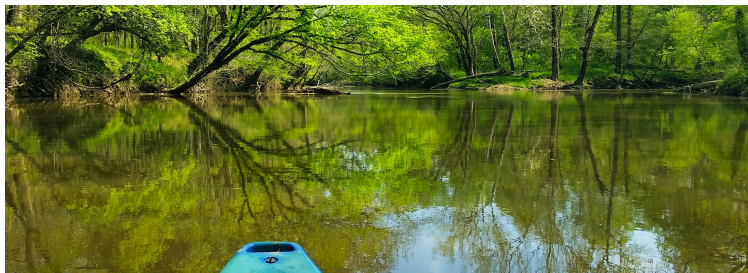


UPPER COASTAL PLAIN

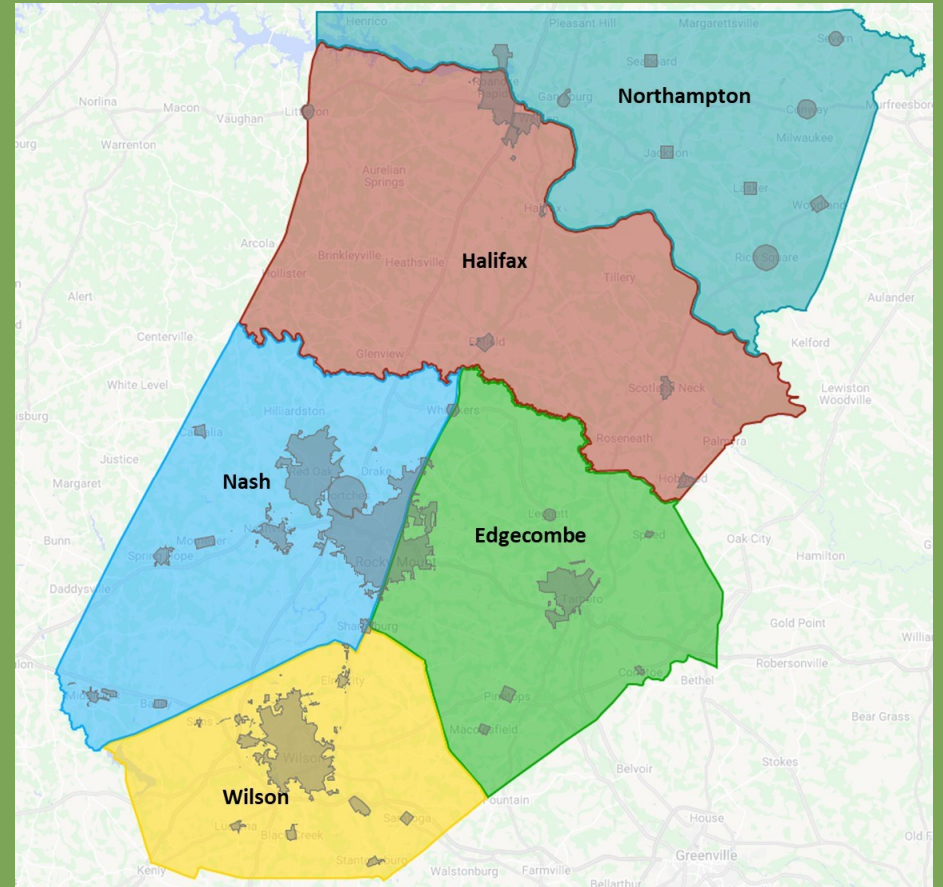


COMPREHENSIVE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY 2023 - 2027

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UPPER COASTAL PLAIN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT DISTRICT SERVICE AREA



INTRODUCTION

Authority

The Upper Coastal Plain Council of Governments (UCPCOG) is a designated Economic Development District (EDD) for the 5-county Upper Coastal Plain region of North Carolina by the U.S. Department of Commerce/Economic Development Administration (EDA). The UCPCOG was established in 1971 under NC General Statute 160A-47. It is headquartered in Wilson, North Carolina.

Who is UCPCOG?

UCPCOG is a lead regional organization comprising five (5) county and forty-one (41) municipal member governments. Working under the direction of local elected officials and appointees of these members, staff plans and administers a variety of federal, state and local programs and services. UCPCOG Board of Director meetings are forums where officials determine priorities for the region.

Members of the Regional Council receive many benefits including:

- ◇ A regional forum addressing issues and developing a cooperative effort to address challenges and opportunities to improve the quality of life for all of the region's citizens.
- ◇ The ability to work through a single agency to enable more effective utilization and administration of federal, state, and local grant and/or private funds.
- ◇ An opportunity to avoid duplication of efforts and ensure better coordination of services.

- ◇ Promotion of cooperation between the public and private sectors.
- ◇ The provision of technical assistance and advice from qualified staff including aging, planning & development, and workforce development services.

UCPCOG's Planning & Development Services department provides professional planning, economic, and community development services to member governments and partners at the local and regional levels. Disciplines include infrastructure, data management, land use, environment, energy, facilitation, and more. The work is supported by grants and contracts for specific regional and local initiatives.

The Workforce Development department receives authority from the Turning Point Workforce Development Board, and supports a highly skilled workforce that can help firms compete in a technologically advanced global marketplace.

The Area Agency on Aging, a service of UCPCOG, plans and administers a variety of federal, state, and local programs and services primarily targeted at supporting aging adults and their caregivers.

These groups, along with their professional staff, assist a variety of stakeholders across the Upper Coastal Plain region with making important decisions on the delivery of services in these program areas.



The UCPCOG offices are located in the Upper Coastal Plain Business Development Center in downtown Wilson

What is a CEDS?

This Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) is designed to identify both regional and local priorities for economic, community and human development. It strives to take a holistic approach, recognizing that the many complex issues and systems are interconnected and reliant upon each other. The success of this strategy relies on informed stakeholder input, key baseline data and facts, and partnership action on implementation. Working together as a region on these agreed upon strategies and actions will result in a more resilient, thriving, equitable economy and community.

Every 5 years, UCPCOG fully updates this strategic plan for the region. The [CEDS](#) is a locally based, regionally-driven economic development process and document that engages community leaders, private sector partners, and other stakeholders in planning and acting for the future. The process is designed to identify locally-grown strategies that will guide regional economic development, encourage partnerships and collaboration, and improve economic outcomes and overall quality of life in the region. Included in this plan is a summary of the economic conditions of the region, an analysis of regional strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (commonly known as a “SWOT” analysis), an action plan, and an evaluation framework to monitor performance and the CEDS’ impact on the regional economy. Economic resilience — or the ability to prevent, withstand, and quickly recover from major disruptions to the economic base — is also a key component of the CEDS.

The CEDS Process

The CEDS is the result of collaboration among partners and key stakeholders from across the Upper Coastal Plain region. A major component of the planning process was a series of discussions hosted in 2022. Stakeholders represented several sectors throughout the Upper Coastal Plain region including: Economic Development, Education, Business, Government, Non -profits, Healthcare, Emergency Management, Public Health, and more. These discussions helped create the foundation for the CEDS and were supplemented through additional engagement from a Strategy Development Group, Advisory Committee, Staff Committee, and citizen participation. This 5-year CEDS will be updated by the CEDS Staff Committee each year following its adoption, with oversight from the CEDS Strategy Development Group and CEDS Advisory Committee.

The Action Plan

Early in the planning process, the Strategy Development Group prioritized a list of 40 topics through an online Tier Ranking Survey. After reviewing the results with the Staff Committee, the Staff Committee identified three Visions with initiatives and objectives critical to the success of the region. These visions are the region’s highest priority. Many of the topics ranked lower but are recognized as high impact to the region, however, in recognition of limited resources and the need to focus those on the three primary focus area visions, the Strategy Development Group did not include initiatives and objectives unique to each. More information on the three primary focus area visions, their associated initiatives, and evaluation framework can be found in the Action Plan section. Successful implementation of the Action Plan will support communities in becoming more innovative, prosperous and resilient.

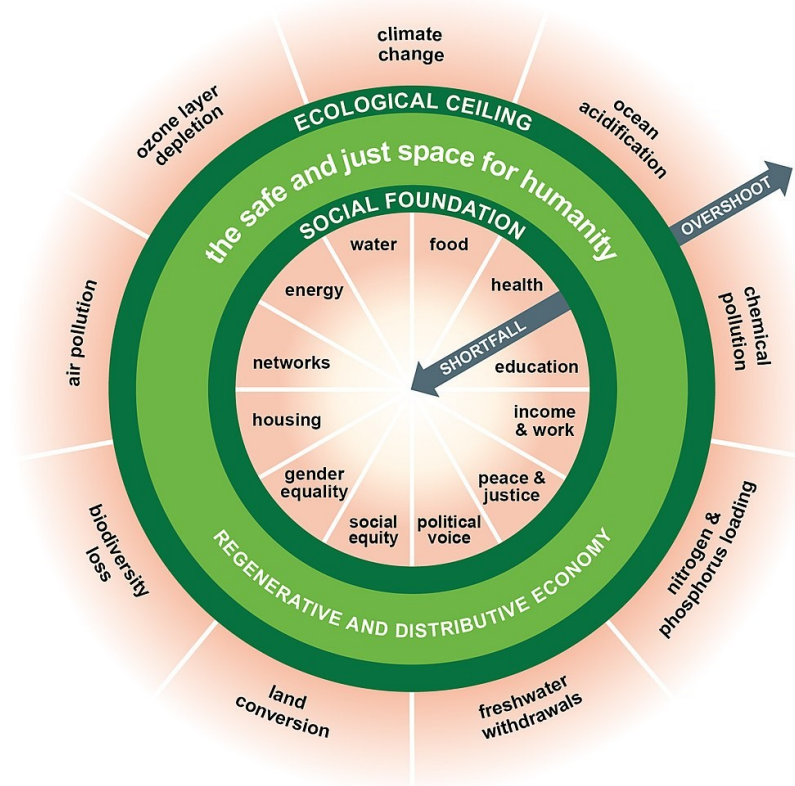


*A bureau within
the U.S. Department
of Commerce*

The Bigger Picture

During the February 23, 2022 CEDS Kick-off meeting, the Staff Committee and Strategy Development Group discussed Doughnut Economics as an example for comprehensive, regional planning. Doughnut Economics is a product of the [Doughnut Economics Action Lab](#), founded by Kate Raworth and it “offers a vision of what it means for humanity to thrive in the 21st century.” It urges policy makers and planners to go beyond conventional economics frameworks and performance measures, e.g., GDP, by also focusing on social and environmental dimensions and measures. It offered a reframing for the region’s approach to the CEDS that is comprehensive, place-based, data-driven, and participative. The Doughnut’s inner ring represents 12 social categories needed for a region to develop successfully. Its outer rings represent the earth’s nine environmental boundaries. Doughnut Economics defines the safe and just space for humanity somewhere in between the region’s ecological ceiling and social foundation.

