

# 2021 ANNUAL UPDATE

FOR THE  
COMPREHENSIVE ECONOMIC  
DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY (CEDS)



UPPER COASTAL PLAIN  
COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS

## NOTICE

This report serves to highlight key activities of the past year performed by Upper Coastal Plain Council of Governments and partners, as it relates to the region's Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy. This report also serves as an annual update per US EDA DOC regulations. No significant changes were made to the UCPCOG Region's CEDS before September 30, 2021.

The Vision of the Upper Coastal Region is to :

**THINK REGIONALLY**

**ACT LOCALLY**

**COMPETE GLOBALLY**



## **GOAL 1: Build on the Region's Competitive Advantages & Leverage Marketplace**

**OBJECTIVE 1:** Improve Upper Coastal Plain Region's ability to attract, retain, and grown the diversity of investment and new employers.

**STRATEGIES AND TACTICS:** Increase Capacity, Increase Connectivity (partnerships), Leverage Investments.

A \$2 million Economic Development Administration grant is helping Halifax Community College in Weldon build an Advanced Manufacturing & Corporate Training Center. The United States Department of Commerce, Economic Development Administration (EDA) announced the awarding of the grant on Dec. 21, 2017. The project is expected to create more than 120 jobs and nearly \$19 million in private investment. Construction of the new Advanced Manufacturing & Corporate Training Center began on July 13, 2020. As of the end of this reporting period, construction was complete and UCPCOG is in the process of closing out the EDA grant.

The training center now houses curriculum and short-term training programs for industrial systems technology, welding technology, and automotive systems technology. The grant also allowed the college to expand the welding area and its industrial systems program which includes solar training, robotics and computer training. The facility serves as a



venue where area businesses and industries can upgrade the skills of their current employees as well as new hires, and schedule other training needs.

Staff continued to work very closely with Northampton County to administer a \$560K NC Department of Commerce grant to build a new sewer connection line from a West Fraser Timber to the Town of Seaboard's Wastewater Treatment Plant. During 2021, work was performed to install a pH buffering and metering system necessary to properly monitor the new connection. In close coordination with this effort, the Town of Seaboard was awarded \$992,576 from EDA on 3/30/2020. It supports required wastewater treatment plant improvements at the town. The grant is matched by \$200,000 from the Golden Leaf Foundation with additional match/gap funding from West Fraser Timber and, in a recent attempt to offset high construction prices, the Town of Seaboard capital reserve fund. The project supports West Fraser's 3-phase plant expansion and modification project needed to stay internationally competitive and retain approximately 150 jobs in the region. It also builds additional capacity at the town for future growth opportunities. This economic development partnership was recognized with a 2020 Aliceann Wohlbruck Impact Award from the National Association of Development Organizations (NADO).

PDS is implementing \$400,000 in EDA allocated CARES Act funding to assist the region's economic response, recovery and resiliency efforts related to the COVID-19 pandemic. The effort helps identify, prioritize, and implement timely projects for UCPCOG, members and allies. There was a significant focus placed on this effort during 2021 which will continue through mid-2022. Progress includes development of a CEDS COVID-19 Addendum, expanded water/wastewater funding program, a new affordable housing focus program, direct assistance to local governments throughout the region to obtain Coronavirus Local Fiscal Recovery Funds, expanded GIS services, and more. The COVID-19 CEDS Addendum focuses on all areas of the CEDS with emphasis on economic recovery, response, and preparation and is available at [www.ucpcog.org](http://www.ucpcog.org).

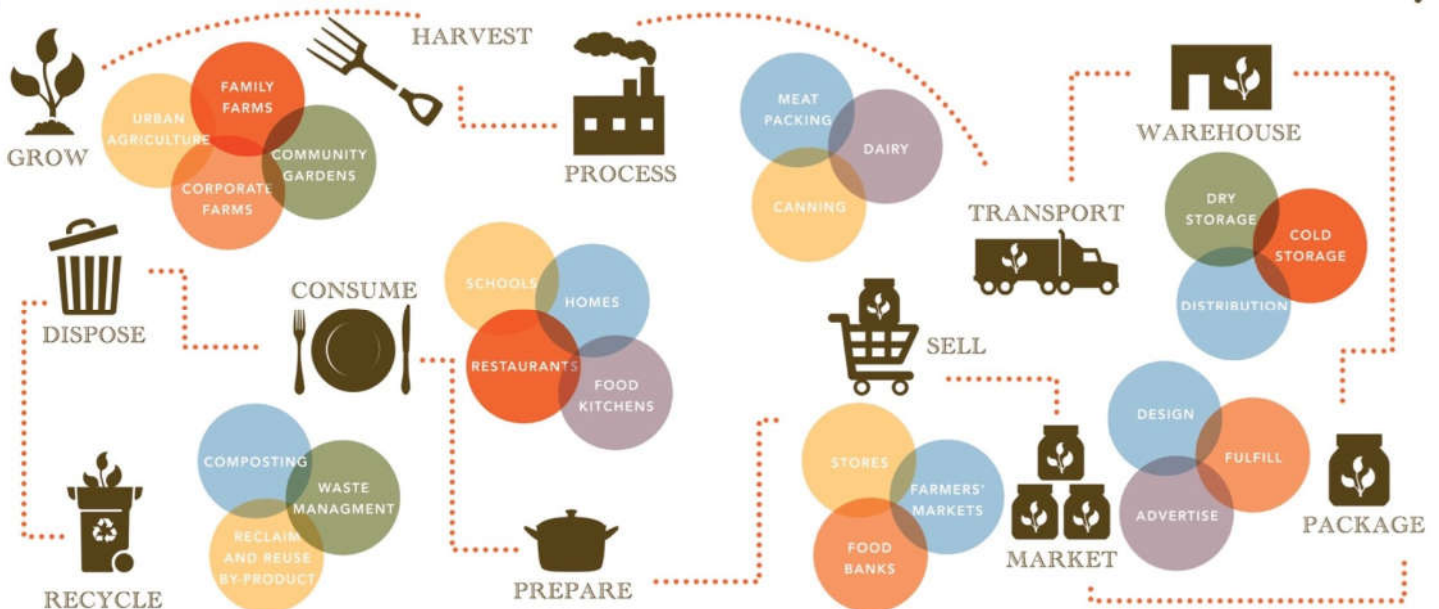
**Goal 1, OBJECTIVE 2:** The Region requires an effective “entrepreneurial ecosystem” to encourage development of new start-ups, support existing small business growth, and develop other entrepreneurial initiatives.

