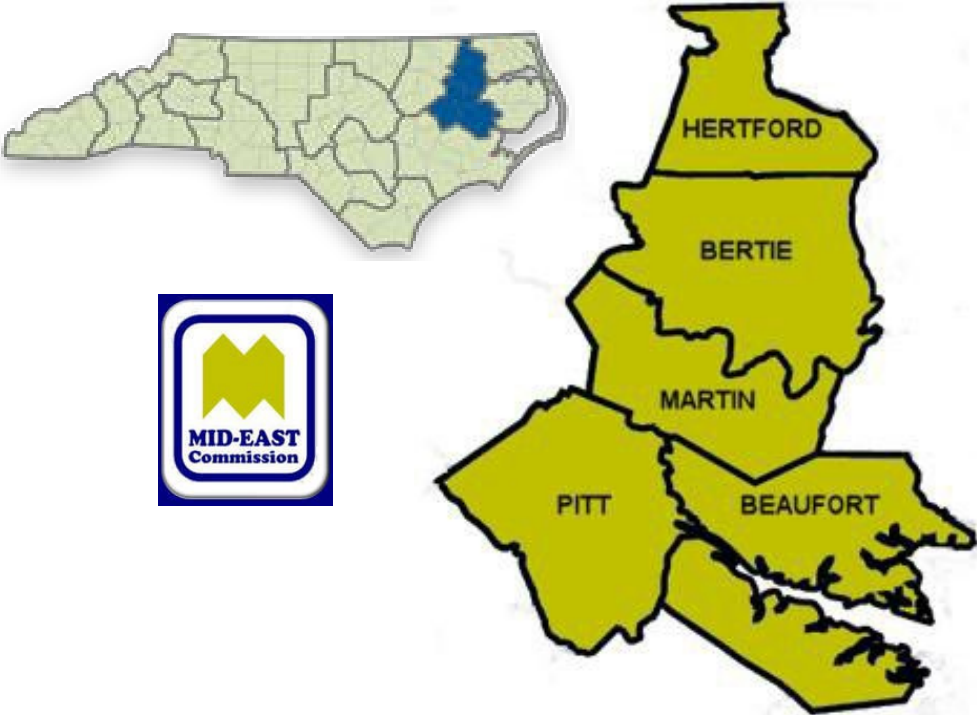


# Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy Executive Summary

## Mid-East Commission 2024

Serving Beaufort, Bertie, Hertford, Martin and Pitt Counties



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# Member Governments

## Beaufort County

Aurora  
Bath  
Belhaven  
Chocowinity  
Pantego  
Washington  
Washington Park

## Hertford County

Ahoskie  
Como  
Cofield  
Harrellsville  
Murfreesboro  
Winton

## Bertie County

Askewville  
Aulander  
Colerain  
Kelford  
Lewiston/Woodville  
Powellsville  
Roxobel  
Windsor

## Martin County

Bear Grass  
Everetts  
Hamilton  
Hassell  
Jamesville  
Oak City  
Parmele  
Robersonville  
Williamston

## Pitt County

Ayden  
Bethel  
Falkland  
Farmville  
Fountain  
Greenville  
Grifton  
Grimesland  
Simpson  
Winterville

## **CEDS Vision Statement**

**The 2024 Mid-East Economic Development District Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy will help build a regional competitive advantage and leverage the marketplace by establishing and maintaining a robust regional infrastructure, thereby creating revitalized and vibrant communities which will develop healthy and innovative people.**

## **Introduction**

The Mid-East Commission was created by the State of North Carolina in May of 1967 as a Regional Council of Governments serving the local governments and residents of Region “Q”, which is comprised of Beaufort, Bertie, Hertford, Martin, and Pitt Counties, as well as their municipalities. The Commission’s mission is to assist people in the Region and its environs by providing professional technical assistance services from its Planning, Economic Development and Community Services Department, Workforce Development, and Area Agency on Aging. The multifaceted and vast experience of its highly trained, educated, and professional staff enables it to meet the needs of its clients, enhancing and sustaining their quality of life.

