



NEWS RELEASE | CITY MANAGER'S OFFICE

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City Names Drayton as Director of Economic Development and Tourism

Following a highly competitive national search, City Manager Ken Larking announced today the selection of Kelly Drayton as the next director of the Danville Office of Economic Development and Tourism (OEDT).

The selection process included multiple rounds of interviews and evaluations focused on leadership, collaboration, strategic planning, and the ability to advance Danville's economic development and tourism goals. Drayton distinguished herself through her experience leading complex, multi-stakeholder initiatives and her track record of building partnerships that deliver measurable results.

Drayton's first day will be December 1, 2026.

Larking said he is looking forward to Drayton joining the team. "Kelly has built her career around bringing diverse partners together to tackle complex challenges and create meaningful results for the communities she serves," said Larking. "She combines strategic leadership with a strong record of execution, and I am confident she will build on the tremendous momentum already underway in Danville. Her experience, collaborative approach, and ability to turn vision into action will help us continue creating economic growth and improving quality of life for our residents."

Assistant City Manager Briana Evans noted, "Economic development is at the heart of Danville's future." That means, Evans shared, Danville needs a forward-thinking leader for the role. "How we connect residents and businesses with opportunity and investment will determine our future here in Danville. In her previous roles, Kelly has brought together business leaders and other partners with different perspectives and skills to create positive change for her community. We are fortunate to find a candidate with such a collaborative approach to lead this next season of growth."

Drayton will lead the City's business attraction, retention, and growth efforts with a staff of seven full-time employees and several part-time staff supporting the City's visitors' centers. The Office of Economic Development and Tourism plays a key role in supporting ongoing business growth, redevelopment initiatives, tourism promotion, and major economic development projects throughout Danville and Southern Virginia.

"I am honored to have the opportunity to serve Danville and to join a community that has built tremendous momentum around economic growth and revitalization," remarked Drayton. "Throughout my career, I have learned that lasting progress comes from bringing people together around a shared vision, building meaningful partnerships, and doing the hard work to turn that vision into results. I look forward to working with our businesses, regional partners, educational institutions, community organizations, and City team to build on the investments already underway, strengthen our economic foundation, and create opportunities for residents and businesses to thrive. I'm excited to get to know this community and get to work."

During her career, Drayton has led regional recovery and resilience initiatives involving public, private, nonprofit, and higher education partners while supporting business recovery, economic resiliency, and long-term strategic planning efforts.

She most recently served as Chapel Hill's Director of Emergency Preparedness and Risk Management, where she led strategic initiatives involving multiple government agencies, businesses, community organizations, and regional partners. She played a key leadership role there in long-term economic recovery and resiliency efforts, coordinating collaborative solutions that supported businesses and residents alike.

While with the City of Raleigh, Drayton worked in emergency management roles that built on her extensive experience with business engagement, resource management, coordination of critical information, and strategic execution. Among those roles, she served as Special Event and Critical Incident Manager, where she managed the processing, permitting, and evaluation of hundreds of special events, activating Raleigh's streets and neighborhoods.

Drayton is a graduate of Elon University and holds a Master's degree in Public Administration from North Carolina State University.

The Danville Office of Economic Development and Tourism works to create the economic conditions that help the whole community thrive. The Office manages the Visit Soti brand, focused on Southside Virginia Tourism, accessible through visitsoti.com. OEDT also recruits and retains businesses for the Danville area. As part of this work, the Office provides information on available sites and buildings, incentives, and other financial resources and offers a website designed for business leaders, discoverdanville.com.

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