondents were asked to rate each infrastructure aspect of Virgin on a scale of 1 to 5; the lowest-rated infrastructure items were the septic system, roads, and emergency services. During interviews, the top requests for infrastructure improvements were a sewer system, sidewalks, and improvements to the power grid.

Q9 - On a scale of 1-5, with 1 being the lowest and 5 being the highest, how would you rate the current infrastructure in Virgin?

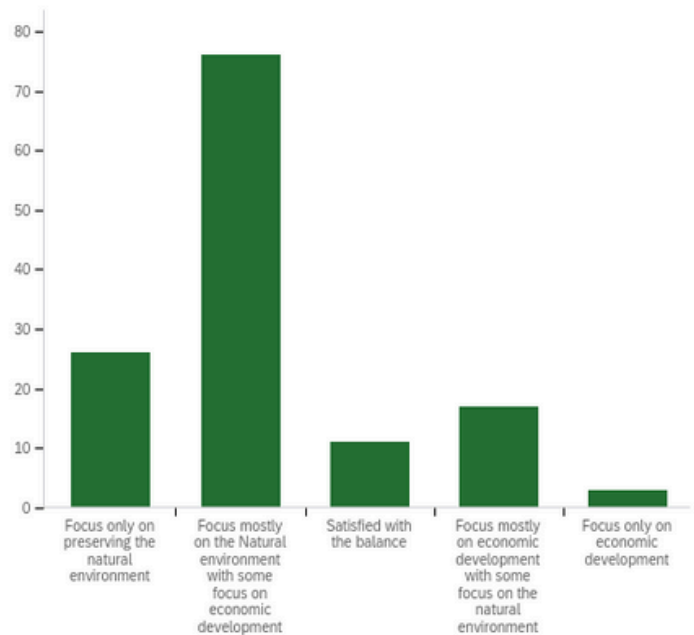


Overall, waste management garnered the highest satisfaction, while roads and emergency services received slightly lower ratings. Those interviewed also expressed concerns about the lack of water and the flood risk for businesses close to the Virgin River. Some constituents suggested infrastructure improvements like sidewalks, gathering areas, and a designated town center would attract more people to local businesses. These insights can guide local authorities in prioritizing infrastructure improvements according to community perceptions and needs.

## Moving Forward

Virgin has the unique challenge of balancing the desire for economic growth and the projected increase in visitation while also preserving the small-town feel and protecting the quality of life for residents. When asked if constituents would prioritize the natural environment or promote economic development, 57.14% of survey respondents indicated that they wanted to focus primarily on preserving the natural environment versus fostering economic development. Of these, 19.55% only wanted to focus only on protecting the natural environment.

Q11 - How do you feel about the balance between preserving Virgin's natural environment and promoting economic development?



Hopes for the future of Virgin include continued economic growth with a balance between tourism and local support, while fears centered around overdevelopment. Residents were concerned about gentrification and being priced out of their housing or place of business; concerns were raised about unplanned growth and its impact on the community's identity, highlighting the need for thoughtful planning and community engagement in decision-making processes. Some business owners and residents called for more inclusive government and community involvement to address these concerns and ensure sustainable economic development. When asked about how involved the town should be in stimulating economic development, 45.86% of survey respondents wanted the local government to have some involvement in stimulating economic growth. In comparison, 34.59% wanted minimal involvement from the local government. Only some respondents wanted high involvement from the local government.

In summary, constituent feedback underscored both the opportunities and challenges facing businesses in Virgin, highlighting the importance of thoughtful planning, infrastructure development, community support, and collaboration to foster a thriving economic environment while also preserving the town's unique charm and character.





# S.W.O.T ANALYSIS

## Introduction

The Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (S.W.O.T.) analysis summarizes input gathered from research, discussions, and surveys of residents and stakeholders. The items below are presented without any predetermined sequence or priority related to the town of Virgin. The priorities for the city would be determined through a collaborative effort involving both the residents and the city officials.

The strengths and opportunities outlined are potential catalysts for growth and development, including strong tourism, availability of local government officials, understanding and addressing community needs, active citizen communication and participation, and a strong sense of safety and identity.