## ***CEDS Overview***

The Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDs) is designed and required to bring together the public and private sectors in creating a comprehensive and performance-based plan to strengthen the regional economy. A CEDs is required for a region to be eligible for assistance through Economic Development Administration (EDA) programs. The Mid-East Region CEDs 2022-2027 document provides an analysis of the regional economy and all of its elements and serves as a guide to establishing regional goals and objectives, developing and implementing a regional plan of action, identifying investment priorities and funding sources, and assigning lead organizations the responsibility for executing the action plan. CEDs 2022-2027 is the result of a continuing economic development planning process developed with broad base and diverse public and private sector participation.

## ***2024 Update***

The 2024 CEDs represents a minor update completed by Mid-East Commission staff. For the 2024 update, Mid-East Commission staff did a deep dive on goals, objectives, implementation strategies and vital projects at a day long planning retreat. Staff then engaged Advisory Committee members who served during the 2022 major update, along with local government members, to identify any additional priorities, any economic shifts observed, and to assess progress made on achieving goals and objectives.

Staff used the information from the planning retreat, from Advisory Committee members, and from local government members to complete the 2024 minor update. Tasks included updating the existing infrastructure, regional profile data, cluster analysis, goals, objectives and implementation strategies, and vital projects sections of the document.

## ***2022 Update***

The 2022 CEDs is a five-year major update. Staff worked with a CEDs Advisory Committee consisting of 46 people from diverse backgrounds representing both the private and public sectors. The CEDs Advisory Committee participated in 16 virtual meetings and also disseminated information for comment via email to develop the plan. Major tasks included updating the demographic and economic data, SWOT analysis, cluster analysis for each county and the region, updating area economic performance factors, updating the economic resilience section including vulnerabilities, steady state, and responsive state initiatives,

updating goals, objectives and implementation strategies, and updating the vital projects list.

The Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy for the Mid-East Region is consistent with and dependent upon the citizen participation process. The 2022 major update included a virtual public open house and two in-person public open houses held in October 2022. The in person open houses were held at the Bertie County Community Space (Windsor, Bertie County) and at the Washington Civic Center (Washington, Beaufort County).

## Background

The Mid-East Region or Region “Q” is located in Northeastern North Carolina but not in the extreme Northeastern corner of the state. The region is comprised of Beaufort, Bertie, Hertford, Martin and Pitt Counties. It is a wide, essentially flat, coastal plain lying within the inner coast along the Albemarle and Pamlico Sounds. The region is dominated by rural undeveloped agricultural and woodland that is sparsely populated. Small municipalities make up most of the population centers in Region “Q”. Pitt County is the only semi-developed county in the region and varies demonstratively from the other four counties.

The region is punctuated by flat, meandering rivers – the Tar-Pamlico, Pungo, Chowan, and Cashie, and the more turbulent waters of the Roanoke. The vast acreage on both sides of these rivers and their many tributary creeks are devoted to undevelopable floodplains. The entire system of sounds, rivers, tributaries and wetlands constitutes the second largest estuary ecosystem on the East Coast and in the lower 48 United States.

The land is dominated by wetland peat, and primarily sand and loam based prime agricultural soils. A large percentage of the land in the region has severe constraints for development, due primarily to a seasonal high water table and year-round wetness tendencies. These soils are also located in areas susceptible to flooding as specified by FEMA. The vegetation consists of that found in wet and floodplain areas with Carolina pines tending to dominate the landscape. Farm crops which are an important part of the natural resource based economy are cotton, grain corn, peanuts, tobacco, soybeans, and sweet potatoes. The region has a mild four-season climate with frequent humid conditions typical of the Southeastern United States.

## Regional Profile Data

### Population Information

Table 1 shows population growth for counties in the Mid-East region. It shows the total population for each county from 2000, 2010, and 2019 as well as the population and percentage growth during that timeframe. <sup>1</sup>

The data shows that Pitt County is much more populated than the other four counties. Pitt County was the only county to grow in population (6.1%) from 2010 to 2019. The other four counties saw a population decline from 2010 to 2019. The Mid-East Region as a whole grew in population by 1.9% from 2010 to 2019.