While the CEDS does not follow the Doughnut Economics framework, its concepts helped inform the Strategy Development Group, Staff Committee, and CEDS Advisory Committee of how to define and approach the region’s collective development needs thoughtfully and holistically.



CEDS AT-A-GLANCE

RESILIENCE

Foster a resilient economy and ecosystem for all

VISION 1 - SOCIAL FOUNDATION

All residents of the Upper Coastal Plain region have the resources necessary to lead a healthy and prosperous life.

INITIATIVE 1

Seek the development of quality affordable housing to meet current demands, compete for new residents, and improve community wealth throughout the region

INITIATIVE 2

Create healthy and connected communities

INITIATIVE 3

Establish, maintain, and expand an accessible public infrastructure

VISION 2 - EDUCATION & ADVANCEMENT

The region bolsters its ability to train, develop, and foster its diverse and talented population

INITIATIVE 1

Improve access to quality and equitable dependent care services

INITIATIVE 2

Ensure residents and businesses across the region have the connectivity, knowledge, and tools necessary to fully participate in the digital world

INITIATIVE 3

Develop, attract, and retain residents by providing them with the skills necessary to perform well in today's and tomorrow's jobs

VISION 3 - THRIVING ECONOMY

Community wealth is generated throughout the Upper Coastal Plain region

INITIATIVE 1

Improve the region's ability to foster a diverse, thriving economy

INITIATIVE 2

Define and promote the region's sense of place

INITIATIVE 3

Build on the region's competitive advantages & leverage the marketplace

SUMMARY BACKGROUND

Regional Overview

The Upper Coastal Plain region was designated a Council of Government by the North Carolina legislature in 1972, when the Upper Coastal Plain Council of Governments was established as one of 16 councils of government regions in the state. The region is comprised of five counties: Edgecombe, Halifax, Nash, Northampton and Wilson. The 41 municipal governments across the region vary in size, the smallest of which is Leggett (population: 37) and the largest of which is Rocky Mount (population: 54,341). The region-wide population is 288,747 according to the Census Bureau 2020 Census. Most of the region is suburban and rural, however certain areas are experiencing modest fiscal growth. Portions of Nash and Wilson Counties are seeing residential growth given the proximity to the Raleigh Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA). Still, many communities across the region, incorporated or not, struggle financially. Along with other counties in northeastern NC, the Upper Coastal Plain region is typically within the state's "red zone," where data trends are typically going in the wrong direction. One key example of this trend is the fact that 3 out of the 5 counties in the region are designated by EDA as Persistent Poverty Counties (Edgecombe, Halifax, Northampton) and four of the five are designated as distressed by the Southeast Crescent Regional Commission (all but Nash). Other aspects of the region's "red zone" trend will be highlighted throughout this document.

The Upper Coastal Plain Region sits in close proximity to the economic center of the Research Triangle, port cities of Wilmington, Morehead City, and Norfolk all with ample transportation for industry and people. It stretches

approximately 50 miles east to west and 65 miles north to south, totaling 1.7 million acres. The region shares a 40-mile border with Virginia, is within 50 miles of the nearest inlets to the Atlantic Ocean, and approximately 25 miles west of Raleigh, the state capital, placing it on the eastern edge of the Research Triangle region.

The Ports of North Carolina at Wilmington and Morehead City and the Port of Virginia in Norfolk, VA are all within 125 miles of the region. The region's waterways include two primary rivers: the Roanoke and Tar, which are the region's most significant watersheds along with small portions of the Neuse and Chowan watersheds. Major reservoirs include Lake Gaston, Roanoke Rapids Lake, Tar River Reservoir, and Buckhorn Reservoir.

Land use is primarily a rural mix of farmland, open space and forestry with suburban, and urban residential areas in small towns and cities with commercial and industrial development throughout. The five counties make up the Rocky Mount-Wilson-Roanoke Rapids Combined Statistical Area (CSA). The CSA is made up of the Rocky Mount Metropolitan Statistical area, containing Nash and Edgecombe counties. The largest city is Rocky Mount, straddling both counties, with a population of 54,341 according to the 2020 census. Tarboro, in Edgecombe county, had a 2020 population of 20,721. The Roanoke Rapids Micropolitan Statistical Area is made up of Northampton and Halifax counties. Roanoke Rapids in Halifax county has a population of 15,229 in 2020. The Wilson Micropolitan Statistical Area is made up of Wilson county. The largest city is Wilson, with a 2020 population of 47,851.

Industry Sectors

The Upper Coastal Plain region is a growing industrial area leveraging its long history as a regional manufacturing, healthcare, agriculture, and education hub and its position in supporting North Carolina's 21st century economy.

Manufacturing

The Upper Coastal Plain region has a long history of attracting national and global employers in the manufacturing sector. The region grew as a tobacco processing hub in the late 1800s and later diversified with the construction of manufacturing facilities by Firestone, Kerr Glass, Bluebell, and more in the late 60s and 70s. Manufacturing employs approximately 20,805 individuals across the five-county region and is its largest industry sector. The average annual wage for workers in this sector is \$64,178. Manufacturing in the region has a location quotient of 2.18, indicating a 118% greater employment compared to the nation as a whole (Source: JobsEQ). Food manufacturing and textile/leather manufacturing also have significantly higher location quotients of 3.38 and 3.80 respectively, indicating a 238% and 280% greater employment compared to the nation as a whole.

Nash, Edgecombe, and Wilson counties are part of the "biopharmaceutical crescent," a region including neighboring Johnston and Pitt Counties that's home to numerous biopharmaceutical manufacturing hubs. Fresenius Kabi, Sandoz, Merck, Pfizer, and Purdue Pharma have locations in the region. The region is attractive to biopharmaceutical companies due to an abundance of undeveloped land, waterways, and a large workforce. Community Colleges offer degrees and workforce education preparing students for jobs in the biopharmaceutical manufacturing industry. Pharmaceutical manufacturing in the region has an astounding location quotient of 13.37, indicating a 1237% greater employment compared to the nation as a whole (Source: JobsEQ).



Pfizer Sterile Injectable Plant, Rocky Mount, NC. The site is one of the largest facilities of its kind in the world, producing 25% of Pfizer's sterile injectables used in US hospitals. (Source: [Pfizer](#))

Top Industries in the Upper Coastal Plain region			
Industry Group	Average Annual Employment Forecast Rate (%) 2022Q4-	Average Wages	Location Quotient (LQ)
Pharmaceutical	0.05	\$115,990	13.37
Textile/Leather	-3.57	\$41,383	3.8
Food Manufacturing	-2.14	\$47,395	3.38
Chemical	-0.49	\$58,350	2.88
Wood/Paper	-1.79	\$55,082	2.05
Auto/Auto-related	-1.95	\$66,517	1.76
Agricultural	-0.54	\$61,391	1.7
Public Administration	-1.24	\$47,608	1.52
Electric/Electronics Manufacturing	-1.14	\$77,599	1.5
Retail	-1.03	\$46,909	1.28
Construction	-0.62	\$56,657	1.06
Health	0.05	\$47,776	0.93
Education	-0.55	\$42,543	0.85

Healthcare & Social Assistance

The wellbeing of residents in the Upper Coastal Plain region is anchored by a thriving healthcare sector supported by strong regional health initiatives. The average annual wage for workers in the Healthcare and Social Assistance sector across the region is \$48,012. Healthcare and Social Assistance in the region has a location quotient of 0.93, indicating a 7% lesser employment compared to the nation as a whole (Source: JobsEQ). At the heart of the healthcare sector are the four hospitals in the five county region.



The largest, [Nash UNC Healthcare](#) (pictured above), is a 345-bed medical center located in Rocky Mount. It is home to a general hospital, day hospital, mental health hospital, rehabilitation center, cancer center, emergency care center, heart center, women's center, and a surgery center.

[Wilson Medical Center](#), located in Wilson, is a 294-bed hospital affiliated with Duke University serving the city and county of Wilson and surrounding areas. It offers cancer care, cardiac care, orthopedics, imaging, surgical services, and more.

[ECU Health North](#) is a 204-bed hospital located in Roanoke Rapids serving patients from Halifax, Northampton, and Warren counties and Virginia border counties. In addition to a staff of 60

physicians from most medical specialties, the hospital offers emergency, psychiatric, and nursery care.

[ECU Health Edgecombe](#), located in Tarboro, is a 117-bed full-service hospital. It offers same day surgery, cancer care, critical care, and more. The hospital is affiliated with regional health services located throughout Edgecombe county to provide care for rural communities.

[Trillium Health Resources](#) is a Managed Care Organization that provides mental health, substance use, and intellectual and developmental disability services throughout eastern NC. Individuals receiving Medicaid through the Tailored Plan may be eligible for physical healthcare and pharmacy. They cover Nash, Halifax, and Northampton county in the Upper Coastal Plain region.

Wilson and Edgecombe counties, the two counties not served by Trillium, are served by [Eastpointe](#), another Managed Care Organization. They provide substance abuse, mental health, and intellectual and developmental disability support.

Educational Services

The growth of the five-county region is supported by a robust system of primary, secondary, and postsecondary education. Public schools, community colleges, and private colleges support the workforce and educational development of residents, helping to prepare the region's workforce for the 21st century economy and attract skilled industries. These schools and colleges also represent some of the largest employers in the region. The average annual wage for workers in this sector is \$47,283 with approximately 8,168 employed. Educational Services has a location quotient of 0.87, indicating a 13% lesser employment compared to the nation as a whole.

Edgecombe County Public Schools operates 14 schools and serves

over 5,200 students. The county is served by Edgecombe Community College, serving around 5,550 students with locations in Rocky Mount and Tarboro.

Halifax County has three schools systems: Halifax County Schools, Roanoke Rapids City Schools, and Weldon City Schools. Halifax County Schools operates 11 schools with over 2,000 students, Roanoke Rapids City Schools operates 5 schools with over 2,500 students, and Weldon City Schools operates 4 schools with over 650 students. The county is served by Halifax Community College with a campus in Weldon.

Nash County Public Schools operates 29 schools with over 14,000 students. The county is served by Nash Community College and is the home of North Carolina Wesleyan University, both with a campus in Rocky Mount.

Northampton County Schools operates 7 schools with over 1,200 students. The county is also served by Halifax Community College in Weldon where the Northampton County Early College is also located.