**STRATEGIES AND TACTICS:** Increase entrepreneurial activity through creation and coordination of support programs.

UCPCOG continues to utilize the first and second floors of its downtown Wilson office building as the Upper Coastal Plain Business Development Center (BDC). During this reporting period, the BDC gained 6 new cubical tenants (\$200/month rental each). The new tenants arrive in addition to 10 existing cubical tenants (16 total) and 6 office tenants (\$400/month each) for a total of 22 current tenants as of the end of this reporting period. There are currently 15 available spaces. UCPCOG established a partnership with the City of Wilson’s GigEast Exchange, a nearby business incubator, which is at capacity, to attract additional tenants. UCPCOG also utilizes the third-floor conference room for necessary in-person meetings because it has the necessary space for social distancing. The building’s fourth floor houses the UCPCOG offices.

The BDC’s Revolving Loan Fund responsibilities were transferred to the PDS Director, Ron Townley. A new RLF Plan was also completed to meet updated EDA guidelines. UCPCOG is in the process of defederalizing the RLF.

UCPCOG’s Healthy Food Access Mapping Project (Healthy FAM) was completed during this reporting period. The Healthy FAM project is discussed in further detail in this report under Goal 3, Objective 2, Item 1, and is mentioned under this objective due to its strong impact on addressing the needs of the region’s food entrepreneurial ecosystem. The project directly engaged food system entrepreneurs to map the existing ecosystem and includes over 27 of 65 total recommendations aimed at further developing and understand the local food value chain and economy. This effort also led to UCPCOG’s role with the Croatan Institute’s ROADS Initiative (discussed further in Goal 3, Objective 2, Item 2), which includes a focus on agricultural financing models to promote and foster create agricultural entrepreneurship. The impact of these efforts on the region’s entrepreneurial ecosystem cannot be understated.





**Goal 1, OBJECTIVE 3:** The Upper Coastal Plain Region must focus on our unique areas of proficiency and innovation and how best to exploit competitive advantages.

**STRATEGIES AND TACTICS:** Develop sector-based approaches for implementation and establish more evidence-based process for investments .

UCPCOG continues development of a “High Demand Career Initiative”. Primary objectives include to: Develop a regional talent management plan / workforce analysis to identify high demand occupations in the region; Link high demand occupations with local training providers to produce a skilled workforce; Create a regional talent management / career planning system with an easy onboarding process; Recruit and/or retain skilled workers for jobs in the region; Develop a sustainable planning and awareness campaign to support the partnership over the next 5 to 10 years.

Previously, UCPCOG initiated the UCP Regional Simulation Partnership that uses electronic software games to help in school and out of school youth learn about career occupations and their work environments. In addition, the RSP will work to provide assistance and referrals to participating youth to help them obtain additional education, training, and/or work experience needed to advance their career opportunities. The NC Simulation Station is a web resource sponsored by the Upper Coastal Plain Council of Governments (UCPCOG) and the Turning Point Workforce Development Board (TPWDB). <https://ncsimulationstation.com>

In the past, focus has been on establishing the program in the region’s K-12 school systems. This effort has continued but was put on hold temporarily during the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic. During this reporting period, the Turning Point Workforce Development Board discussed the potential to leverage the Regional Simulation Partnership to train adult, dislocated workers in addition to student training efforts. A pilot program is being developed at the NC Works Center in Wilson County. EDA CARES Act funding has helped further this effort.