<b>Table 1. Mid-East Commission Region Population Growth, 2000-2019</b>					
<b>County</b>	<b>Census 2000</b>	<b>Census 2010</b>	<b>Census 2019</b>	<b>Growth 2010-2019</b>	<b>% Growth 2010-2019</b>
Beaufort	44,958	47,759	47,168	(-591)	(-1.2%)
Bertie	19,773	21,282	19,380	(-1,902)	(-8.9%)
Hertford	22,601	24,669	24,012	(-657)	(-2.7%)
Martin	25,593	24,505	22,849	(-1,656)	(-6.7%)
Pitt	133,798	168,148	178,433	10,285	6.1%
<b>Region Total</b>	<b>246,723</b>	<b>286,363</b>	<b>291,842</b>	<b>5,479</b>	<b>1.9%</b>

Source: US Census Bureau (2000 Decennial Census, 2010 Decennial Census, 2019 American Community Survey)

<sup>1</sup> The CEDS Advisory Committee determined that the 2020 US Census data is inaccurate for a majority of the region. There were particular issues with undercounting, especially in rural areas of the region. Additionally, there seems to be inaccuracies in other data sources from the same time period. This is likely due to issues related to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic effecting data collection efforts. The Advisory Committee decided to use data from 2019, which is more dated, but seems to be more accurate based on local knowledge. Future population projection data was omitted, as it was determined that these projections were skewed by the inaccurate 2020 Decennial Census data counts.



## Mid-East Region Employment

<b>Table 2. Mid-East Region Employment by Industry &amp; Earnings per Worker, 2015-2020</b>				
<b>Occupation</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>2020</b>	<b>Change in Jobs 2015-2020</b>	<b>2020 Earnings per Worker</b>
Accommodation and Food Services	11,670	10,347	(-11.3%)	\$13,863
Administrative and Support and Waste Management and Remediation Services	6,843	6,655	(-2.7%)	\$34,727
Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing and Hunting	1,990	2,122	6.6%	\$40,983
Arts, Entertainment and Recreation	779	652	(-16.3%)	\$18,846
Construction	4,363	5,916	35.6%	\$42,191
Educational Services	14,501	14,260	(-1.7%)	\$40,887
Finance and Insurance	2,748	2,139	(-22.2%)	\$55,848
Health Care and Social Assistance	22,495	23,641	5.1%	\$39,094
Information	1,277	841	(-34.1%)	\$54,380
Management of Companies and Enterprises	1,038	905	(-12.8%)	\$81,068
Manufacturing	12,305	11,548	(-6.2%)	\$59,267
Mining	369	482	30.6%	\$65,509
Other Services (Except Public Administration)	2,219	2,128	(-4.1%)	\$31,231
Professional, Scientific and Technical Services	2,337	2,320	(-0.7%)	\$49,005
Public Administration	6,438	6,486	0.7%	\$44,465
Real Estate and Rental and Leasing	1,013	1,161	14.6%	\$32,365
Retail Trade	13,738	14,106	2.7%	\$26,083
Transportation and Warehousing	1,726	2,096	21.4%	\$47,434
Utilities	837	877	4.8%	\$59,334
Wholesale Trade	3,211	2,728	(-15.0%)	\$48,818

Sources: US Bureau of Labor Statistics (2015 Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages, 2020 Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages) used first, US Census Bureau (2015 American Community Survey, 2020 American Community Survey) used when BLS data unavailable.

## Assessment of the Area

The economic development assessment of the Mid-East Region can be directly stated through a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) analysis as follows:

### *Strengths*

- The work ethic and ongoing training of the workforce
- Educational opportunities
- Partnerships
- Business & industry collaboration with education institutions
- Trauma center in the region
- ECU Health medical facilities across region
- Strong community college system across region
- Transportation systems improving
- I-187 and Future I-87
- Increased capacity for leisure and recreation activities
- Job and career opportunities
- Lower cost of living
- Thriving entrepreneurial base
- Mining, fishing, agriculture of continued importance
- Low traffic volumes in most counties
- Strong rail system in most areas
- The People
- Natural resources
- Potential for growth
- Increasing willingness across the region to collaborate for the good of everyone
- Increasing airport capacity
- Community College Small Business Centers and ECU's Small Business Technology Development Center (SBTDC) programs
- Historic downtowns with growing, vibrant arts communities
- Proximity to the Hampton Roads region of Va.
- Inner Banks tourism
- History and natural beauty
- Clean water and air
- Industry clusters in boat building, life sciences, air filtration and defense
- Proximity to the Port of Norfolk
- NC East Alliance as a policy advocate for the region
- Low cost of living