Wilson County Schools operates 27 schools with over 10,000 students. The county is served by Wilson Community College and is the home of Barton College, both with a campus in Wilson.

Pictured right: the Braswell Courtyard at NC Wesleyan University. [More photos of campus here.](#)



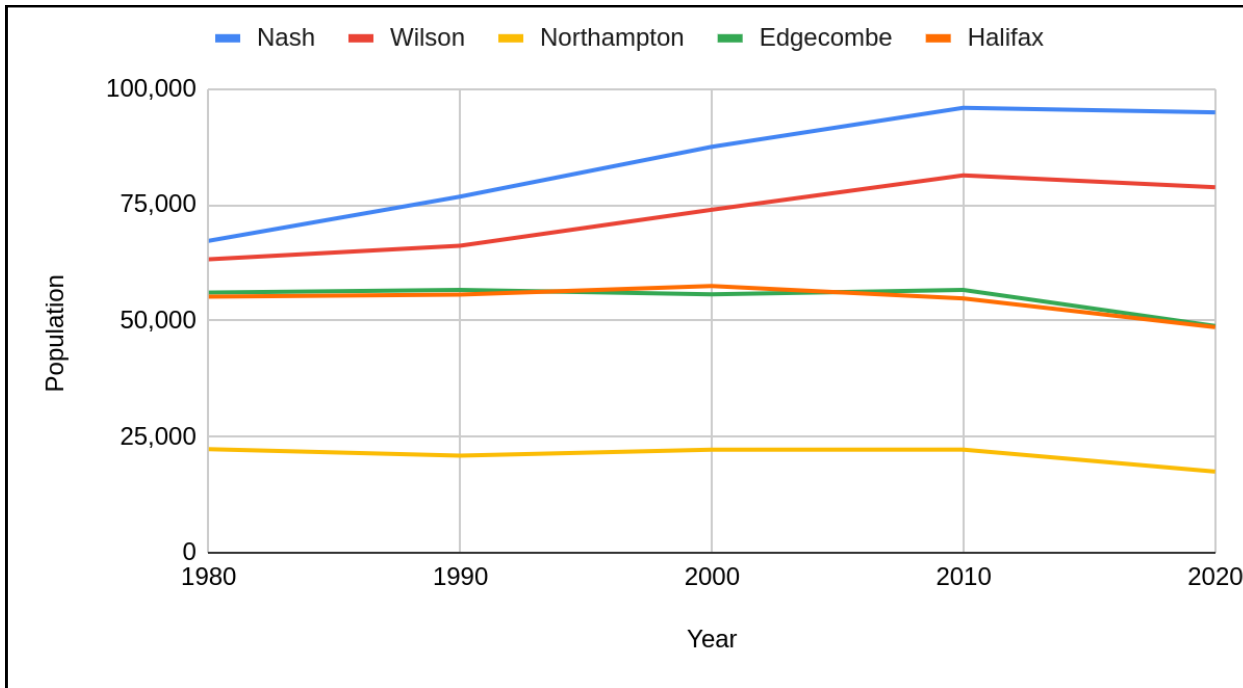
Agriculture

From the early agriculture of the Tuscarora people to the first livestock, corn, peas, and potatoes grown by British settlers, agriculture has played a central role in the development of the Upper Coastal Plain region. Settlers grew tobacco for personal use. (Source [NC Gen Web](#)). The region is fertile, and full of prime land for growing crops and raising livestock. The farmland of the region is made of soft and sandy loam soils. Rich organic matter extends throughout the five counties.

After the Civil War, the demand for “bright leaf” flue cured tobacco skyrocketed. The Wilmington and Weldon Railroad opened in 1840, which, at the time, was the largest railroad in the world. The effect of the railroad on the Upper Coastal Plain region was immense. Three depots along the railroad were established in Wilson County. With the newfound rail connection, farmers across the area were encouraged to produce a surplus of all types of crops for export. The farm productivity and land values in the area shot up, raising the standard of living (Source: Wilson County Architecture). The area is a leader in the production of tobacco, cotton, corn, wheat, chickens, beef and dairy cattle, peanuts, and other goods.

Organic farming is also prevalent throughout the region. Nash county holds the designation of having the most Certified Organic Operations (25+) in northeastern NC. Overall, organic farmland in North Carolina is valued at about \$4,531 an acre, the third highest in the country. Organizations such as the Croatan Institute work to support organic agriculture as a pathway to rural revitalization throughout the region. (Source: [Organic Opportunities](#)). Farms such as [Golden Organic Farm](#) in Edgecombe county work to advance sustainable farming practices and build community wealth for the region’s BIPOC communities through organic agriculture.

Population



Regional Population (2020 Census): 288,747					
	1980	1990	2000	2010	2020
Nash	67,153	76,677	87,420	95,840	94,970
Wilson	63,132	66,061	73,814	81,234	78,784
Northampton	22,195	20,798	22,086	22,099	17,471
Edgecombe	55,988	56,558	55,606	56,552	48,900
Halifax	55,076	55,516	57,370	54,691	48,622
North Carolina	5,881,766	6,628,637	8,049,313	9,535,483	10,439,388

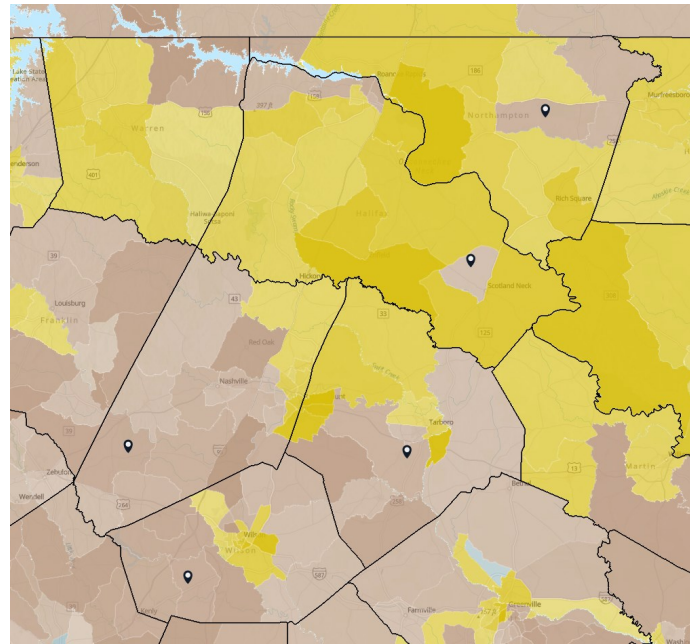
Race & Ethnicity

USA 2020 Census Race and Ethnicity Characteristics

Census Tract

Predominant category

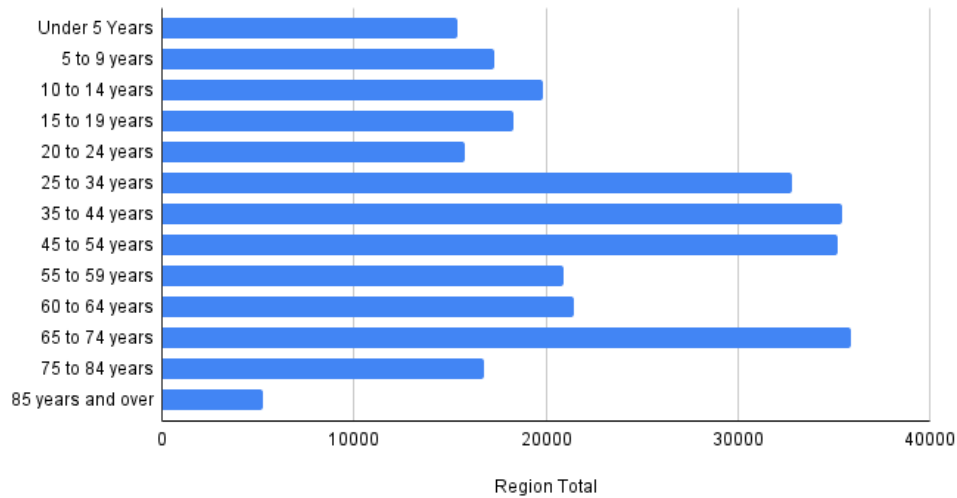
- American Indian and Alaska Native alone, not Hispanic or Latino
- Asian alone, not Hispanic or Latino
- Black or African American alone, not Hispanic or Latino
- Hispanic or Latino Population
- Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander alone, not Hispanic or Latino
- Some Other Race alone, not Hispanic or Latino
- Population of two or more races, not Hispanic or Latino
- White alone, not Hispanic or Latino



	Edgecombe	Halifax	Nash	Northampton	Wilson	Region Total	North Carolina
American Indian and Alaska Native	114 (0.23%)	1,614 (0.33%)	477 (0.5%)	28 (0.16%)	213 (0.03%)	2,446 (0.84%)	98,911 (0.95%)
Asian Alone	108 (0.22%)	374 (0.77%)	832 (0.88%)	22 (0.13%)	858 (1.1%)	2,194 (0.75%)	312,111 (3.0%)
Black or African-American alone	28,094 (57.5%)	25,385 (52.2%)	38,493 (40.5%)	9,842 (56.3%)	31,120 (39.5%)	132,934 (45.8%)	2,160,554 (20.8%)
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander	46 (0.09%)	100 (0.2%)	40 (0.04%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	186 (0.06%)	6,060 (0.05%)
White alone	17,587 (36%)	18,536 (38.2%)	45,571 (48%)	6,896 (39.5%)	36,246 (46%)	124,836 (43.0%)	6,433,921 (62%)
Two or More Races	1,065 (2.2%)	1,693 (3.5%)	1,969 (2.1%)	660 (3.8%)	1,650 (2.1%)	7,037 (2.4%)	305,309 (2.9%)