UCPCOG staff engage with federal, state, regional and local partners on a regular basis to meet various sector needs and other elements of the CEDS. These included NC Rural Center’s Rural Day, NCSU’s Institute for Emerging Issues Re-Connect Rural & Urban Forum, NC Mainstreet Conference, Rural Center Housing Needs assessment workgroup, NC Inclusive Disaster Recovery Network, NC Pandemic Response Task Force, and others.

During this reporting period, PDS worked with the CEDS Advisory Committee to nominate individuals for the CEDS Strategy Development Group (SDG). The committee was asked to consider the region’s competitive advantages and how to best exploit them as they nominated a representative group of SDG nominees.

## GOAL 2: Establish & Maintain a Robust Infrastructure

**OBJECTIVE 1:** Water and wastewater systems have increasing costs in operations and maintenance and respond with associated fee increases. To create economies of scale, water and sewer systems can be better integrated and coordinated. Deferred maintenance creating operational efficiencies can also be addressed.

**STRATEGIES AND TACTICS:** Establish resources management, planning, coordination, and investments as well as build technical capacity with local water and sewer utility providers.

This is a major focus area of the Planning and Development Services Department with a large amount of dedicated resources. UCPCOG is the leader in public sector awards for water and sewer infrastructure improvements. **Red text denotes affordable housing projects.**

Completed Projects
Saratoga 2017 NC DEQ Clean Water State Revolving Fund Grant/Loan #E-SRP-D-17-0118
Lucama 2017 NC DEQ Drinking Water State Revolving Fund Grant/Loan #H-SRP-D-17-0088
Active Projects
Bailey 2019 NC DEQ Clean Water State Revolving Fund #CS370696-02 & E-SRP-W-20-0176
Bailey 2020 NC DEQ Clean Water State Revolving Fund #CS370696-03
Enfield 2018 NC DEQ Drinking Water State Revolving Fund Grant/Loan #WIF -1957
Enfield 2018 NC DEQ Drinking Water State Revolving Fund Grant/Loan #H-SRP-D-18-0159
Enfield 2019 NC DEQ Drinking Water State Revolving Fund Grant/Loan #E-SRP-W-20-0179
Enfield 2019 NC CDBG-I Water #19-I-3103
<b>Enfield 2019 NC CDBG – NR #18-C-3072</b>
Enfield 2020 NC CDBG-I Sewer Grant #16-I-3157/20-I-3607
Hobgood 2019 CDBG – I Sewer #15-I-3082 & 19-I-3106
Lucama 2017 NC DEQ Drinking Water State Revolving Fund Grant/Loan #H-SRP-D-18-0160
Lucama 2019 NC DEQ Clean Water State Revolving Fund Grant/Loan #CS370602-01
Saratoga 2018 NC DEQ Drinking Water State Revolving Fund Grant #WIF1965
Saratoga 2020 NC CDBG-I GSW Sewer Grant #15-I-3164/20-I-3614
Seaboard 2019 NC DEQ Drinking Water State Revolving Fund Grant/Loan #WIF1974
Seaboard 2020 NC DEQ Drinking Water State Revolving Fund Grant/Loan #2001
<b>Seaboard 2018 CDBG-NR #18-C-3075</b>
Sharpsburg 2019 NC DEQ Clean Water State Revolving Fund Grant/Loan #CS370698-01
Whitakers 2019 NC DEQ Clean Water State Revolving Fund Grant/Loan #CS370579-02
Whitakers 2018 CDBG-I Sewer Project #18-I-3040
Whitakers 2020 NC DEQ Drinking Water State Revolving Fund Grant/Loan #1995
<b>Whitakers 2020 CDBG-NR #11-D-3144</b>
Whitakers 2021 NC DEQ Clean Water State Revolving Fund Grant/Loan #CS370579-03
Woodland 2020 CDBG-I Sewer Project #19-I-3116
Woodland 2019 NC DEQ Clean Water State Revolving Fund Grant/Loan #CS370639-01/SP-W0200
Continued on next page

## Projects In Development

Enfield 2020 NC DEQ Clean Water State Revolving Fund Grant/Loan
Enfield 2020 NC DEQ Drinking Water State Revolving Fund Grant/Loan #1994
Halifax NC DEQ Clean Water State Revolving Fund Grant/Loan
Lucama 2020 NC DEQ Drinking Water State Revolving Fund Grant/Loan
Nashville 2021 CDBG-I Sewer Grant Application
Saratoga 2021 CDBG-I SSR Sewer Connections Grant Application
<b>Saratoga 2021 CDBG-NR Application</b>
<b>Garysburg 2021 CDBG-NR Application</b>
<b>Hobgood 2021 CDBG-NR Application</b>
<b>Speed 2021 CDBG-NR Application</b>
<b>Saratoga 2021 CDBG-NR Application</b>
<b>Sharpsburg 2021 CDBG-NR Application</b>

**Goal 2, OBJECTIVE 2:** Areas of our region lack adequate broadband access. High-speed broadband is a necessity for the development of resilient and successful communities. It is required for businesses to thrive and ultra-high speed broadband is critical to global competitiveness.


**STRATEGIES AND TACTICS:** Improve robust and affordable broadband access to un-served and underserved areas to meet present and future needs.