The town's weaknesses and threats include the need for infrastructure upgrades, underutilization of current assets, lack of marketing to drive growth and attract business and tourism, division within the community on future development, reliance on tourism for economic growth, and the lack of diversity in the economy.

## S.W.O.T. Analysis for the City of Virgin

<b>INTERNAL</b>	<p><b>STRENGTHS - Identifying Core Strengths:</b> Understanding the city of Virgin's strengths, including a skilled workforce, natural resources, technological capabilities, and a solid educational system, helps leverage them effectively to promote economic growth.</p>
	Those in government roles are open to communication from constituents.
	Citizens are engaged in the government and express their desires and opinions.
	Natural Assets: There are valuable local resources for business leverage.
	Tourism can drive growth and allow for the expansion of the local economy and upgrades to infrastructure.
	Room for Growth: Virgin is a rural community with room and opportunities for expansion.
	There is government awareness of controversy surrounding the topic of growth within the community.
	Quality Living: Residents feel like the city is safe with educational, and recreational benefits.
	There is a realization of the need for economic sources to be established to maintain and grow infrastructure. The town leaders seek collaboration and networking from constituents to gain ideas on how to be successful.
The city and government officials have identified possible areas of growth and improvement. For example, restaurants, farm stands and coffee shops. Areas of where these could be located are also identified.	
<b>INTERNAL</b>	<p><b>WEAKNESSES - Recognizing Weaknesses:</b> An economic development plan can address these areas for Virgin through targeted interventions by acknowledging internal weaknesses. These include infrastructural deficits, skill gaps in the workforce, and access to capital.</p>
	Amplify and develop avenues for communication between constituents and government leaders, including a communication channel on the website, social media, and town forums.
	There is a need to address workforce specialization to bolster economic resilience and future growth through targeted educational and skill development initiatives.
	Weak Marketing: The city could benefit from showcasing its unique qualities and attractions by adopting more robust marketing strategies to elevate its profile and attract greater interest.
	Infrastructure Development & Access to Capital: There are gaps in infrastructure, such as outdated roads and sidewalks, inadequate sewage, and other utilities, alongside restrictive land use codes. While residents desire to improve these aspects, funding constraints remain a challenge.
	Resource Underutilization: Parks are underutilized for community events, highlighting a need for improved stewardship. Better leveraging of these spaces could significantly strengthen community bonds.
	Virgin is overly dependent on a limited number of sectors. To ensure sustainable growth and resilience, Virgin would benefit from actively seeking to diversify its economic base.
	Politically divisive community: According to the recent community survey, 52% of constituents do not favor government assistance in funding for land use, while 48% support these initiatives. Citizens are split on whether or not they want more tourism or marketing activities in the town.
<b>EXTERNAL</b>	<p><b>OPPORTUNITIES - Spotting Opportunities:</b> This SWOT analysis highlights external chances for growth and development, such as emerging markets, technological advancements, or funding opportunities. Recognizing these opportunities allows for proactive planning to capitalize on them for the city of Virgin.</p>
	Business Incentives: Potential fee-in-lieu of incentive/reduction of fees, or grants for improvements are available. Discounts are offered to locals for various businesses that are introduced, such as grocery stores, small-scale restaurants, farm stands, and coffee shops.
	Grocery Store or small-scale restaurants that are locally owned (e.g. Grocery Store, Small Restaurants, Farm Stands, Coffee Shops)