## ***Weaknesses***

- Workforce quantity
- Lack of available sites and buildings
- Lack of housing including moderate income rental housing
- Low traffic volumes makes competition for transportation projects difficult
- Vulnerability to natural disasters
- Lack of extracurricular/entertainment activities for adults
- Lack of citizen awareness on what is available to them
- Lack of healthcare facilities in some areas
- Lack of suitable public transit in most areas
- Lack of infrastructure funding
- High poverty rates
- Insufficient K-12 system and poor test scores
- Low graduation rates from high school
- Lack of broadband
- Perceived high property tax rate
- Lack of good paying jobs
- Lack of workforce housing
- Price of raw materials (lumber, steel)
- Lack of available buildings (product)

## ***Opportunities***

- CSX Intermodal facility in Rocky Mount
- Regional Workforce Innovation Center to train large numbers of employees
- Expand on biotechnology for all areas including agriculture
- Support services for the creative community
- River tourism
- Increased access to venture capital
- Expansion of local airports
- Expansion of existing business sectors
- Expansion of tourism opportunities
- Make young professionals/graduates aware of local opportunities
- Development of entertainment venues
- Take advantage of local history as a tourism draw
- Broadband expansion
- Remote working of millennials and Gen Z
- Large number of entrepreneurs
- Affluent retirees who could serve as SCORE (business mentor) volunteers
- Mild climate
- Proximity to the Port of Norfolk
- Development of shell buildings and industrial sites
- Airbnb growth in rural areas
- Future 1-87
- Capitalize on timber/forestry industry

## ***Threats***

- The strong manufacturing base is insufficiently diversified. Downturn in one or more key industries would have severe consequences.
- Continued devastation from frequent natural disasters such as hurricanes and associated flooding
- The idea that young professionals must leave the area to go live/work in larger cities like Raleigh or Charlotte to do well
- Lack of extracurricular activities and entertainment opportunities for adults
- Climate change
- Continued company locations to urban areas
- Aging workforce
- Brain drain
- Flood plain encroachment
- High poverty level
- Poorly funded education system
- Rural hospital closures (access to healthcare)
- Budgetary issues/funding shortfalls
- Lack of broadband service
- Declining infrastructure conditions

## **Cluster Analysis**

This cluster analysis was developed in partnership with each county's Economic Developer and the Rivers East Workforce Development Board.

### ***Beaufort County***

Beaufort County is well represented in all three areas classified as primary economic drivers. Mining, agriculture and manufacturing all employ a large number of people and generate a tremendous amount of income. Additional sectors include aquaculture and commercial fishing.

Opportunities exist in all sectors of advanced manufacturing and general manufacturing. Beaufort County Economic Development has identified existing manufacturing clusters of boat building, air filtration, and metalworking.

The healthcare sector will continue to grow in Beaufort County as it will across the region. The county will support initiatives by the NC Dept. of Commerce, the Economic Development Partnership of NC (EDPNC) and other partnerships that will drive business to Beaufort County and will improve opportunities for its citizens.

### ***Bertie County***

In Bertie County, the Perdue Farms Facility – a poultry processor located in Lewiston-Woodville is the largest employer within the county and is the largest driving economic force. The Bertie County Correctional Facility is also a major employer. The County's Economic Development Commission is interested in continuing to recruit support services for this major complex.

The next highest employment sectors are healthcare and education, as is the case for much of the state. Agriculture continues to employ many people in Bertie County. There are also many small businesses in the county and entrepreneurship has been increasing in recent years.

The Economic Development Commission is focusing on tourism and on all types of manufacturing. Existing manufacturing clusters include food, value added agriculture and agricultural biotechnology. The county is already home to AVOCA, which is a bio-mass extraction company. The county is also home to Darling (formerly Valley Protein), a rendering company which takes excess product from the Perdue Facility and turns it into a protein to be put in animal feed.

Possible cluster opportunities for Bertie County include alternative energy (bio-mass and solar), marine trades, food production and distribution, automotive, and tourism, including but not limited to, adventure tourism and the Lost Colony.