UCPCOG was awarded \$72,000 from EDA for a Regional Broadband planning initiative in March 2020. The scope of work includes asset mapping, broadband literacy and education, private sector provider engagement, and other activities for underserved areas needing improvement for resilience and future growth. The grant funding was matched with in-kind match generated by a May 2020 virtual training and time committed to the project by regional broadband task force members. The overall goal of the project is the attract reliable, affordable internet service providers to the rural communities across the Upper Coastal Plain region to leverage economic opportunities and improve quality of life. During this reporting period, the project’s focus has been on advertising a Request for Information (RFI) for High-Speed Broadband Services in two Northampton County focus areas. The RFI development and administration involved novel partnerships between municipal governments and the county government, led by PDS. The process will continue through March 2022.

Staff is actively researching new broadband funding resources and connecting member local governments to resources to aid in broadband expansion project development. Specifically, the Institute for Emerging Issues’ BAND-NC Digital Inclusion Planning grant program, the American Rescue Plan Act local fiscal recovery funds, and the upcoming congressional infrastructure package. Through this effort and the EDA-funded regional broadband initiative, PDS has coordinated with several internet service providers to help position the region for broadband funding application partnerships.




Scan this to view the full Digital Inclusion Plan:



### Upper Coastal Plain Digital Inclusion Plan

Prioritized Action Plans to Bring Digital Equity to Edgecombe, Halifax, Nash, Northampton and Wilson Counties



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PDS advised the City of Wilson's Greenlight Community Broadband on the development of an EDA CARES Act grant application to extend fiber internet to the Towns of Black Creek, Saratoga, Stantonsburg, and Lucama. The \$1.5m project was funded on April 15, 2021 and UCPCOG is administering the project.



PDS received a \$20,000 grant from the Institute for Emerging Issues at North Carolina State University to facilitate a region-wide digital inclusion planning process with a focus on the unique digital inclusion needs in all five counties. Consultant Deborah T Watts was hired to assist in the development of the digital inclusion plan. During this reporting period, focus has been on implementing the plan and fostering the new partnerships established during the planning process. Three counties (Halifax, Nash, and Edgecombe) have received additional BAND-NC grant funds, leveraged by the regional planning process. Implementation at the local and regional level will continue to be a focus in the next reporting period. This project received a 2021 Aliceann Wohlbruck Impact Award from the National Association of Development Organizations (NADO).



The UCP Broadband Taskforce, which was created to work together regionally to address unserved and underserved communities, continued to meet during the reporting period. Agenda items included digital inclusion planning discussions, broadband funding opportunities, legislative updates, telemedicine and digital inclusion case studies, updates from members and partners on their ongoing broadband planning efforts, and more. Guest speakers included representatives from the North Carolina League of Municipalities, City of Wilson, City of Rocky Mount, Lake Gaston Computer Club, and Vidant Health. The broadband task force has gained momentum, with record participation. Task Force meeting notes and materials are available for EDA review at any time.

The Upper Coastal Plain continues engaging with State officials about rural broadband deployment strategies in an effort to provide member governments with reliable, useful broadband information. This includes a partnership with the North Carolina Department of Information Technology Broadband Infrastructure Office to help gather responses to the statewide NC Broadband Survey and to help advertise the regional RFI for high-speed broadband services. As of the end of this reporting period, almost 2,500 responses were collected throughout the region. A map designed to share updated survey responses throughout the region was created for member government use during this reporting period.

PDS co-sponsored another NC Broadband Matters workshop in May 2021. Previously, UCPCOG partnered with NCBM for a May 2020 webinar. The 2021 webinar was focused on broadband funding opportunities and was focused on the upper coastal plain region.

**GOAL 2: Goal 2, OBJECTIVE 3:** Continue progress in emerging clean energy sectors while maintaining necessary traditional energy sources in a manner that sustains growth while increasing resiliency.

**STRATEGIES AND TACTICS:** Encourage balanced use of all available energy sources and promote accessibility to communities throughout the region.

PDS continued its partnership with the North Carolina Clean Energy Technology Center at NC State University to help with outreach to local governments on the topic of clean energy. Recent efforts include strategies to help local governments in the region, such as Halifax County, obtain SolSmart designation, which would demonstrate the area's commitment to driving continual improvement in the solar energy market. This effort will continue during the next reporting period and clean energy will be a major focus of the upcoming process to rewrite the region's CEDS.

Previously, PDS Director Ron Townley facilitated an industrial solar workshop for public officials. The event was held at the Center for Energy Education (C4EE) in Halifax County and included sessions on State and local permitting, health and safety impacts, taxes, real estate values and revenues, legal considerations and more. Local officials participated from around the region and from across the state. The C4EE is an eastern united states hub for the renewable energy industry, a hands-on training ground for solar installations, a destination for students and families to learn about renewable energy resources, and an education and training facility for our workforce to provide the knowledge and skills needed to pursue a career in the growing renewable energy industry. A representative from C4EE has been nominated for the CEDS Strategy Development Group.

**OBJECTIVE 4:** The region must continue its vigilance and ensure a fair share of both state and federal transportation funds. Also, the region has had limited multi-modal transportation options, particularly in the more rural areas.