EXTERNAL	<b>OPPORTUNITIES Continued</b>
	Improvement District funding possibilities can be explored. (PIDS)
	Payment in Lieu of Taxes (PILT) Fund Reallocation: By strategically reallocating PILT funds, Virgin could prioritize critical infrastructure projects and community services. This would directly address gaps in public utilities and safety measures. This approach not only maximizes the impact of federal contributions but also strengthens the city's appeal as a vibrant place to live, work, and visit.
	Tax Increment Financing (TIF): Virgin could utilize this public financing method to subsidize redevelopment and infrastructure priorities (e.g., sewage systems and road repairs). Through TIF, future increases in property tax revenues from development projects can be captured without increasing existing taxes.
	Property Tax Payment Pause (Deferral Program): Opportunity for businesses to remain at the "pre-improvement" tax rate on their property, provided they build sidewalks and invest in road improvements. If a pause on property tax payments for five years is proposed, allowing funds generally allocated to property taxes to be invested in sidewalk and road improvements instead. Balancing the immediate benefits of tax deferral with the long-term needs of the community and its economic development goals is crucial for the success of this program. Consider looking at other redevelopment or commercial development area options.
	There is a focus in Virgin's five-year plan on enhancing transportation and sidewalks, repurposing older buildings, such as the old post office or church, and updating/upgrading parks. The financing of the enhancements is an opportunity.
	A "New Business Incentive" or Support program could be incorporated into the town budget.
	As more businesses are introduced, additional basic services will be added to support both locals and tourists, such as bike and walking trails.
	Entrepreneur Support: An ecosystem with co-working spaces and networking opportunities (using community centers as an example) could be developed.
	Educational Collaboration: Skill-focused programs with local institutions and vocational schools and classes can be offered to bring jobs to the town and invest in its future.

EXTERNAL	<b>THREATS - Mitigating Threats: Understanding potential external threats, such as economic downturns, changes in legislation, or competitive pressures, enables Virgin to develop strategies to reduce its impact.</b>
	Limited Customer Base: In a small town with a relatively small population, the customer base might be limited. Businesses could focus more on what benefits residents and those passing through to expand their customer base for financial benefits.
	Competition: New or existing competitors could offer similar products or services at lower prices, threatening Virgin's market share.
	Seasonality: Virgin's economy is too heavily reliant on tourism.
	Remote Location: Virgin's remoteness could pose challenges for attracting and retaining skilled employees, limiting access to specific resources or suppliers.
	Change Resistance: There is local hesitance towards new initiatives.
	Limited Infrastructure: Virgin might have limitations in terms of high-speed internet access, reliable transportation options, or specialized utilities needed for certain businesses.
	Regulations: Virgin has strict local zoning laws, permitting processes, and unique rules that might have a negative impact on growth. New rules might increase costs or restrict Virgin's ability to operate in a certain market.
	Some feel there are too many people. Questions have come up like, "How do you control it?" Need to identify what would be acceptable (to not be like Springdale).
	Natural Disasters: Virgin is prone to droughts, floods, and wildfire.
	Crossing State Route 9 is really dangerous for pedestrians. All safety issues adjacent to state route 9.
	Economic Vulnerability: A national economic downturn could affect consumer and tourist spending in Virgin.
	Rising Costs: Potential increases in rent, materials, or labor costs, could squeeze profit margins.
	Supply Chain Disruptions: Global supply chain issues could affect the ability to obtain necessary materials or equipment.
	Federal Government Dependency: Any government shutdown has a large impact on Virgin City's residents due to the dependency on the National Parks for employment.

## Summary

In conclusion, Virgin's strategic approach to sustainable growth is carefully developed through a thorough SWOT analysis, which is further refined by a TOWS analysis—a strategic method that goes beyond merely identifying internal strengths and weaknesses along with external opportunities and threats. TOWS specifically aims to create actionable strategies by systematically exploiting strengths and opportunities while addressing weaknesses and defending against threats.

The region's strong educational system, skilled workforce, and the allure of its natural environment (Strengths) provide a solid foundation to address infrastructure and marketing deficiencies (Weaknesses), turning these areas into exciting growth opportunities. Additionally, these strengths help mitigate economic shifts (Threats) by leveraging the community's robust educational and workforce assets to attract new industries and investment, thus turning potential risks into opportunities for transformation.

Through TOWS strategic guidance, Virgin's active community engagement (Strength) can creatively bridge infrastructure gaps (Weakness) and adapt to economic shifts (Threats), utilizing these strengths to tackle *both* internal deficiencies and external challenges directly. This proactive engagement ensures that opportunities like increased tourism and new business ventures can effectively address and leverage the identified weaknesses of enhancing communication, workforce training, and better resource utilization to creatively devise ways to address infrastructure challenges.

This strategic synthesis ensures that Virgin aligns its internal capabilities with external possibilities, fostering a resilient and adaptable economic framework poised for sustainable development and a dynamic future. The priorities for implementing these strategies will be collaboratively set by the residents and city officials, ensuring alignment with local needs and perspectives.





