



Updates from the Office of Economic Development

More Support, More Smiles: Ambassadors Join Downtown Efforts

Starting in February 2026, you may see uniformed ambassadors in the downtown area serving as friendly guides, caretakers and problem-solvers to help keep our downtown area safer, cleaner, and more welcoming. The ambassadors will complement the core cleaning work done by the City's Parks and Recreation staff and add over 200 hours per week of additional presence and support to the downtown area. The company providing these services is [Block by Block](#), with 30 years of experience providing ambassador services in over 190 business districts and downtowns across the country. Block by Block is now hiring an [Operations Manager](#) for Charlottesville. If you or anyone you know would be interested in this position, you can click [here](#) to apply.

A BIG Thank you to our Downtown Mall Custodial Team



The City's Parks & Recreation Downtown Mall Custodial Team plays a vital but often unseen role in the Downtown Mall's ongoing success. Starting each day at 5:00 a.m., this dedicated team cleans and cares for the entire mall long before most visitors or city residents arrive. Their early-morning efforts ensure that by the time the community and guests begin their day, the mall is already clean, safe, and ready to welcome everyone.

The maintenance of the outdoor pedestrian mall encompasses over 182,000 square feet of this iconic public space and requires daily, year-round attention to preserve both its beauty and functionality. The Downtown Mall Custodial Team performs a series of essential tasks focused on cleanliness, safety, and the preservation of the mall's design integrity, which remains closely tied to the original Halprin design.

From a 2-step process of backpack blowing and mechanical sweeping, to seasonal leaf collection with Billy Goat machines, the team keeps walkways clear and brick pavers pristine. They perform lighting inspections twice daily, monitor and repair benches, bollards, and brick surfaces, and ensure storm grates are free of debris to prevent flooding. The team also maintains key landmark features like the Freedom of Speech Wall and the mall's four fountains, keeping them clean and operational.

Trash collection is one of the most frequent and labor-intensive maintenance tasks performed on the Downtown Mall. With 54 trash receptacles, including two original units dating back to the mall's opening and tied to Halprin's design, emptied up to three times a day, they manage over 4 tons of waste monthly - an impressive feat that reflects the mall's high level of activity the space supports.

The result of their efforts is a clean, well-maintained, and fully operational space that stands as a point of pride for our city and a welcoming environment for all who visit. Their dedication, professionalism, and early-morning commitment make them the unsung heroes of the Downtown Mall's continued success.

We owe a big thank-you to our maintenance team for the great work they do every day!

Tree Work on the Downtown Mall

The City of Charlottesville Parks and Recreation Department will be performing yearly tree pruning maintenance on the Downtown Mall beginning on Monday, January 5, 2026, at 8:00 AM. The timeframe for tree work is expected to be 5-10 days within a two-week window to allow for inclement weather. Maintenance will include the removal of one tree near the Parks and Recreation Office, along with structural pruning and removal of dead branches from all canopy trees along the length of the mall. Tree work will closely resemble operations performed in January 2024 and January 2025. Pedestrian foot traffic may be slowed in certain areas and walkers are encouraged to remain alert and use caution when

approaching work zones. Restaurant operators are responsible for moving café space enclosures, furniture, and other belongings off-site or out of the way to ensure crews have clear access to the trees.



Any questions can be directed to Steve Gaines, Charlottesville Parks and Recreation Urban Forester, (434) 970-3587, or gaines@charlottesville.gov.

Available Property Spotlight



Would your business benefit from a brick-and-mortar location located on the 1st floor of a multi-family residential development with easy access to the Rt. 250 bypass? The Hudson has 1,700 square feet of retail/office space available at **905 River Road**. With an open floorplan, two ADA bathrooms, available on-street parking, and an abundance of natural light, this space can be just about anything you need. Whether you want to open a small fitness studio, an office for professional services, or a place to sell your one-of-a-kind goods, this space will check all of your boxes! 905 River Road is represented by Steve Houchens of

The Caton Companies. Contact Steve at shouchens@msc-rents.com or (434) 977-4181, ext. 115, for more information and to schedule a showing.

Information on this and other available properties in the City of Charlottesville is available on the Office of Economic Development's "**Sites & Buildings**" webpage. If you have commercial, retail, or industrial space available for lease or sale, let us know by emailing property information and any marketing flyer to ecodev@charlottesville.gov.

Ready to Work Employer Spotlight: Design Electric's Electrical Apprenticeship Program

Ready to Work is excited to highlight **Design Electric, Inc.**, a participating employer currently hiring **Electrical Apprentices** for commercial projects in Charlottesville. This full-time opportunity offers hands-on training, steady local work, and a clear pathway to a long-term career in the skilled trades.

At Design Electric, apprentices are treated as valued team members from day one. As an Electrical Apprentice, participants assist with installing, maintaining, and repairing electrical systems on commercial job sites while building foundational skills such as conduit bending, wire pulling, fabrication, and tool use. Apprentices participate in daily safety meetings and receive ongoing mentorship designed to help them grow both technically and professionally.

Design Electric welcomes individuals who are dependable, safety-minded, and eager to learn. Ideal candidates are comfortable using hand and power tools, can accurately read a tape measure, and are physically able to work in varied conditions. A strong work ethic and a desire to enroll in an apprenticeship program are essential.