**STRATEGIES AND TACTICS:** Continue collaboration in and between the regional MPO and two RPO transportation planning groups and State to ensure that critical transportation needs are met. Design and implement a regional strategy to take the fullest advantage of CCX multi-modal distribution and transportation hub.

PDS staff and/or the Executive Director attends the Upper Coastal Plain Rural Transportation Planning Organizational Meetings on a continuing basis to ensure coordination on activities and opportunities. UCPCOG staff regularly participates in meetings with member governments.

UCPCOG monitors activities of the Peanut Belt and Upper Coastal Plain Rural Planning Organizations. Representatives from both organizations have been nominated to serve on the CEDS Strategy Development Group. UCPCOG has also been partnering with the City of Rocky Mount (which maintains the Rocky Mount Metropolitan Planning Organization) to discuss strategies for transit improvements.

After CSX corporate headquarters reconsideration of a new strategic multi-modal inland port on the eastern seaboard, the region's CSX high-tech intermodal terminal project, the Carolina Connector, is once again moving forward at a strong pace. The facility will have a lift capacity of 110,000 containers per year. PDS continues to monitor the situation and access opportunities for any needed support or cooperation. The CSX connector has recently been a topic of discussion regarding the region's affordable housing efforts.

As a part of its efforts to leverage the CSX Carolina Connector's presence in the region, UCPCOG assisted the Rocky Mount-Wilson Regional Airport Authority with an EDA Economic Adjustment Assistance grant application for a joint aviation and landside industrial park feasibility study. As of the end of this reporting period, the airport is updating its SAM.gov information as required prior to submitting the funding proposal.

**Goal 2, OBJECTIVE 5:** Incorporate the region’s natural “Green and Blue Infrastructure” assets into development strategies, particularly the area’s primary rivers, the Roanoke and the Tar, as well as nature trails.

**STRATEGIES AND TACTICS:** Promote the regional economic benefits of developing a green infrastructure. Increase collaboration and participation between jurisdictions in both recreational planning and the utilization of heritage tourism associated with the Tar and Roanoke Rivers. Prioritize ways to connect open spaces, watersheds, parks, and other natural areas to maintain quality of life.

PDS attended and participated in NCGrowth's Blueway Guide Launch on March 31, 2021. Staff will study the guide and will determine how the region can leverage this new resource.

The UCPCOG’s COMPASS (Center on Maintaining Preferred Aging Services & Solutions) non-profit is developing a "Tiny Home" community for underserved older adults. They worked to make sure connection to greenspace and ensuring some green space on their pilot “tiny lot” was considered to maintain quality of life for those who participate in this project. During this reporting period, efforts to find a location more suitable than the land previously considered in the City of Wilson was underway. Staff discovered a potentially viable location in the Town of Garysburg in Northampton County. This project received a 2020 Aliceann Wohlbruck Impact Award from the National Association of Development Organizations (NADO).

PDS is implementing a project funded by the North Carolina Department of Environmental Quality’s 205j program to assist the City of Roanoke Rapids in GIS mapping of their infrastructure. Work on this program will improve the resiliency of Roanoke Rapid’s water and sewer infrastructure.

### **GOAL 3: Create Revitalized, Healthy & Resilient Communities**

**OBJECTIVE 1:** Communities must develop in a way that facilitates safe and healthy outdoor activities.

**STRATEGIES AND TACTICS:** Raise awareness about the importance of government planning in ensuring that residents have transportation, housing, and job center choices that could contribute to healthier, safer communities. Create new “impactful” recreational options that serve broader regional needs.

The UCPCOG continues assisting the Town of Princeville, Edgecombe County, state and federal agencies on Hurricane Mathew recovery projects and wherever possible leveraging those efforts. The crux of the recovery is focused on rebuilding a more resilient community. This is an EDA funded effort and partners include NCSU, ECU, FEMA, NCEM, and many others. The project has received continuation funding from EDA with match funds from the State/Town. Recovery efforts include the areas of housing, land use, town hall, school, senior/community center, museum, parks, infrastructure, fire station, and more. Very strong progress has been made by and for the town. A major focus during this reporting period was providing financial assistance to the town in order to update its financial records, seek a new CPA firm for ongoing accounting assistance, and seek a new auditor.

The PDS and Area Agency on Aging Director are members of the Wilson Forward Wellness Collaborative. The group completed a new wellness plan and collaborators have been working to begin meeting the plan’s goals that include efforts in the areas of food, recreation, and other elements of the CEDS.

Through its ongoing efforts to prepare all member governments for the American Rescue Plan Act local fiscal recovery funds, PDS has discussed potentially eligible parks and recreation projects with several communities including the Town of Princeville, Scotland Neck, Stantonsburg, and Pinetops.

**Goal 2, OBJECTIVE 2:** Galvanize economic and community development opportunities in the healthy, local, export, and value-added foods clusters. Adequately and affordably provide healthy food options to communities. Leverage the burgeoning local foods movement in the region as consumers express a desire for fresh, healthy, and affordable produced foods.