The Economic Development Commission has been heavily involved in marketing the county for travel and tourism in recent years. Bertie County has purchased 147 acres of land on the Albemarle Sound, referred to as the "Tall Glass of Water" project. The site will be an amenity for both residents and visitors to the county including a public beach/swimming area, a science education center, hiking trails, and camping opportunities. The Economic Development Commission is partnering with municipalities in the county to create a tourism trail which

makes visitors to Tall Glass of Water aware of opportunities across the county, such as local foods, restaurants, and retail experiences. The film industry is growing in Bertie County and the county is working with a non-profit organization that has a bold vision to build a film ecosystem in northeastern NC.

Bertie County also recognizes the potential for waterfront and retirement residential development. A company has recently purchased the old Scotch Hall site and is doing a complete revitalization of the golf course and building spec homes, along with a new restaurant and community center.

## ***Hertford County***

Hertford County's location along the North Carolina and Virginia border offers direct business and employment ties to the Richmond and Hampton Roads area, which includes military and shipyards located there. The Hertford County Economic Development Department indicates that steel and other metal fabrication, metal recycling, agriculture and forestry are also major business clusters for them. Nucor Steel is a major economic force in the county and many subsidiary businesses exist due to their presence.

Alternative energy, specifically solar and biomass, have been growing clusters. It is worth noting that large scale solar developments are now subject to new county ordinances, which may limit the growth of this cluster in the future.

Hertford County is identified as a multi-county mini hub for healthcare and retail shopping. Hertford County is dominated by the healthcare sector. Another top sector is small business, which represent 84% of the businesses in the county. Hertford County also recognizes the potential for waterfront and retirement residential development.

## ***Martin County***

The current cluster areas for Martin County are wood and pulp processing, food processing, value added agriculture, green energy, chemicals and plastics, and advanced manufacturing. Martin County is also positioned as a regional hub for retail business and tourism, because of its location at the intersection of future Interstate-87 and US-13/US-17.

Domtar has the largest manufacturing footprint in Martin County, followed by Flagstone Foods, which is the largest private employer in the county. The county owns a rail-served industrial park in Everetts, which was rebranded in 2019 as the NC Rail and Commerce Park.

The Senator Bob Martin Eastern Agricultural Center is the largest equine facility in Eastern North Carolina, containing 456 permanent stalls. It hosts equine events from the Mid-Atlantic and Southern states, adding to Martin County's tourism economy. Martin Community College has the only equine program in the eastern part of the state, further contributing to the equine niche in the county. The community college is planning on adding other unique programs in the future, such as forestry.

## ***Pitt County***

The Pitt County Economic Development Department has identified its high growth industry sectors as life sciences, specifically biopharmaceuticals and medical devices, along with the downstream supportive industries. The county leadership has worked for many years with multiple partners to position Pitt County as a leader in biopharma and related industries in North Carolina.

Assets include East Carolina University, ECU Brody School of Medicine, ECU School of Dental Medicine, ECU Department of Engineering, ECU Health (formerly Vidant Health), Pitt Community College and its BioWork program, the NC Community College System's BioNetwork Center, the Technology Enterprise Center of Eastern Carolina, home of the NC Pharmaceutical Services Network, and Pitt County Schools' Health Sciences Academy. Also notable is the opening of the ECU Life Sciences Building in November 2021, which will be the home of the Golden Leaf funded Eastern Region Pharma Center.

Key support partners include the North Carolina Biotechnology Center, ECU's Small Business and Technology Development Center (SBTDC), ECU's Division of Research, Economic Development and Engagement (REDE), Thermo Fisher Scientific, Mayne Pharma, CMP Pharma, RTI Surgical, and DR Burton. Thermo Fisher Scientific expanded in December, 2020 (\$500 million, 500 jobs) and September 2021 (\$154 million and 290 jobs).

The largest sector in Pitt County is Health Care and Social Assistance, employing 15,646 workers. The next-largest sectors in the region are Educational Services (13,622 workers) and Retail Trade (9,912).