Individuals interested in building a career in the electrical trade are encouraged to apply and explore the benefits of joining an employee-owned company that invests in its people. Click [here](#) to apply. To learn more about Design Electric's benefits, click [here](#).

Ready to Work is proud to partner with employers like Design Electric who are investing in real training and strong career pathways for our local workforce.

'Tis the Season to Reflect, Connect and Prepare

As the year winds down, businesses of all sizes have an opportunity to pause with intention. This is an ideal time to reflect on 2025 wins, assess challenges, and identify lessons that can inform smarter decisions moving forward.

Revisiting your business plan now, whether formal or informal, helps ensure your goals, operations, and financial strategies are aligned with where your business is today. Reviewing performance, refining

An advertisement for Design Electric's Electrical Apprenticeship Program. It features two workers in hard hats and safety gear standing in front of a building. The text reads: "JOIN OUR TEAM", "NOW HIRING APPRENTICE ELECTRICIANS", "DESIGN electric", "proactively empowering", "100% Employee Owned", "Safety | Innovation | Collaboration | Humble but Confident | Gets it Done", and "The Clear Choice for Commercial and Industrial Electrical & Turnkey Wireless Services".

priorities, and planning for the next quarter or the year ahead allows you to enter the new season with clarity and momentum.

This is also a valuable moment to connect with Entrepreneur Service Organizations (ESOs), which support businesses across industries and stages. Organizations such as the **Central Virginia Small Business Development Center** and **Community Investment Collaborative (CIC)** offer coaching, technical assistance, workshops, and access to capital to help strengthen operations, enhance skills, and build on existing fundamentals.

By using this time to reflect, connect with available resources, and prepare intentionally, businesses can position themselves for sustainable growth and a strong start to the year ahead.

Ready To Work - Bridging the Skills Gap



Employers across the country are sending a clear message: they want proof that job candidates are truly ready to succeed in the workplace.

A recent **HR Dive** article highlights a growing shift in hiring practices, with employers placing less emphasis on degrees alone and more value on demonstrated skills, practical experience, and industry-recognized credentials. In addition to technical abilities, employers are increasingly prioritizing soft skills such as communication, reliability, adaptability, teamwork, and problem-solving—skills that are essential for

long-term success on the job.

The **Ready to Work** program was designed to directly respond to these evolving workforce needs.

Ready to Work prepares participants for employment by focusing on the real-world skills employers say matter most. Through structured job readiness training, participants strengthen their workplace communication, professionalism, time management, and conflict resolution skills. The program also provides career coaching, resume support, interview preparation, and guaranteed interviews with local, participating employers.

What sets Ready to Work apart is its emphasis on readiness, not just placement. Participants leave the program with a clearer understanding of workplace expectations and the tools needed to succeed once hired. This approach helps employers access a stronger talent pipeline of candidates who are prepared to contribute on day one, reducing turnover and improving retention.

As hiring expectations continue to evolve, programs like Ready to Work play a critical role in closing the gap between job seekers and employers. By building skills, confidence, and credibility, Ready to Work helps individuals take the next step toward stable, meaningful employment while supporting employers in building a resilient local workforce. Click [here](#) and enroll today!

VIPC Founder Workshop

Access to capital is one of the biggest challenges facing early-stage startups and understanding where to begin can be just as difficult. Designed to help Virginia founders cut through the confusion and gain clarity on available funding opportunities, the **Virginia Innovation Partnership Corporation (VIPC)** Funding Pathways Founder Workshop is coming to Charlottesville on Wednesday, January 7th, from noon – 1:30 pm at the **Central Virginia Small Business Development Center** (300 Preston Avenue, Suite #206, Charlottesville, VA 22902).

Led by the **Virginia Venture Partners (VVP)** investment team, this free, interactive workshop provides an overview of funding programs offered through VIPC, including grants and convertible note options. Founders will learn how these programs work, what investors look for in strong applications, and how to position their companies for funding success.

The workshop is structured as a practical, lunch-and-learn session, allowing ample time for questions, discussion, and peer networking. Attendees will gain firsthand insight from the investment team while connecting with other entrepreneurs navigating similar challenges.

This session is ideal for early-stage founders and startup teams seeking capital, preparing for future investment, or looking to better understand Virginia's innovation and startup ecosystem. Whether participants are just getting started or refining their funding strategy, the workshop offers actionable guidance and valuable connections.

Registration is now open, and you can reserve your spot at [VIPC Funding Pathways](#). We encourage all founders and startup teams to attend and take an important step toward securing funding and accelerating growth!

OED Fun Fact

Winter has made an early entrance this year—but will it stick around long enough for a white Christmas? In Charlottesville, snowy Christmas mornings are a rare treat. Historically, the odds of waking up to snow on December 25th are less than 1 in 10. But when it *does* happen—like in 1962, 1989, and 2009—it transforms the town into a magical winter wonderland. Here's hoping for a little holiday sparkle this year! Wishing everyone a joyful and safe holiday season!

Free Business Resources



The Central Virginia Small Business Development Center is a team of business and technical experts available to advise and assist entrepreneurs, confidentially and free of charge. They offer 1:1 assistance, curated research, access to technical experts and professionals, and timely events/training. To see upcoming SBDC events, click [here!](#)

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