**STRATEGIES AND TACTICS:** Develop a food network in the region. Increase Community Economic Self-Reliance with Local Food. Promote community gardens and urban agriculture.

PDS completed its Kate B. Reynolds Charitable Trust (KBR) funded effort to map the region’s local healthy food asset value chain, with an emphasis on underserved and at-risk communities. The project was funded in December 2019 and was kicked-off to a regional local food partnership on February 5, 2020 as the Healthy Food Access Mapping Project (Healthy FAM). Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the project was extended and was a major focus of this reporting period. Work will continue in the next reporting period. During this reporting period, the Healthy FAM product was unveiled to food system stakeholders, member governments, and the local media. As a part of implementing the Healthy FAM assessment, PDS procured a health food system consultant and has partnered with the Triangle J and Kerr-Tar Councils of Government to seek EDA Economic Adjustment Assistance funding for the “Tri-COG Food Ecosystem Economic Development Strategy” project. The partnership is led by UCPCOG and requested \$311,500 from EDA matched by \$78,000 in local funds. UCPCOG plans to seek funding from KBR to cover the local match requirement. The HFAM project received a 2021 Aliceann Wohlbruck Impact Award from the National Association of Development Organizations (NADO).

Pictured right, a screenshot of the Healthy FAM Hub webpage. You can access the HFAM Hub by scanning the QR code below:





UCPCOG has partnered with the Croatan Institute to assist with establishing North Carolina as a Regenerative Organic Agricultural District (ROAD), in order to serve as a magnet for investment in regenerative agriculture across the state. This partnership directly stemmed from the region's healthy local food asset mapping project reported above. PDS participates on more than one committee as the process is underway. Staff leveraged the HFAM project with a USDA grant subcontract for \$35,000 under the Croatan Institute to help develop pilot financial models for sustainable farms improving soil health. This is part of a larger national pilot with teams in the mid-west, west coast, and our region.



The Upper Coastal Plain's Area Agency on Aging (AAA) has received Aging CARES Act Nutrition Funding to help ensure at risk seniors throughout the region have access to affordable and nutritious food during the COVID 19 pandemic crises and its aftermath. Approximately \$200,000 was available for the effort. Eligible activities include the purchasing, processing, storage, transportation, and delivery of food to senior residents. PDS is assisting AAA in leading this effort, leveraging the momentum of the Healthy Food Access Mapping project. The Nash County Farmer's Market was selected to administer this program after UCPCOG AAA facilitated a competitive RFQ process. The Nash County Farmers Market uses farmers and producers located in Halifax, Edgecombe, Nash, Northampton, and Wilson Counties for 100% of the CSA Boxes' contents to the greatest extent possible, while maintaining a variety of healthy options. Each box contains seasonal items in portion for at least two USDA recommended servings for one person. Items include a green vegetable, leafy green vegetable, yellow/orange/red purple vegetable, one vegetable compatible with longer storage, one fruit, one source of grain, and one source of protein. From Sep 2020 – Jun 30, 2021, the program provided 1055 Grocery orders, 308 Robotic Pets, 48 Tablets and made numerous referrals to other agencies for additional supports. Over 250 CSA boxes per week have been distributed since late April 2021.

During the previous reporting period, PDS led a regional partnership to utilize the VISIT NC FARMS agritourism app for Edgecombe, Halifax, Nash, and Northampton Counties. It includes an \$8,500 grant for county partners to get trained, list 100 assets throughout the region, and create and implement initial marketing. During this reporting period, this effort focused on identifying agritourism assets and marketing the app at the county and regional level.



PDS Director continues to serve on the Twin County Just Foods Collaborative Advisory Council, OARS (Organic Agriculture Revitalization Strategy) Advisory Council, and Wilson Food Council Strategic Development Team. Through these efforts, various strategies, action plans, scopes of work, community-based events, and other work is being conducted to improve the local & healthy food scene. The Area Agency on Aging also sits on the Wilson Food Council and the Twin County Just Foods Advisory Council.

**Goal 3, OBJECTIVE 3:** Most of the region's downtowns need to attract new businesses, residents and visitors. A few are now gaining momentum with the improved state and national economy, but need more support.

**STRATEGIES AND TACTICS:** Revitalize both large and small downtowns throughout the region. Invest in repurposing commercial and residential buildings for emerging economic activities. Ensure that local building codes and code enforcement measures are ensuring safety, while not unnecessarily deterring renovation of downtown buildings.

PDS staff has partnered with the NC Department of Commerce, Main Street & Rural Planning Division to develop economic development-focused strategic plans in Stantonsburg and Pinetops. Both plans were in progress during the previous reporting period. As the partnerships progress, PDS staff will work to bring Main Street & Rural Planning resources to other towns in the region. The EDA CARES Act Supplemental funding will enable staff to work diligently on both planning processes.

During this reporting period, PDS has continued efforts to pursue downtown economic development goals to leverage each community's unique economic development opportunities.