The industry cluster in Pitt County, North Carolina with the highest relative concentration is Pharmaceuticals with a location quotient of 12.13. This cluster employs 2,116 workers in the region with an average wage of \$67,561. Employment in the Pharmaceutical cluster is projected to expand in the region about 0.5% per year over the next ten years. Pitt County continues to be a regional leader in the healthcare, education, and retail sectors. As of 2020, total GDP in Pitt County was \$8,669,380,000. Of all the sectors in Pitt County, Manufacturing contributed the largest portion of GDP in 2020, (\$2,111,384,000) The next-largest contributions came from Educational Services (\$1,367,141,000); and Health Care and Social Assistance (\$1,336,364,000). Renewable energy product manufacturing (primarily solar related products) is a growing industry in Pitt County.

## ***Mid-East Region***

Healthcare/social assistance, education, and manufacturing dominate the regional economy. The Rivers East Workforce Development Board has identified healthcare and biotechnology as two growth sectors for the region. This combines two of the region's top current employment sectors.

Many of the regional assets for biotechnology are centered in Pitt County. However, there are five hospitals and many primary physicians throughout the region that can participate in clinical trials. Avoca, Inc. is a bio-mass facility located in Bertie County. Nutrien-Aurora,

Weyerhaeuser, and Perdue are also national leaders in agricultural biotechnology. Each of these has major processing facilities that are located in the region, yet they are located outside of Pitt County.

Educational opportunities related to biotechnology are spreading throughout the region. East Carolina University and the Community College system throughout the region are leading the way with educational programs designed to prepare individuals for work in biotechnology and related fields. All of the region's Community Colleges are in a biotechnology consortium. Additionally, training for this area is filtering down to the High School level.

The region has a broad base of industries in the manufacturing sector that includes heavy process to light manufacturing.

Large public sector employers throughout the region include East Carolina University, ECU Health, each of the Community Colleges and each County Board of Education.

Existing clusters for the region include advanced manufacturing, biopharmaceuticals, boat building/marine trades, chemical processing, life sciences, local education and training providers, local government services, logistics, plastics, production technology and heavy machinery, small business, tourism, and value-added agriculture.



## Goals and Objectives

<b>NC Tomorrow (Statewide CEDS) Guiding Principle</b>	<b>BUILD ON EACH REGION'S COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE AND LEVERAGE THE MARKETPLACE</b>
<b>Goal 1</b>	<b>Brand and market the Mid-East Region in order to support existing businesses, encourage entrepreneurship, highlight educational opportunities, foster continued development of target clusters, attract new employers, diversify the regional economy and retain the millennial and Gen-Z generations.</b>
<b>Objective 1</b>	<b>Continue making regular updates to regional and local cluster analyses and identify clusters that offer competitive advantages.</b>
<b>Objective 2</b>	<b>Use the cluster analysis to target existing businesses and start-ups and market the benefits of locating in the region.</b>
<b>Objective 3</b>	<b>Engage partner organizations to regularly update the Mid-East Region CEDS Implementation Plan (the most recent edition being the 2020 Regional Collaborative Strategic Plan).</b>
<b>Objective 4</b>	<b>Conduct an analysis that identifies the existing and potential improved place brand for the region.</b>
<b>Objective 5</b>	<b>Develop and implement a Regional Marketing Plan.</b>
<b>Objective 6</b>	<b>Create a marketing image that reflects the quality of life and unique assets of each area, such as water resources, peanuts, glassworks, historical and cultural sites, sports arenas, campgrounds, etc.</b>
<b>Objective 7</b>	<b>Assist businesses with the development of new adaptive capabilities.</b>

<b>NC Tomorrow (Statewide CEDS) Guiding Principle</b>	<b>ESTABLISH AND MAINTAIN A ROBUST REGIONAL INFRASTRUCTURE</b>
<b>Goal 2</b>	<b>Complete and maintain the physical infrastructure needed to support industrial, commercial and residential development in rural areas, including broadband service, multi-modal transportation connections, affordable housing, and utilities such as electricity, water, sewer and natural gas service.</b>
<b>Objective 1</b>	<b>Develop multi-modal transportation plans that address existing and future year capacity deficiencies and implement multi-modal transportation projects across the region. (Multi-modal transportation includes all modes of transportation and their connections to each other.)</b>
<b>Objective 2</b>	<b>Plan for and expand broadband infrastructure to all areas of the region, including the “last mile” in rural areas until all households, businesses and organizations are served.</b>
<b>Objective 3</b>	<b>Research the current housing stock, identify additional needs and develop and implement a plan for the availability of a variety of housing options.</b>
<b>Objective 4</b>	<b>Map critical assets across the region.</b>
<b>Objective 5</b>	<b>Expand sewer and natural gas infrastructure to existing and anticipated future industrial areas.</b>
<b>Objective 6</b>	<b>Expand potable water infrastructure and wastewater infrastructure across the region.</b>