# TOP 7 GOALS & STRATEGIES

With the aforementioned data and priorities of Virgin in mind, it is recommended that the town pursue the following seven goals, employing the strategies listed.

## Goal 1: Quality of Life

Preserve and expand Virgin's resources that contribute to a high-quality life for current and future Virgin residents.

### Strategies:

- Engage local stakeholders (business owners, residents, and government officials) in economic development planning to ensure buy-in and support of new initiatives.
  - Continue to include stakeholders in the formation of and future adjustments to this economic development plan through surveys and interviews.
- Support the maintenance and expansion of town, county, and state parks, as well as recreational and cultural facilities.
  - Use town parks more frequently for community events
  - Use historic downtown and town square more regularly as "third spaces" for community gatherings
- Increase town connectivity by improving sidewalks in the town center and adding sidewalks between neighborhoods
- Create and expand trail systems throughout Virgin, connecting them with other trails in Southern Utah, to attract hikers and bikers
  - Consider applying for a Utah Outdoor Recreation Grant or federal Recreational Trails Program grant



## Goal 2: Workforce Development

Develop a well-trained workforce to meet the needs of local employers.

### Strategies:

- Launch a workforce development committee (name suggestion: Virgin Ventures) comprised of economic development staff, the Department of Workforce Services, key business partners, and higher educational partners such as SUU's Division of Community Outreach Engagement.
  - This committee aims to help job seekers and workers access employment, education, training, and support services needed to succeed in the labor market and match employers with well-trained workers.
- Form a Virgin Business Council to encourage business-owner communication, camaraderie, and joint marketing.
  - Invite all town business owners to join the business council and elect a leader.
  - The business council will hold regular meetings.

## Goal 3: Business Expansion, Attraction, and Retention

Position Virgin as a viable and attractive place for businesses to locate and expand. Provide the necessary tools, resources, and networking to foster business retention and expansion.

### Strategies:

- Take advantage of state and regional resources
  - Connect local businesses to resource providers such as
    - Utah Governor's Office of Economic Opportunity (GOEO)
    - Utah Small Business Development Center
    - Utah Department of Workforce Services
    - World Trade Center Utah
    - Small Business Development Center at Southern Utah University
    - Innovation Center at Utah Tech University
    - Business Resource Center at Utah Valley University
  - Become familiar with tax credit options for businesses such as:
    - Enterprise zone tax credits (run by GOEO)
    - Rural Economic Development Tax Increment Financing (run by GOEO)
    - High-Cost Infrastructure Tax Credits (run by Office of Energy Development)
  - Assist qualifying businesses in taking advantage of available tax credit programs
    - Attend workforce development committee meetings and Virgin Business Council meetings to educate business owners on tax opportunities.





- Ensure development plans and zoning codes are pro-business for what Virgin is looking for
  - Solicit buy-in from the Virgin Business Council on how to improve zoning laws and regulations
- Build out a business resources web page on [Virgin.utah.gov](http://Virgin.utah.gov) that includes resources for existing businesses and prospective businesses
  - Resources for current Virgin businesses
    - Business licensing renewal instructions
    - Links to state and regional business resources
  - Resources for prospective Virgin businesses:
    - Zoning map
    - Business licensing forms and requirements
    - Tax credit options
    - Links to state and regional business resources
    - The final version of this Economic Development Plan
- Target specific industries to capitalize on the strengths Virgin offers and create jobs throughout the community
  - Promote sectors such as eco-tourism, outdoor recreation equipment manufacturing/repair/rental, retail trade, local artisan products, and food services that can leverage the local workforce's natural resources and expertise.
- Visit key business owners annually to assess their needs
  - Attend appropriate Virgin Business Council meetings
  - Use business expansion, attraction, and retention (BEAR) surveys to determine business-owner needs

## Goal 4: Infrastructure Development

Plan for population and business growth. Prepare for increased motor coach traffic on Highway 9 due to planned reroute through Virgin.