Age

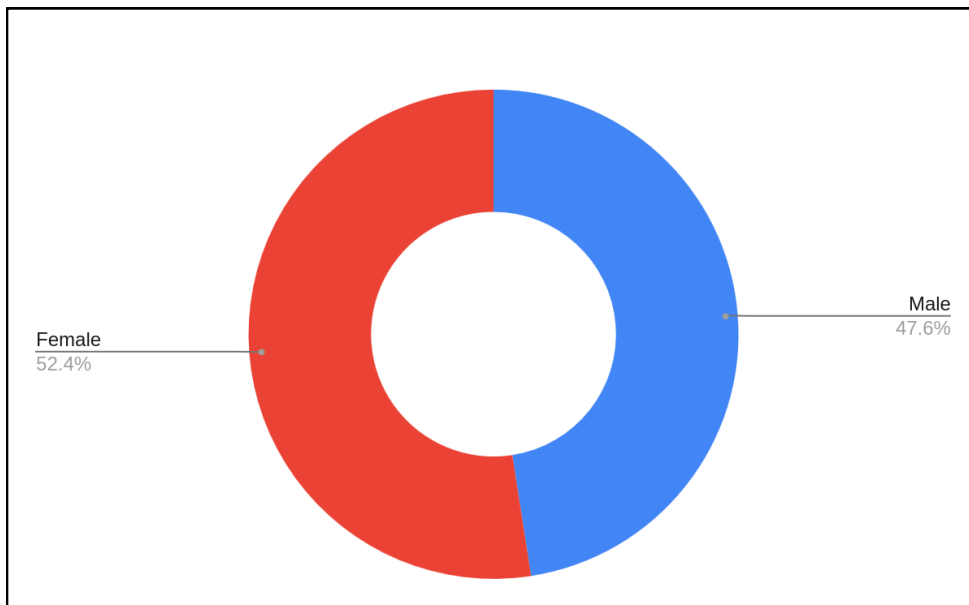
Regional Age Distribution



Educational Attainment

	Nash	Wil-son	Nort hampton	Edge combe	Hali-fax	North Caroli-na
High School Graduate	32.9 %	32.9 %	34.0 %	38.2 %	37.1 %	24.9%
Some College	20.7 %	19.9 %	20.4 %	21.0 %	19.9 %	19.8%
Associate's Degree	12.0 %	9.6%	9.9%	8.0%	8.1%	10.1%
Bachelor's Degree	15.6 %	12.9 %	10.5 %	12.7 %	9.8%	21.7%
Graduate or Professional Degree	6.2%	6.8%	6.1%	4.7%	5.0%	13.2%

Gender

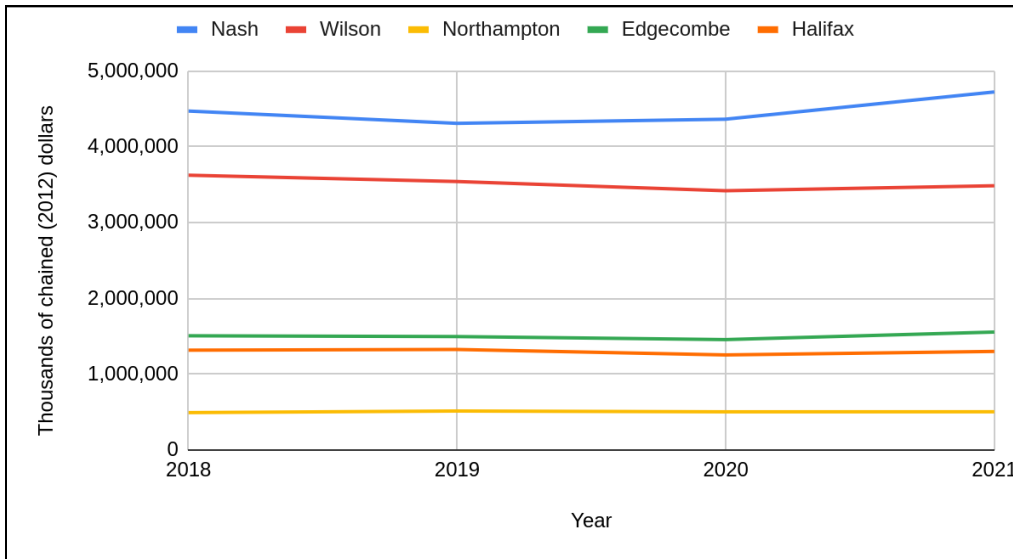


Employment

	Unemployment Rate 2022 Average (%)	Labor Force Participation Rate Age 16+ (%)
Edgecombe	6.5	55.6
Halifax	5.5	49.5
Nash	5.0	62.8
Northampton	4.9	48.6
Wilson	5.1	56.0
North Carolina	3.7	62.2

Total Employment	1990	2000	2007	2019	2021
Halifax	22,510	21,542	22,779	19,106	17,747
Northampton	8,260	8,226	8,536	7,307	6,731
Nash	39,719	41,529	43,885	40,772	39,381
Edgecombe	26,861	23,608	22,415	19,559	18,531
Wilson	32,460	35,140	38,149	32,741	31,183
REGION	129,810	130,045	135,764	119,485	113,573
NC	3,336,193	3,972,811	4,297,692	4,808,270	4,721,198
2021 Compared to	1990	2000	2007	2019	
Halifax	-21.2%	-17.6%	-22.1%	-7.1%	
Northampton	-18.5%	-18.2%	-21.1%	-7.9%	
Nash	-0.9%	-5.2%	-10.3%	-3.4%	
Edgecombe	-31.0%	-21.5%	-17.3%	-5.3%	
Wilson	-3.9%	-11.3%	-18.3%	-4.8%	
REGION	-12.5%	-12.7%	-16.3%	-4.9%	
NC	41.5%	18.8%	9.9%	-1.8%	

Gross Regional Product



*Real GDP is in Thousands of chained (2012) dollars	State GDP Rank	2018	2019	Percent change from preceding period	2020	Percent change from preceding period	2021	Percent change from pervious period	2021 Percent change rank in state
Edgecombe	54	1,502,543	1,491,921	-0.7	1,451,777	-2.7	1,556,949	7.2	36
Halifax	64	1,311,233	1,320,522	0.7	1,248,443	-5.5	1,300,109	4.1	75
Nash	21	4,466,697	4,304,726	-3.6	4,359,437	1.3	4,723,927	8.4	16
Northampton	83	487,545	508,630	4.3	498,110	-4.2	504,171	3.5	81
Wilson	30	3,618,964	3,535,906	-2.3	3,413,879	-3.5	3,485,097	2.1	89

Source: <https://www.bea.gov/sites/default/files/2022-12/lagdp1222.pdf>

County Profile: Edgecombe

Edgecombe County was originally home to the Tuscarora, an Iroquoian-speaking Native American tribe who were forced north after the Tuscarora War in the early 1700s. Some Tuscaroran descendants still live in Edgecombe county. The current county was named after Baron Richard Edgecombe formed after numerous concessions to carve out other counties. The county seat is Tarboro and the largest city is Rocky Mount, which is split between Edgecombe and Nash Counties. The Town of Princeville was founded in 1865 by formerly enslaved people and was the first all-black incorporated town in the state. The first New Deal-funded electrical cooperative was formed in Tarboro in 1937. Attractions in the county include Tarboro Town Commons, the only colonial common remaining in NC, Riverfront Park in Tarboro, Battle Park in Rocky Mount, the Rocky Mount Event Center, and the Booker-T Theater. Edgecombe County's largest employers include City of Rocky Mount, Edgecombe Tarboro Board of Education, Sara Lee Frozen Bakery, Edgecombe County.

Category	County Value	State Value	Source
Total Population	48,900	10,439,388	P1 2020 Decennial Census
Median Household Income	\$14,974	\$61,972	S1901 2021 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates
Bachelor's Degree or Higher	17.4%	34.9%	S1501 2021 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates
Employment Rate	50.4%	57.4%	DP03 2021 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates
Total Housing Units	23,059	4,708,710	H1 2020 Decennial Census
Without Healthcare Coverage	10.2%	10.4%	S2701 2021 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates
Total Employer Establishments	709	240,760	CB2000CBP 2020 Economic Survey Business Patterns
Total Households	19,259	4,179,632	DP02 2021 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates
Food Insecurity Rate	14.3%	11.8%	Feeding America Map the Meal Gap

County Profile: Halifax

Formed out of Edgecombe County in 1758, Halifax county is located on the fall line between the Coastal Plain and Piedmont regions. It was named after George Montague, the second earl of Halifax. The county seat is Halifax and the largest city is Roanoke Rapids. The Halifax Resolves, which instructed North Carolina's delegates to the Second Continental Congress to vote for independence from Great Britain, was signed in Halifax on April 12, 1776, a date commemorated on the state flag. Halifax and Warren Counties are home to members of the Haliwa-Saponi Tribe. Points of interest include Medoc Mountain State Park, Lake Gaston, Roanoke Rapids Lake, the Lakeland Arts Center, Sylvan Heights Bird Park, Weldon Mills, and the Roanoke Canal Museum. Halifax County's largest employers include Resers Fine Foods, Vidant Medical Center (now ECU Health North), County of Halifax, WestRock Services, and Halifax County Schools.

Category	County Value	State Value	Source
Total Population	48,622	10,439,388	P1 2020 Decennial Census
Median Household Income	\$37,832	\$61,972	S1901 2021 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates
Bachelor's Degree or Higher	14.8%	34.9%	S1501 2021 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates
Employment Rate	45.3%	57.4%	DP03 2021 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates
Total Housing Units	24,735	4,708,710	H1 2020 Decennial Census
Without Healthcare Coverage	12.1%	10.4%	S2701 2021 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates
Total Employer Establishments	938	240,760	CB2000CBP 2020 Economic Survey Business Patterns
Total Households	20,049	4,179,632	DP02 2021 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates
Food Insecurity Rate	16.0%	11.8%	Feeding America Map the Meal Gap

County Profile: Nash

Nash County was formed in 1777 from parts of Edgecombe county and was named for Revolutionary War general Francis Nash. The area was originally home to the Tuscarora people. Nashville, the county seat, was incorporated in 1815 and named for the county. The largest city is Rocky Mount, which is shared with Edgecombe County. The state's second textile mill, Rocky Mount Mills, was formed in 1818 and operated until 1996. Rocky Mount is also home to North Carolina Wesleyan University. The county's attractions include the first Hardee's restaurant, Rocky Mount Mills, the Country Doctor Museum, the Tar River Trail, and many festivals including the Nashville Blooming Festival and Spring Hope Pumpkin Festival. Nash County's largest employers include Hospira, Nash County Public Schools, Consolidated Diesel Company, Nash General Hospital, McLane Mid-Atlantic, and Boddie Noell Enterprises.

