

## Orange County works to grow economy based on OED assessment's findings and recommendations

Folklore says that President James Madison loved craft beer so much, he once tried to appoint a Secretary of Beer to his cabinet. Hundreds of years later and on recommendation of Virginia Tech's Office of Economic Development (OED), the Orange County Board of Supervisors is certainly doing Madison's beer appreciation justice by looking to establish a brewery at Montpelier, Madison's Virginia home.

Last year, OED began researching agriculture and tourism-related economic opportunities for Montpelier through a grant sponsored by the Governor's Agriculture and Forestry Industries Development Fund (AFID). This year, the OED presented their findings and provided best-practice recommendations to Orange County and The Montpelier Foundation.

The brewery at Montpelier was one of the OED's recommendations for fostering potential economic development in the county. The OED also encouraged short-term approaches to economic development through lodging, particularly boutique hotel development, along with associated outdoor recreation opportunities. For the long-term, OED recommended the creation of a group of partners that would continuously look for ongoing economic development opportunities.

Tommy Miller, director of the Orange County Office of Economic Development, said the office reached out to the OED to begin examining how to increase visitors and diversify revenue streams. Adding on a farm brewery and full-scale accommodations were the most enticing solutions, especially because they fulfill an existing need in the county. "Those two recommendations really bring the greatest bang for the buck," Miller said.

For now, Montpelier is focusing its energy on the farm brewery, said Sean O'Brien, executive vice president and chief operating officer of Montpelier. Since the OED's identification of this market opportunity, a team of students from nearby University of Virginia's Darden School are working on business planning and implementation of the brewery.

"Farm breweries -- and also wineries and vineyards -- attract a lot of visitors, and we would love to be able to sort of double dip, and have people come here for the historic experience and then have the opportunity to go to the farm brewery and have some nice food. And then people who come because they would love to go visit a farm brewery suddenly discover that James Madison's house is right next door, and they're like, 'Oh, hey, I want to go there, too,'" O'Brien explained.

As for the other recommendations, they're all still on the table, O'Brien says. With so many recommendations, it's a process of focusing in on one and "really fully considering it."

"We're looking at ways to take advantage of the space that we have out here to do more and different things than a typical historic site would do," O'Brien said.

To learn more about Montpelier, visit [www.montpelier.org](http://www.montpelier.org). For more information about the OED's study, please contact Sarah Lyon-Hill at [msarahlh@vt.edu](mailto:msarahlh@vt.edu).