<b>NC Tomorrow (Statewide CEDS) Guiding Principle</b>	<b>CREATE REVITALIZED, HEALTHY AND RESILIENT COMMUNITIES</b>
<b>Goal 3</b>	<b>Support and help revitalize safe, walkable communities with vibrant urban and town centers, thriving rural areas, a variety of housing options, affordable services, and healthy citizens.</b>
<b>Objective 1</b>	<b>Promote environmentally sustainable development patterns.</b>
<b>Objective 2</b>	<b>Plan for and accelerate investments in healthy, safe and walkable neighborhoods and ensure that underserved and distressed communities are engaged in the planning process.</b>
<b>Objective 3</b>	<b>Plan for and implement the restoration and preservation of urban and town centers.</b>
<b>Objective 4</b>	<b>Collaborate with law enforcement on community policing initiatives.</b>
<b>Objective 5</b>	<b>Ensure that all residents have access to healthcare, education, and affordable services. Identify areas that lack access or where access is not affordable.</b>
<b>Objective 6</b>	<b>Capitalize on natural resources and recreation opportunities in order to improve the quality of life for citizens and promote ecotourism.</b>
<b>Objective 7</b>	<b>Address food deserts where there is a lack of options for healthy, fresh foods. Develop healthy eating resources to address dietary challenges in low income rural areas.</b>
<b>Objective 8</b>	<b>Assist local governments with day to day management and planning needs.</b>
<b>Objective 9</b>	<b>Improve community and regional resilience to flooding and other natural hazards.</b>

<b>NC Tomorrow (Statewide CEDS) Guiding Principle</b>	<b>DEVELOP TALENTED AND INNOVATIVE PEOPLE</b>
<b>Goal 4</b>	<b>Develop a workforce with 21<sup>st</sup> Century skills by retaining the millennial and Gen-Z generations, expanding access to higher education, workforce, and vocational training, increasing collaboration with employers, expanding access to entrepreneurial support, and providing incubator spaces for small businesses.</b>
<b>Objective 1</b>	<b>Foster the development, recruitment and retention of a workforce with 21<sup>st</sup> Century skills.</b>
<b>Objective 2</b>	<b>Identify and analyze all educational, workforce, and vocational training resources and conduct a gap analysis based on employer needs.</b>
<b>Objective 3</b>	<b>Develop ways to create an entrepreneurial ecosystem across the region which supports existing small businesses and fosters the development and growth of new small businesses.</b>
<b>Objective 4</b>	<b>Improve marketing of current Career Paths, develop additional Career Paths that recognize the needs of employers, and start students in developing on these pathways in High School.</b>
<b>Objective 5</b>	<b>Provide the atmosphere and amenities desired by the millennial and Gen-Z generations.</b>
<b>Objective 6</b>	<b>Bring career counseling, career readiness, business development, and workforce development programs out into the community.</b>
<b>Objective 7</b>	<b>Increase marketing of workforce development programs and apprenticeship programs available to employers.</b>

## Vital Projects

This section identifies regional projects, programs and activities designed to implement the goals and objectives of the CEDS. The vital project list is general rather than location specific. The vital project is alphabetically listed and not in any prioritized order.