Category	County Value	State Value	Source
Total Population	94,970	10,439,388	P1 2020 Decennial Census
Median Household Income	\$56,560	\$61,972	S1901 2021 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates
Bachelor's Degree or Higher	23.0%	34.9%	S1501 2021 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates
Employment Rate	59.0%	57.4%	DP03 2021 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates
Total Housing Units	43,154	4,708,710	H1 2020 Decennial Census
Without Healthcare Coverage	12.1%	10.4%	S2701 2021 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates
Total Employer Establishments	2,041	240,760	CB2000CBP 2020 Economic Survey Business Patterns
Total Households	38,029	4,179,632	DP02 2021 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates
Food Insecurity Rate	11.6	11.8%	Feeding America Map the Meal Gap

County Profile: Northampton

Northampton County was formed in 1741 out of parts of Bertie County and was named for James Compton, the Earl of Northampton. It is the northernmost county in the Upper Coastal Plain and borders Virginia. The region was first inhabited by the Tuscarora and Meherrin peoples. The county seat is Jackson. Points of interest include the Northampton County Museum, Odom Shooting Range, Boone’s Mill Pond Dam, and the annual Northampton County Farm Festival Jubilee. Northampton County’s largest employers include Lowes Home Centers, Meherrin Agricultural & Chemical Company, Northampton County, Kipp ENC Public Schools, and Enviva Management.

Category	County Value	State Value	Source
Total Population	17,471	10,439,388	P1 2020 Decennial Census
Median Household Income	\$39,764	\$61,972	S1901 2021 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates
Bachelor’s Degree or Higher	16.7%	34.9%	S1501 2021 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates
Employment Rate	44.9%	57.4%	DP03 2021 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates
Total Housing Units	10,570	4,708,710	H1 2020 Decennial Census
Without Healthcare Coverage	12.1%	10.4%	S2701 2021 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates
Total Employer Establishments	258	240,760	CB2000CBP 2020 Economic Survey Business Patterns
Total Households	7,397	4,179,632	DP02 2021 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates
Food Insecurity Rate	12.7%	11.8%	Feeding America Map the Meal Gap

County Profile: Wilson

Wilson County was established in 1855 out of parts of Edgecombe, Johnston, Nash, and Wayne counties. It was named for Colonel Louis D. Wilson, a state senator who died of fever during the Mexican-American War. Like other counties, the earliest inhabitants of Wilson County were the Tuscarora people. The county seat and largest city is Wilson. The county is known for pork barbecue and is home to Barton College, a four-year liberal arts college. BB&T Bank, now Truist, was founded in Wilson in 1872. Notable landmarks and attractions include the Lucas-Barnes House and James Scarborough House, the Atlantic Coast Line Railroad Passenger and Freight Station, Arts Council of Wilson, and Vollis Simpson Whirligig Park (Source: [NCPedia](#)). Wilson County's largest employers include Bridgestone Americas Tire Operations, Truist Financial, Wilson County Schools, Kidde Aerospace/Fenway Safety Systems, and ST Wooten Corporation.

Category	County Value	State Value	Source
Total Population	78,784	10,439,388	P1 2020 Decennial Census
Median Household Income	\$47,201	\$61,972	S1901 2021 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates
Bachelor's Degree or Higher	17.8%	34.9%	S1501 2021 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates
Employment Rate	52.8%	57.4%	DP03 2021 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates
Total Housing Units	36,252	4,708,710	H1 2020 Decennial Census
Without Healthcare Coverage	16.4%	10.4%	S2701 2021 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates
Total Employer Establishments	1,773	240,760	CB2000CBP 2020 Economic Survey Business Patterns
Total Households	32,868	4,179,632	DP02 2021 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates
Food Insecurity Rate	13.7%	11.8%	Feeding America Map the Meal Gap

SWOT ANALYSIS

Determining the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of the region in order to better understand “where we are” and “where are we going” is vital to regional economic development. Through a largely open-ended, online survey, the CEDS Staff Committee and Strategy Development Group focused on collecting data from a broad spectrum of stakeholders throughout the region to assist with the SWOT Analysis.

Strengths are a region’s relative competitive advantages and are often internal in nature.

Weaknesses are a region’s relative competitive disadvantages and are often internal in nature.


Opportunities are chances or occasions for regional improvements or progress, often external in nature.

Threats are chances or occasions for negative impacts and regional decline, often external in nature.

Stakeholder Participation

In the spring and summer of 2022, the CEDS Strategy Development Group and Staff Committee conducted an online survey to hear directly from the region’s stakeholders about the region’s strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. The results helped to guide Strategy Development Group discussions, identify regional priorities for economic and community development, and ultimately determine the direction of the Action Plan . The Strategy Development Group also took the opportunity to learn more about what makes the region resilient and how equitable the region is with respect to its development.

Upper Coastal Plain Regional SWOT Analysis Survey



What?
The Upper Coastal Plain Economic Development District is developing a Comprehensive Economic Development Study (CEDS). The CEDS provides a clear understanding of the region’s economic situation and guides elected officials, economic developers, business owners, residents, and others on goals and strategies to guide the region to a more prosperous and resilient future.

Where?
The Upper Coastal Plain Economic Development District consists of Edgecombe, Halifax, Nash, Northampton, and Wilson Counties in northeastern North Carolina. The Upper Coastal Plain Council of Governments, which serves all five counties, is leading the CEDS planning process.

Who?
Anyone who lives, works, worships, or has an interest in the Upper Coastal Plain region is encouraged to respond to the SWOT Analysis Survey.

SWOT ANALYSIS SUMMARY

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES	OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
◇ Agricultural Lands and Production	◇ Aging Infrastructure	◇ Ability to attract residents from higher-cost areas	◇ Aging population
◇ Cost of Living	◇ Barriers to Entrepreneurship	◇ Agritourism	◇ Broadband regulations
◇ Diversity of Residents	◇ Broadband Access	◇ Ample building sites	◇ Climate change
◇ Educational Opportunities	◇ Change Resistance	◇ Downtown redevelopment	◇ Competition between jurisdictions/neighbors
◇ History	◇ Crime and Drug Use	◇ Educational programs linked to employer needs	◇ Economic impacts of COVID-19
◇ Industry Clusters	◇ High Poverty	◇ Enhances passenger rail	◇ Healthcare affordability
◇ Natural Environment	◇ Housing and affordability and supply	◇ Entertainment, Arts & Crafts Economy	◇ Inflation and rising cost of goods and utilities
◇ Partnerships & Collaborations	◇ Inadequate mental health resources	◇ Historic Tourism	◇ Loss of history over time
◇ Proximity to Triangle and other big cities/employment centers	◇ Lack of career opportunities that offer a living wage	◇ Improving access to locally grown food	◇ Natural disasters
◇ Quality of Life	◇ Lack of civic engagement	◇ Infrastructure investments to attract businesses and residents	◇ Population decline
◇ Roads, Rail, and Air Connectivity	◇ Low community wealth generation	◇ New and enhanced grant programs	◇ Racism and the racial divide
◇ Social linkages between communities	◇ Poor health outcomes	◇ New partnerships to solve complex issues	◇ Substance misuse
◇ Space for growth	◇ Poor mindset, which can hold us back	◇ Potential to join the green economy	◇ Unwillingness to collaborate
◇ Temperate Climate	◇ Public Transit and Alternative Modes of Transportation	◇ Strong economic development programs	◇ Vacant downtowns
◇ Workforce Skillset	◇ Race/Ethnic Relations	◇ Visionary citizens	

Within the SWOT Analysis survey, respondents were asked to share feedback related to the region's equity and inclusion in terms of its development. Highlighted responses include:

“The region has started to improve due to the national conversation and attention of the younger generation but **longstanding culture and institutional biases needs deliberate and strategic attention to help the most underserved and vulnerable develop wealth** needed to raise the whole region's economy, health, etc. so it does not continue to drag the region down for more generations.”

“Equity and inclusion programs are out there and available, the region needs to **do a better job of marketing them to vulnerable populations and getting vulnerable persons to participate.**”

“We need to **make sure smaller communities receive assistance with their elderly populations** ensuring their health (access to doctors, cost of medicine, availability of food), lower-income residents with available housing, providing access to broadband at reasonable costs, and affordable transportation linking rural areas to urban areas.”

“We are making progress in some areas but still a lot more effort and work is needed.”

“The issue is societal. I think we are very equitable and inclusive if you had a solid foundation to build on, but **we have a tendency to expect those without that foundation to function like those that have it.** It's a vicious cycle that those without a foundation never get it and then never give it because they do not see a way out, and profess there is no way out so why bother.”

“Somehow **we need to get more citizen involvement and buy in and the things that we're doing.** There seems to be a disconnect between what community leaders are planning and doing, and what the average citizen thinks his or her input is on that process. Citizens that find information difficult to locate or that their opinion doesn't matter or not going to be engaged.”

“It is imperative we **ensure resources and funding are equally available to smaller communities and municipalities for economic development, revitalization, planning, etc.**”

Resilience

Foster a resilient economy and ecosystem for all

Regional economic prosperity is linked to an area's ability to prevent, withstand, and quickly recover from any type of shock or disruption. Planning for resilience includes a multi-phased approach that anticipates risk, evaluates the potential impact on key assets, and develops a response. In the context of economic development, economic resilience becomes inclusive of three primary attributes: the ability to recover quickly, the ability to withstand, and the ability to avoid a shock. Often, the shocks/disruptions to the economic base of regions are manifested in three ways:

- ◇ Downturn or other significant events in the national or international economic which impact demand for locally produced goods and consumer spending
- ◇ Downturns in specific industries that constitute a critical component of the region's economic activity
- ◇ Other external shocks (a natural or man-made disaster like hurricanes or the COVID-19 pandemic, exit of a major employer, the impacts of climate change, etc.)

The Economic Development Administration provides the following guidance on integrating regional economic resilience through a two-pronged approach:

1. Planning for and implementing resilience through specific goals or actions to bolster the long-term economic durability of the region (**steady-state**)
2. Establishing information networks among the various stakeholders in the region to encourage active and regular communications between the public, private, education, and non-profit sectors to collaborate on existing and potential future challenges (**responsive**)

The Upper Coastal Plain region strives for resilient communities and regional economic prosperity through regional self-reliance, while building a strong economic base that minimizes dependence on forces over which the local areas have no control.

Within the SWOT Analysis Survey, respondents were asked how they would rank the region's overall resiliency. In the question description, resilience was defined as "Resiliency is the capacity to recover quickly and overcome social, psychological, physical, or cultural difficulties, traumas, or challenges - often bouncing back to a state of greater wisdom and strength." The results were about neutral.



A beaver dam along Conetoe Creek in Edgecombe County during Tropical Storm Ian in 2022

As a follow-on, respondents were asked to share additional thoughts about the region's resiliency. The CEDS committees were impressed with the thoughtfulness of the responses, so many highlights are included below:

Threats of climate change are not being adequately addressed at the regional and local levels despite the state and federal efforts to support preparedness

The Region is very resilient when it comes to natural disasters, but the Region struggles in addressing and reversing the social economic divide in the region

After COVID, I do question our resiliency as we are facing area-wide shortages in staffing, difficulties in procuring labor to handle water/ sewer infrastructure projects, and lack of ongoing assistance for those who need it with utilities and rental fees.