UCPCOG facilitates and manages a Regional Brownfields Coalition. The Coalition formed over 10 years ago and has helped assess dozens of sites throughout the region, leveraging over \$58M in redevelopment. Previously, UCPCOG applied for and received a new \$300,000 EPA Assessment Grant Award to address the JAECO and Westpoint Stevens sites in Roanoke Rapids, the M&M Grill in Littleton, and other potentially contaminated sites with redevelopment potential. During this reporting period, the M&M grill in Littleton was demolished and the underground storage tanks were removed. The Coalition adopted two new sites to the regional brownfields inventory: Wooten Marine in Rocky Mount and Sharpsburg Municipal Complex. The Coalition began working with the Town of Sharpsburg to address the old gas station at the Municipal Complex site.

During the previous reporting period, UCPCOG began to assist the City of Rocky Mount's Business and Economic Development Commission, a group commissioned by the Mayor's Office, in developing a city-wide CEDS. The city's planning process was placed on hold while stakeholders work together to establish goals. This has led to UCPCOG's partnership with the City of Rocky Mount on addressing workforce transit, childcare, and housing goals in and around Rocky Mount.

PDS expanded services to member governments through continued partnerships with Stewart Inc. and CodeWright Planners, LLC in association with the Timmons Group, Both& Planning, and the Brough Law Firm. This provides members quick access to qualified planning services firms authorized to operate in North Carolina. Partner firms possess expertise in Comprehensive and Master Plans, administration of zoning ordinances, code enforcement, and regulatory amendments to Zoning Ordinances, Subdivision Ordinances, UDOs, and land use regulations as required by NCGS Chapter 160D. Members can contract directly with these firms without going through an RFQ process. At the end of this reporting period, 13 member local governments have utilized this list.



**Goal 3, OBJECTIVE 4:** Our region has an inadequate supply of new and rehabilitated workforce housing to meet current demand or compete for new residents.

**STRATEGIES AND TACTICS:** Increase workforce housing development through financial incentives for developers. Align economic development, business recruitment, and housing development efforts to ensure attractive and appropriate housing is available for new workers. Preserve historic and period homes and neighborhoods as part of a larger tourism and placemaking strategy.

PDS submitted 6 applications to the North Carolina Department of Commerce's CDBG Neighborhood Revitalization (CDBG NR) program in addition to administering over 4 CDBG NR application from a former round. The new applications were submitted in partnership with the Towns of Sharpsburg, Seaboard, Speed, Hobgood, Garysburg, and Saratoga. PDS has leveraged the EDA CARES Act funding to further focus its affordable housing efforts and will continue to be proactive on searching for eligible projects across the region during the next reporting period.

To further its affordable housing efforts, UCPCOG procured a housing inventory consultant to develop a database of eligible, competitive housing projects. This effort is funded through the EDA CARES Act efforts. A database will inform PDS of where future CDBG-NR applications should be developed for the greatest impact on the region's underserved residents and communities.

Working through UCPCOG non-profit COMPASS (Center on Maintaining Preferred Aging Services & Solutions) to develop a "Tiny Home" community for underserved older adults, the group acquired property and submitted for funding for site preparation. The site previously considered in Wilson is no longer appropriate for the tiny homes due to an city council decision. Staff has identified a potential location in Garysburg in Northampton County. This project received a 2020 Aliceann Wohlbruck Impact Award from the National Association of Development Organizations (NADO).

## **GOAL 4: Develop Talented and Innovative People**

**OBJECTIVE 1:** Develop, attract, and retain workers with the necessary skills required for today's, and tomorrow's jobs.

**STRATEGIES AND TACTICS:** Prepare youth, unemployed and underemployed individuals for high-skill, in-demand jobs. Expand student and worker awareness of career opportunities, their requirements, and the pathways available to attain personal goals. Conduct a regionally coordinated marketing campaign that identifies and promotes middle-skill career opportunities to younger populations.

The Turning Point Workforce Development Board registered 1,183 unemployed persons from April 2021 through September 2021. There has been a major increase for Adults/Dislocated Workers since the COVID-19 pandemic began for those needing Unemployment Insurance services.

Turning Point WDB Business Service Team and regional NCWorks Career Centers continues to assess the needs of our local employers. Collaboration of partners (Community College, Vocational Rehabilitation (VR), Department of Social Services, etc. strategize to provide solutions such as On-the-Job training, Worker Experience, Incumbent Worker grants and Customize training.

Under the Area agency on Aging Senior Community Service Employment Program a total of 74 senior participants were served in the 5-county region in FY '17-'18, 61 in FY '18- '19, and 40 in FY '19- '20. These seniors are placed with a variety of employers willing to help re-train seniors on-the-job for vacant positions. The amount of participants served during FY '19- '20 is lower due to the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. AAA also provided 48 tablets to program participants since September 2020. Additionally, 29 SCSEP participants received laptops, broadband connectivity, and the GetSetUp training platform so that they could continue to gain important skills during the pandemic as they were unable to return to host agencies for training.