### Strategies:

- Increase town connectivity by improving sidewalks in the town center and adding sidewalks between neighborhoods
- Prioritize affordable housing in order to attract and maintain a well-trained workforce
- Evaluate and improve parking conditions along major traffic centers, including Highway 9
- Support the public and private sector's efforts to expand fiber-optic, high-speed internet town-wide
- Initiate the transition from septic to sewer systems throughout the whole town
- Work with local leaders to Develop Public Infrastructure Districts (PIDs), Qualified Opportunity Zones, and Redevelopment Areas

## Goal 5: Community Engagement

Engage with the local community through events, workshops, and volunteer opportunities to foster a sense of pride and involvement, which can translate into positive word-of-mouth promotion.

### Strategies:

- Encourage the local community to support local businesses, which would lead to increased tax revenue
  - Ex. Encourage local businesses to offer local citizens discounts
- Utilize a leakage study to determine which industries need additional local support
- As local businesses develop, educate the community on the benefits of shopping locally during community gatherings
- Build a Shop Local page on the Virgin website and social media (once launched)

## Goal 6: Tourism & Hospitality

Embrace Virgin as a gateway community. Strengthen and expand local tourism and hospitality economy.



### Strategies:

- Support existing—and the development of—short-term rentals (STR) (hotels, motels, AirBnBs and VRBOs) and meeting spaces
  - Work with local citizens to understand the desire/support for STR properties
  - Host a regular conversation with STR owners to understand their needs and desires
  - Develop a community-wide business plan with local STR owners to help drive tourism traffic to Virgin
- Attract events and conferences to Virgin
  - Start small with weddings, parties, and corporate dinners/lunches
    - Use the natural landscape in the region to help drive the message that Virgin is a destination-wedding location
  - Build up to more significant events as the local economy and demand for local events grows
  - Work with local businesses to create travel packages that highlight the proximity to Zion National Park, as well as Virgin-centric amenities and attraction
- Create a bus/shuttle plan to take visitors to Zion National Park
  - Include shuttle stop maps, times of departure, and return
  - Speak with SunTran about opportunities to partner and include Virgin as a future stop from St. George to Zion National Park
  - Ask SunTran about the reallocation of funds to help develop a shuttle service
- Work with legislative leaders to preserve and expand Virgin's tax base
  - Become familiar with all taxing opportunities on the state and federal level that help local towns and cities
  - Take advantage of Car Rental Tax revenues generated by the State that can be used to advertise tourism opportunities in Virgin to create more travel and hospitality revenue
  - Look into getting Resort Tax expanded to also include Virgin
  - Generate new Transient Room Taxes with hotel revenues to capture tax revenue from outside visitors and reduce the tax burden on residents
    - Take advantage of TRT taxes

