

The Virginian-Pilot

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Norfolk is getting 6,000 new jobs. The city wants to help residents get them.

By Eric Hartley

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Bill Tiernan | The Virginian-Pilot

Virginia Governor Terry McAuliffe during his remarks at an announcement by IKEA Tuesday, June 21, 2016 for a proposal to build an IKEA in Norfolk to open in 2018. The announcement was held at the Slover Library in downtown Norfolk.



Vicki Cronis-Nohe | The Virginian-Pilot

State Sen. Kenny Alexander, who was running for mayor in Norfolk at the time, listens to Gov. Terry McAuliffe's comments during a press conference on Tuesday, March 15, 2016, in Norfolk.



Stephen M. Katz | The Virginian-Pilot

Construction workers install glass on the curtain wall of the atrium of The Main, Norfolk's future hotel and conference center, Tuesday, Jan. 19, 2016.



Courtesy of the city of Norfolk

A \$40 million overhaul of the facility and rebranding is set for an opening in Spring 2017.

NORFOLK

City officials like to brag about the 6,000 jobs coming to Norfolk over the next two years thanks to ADP, Ikea, The Main and more.

But for months, Councilwoman Mamie Johnson has been asking a simple question: How can Norfolk residents find out what those jobs will be – and compete for them?

The city's answer is a program called Norfolk Works, whose centerpiece is a downtown job center opening in late October.

Officials say it will be the first central hub to connect those who need jobs with companies that are hiring.

"This has been a long time coming," Johnson said after learning about Norfolk Works.

The job center will be in a vacant city-owned space near the corner of Bank and Main streets, between a tailor and a sandwich shop. Mayor Kenny Alexander and other officials said they wanted to make sure it was near bus and light-rail lines so people without cars can get there.

The center will offer help with resumes and information about open jobs, said Peter Chapman, the deputy city manager overseeing the program. It also could host small job fairs and career workshops.

Chapman said city officials are talking to many employers who are bringing jobs to Norfolk about getting as many city residents as possible hired.

Alexander said that's only fair because those companies have all been given public incentives.

Most major new employers – including ADP, Ikea and the developers of the Waterside District and a downtown boutique hotel – negotiated deals with Norfolk that call for the city to refund them a percentage of the tax revenue they generate. And the city is contributing more than \$100 million toward The Main, a downtown hotel and conference center.

While Norfolk is thriving in terms of jobs, some residents are struggling. Unemployment in the city, at 5.4 percent as of August, is higher than the regional and state rates, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

And although numbers aren't available by race for individual cities, the national unemployment rate is about twice as high for black adults as for whites. In South Hampton Roads, the highest unemployment rates are in Norfolk and Portsmouth, the cities with the largest percentages of black residents.

Johnson, the councilwoman, has said she often hears from residents who've read about all the new jobs coming but don't know how to apply for them.

"There seems to be a disconnect," Johnson said during a July council meeting.

Chapman said Norfolk Works will be part of the city's efforts

to reduce poverty, and he said the involvement of businesses will be key.

“If you don’t have a relationship with employers ... you don’t have a real workforce development initiative,” Chapman said.

He said he doesn’t yet know what hours the job center will be open or how many employees it will have. The city’s neighborhood and development departments will supply the staff.

The city website also features new links to job postings from Movement Mortgage, ADP, Waterside and grocer Lidl.

Norfolk already has a Workforce Development Center in Wards Corner, but Chapman said the name is something of a misnomer. It hosts job fairs and helps residents get job skills and GEDs. It also helps unemployed or low-income people apply for government assistance programs.

Chapman said Norfolk Works will be something new, offering residents connections to specific employers. It will be prepared for all kinds of job seekers, including college graduates and people with little to no work experience and only a high-school-equivalency diploma.

“There will not be and there cannot be a one-size-fits-all model,” Chapman said.