- Advocate for NCDOT to change the STI funding formula to benefit rural areas.
- Attract retirees by marketing the benefits of retiring in the region and through certification programs such as “Retirement Friendly Communities”.
- Bring existing roadways up to modern standards.
- Communicate to leaders that funding must accompany any new state and federal mandates, especially in low-income municipalities and Tier 1 counties, to assist local governments with the cost of compliance.
- Completion of infrastructure throughout industrial and/or technology parks.
- Conduct place-making exercises throughout the region.
- Conduct resiliency outreach and offer resiliency planning support services across the region.
- Construction or expansion of workforce training centers.
- Continued improvements to air passenger service to the region.
- Continued improvements to highways throughout the region.
- Create a regional partnership to ensure that high-speed broadband internet access is available in all areas of the region, including the last mile in rural areas. Take advantage of available grant programs and advocate for local input to be a driving factor when selecting firms to deliver on contracts.
- Creation of disaster resistant jobs through workforce training, vocational training and education with a focus on 21st Century skills.
- Develop a regional greenway system that ties in with the East Coast Greenway and the NC Great Trails State Plan.
- Develop a regional substance abuse treatment facility.
- Develop additional affordable housing stock, including apartments, and promote affordable housing to encourage growth in communities.
- Develop ways for retirees to stay involved in communities, i.e. volunteering for boards, etc.
- Enhance the regional meeting capabilities throughout the region.
- Ensure access to a variety of housing options and quality K-12 education in all areas of the region.
- Establishment of business incubator facilities throughout the region.
- Expand hotels/accommodations for visitors to the region.
- Expansion of sewer and natural gas infrastructure to additional areas, especially anticipated future industrial areas.
- Explore additional cross-county and regional cost sharing opportunities for infrastructure and services.
- Extension of infrastructure including water, wastewater, roads, electric, rail, gas and broadband to new industries.
- Foster continued development of target clusters identified in the local and regional cluster analyses.

- Foster the development of new, desirable industrial buildings (shell buildings) which can be customized to meet the needs of a variety of industries.
- Further develop tourism opportunities throughout the region through a unified branding campaign that shows benefits and highlights of our counties and counties in surrounding regions, including a visual map for marketing purposes.
- Host a recurring Preparedness Day for local governments.
- Identify best practices throughout the region and create an easy to access platform to share ideas and successes.
- Improve mobility and connectivity throughout the region.
- Improve public transportation systems.
- Improve rail including passenger rail availability.
- Incorporate the arts, cultural activities and festivals in the economic development strategy for the region.
- Increase access to community-based mental healthcare across the region.
- Increase capacity to develop and promote Career Paths.
- Install electric vehicle charging stations.
- Mitigate damage from natural disasters by protecting public utilities from flooding where feasible and improving land drainage across the region.
- Obtain more funding for community development projects.
- Offer a public assistance class for disaster recovery reimbursement.
- Prioritize safety improvements on roadways/segments with high accident rates.
- Promote affordable housing in rural areas by advocating for the revision and modification of LMI tax credits to better serve Tier 1 and rural areas. This includes changes to the QAP formula to change the definition of grocery store, making qualification for the tax credit easier, and providing more money for the tax credit.
- Provide education and outreach on services provided to benefit citizens in the region.
- Regionalization of water and wastewater systems where appropriate.
- Revitalization of downtown areas throughout the region.
- Start a group for advocacy to the state and federal government to communicate the region's needs and advocate for investment in the region.
- Utilize partnerships to get information out and educate communities.

Funding for past projects and these prospective projects has/will come from a combination of the following sources:

1. Local Government Funds
2. Economic Development Administration
3. NC Broadband Office
4. NC Community Development Block Grant- Economic Development
5. NC Community Development Block Grant- Infrastructure
6. NC Dept. of Commerce- Economic Infrastructure and Building Reuse
7. NC Dept. of Commerce- Workforce Development Funds
8. NC DEQ State Wastewater and Drinking Water Reserves Program
9. NC DOT- Rail Industrial Access Program
10. NC Golden LEAF Foundation
11. NC Industrial Development Fund
12. NC Land and Water Management Trust Fund

- 13. NC Parks and Recreation Trust Fund
- 14. NC Recreational Trails Program

## **General Evaluation Criteria**

While specific performance measures are located under each objective in the full plan, the following general performance measures will be used to evaluate the Mid-East Commission's successful development and implementation of the CEDS.

1. Number of jobs created after implementation of the CEDS.
2. Number and types of investments undertaken in the region.
3. Number of jobs retained in the region.
4. Amount of private sector investment in the region after implementation of the CEDS.
5. Changes in the economic environment of the region.

Thank you very much to those of you who helped make this plan possible – and to everyone who is dedicated to working on its implementation.



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