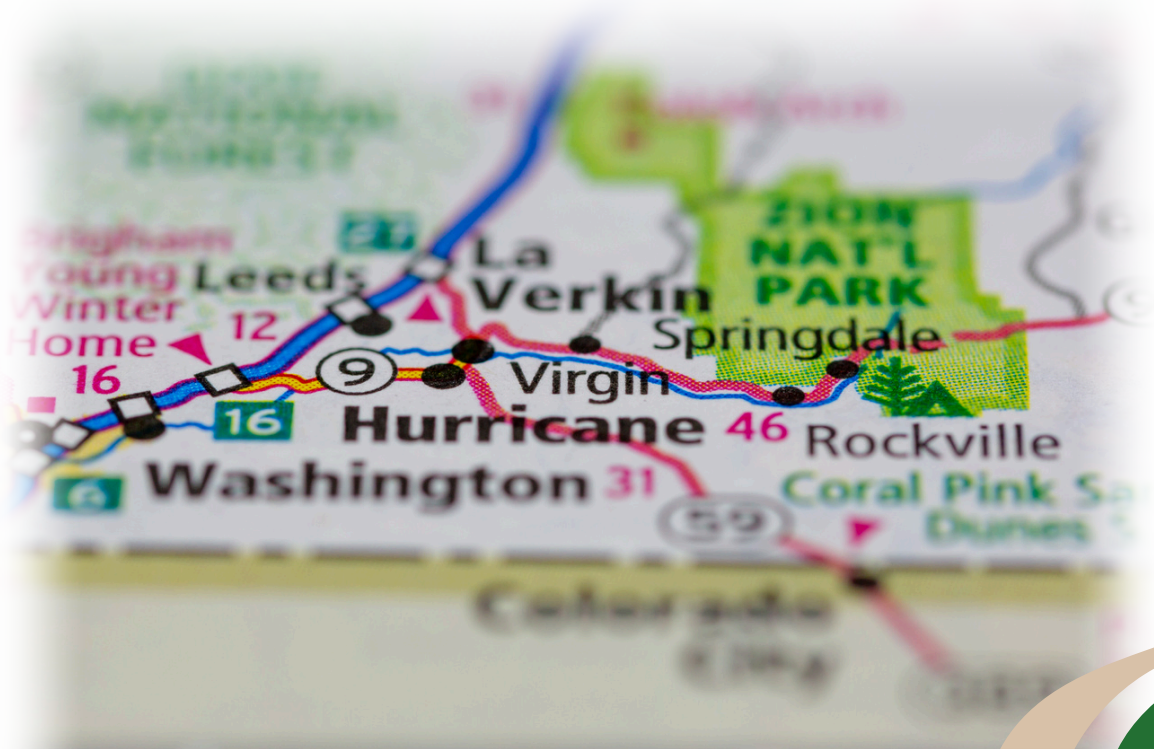


## Goal 7: Promote & Market Virgin

Create a Virgin brand to help promote and market the town.

### Strategies:

- Create and capitalize on a Virgin brand and tagline, such as:
  - Where Every Beginning is Pure
  - Experience Nature's Untouched Beauty in Virgin
  - Discover the Purity of Virgin
  - Pure Charm, Pure Virgin
  - Where Every Moment is New
  - Experience the Freshness of Virgin
  - Where New Beginnings Take Flight
  - Pure Beauty Awaits in Virgin
  - Where Simplicity Shines Bright
  - Nature's Sanctuary
  - Protectors of Nature's Beauty
- Use the Virgin brand to develop a marketing strategy to promote the town as a destination for new businesses
  - Highlight the benefits of locating a new business in the area, such as:
    - A skilled, connected workforce
    - Quality of life
    - Simplicity of life
    - Proximity to Zion National Park
    - Natural, surrounding beauty
    - Year-round warm weather
    - Rural environment



- Create a new .com-based website for Virgin and connect it to the virgin.utah.gov website
  - .com websites allow more flexibility in creation and advertising than .gov websites
  - Virgin can use advertising dollars on the website from local companies to help support the creation and upkeep of the website
- Use the brand as the base for marketing
  - Utilize digital marketing channels and social media platforms to reach a broader audience and engage with potential visitors through visually appealing content and interactive campaigns
    - Create a Virgin Facebook and Instagram page
    - Engage with a Southern Utah-based social media influencer to create a Virgin campaign that will draw eyes across the nation and the globe
    - Create short promotional videos to host on Virgin's new website
  - Establish partnerships with the National Park Services and deepen the partnership with Greater Zion to cross-promote attractions and activities within the park and the community
    - Emphasize outdoor activities to attract nature enthusiasts and adventure seekers, such as:
      - Hiking
      - Camping
      - Wildlife viewing
    - Offer special tour packages, discounts, and deals that combine park visits with local accommodations, dining, and activities to entice tourists
- Organize cultural events and festivals
  - Showcase local traditions, arts, and cuisine to draw visitors and create a sense of community
  - Study other small-town festivals to see what drives foot traffic at the festival
    - Beatty, NV (Death Valley)
    - Midway, UT
    - Pleasant Grove, UT
  - Build a rodeo ground
    - Host a number of equine activities, such as
    - Rodeos (consider hosting the State High School Rodeo Championship)
    - Show Jumping
    - Dressage
    - Trail Rides
- Create an economic development promotional brochure and share it with state recruiting partners and site selectors
  - Ask the Office of Tourism to create a page on its website for Virgin
    - Provide the Office of Tourism with the work
    - Link the new .com website to the Office of Tourism and vice versa
  - Spend advertising dollars to drive these messages throughout the Southwest United States

# CONCLUSION

The Economic Development Plan for the Town of Virgin has a clear vision for the town's future, highlighting the preservation of the town's unique natural beauty and small-town character. This plan, developed through extensive community input, historical research, and a thorough SWOT analysis, proposes strategic initiatives aimed at enhancing local infrastructure, supporting small businesses, and boosting tourism while maintaining Virgin's ecological and cultural integrity.