COVID has emphasized the need for stronger local and regional economies as a resiliency strategy in the global marketplace where food system, energy, manufacturing, and other global supply chain dependent systems can break down and make the region vulnerable.

We are getting better but need to do more regional economic and educational partnering. If we become business friendly, more businesses will come. Wages will rise. Hopes will rise. The region will become a destination rather than something to escape from.

There are those here who wish to do better, but we need more help. Not merely in the form of money, but long term oversight to ensure implementation

The trauma in the area continues to not be heard. Listen to our people and just don't hear them. With more organizations (like the Rural Opportunity Institute) and companies committing to providing trauma-informed services and recognizing the impacts of trauma on individuals, the region can become even more resilient and livable.

I believe short term our region is very resilient. The problem is retaining the interest of area citizens and officials to commit to long term efforts recovery.

I think that people are simply surviving. I do not think that people are necessarily getting over difficulties, just through them. People are not bouncing back to a state of greater wisdom and strength. With each tragedy, be it climate or economic stressors, our region gets through it, but I do not see us bouncing back stronger per say. We know that poverty causes PTSD and those things are not properly addressed so it starts to affect the mindset of the people who live within the region. Especially those who have lived here for generations.

I think that our region has been resilient for an economy and conditions that lived in the not too distant past. However in order for us to be resilient for the future we are going to have to tackle how to get our adult working age population to work in jobs that pay a living wage, they have to have an affordable house, and it has to be broadband access to it. We will not be resilient if we continue to use the same approaches that have been used for the past 15 20 years.

I believe our local and state Emergency Management teams could handle any disasters that we may face, based on previous hurricanes, and recover after some time. However, after COVID, I do question our resiliency as we are facing area-wide shortages in staffing, difficulties in procuring labor to handle water/ sewer infrastructure projects, and lack of ongoing assistance for those who need it with utilities and rental fees. Homeowners still have some options for assistance.

Regions Innovating for Strong Economies and Environment (RISE) Program

While this CEDS was under development, the North Carolina Office of Recovery and Resilience (NCORR) and the NC Rural Center were administering a concurrent regional planning process called Regions Innovating for Strong Economies and Environment Program (RISE). The CEDS Staff Committee had representation on the Upper Coastal Plain region's RISE planning team, which also consisted of NC Rural Center, NCORR, and Kleinfelder, Inc. (the RISE planning administrator). The RISE planning process aimed to support resilience primarily in the storm-impacted regions of North Carolina, which included the five Upper Coastal Plain counties, by:

- ◇ Providing coaching and technical assistance to regional partners to support community vulnerability assessments, identify priority actions to reduce risk and enhance resilience in their region, and develop paths to implementation.
- ◇ Developing the North Carolina Resilient Communities Guide, as a statewide resource that provides tools, guidance, and opportunities for building community resiliency.
- ◇ Hosting regional leadership training workshops that emphasize resilience as a tool for community economic development.

The RISE effort for the Upper Coastal Plain region built on analysis and planning conducted over the last several years, including:

- ◇ [N.E.W. Regional Hazard Mitigation Plan](#)
- ◇ [Hurricane Matthew Resilient Redevelopment Plans](#)
- ◇ [River Basic Studies](#)
- ◇ [North Carolina Climate Risk Assessment and Resilience Plan](#)

With the concurrent, professionally led RISE process occurring across the region at the same time as this CEDS was under development, the CEDS Strategy Development Group decided to base this document's resilience strategies on the results of the RISE process. The RISE process stakeholders included emergency managers and land use planners from across the region, so this essentially expanded the scope of the CEDS in a very insightful way. The RISE leadership team supported this approach, which aims to make the deliverables of both efforts more effective and interconnected.

The [results of the Upper Coastal Plain RISE process](#), which are considered part of this CEDS, include robust data on the region's climate resilience and environmental resilience overall.

Other **Steady-State Initiatives** Include:

- ◇ Monitor global, national, regional economic trends and work to anticipate periods of macro-level growth and concentration
- ◇ Conduct and maintain comprehensive planning that includes integration of hazard mitigation, transportation, and other planning efforts
- ◇ Monitor key corporate activity of major local employers and target clusters

- ◇ Support stable economic clusters and target development of emerging clusters or industries that build on the region's assets
- ◇ Promote and develop value-chains of target sectors that close economic gaps and build on the region's strengths
- ◇ Build a resilient workforce that is educated in STEM and is cross-trained, able to shift between jobs or industries
- ◇ Encourage local government fiscal practices and policies to increase sustainability of core services, tackle new initiatives, and support improvement with current revenue while maintaining available reserves during economic stress
- ◇ Continue to develop and maintain key infrastructure assets like high speed broadband, water/wastewater improvements, railroad/pedestrian/bicycle access, stream debris removal/stormwater, etc.
- ◇ Promote collaboration and zoning to allow for better food waste practices such as composting

Other **Responsive Initiatives** Include:

- ◇ Identify and pursue immediate short- and long-term opportunities for economic growth through leveraging and emerging trends in areas within 200 miles of the region
- ◇ Collaborate regionally on hazard mitigation plans and other environmental hazard planning efforts, such as RISE and any planning efforts that stem from it
- ◇ Review and evaluate the condition of area companies similar to, or reliant upon, major employers announcing layoffs or closures
- ◇ Strengthen coordination between the Turning Point Workforce Development Board, economic development entities, and support services to address short-, immediate-, and long-term recovery needs or specific sectors
- ◇ Establish a process for greater regional communication, monitoring, and updating of business community needs and issues
- ◇ Evaluate the region's emergency shelter capacity to house residents, their families, and where possible, their pets, in periods of extreme heat, flooding, or other natural disasters

ACTION PLAN

The strategic planning process was developed primarily from the CEDS Strategy Development Group meetings and the SWOT analysis. By studying the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats most commonly voiced by survey respondents, and by delving deeper on topics of regional importance through open dialogue, Strategy Development Group members and UCPCOG staff were able to develop a strategic plan that works to build on the region's strengths and opportunities, while addressing its weaknesses and threats.

To develop a comprehensive and effective action plan that fulfills our overarching goal to advance the UCPCOG region through comprehensive planning and development services, the action plan identifies three Primary Focus Areas critical to the success. The action plan also includes a focus on resiliency immediately following the three visions. The Primary Focus Areas and their visions are:

◇ Social Foundation

Vision: All residents of the Upper Coastal Plain region have the resources necessary to lead a healthy and prosperous life.

◇ Education & Advancement

Vision: The region bolsters its ability to train, develop, and foster its diverse and talented population.

◇ Thriving Economy

Vision: Community wealth is generated throughout the Upper Coastal Plain region.

Each vision is broken down into initiatives which contribute directly to that vision's success. Each Initiative includes strategic activities defined as more specific, measurable, concrete tactics or actions, and an evaluation framework, which identifies partners and a timeframe for each strategic activity.

Strategic Activities and Evaluation Frameworks define the Initiative's general intentions that build upon the Vision. They also provide benchmarks by which the region can measure successful performance. The Action Plan's Visions and Initiatives are all interconnected and are not ranked against each other.

The Evaluation Framework Partners legend is in the Appendix.

Action Plan Guide	
Initiative	Primary Topic
Vision 1, Initiative 1	Housing
Vision 1, Initiative 2	Community Health
Vision 1, Initiative 3	Regional Infrastructure
Vision 2, Initiative 1	Dependent Care
Vision 2, Initiative 2	Digital Inclusion & Broadband
Vision 2, Initiative 3	Workforce Training
Vision 3, Initiative 1	Economic Development
Vision 3, Initiative 2	Placemaking
Vision 3, Initiative 3	Economic Competitiveness

Vision 1: All residents of the Upper Coastal Plain region have the resources necessary to lead a healthy and prosperous life

Initiative 1: Seek the development of quality, affordable housing to meet current demands, compete for new residents, and improve community wealth throughout the region

The Upper Coastal Plain region has an inadequate supply of new and rehabilitated workforce housing, particularly for low-income families, which affects every aspect of the community. There is a well-documented lack of affordable housing for households at or below 80% of the Area Median Income (AMI). Workforce housing includes households with income up to 120% of AMI. In parts of the Upper Coastal Plain region, up to one half of renters spend more than 30% of their income on rental housing older than the state and national averages. These households often do not have sufficient income to purchase or rent new or substantially rehabilitated homes. Low median incomes, infrastructure challenges, and lack of incentives for development have caused residential developers to overlook the region, resulting in a lack of affordable housing choices for residents, as well as attractive options for prospective residents, many of whom are likely to consider moving to the region to escape the relatively higher cost of housing in more urban areas.

County	Cost-Burdened Homeowners	Renters with affordability challenges	Homeowners with affordability challenges	Income needed to afford a two-bedroom apartment	Median household income (Census Bureau)
Edgecombe	33%	40%	28%	\$30,960	\$40,489
Halifax	35%	48%	27%	\$29,920	\$35,904
Nash	30%	44%	23%	\$30,960	\$56,560
Northampton	32%	43%	26%	\$27,720	\$38,969
Wilson	31%	45%	22%	\$31,120	\$47,201

Highlight: Rocky Mount's [Five Points Crossing Affordable Housing Community](#). In the fall of 2019, the City of Rocky Mount developed a comprehensive development plan to create general occupancy affordable housing on city-owned land downtown. The process utilized the Public-Private Partnerships for Housing programs aligned with the North Carolina Office of Recovery and Resiliency (NCORR). The City partnered with Woda Cooper Companies to develop Five Point Crossing, which will include a 4-story, \$9.4M facility that will offer 28 one bedroom units and 22 two-bedroom apartments, with six units with features for those with disabilities.

Source: [North Carolina Housing Coalition](#)

SWOT Analysis:

Strengths: Ample land for housing development, lower cost of living compared to nearby urban markets.

Weaknesses: Increasing cost of rent, lack of affordable housing supply, failure to address racial and geographical housing inequities.

Opportunities: There are successful models of housing developments to support teachers and other workforce, attracting new residents from the Triangle.

Threats: Wage stagnation, increasing cost of supplies globally, structural barriers to quality affordable housing.