**Goal 4, OBJECTIVE 2:** Further align and coordinate the region’s workforce and educational systems.

**STRATEGIES AND TACTICS:** Create stronger 5-county coordinated partnerships between educational institutions and key public/private workforce development interests. Launch region-wide sector and industry related workforce initiatives designed to align training and educational options to the skill needs for critical, in-demand occupations. Improve efforts to prepare workers for available jobs. Address unique challenges of special populations of adult workers.

Under the leadership of Executive Director, Robert Hiatt, the new initiative with the working title, “Regional Prosperity Initiative”, continued being developed. The concept is, “To develop talented and innovative people for high demand careers in the region through a combination of strategic partnerships, technology solutions, and planning efforts.”

The Turning Point Workforce Development Board registered 63 additional youth participants for appropriate positions during this reporting period. Since the last reporting period, youth numbers decreased due to many youth service providers complying to the Stay At Home mandates and the temporary closure of many youth employment businesses (hospitality businesses such as restaurants, hotels, retail stores).



The Turning Point Workforce Development Board has (3) three State Certified Career Pathways – Healthcare, Advance Manufacturing and the newest Business Service Support. Business Service Support Career Pathways consist of (1) Business Administration and Support (2) Information Technology and (3) Logistics and Supply Chain Management. For example, Office Administration encompasses clerical staff and office managers, Finance jobs include bookkeepers, accounting technicians and financial officers. Information Technology jobs deal with computers, software, networking and the technical infrastructure of the company. Logistics and Distribution jobs are associated with analyzing, developing and implementing strategic plans that affect production, distribution, and inventory. Metrics are now being gathered to update data that supports these current efforts. Additionally, the Agriscience Pathway is now being revisited for submittal to the State team for review for certification and local implementation.

UCPCOG continues participating in the Regional Advanced Manufacturing Pipeline – East (RAMP East) initiative that is a regional partnership between Region Q WDB, Turning Point, regional community colleges and economic development partnerships to enhance recruitment efforts in the Advance Manufacturing sector. This is a proactive approach for recruiting underserved populations of the 10 counties building a pipeline of potential candidates for immediate and future am jobs.





**Goal 4, OBJECTIVE 3:** Further address human resource development deficits by workforce development.

**STRATEGIES AND TACTICS:** Increase soft skills and life skills instruction in K-12 instruction and workforce development training, utilizing such tools as "Working Smart" and "Career Readiness Certifications". Leverage health related investments already occurring in the region, i.e. Partnership with Area L AHEC, the intermediary for the Turning Point WDB health awareness and sector training. Philanthropic investment in Healthy Places NC. Encourage older adults in the workforce to utilize services available through the Area Agency on Aging and the aging network.

The Turning Point Workforce Development Board conducted 24 Employer Recruitment Events, which is low compared to previous reporting periods due to the COVID-19. Staff is beginning to increase business recruitment by utilizing virtual recruiter events and expect employer recruitment to gradually increase soon.

Turning Point previously participated in several meetings with employers and apprenticeship staff to answer questions and engagement interested parties in apprenticeship information. Apprenticeship interests continue to grow in the Turning Point Region during this period. A state-assigned Consultant provides technical assistance to both Community College training staff and interested employers through the connection of the Business Engagement Coordinator (Turning Point staff member). There is a pending contract for apprenticeship with a Nash County employer and future contracts in the pipeline awaiting further TA. We hope these contracts will be active in the next few months.

UCPCOG has partnered with NCHQA (North Carolina Healthcare Quality Alliance), which has been awarded a \$1 million HRSA RCORP Implementation grant for the three-year period from Sept. 1, 2020 to August 31, 2023 to address prevention, treatment, and recovery for substance use disorder in Edgecombe, Halifax, and Northampton counties. This will provide a great opportunity for UCPCOG to build experience with opioid grants and partners, and chase after some other opportunities down the road. Substance abuse is an issue with the region's workforce and economic development strategies, and a growing issue with older adults. During this reporting period, a Regional Opioid Navigator was hired through the UCPCOG Area Agency on Aging to carry out the NCHQA scope of work.

## CEDS Update | CEDS 2027

UCPCOG will re-write its Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy by December 01, 2022. As of the end of this reporting period, the UCPCOG Board of Directors has formally appointed itself as the CEDS Advisory Committee. The CEDS Strategy Development Group (SDG) members have been nominated by the CEDS Advisory Committee. Nominees will be asked to accept or deny their nomination early in the next reporting period. The SDG is likely to meet for the first time in January and a tentative CEDS update timeline has been shared with the CEDS Advisory Committee. The process will enable SDG members to participate virtually. Additionally, UCPCOG has joined a peer network of economic development professionals who seek to embrace more deliberate, comprehensive, market-based, and inclusive approaches to regional growth as a New Growth Innovation Network (NGIN) Inclusive Recovery Initiative Community of Practice. UCPCOG's involvement in NGIN's Community of Practice will ensure staff has the resources to lead the CEDS SDG in the difficult conversations surrounding inclusion and equity as the CEDS is re-written. NGIN was funded by EDA to lead this process and UCPCOG volunteered to participate.

Find out more about UCPCOG at [www.ucpcog.org](http://www.ucpcog.org).

# UPPER COASTAL PLAIN REGION