The strategy emphasizes robust community engagement and adaptive governance to align the town's strengths with emerging opportunities, ensuring that economic development efforts are both practical and reflective of community values. Goals such as improving public spaces, fostering local events, and upgrading connectivity and infrastructure underscore a proactive approach to enhancing quality of life and economic vitality.

In essence, this plan champions a vision of progress that harmonizes economic objectives with environmental stewardship and community values, paving the way for a prosperous and sustainable future.



# APPENDIX A

## Residential Survey Questions

1 - Do you live in Zion Canyon? If so, please select which city. If not, please select other.

2 - Sometimes local governments provide financial incentives or land use incentives to support new businesses. Would you support such incentives?

3 - What additional services, facilities, or businesses would you like to see in Virgin? Please select all that apply.

4 - Would you prefer to see new locally-owned businesses or franchises?

5 - Are you interested in starting a business in Virgin?

6 - What type of business would you like to start?

7 - What obstacles do you see for starting a business in Virgin?

8 - To what level should local government engage in stimulating economic growth in Virgin?

9 - On a scale of 1-5, with 1 being the lowest and 5 being the highest, how would you rate the current infrastructure in Virgin?

10 - Which existing community resources could be better utilized? (i.e. parks, Virgin River, historical buildings, town square, etc.)

11 - How do you feel about the balance between preserving Virgin's natural environment and promoting economic development?

12 - Sometimes local governments provide initiatives to support new or existing businesses such as educational trainings or programs. Would you support such initiatives?

13 - Do you own a business in Virgin?

# APPENDIX B

## Town Council Survey Questions

1- What is your favorite thing about Virgin?

2- How long have you been a resident?

3- Is there a need for Virgin to invest in infrastructure improvements (e.g., transportation, utilities, broadband) to support economic growth?

a. Which improvement is most urgent or could be the most meaningful?

4- What do you believe creates economic well-being in our community?

5- What type of businesses would you personally like to see come to Virgin?

6- What specific services or amenities is Virgin lacking that could improve residents' quality of life?

7- Are there any specific sectors or industries you believe our town should prioritize for economic growth? (e.g., technology, healthcare, manufacturing, etc.)

8- What do you feel is the priority? Increasing the town's tourist-based economy or expanding offerings for residents?

9- What would you like to preserve in the town? This could be the feel of the community or more specific things such as buildings or landmarks that list specific places.

10- What do you think would make people leave Virgin?

11- Sometimes local governments provide financial incentives or land use incentives to support businesses. Would you support such incentives? Why or why not?

12- Sometimes local governments provide initiatives to support businesses such as educational trainings or programs. Would you support such initiatives? Why or why not?

13- What do you think the town council's role is in promoting economic development? Are there specific tools or tactics?

14- What are your hopes and fears for the future of Virgin?



# APPENDIX C

## Business Owner Survey Questions

- 1- How long have you been doing business in Virgin?
- 2- Does your business serve more tourists or residents?
  - a. Do you offer any sort of discount programs to residents?
- 3- What makes Virgin a good place to do business? What opportunities are there for small businesses to thrive in Virgin?
- 4- Would you be interested in participating in a business coalition? What benefits would make it worth joining?
- 5- What types of support do you think businesses need?
- 6- What makes Virgin a difficult place to do business?
- 7- What obstacles do you see for starting or growing a business in the community? (e.g., access to capital, permits, marketing, infrastructure)
- 8- Are there any specific sectors or industries you believe Virgin should prioritize for economic growth? (e.g., technology, healthcare, manufacturing, etc.)
- 9- What type of services would make your business more successful? Or what kinds of business would you personally patronize?
- 10- What infrastructure improvements or amenities would you suggest to attract more people to businesses in the area?
- 11- How do you think Virgin can leverage its unique characteristics or assets to attract new businesses or industries?
- 12- How can the town better promote and showcase the unique offerings of local businesses to both residents and visitors?
- 13- What are your hopes and fears for the future of Virgin?
- 14- Do you have any additional thoughts about economic development in Virgin?
- 15- Is there anything else you want us to know? Or we should have asked about?



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