Strategic Activities:

1. Seek additional funds for housing development, such as the North Carolina Department of Commerce's Community Development Block Grant - Neighborhood Revitalization program.
2. Align economic development, business recruitment, and housing development efforts to ensure attractive, appropriate, and equitable housing is available for new and existing workers.
3. Harmonize zoning ordinances and comprehensive land use plans to enable and encourage the development of accessory dwelling units, tiny homes, or upper-level downtown residences to increase the supply of new housing in developed areas and facilitate neighborhood revitalization.
4. Require or otherwise encourage housing developers to implement [universal design standards](#) that are accessible to people with a wide range of abilities, disabilities, and other characteristics, with a specific focus on the region's aging population.
5. Promote local government strategies to recycle viable, existing structures to encourage adaptive reuse and community reinvestment.
6. Support equity-driven strategies to establish mixed-income neighborhoods that ensure under-resourced and low-income families have access to middle-class amenities, while also encouraging communities to develop or improve amenities in traditionally low-income areas.
7. Develop affordable housing targeted at teachers, healthcare workers, or other service-workers in high-demand.
8. Establish a regional housing task force composed of local government leaders, employers, economic development professionals, school systems, healthcare providers, and community members with lived experience to facilitate meaningful cooperation on this complex topic.
9. Construct elevated homes on previously flooded lots where allowed, especially in Princeville where the levee, drainage, and floodgates are being upgraded, in an effort to address the regional housing shortage.



Evaluation Framework

Vision 1: Social Foundation - All Residents of the Upper Coastal Plain Region have the resources necessary to lead a healthy and prosperous life.

Initiative 1: Seek the development of quality affordable housing to meet current demands, compete for new residents, and improve community wealth throughout the region.

Strategy	Partners	Timeline	Performance Measures
Seek additional funds for housing development, such as the North Carolina Department of Commerce's Community Development Block Grant - Neighborhood Revitalization program.	LG, NCDOC, UCPCOG	1-3 years	Number of governments in the region that seek affordable/workforce housing funds, either to rehabilitate existing housing, replace existing housing, or construct new housing, with a focus on service workers and low-moderate income residents. Amount of grant funds (local, state, or federal) are invested in housing development and housing related services.
Align economic development, business recruitment, and housing development efforts to ensure attractive, appropriate, and equitable housing is available for new and existing workers.	CC, EDC, LG, NCHFA, NP, TPWDB	3-5 years	Number of increased economic development, business recruitment and housing development efforts that are aligned.
Harmonize zoning ordinances and comprehensive land use plans to enable and encourage the development of accessory dwelling units, tiny homes, or upper-level downtown residences to increase the supply of new housing in developed areas and facilitate neighborhood revitalization.	DDC, LG, SOG	1-3 years	Number of zoning ordinances that are updated to allow new forms of housing, including accessory dwelling units or tiny homes in defined targeted areas.
Require or otherwise encourage housing developers to implement universal design standards that are accessible to people with a wide range of abilities, disabilities, and other characteristics, with a specific focus on the region's aging population.	AAA, FI, LG, NP, HP, UT, UCPCOG	3-5 years	Number of policies or incentives that are developed to required or encourage universal design standards
Promote local government strategies to recycle viable, existing structures to encourage adaptive reuse and community reinvestment.	LG, NCDOC, U, UCPCOG	1-3 years	Number of local governments that recycle existing structures.
Support equity-driven strategies to establish mixed-income neighborhoods that ensure under-resourced and low-income families have access to middle-class amenities, while also encouraging communities to develop or improve amenities in traditionally low-income areas.	LG, NCHFA, NP	5+ years	Number of strategies that support mixed-income neighborhoods Number of resources offered to cost-burdened homeowners and renters.
Develop affordable housing targeted at teachers, healthcare workers, or other service-workers in high-demand.	EDC, LG, NCHFA, NP, U, UT	5+ years	Percentage reduction of cost-burdened home owners.

Vision 1, Initiative 1 Evaluation Framework Continued

Strategy	Partners	Timeline	Performance Measures
Establish a regional housing task force composed of local government leaders, employers, economic development professionals, school systems, healthcare providers, and community members with lived experience to facilitate meaningful cooperation on this complex topic.	EDC, LG, NP, NCDOC, NCHFA, UCPCOG	1-3 years	New partnerships and goals developed related to regional affordable and workforce housing
Construct elevated homes on previously flooded lots where allowed, especially in Princeville where the levee, drainage, and floodgates are being upgraded, in an effort to address the regional housing shortage.	FI, LG, NCDEQ, NCDOC, NCHFA, UCPCOG	3 - 5 years	Number of previously flooded properties utilized the build new elevated homes. Number of elevated homes constructed in previously flooded areas.

Vision 1: All residents of the Upper Coastal Plain region have the resources necessary to lead a healthy and prosperous life

Initiative 2: Create healthy and connected communities

The Upper Coastal Plain region must capitalize on its human, natural, and built environment assets to promote healthy communities and support economic growth. Opportunities to develop healthy and resilient communities include:

- ◇ Increasing access to healthy, local foods
- ◇ Providing better and more accessible opportunities for exercise and recreation
- ◇ Creating physical connections that enable all residents to navigate their communities and access its amenities safely and through multiple modes of transportation.



A pedestrian bridge along the Tar River Train in Rocky Mount.

The region’s local governments and development stakeholders should take a two-pronged approach to improving community health – by considering what its residents need to improve their own health, and what healthcare providers need to improve the community’s health overall. Partnerships are key in implementing any of the strategies identified within this CEDS, but are particularly important in creating healthy communities.

For example, a community’s walkability is more than the condition of its sidewalks and crosswalks. It’s also about community identity, access, wealth creation, efficiency, sustainability, and more, and takes more than one organization to develop.

Walkable communities are livable, economically competitive communities.

According to the [University of Delaware](#):

The health of a community can largely be attributed to the opportunities that are provided for active transportation and physical activity among community members. For example, communities that depend on automobiles to transport people from one destination to another promote a less active lifestyle contributing to greater healthcare expenses related to poor physical health. A neglect of community-design principles, lack of walkable infrastructure, and compartmentalized built environments has led to less active lifestyles and a greater incidence of chronic obesity and related diseases.

The Upper Coastal Plain region consists of many communities that have become less walkable over time. Though many small towns seem walkable in terms of size, the street networks often have unsafe crossings, ineffective traffic signals that may not account for pedestrians, barriers and gaps in the sidewalk network, and old curb designs that lack ramps or have dangerous ramps, preventing access to basic mobility by senior citizens, youth, parents with small children, and individuals who rely on mobility devices.

Walkable communities have several outcomes that will advance multiple goals identified in the CEDS process, in addition to promoting health.

- ◇ Walkable places are in high demand and very short supply, meaning that they are highly competitive in attracting and retaining business firms and residents. Communities in the Upper Coastal Plain region can create a competitive advantage for themselves by focusing on walkability. This advantage will help communities that are walkable:
 - ◇ *Retain young people and slow “brain drain”*
 - ◇ *Attract families and remote workers*
 - ◇ *Make life better for those who are already here*
- ◇ Walkable communities are good for children and seniors, and others who may not drive. People with visual impairments and mobility limitations also benefit from safe walking infrastructure.

Safe biking networks are also highly conducive to community identity, livability, economic success, and good health.

- ◇ Biking is an affordable transportation mode for many low-wage workers. About 4% of North Carolinians use a bike as their primary transportation to work. “Utility cyclists” (people who rely on an inexpensive bike as their main transportation because they don’t have another option) are visible throughout the Upper Coastal Plain region, especially among workers at grocery stores, food service establishments, and other service employers.
- ◇ Among higher-earning workers who voluntarily seek to bike to work, safe options for biking can reduce the need for car ownership from multiple cars per household to one car per household.
- ◇ More and more young people and active families are seeking affordable small towns where they can take advantage of non-car transportation options.

- ◇ Bike facilities in downtown and commercial areas have been shown to result in increased spending per visiting customer when compared to motorized vehicle modes.
- ◇ Bike-friendly communities are competitive. They retain young adults, they attract people who have options, and they attract firms.
- ◇ Bike infrastructure is the most efficient and also the least expensive type of transportation infrastructure. Bike facilities can typically be provided within existing street pavement and right-of-way, and often are implementable with inexpensive markings and vertical protective elements. Bike lanes carry far more people (customers, employees, etc.) than car lanes can when compared on a square-foot basis.
- ◇ Bike parking likewise is far less costly to provide and takes up a tiny fraction of the vast space required to store empty cars. Car parking is a problem of geometry that is usually not possible to solve in a downtown setting with small sites and compactly spaced buildings, but bike parking is easily and cheaply implemented.
- ◇ Modern bike networks are composed of “8-80” facilities, meaning they are safely bikeable not just for healthy athletic people, but for people aged 8 to 80 (or beyond). The current state of the practice for bike facilities is “protected” bike infrastructure, which allows people to ride without concerns about physical conflicts from cars.

Beyond walk- and bike-ability, efforts to improve access to healthy, local foods, such as the [Healthy Food Access Mapping Project](#) (HFAM), and the development of additional, accessible parks and recreation opportunities, can be considered true community health and resilience strategies. Close by, neighboring Bertie County’s [Tall Glass of Water](#) project provides a recent example of a true community health and resilience project, leveraging the area’s natural, historic, and cultural assets while providing a new and accessible recreation space for all of its citizens to enjoy.

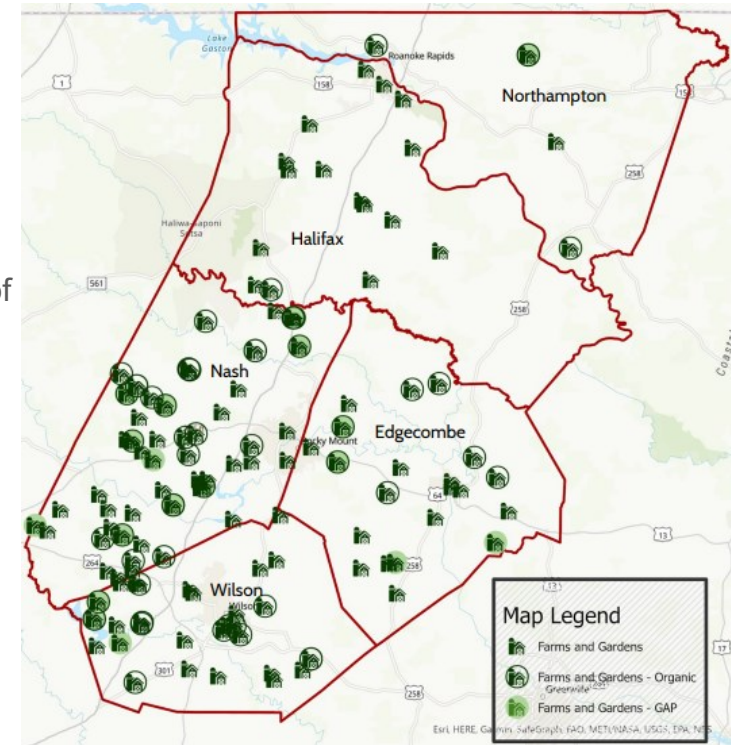
SWOT Analysis:

Strengths: Community Colleges are great at training healthcare workers, public park access.

Weaknesses: Poor health outcomes across the region, health disparities, lack of mental health services, lack of connectivity among park spaces, crime, and racial inequities.

Opportunities: Continued investment in park and recreation systems, partnerships among transportation officials, investment in bike and pedestrian infrastructure.

Threats: Impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the healthcare system, flooding of park facilities, lack of control over state and federal transportation policy.



A map of farms & gardens from the HFAM project.

Strategic Activities:

1. Assess the walkability of the region's small towns by conducting active-transportation planning studies and walkability audits.
2. Encourage local governments and the NC Department of Transportation to plan and construct more accessible sidewalks and street crossings, for streets owned by towns or NCDOT, respectively.
3. Adopt local Complete Streets resolutions to encourage the implementation of the 2019 updated [NCDOT Complete Streets](#) policy.
4. Map the region's parks and recreation resources to determine areas that need additional investment or lack adequate connectivity and seek funding to improve the quality and accessibility of parks and recreation facilities.
5. Work with appropriate state and local agencies to establish local and regional bike and pedestrian trail networks, encouraging the utilization of existing rights of ways (sewer, stormwater, rail, etc), and seek ways to implement the local components of the [Great Trails State](#) network.
6. Develop or update bicycle and pedestrian plans across the region through partnerships with the region's RPOs and MPO, and by applying for local-government bicycle and pedestrian planning grants sponsored by the [NCDOT Bicycle and Pedestrian Division](#).
7. Encourage county governments to utilize opioid settlement funds in ways that will improve the region's community health overall.
8. Implement, and assist community organizations with implementing, the strategies identified within the [Healthy Food Access Mapping](#) project, and continue to study the needs of the region's food producers and distributors to help improve access to healthy, local foods across the region.
9. Support Human Service Organizations in the region participating in the [Healthy Opportunities Pilot Program](#).
10. Connect emergency food distribution agencies with local farmers for purchase of fresh local healthy food.
11. Support healthcare organizations in participating, and investing, in produce prescription programs and Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) programs that allow patients to reallocate their food dollars to other areas of need such as medications, housing, transportation, etc.
12. Encourage publicly accessible bike rental opportunities to encourage new modes of transportation around town.
13. Encourage zoning and land use policies to support urban agriculture and the community use of public land for growing and training purposes to increase access to fresh and healthy food, especially in underserved communities.
14. Secure resources and increase collaboration among community partners that enable food distribution sites to purchase from, and pick up, produce sold by small farmers and farmers of color.

Evaluation Framework

Vision 1: Social Foundation - All Residents of the Upper Coastal Plain Region have the resources necessary to lead a healthy and prosperous life.

Initiative 2: Create healthy and connected communities.

Strategy	Partners	Timeline	Performance Measures
Assess the walkability of the region's small towns by conducting active-transportation planning studies and walkability audits.	DDC, LG, MPO, NCDOT, NCLM, RPO, UCPCOG	1 - 3 years	Number of walkability assessments conducted.
Encourage local governments and the NC Department of Transportation to plan and construct more accessible sidewalks and street crossings, for streets owned by towns or NCDOT, respectively.	LG, MPO, NCDOT, RPO	1 - 3 years	Number of new accessible sidewalks and street crossings in NCDOT pedestrian rights-of-ways.
Adopt local Complete Streets resolutions to encourage the implementation of the 2019 updated NCDOT Complete Streets policy.	LG, MPO, NCDOT, RPO	3 - 5 years	Number of local Complete Streets resolutions adopted.
Map the region's parks and recreation resources to determine areas that need additional investment or lack adequate connectivity and seek funding to improve the quality and accessibility of parks and recreation facilities.	LG, NCDNCR, NP, UCPCOG	1 - 3 years	Amount of funding secured to improve parks and recreation facilities, recreation maps developed.
Work with appropriate state and local agencies to establish local and regional bike and pedestrian trail networks, encouraging the utilization of existing rights of ways (sewer, stormwater, rail, etc), and seek ways to implement the local components of the Great Trails State network.	K-12, LG, MPO, NCDOT, RPO, TA	5 + years	Number of bike and pedestrian trails established.
Develop or update bicycle and pedestrian plans across the region through partnerships with the region's RPOs and MPO, and by applying for local-government bicycle and pedestrian planning grants sponsored by the NCDOT Bicycle and Pedestrian Division .	LG, MPO, NCDOT, RPO, UCPCOG	3 - 5 years	Number of bike and pedestrian plans developed or updated across the region
Encourage county governments to utilize opioid settlement funds in ways that will improve the region's community health overall.	AAA, HP, FI, IEI, NCACC, NCRC	5 + years	Amount of funds from the opioid settlements that is used for community health.
Implement, and assist community organizations with implementing, the strategies identified within the Healthy Food Access Mapping project, and continue to study the needs of the region's food producers and distributors to help improve access to healthy, local foods across the region.	AAA, CE, DEPC, EDC, IEI, K-12, LG, NP, UCPCOG	5 + years	Number of strategies implemented from HFAM.

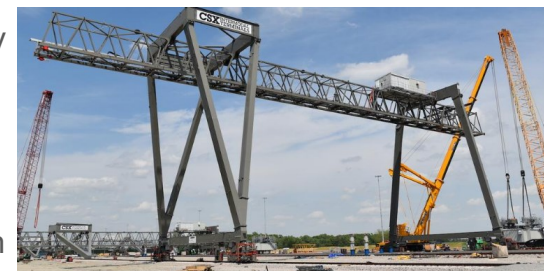
Vision 1, Initiative 2 Evaluation Framework Continued

Strategy	Partners	Timeline	Performance Measures
Connect emergency food distribution agencies with local farmers for purchase of fresh local healthy food	AAA, CC, CE, NP, U	1 - 3 years	Number of emergency food agencies that purchase healthy food locally for distribution
Support healthcare organizations in participating, and investing, in produce prescription programs and Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) programs that allow patients to reallocate their food dollars to other areas of need such as medications, housing, transportation, etc.	CE, HP, NCDA, NP	3 - 5 years	Number of organizations/patients participating in produce prescription programs
Encourage publicly accessible bike rental opportunities to encourage new modes of transportation around town.	DDC, LG, MPO, RPO	3 - 5 years	Number of bike rental opportunities in the region
Encourage zoning and land use policies to support urban agriculture and the community use of public land for growing and training purposes to increase access to fresh and healthy food, especially in underserved communities	CE, LG, NCDA, NP, UCPCOG	3 - 5 years	Number of acres secured for urban agriculture or community use of land
Secure resources and increase collaboration among community partners that enable food distribution sites to purchase from, and pick	CE, HP, K-12, LG, NCDA, NP,	1 - 3 years	Number of food distribution sites that purchase directly from small farmers and farmers of color
Promote CSA programs in Community Colleges and Schools for their students	CC, CE, K-12, NCDA, NP	1 - 3 years	Number of schools in the region that coordinate a CSA box program

Vision 1: All residents of the Upper Coastal Plain region have the resources necessary to lead a healthy and prosperous life

Initiative 3: Establish, maintain, and expand an accessible public infrastructure

To remain competitive in the global economy, the revitalization and improvement of the region’s infrastructure assets is a priority. Businesses, entrepreneurs, and residents make use of a well-coordinated and robust regional electric, transportation, water, and wastewater infrastructure. The region has quality infrastructure assets on which to build, including two airports, the primary east coast north-south interstate highway (I-95), the primary east coast north-south rail line, and abundant groundwater resources. There are 37 public water and 36 public wastewater utilities in the Upper Coastal Plain region of varying sizes and capacity. Each of these are in varying conditions and stages of development, and serve the region’s residents and business community. The recently completed [CSX Carolina Connector \(CCX\)](#) facility in Rocky Mount, an inland port, is capable of reaching 5 million consumers within



CCX Intermodal Terminal in Rocky Mount

a roughly 120-mile radius. It features three wide-span, fully automated, zero-emission electric cranes with a total lift capacity of 110,000 containers/year. The Rocky-Mount Wilson Airport in Nash County serves major employers such as Cummins, Bridgestone Americas, Pfizer and Clayton Homes, to meet their cargo and corporate transportation needs. The region's infrastructure plays a key role in attracting employers and sustaining a strong economy.

While the economic development benefits of the region's infrastructure are clear, the region's infrastructure stakeholders must also recognize that a functioning, accessible infrastructure is crucial to the region's social foundation. [According to the NC Rural Center](#),

community water and wastewater systems, both publicly and privately owned, are central to the physical and economic health and well-being of rural North Carolina. However, challenges to these water systems in rural areas of our state have mounted as rural economies have changed. Fewer major private purchases of public water, from manufacturing plants in particular, have decreased available working capital for public utilities management. Additionally, outmigration and the decline of rural population density reduces the ratepayer base, and many communities did not charge high enough rates to set aside long-term repair and upgrades.

In a 2021 letter to US Governors, [EPA Secretary Michael Regan](#) encouraged states to target infrastructure resources to disadvantaged communities, and that

every state in America has disadvantaged communities - rural, urban, suburban - that have deeply rooted water challenges, whether it is too much, too little or poor-quality water. These communities have never received their fair share of federal water infrastructure funding. Through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, states have an unprecedented opportunity to correct this disparity.

The Upper Coastal Plain region has disadvantaged communities with water challenges, structural barriers, and difficulty accessing other forms of public infrastructure, which leads to significant disparities even across these five counties. Investments in infrastructure across these disadvantaged communities, whether in water, wastewater, transit, or another form of infrastructure, will improve the region's quality of life overall, lived experience, and will extend infrastructure's economic and public health benefits. The [City of Wilson's RIDE micro-transit system](#), for example, sought to improve access to public transit by replacing the city's bus system through a public-private partnership. The RIDE system services about 3,700 trips each week, and 50% of trips are journeys to work. While the RIDE program is subsidized by the city and is costing about 25% more than the former city bus, fixed-route system, its level of responsiveness to those who need it make the investment worth it, [according to the Assistant City Manager](#). Finally, as inflation continues and the cost of housing, groceries, gasoline, and more continue to rise, the affordability of the region's utilities must be part of the larger infrastructure discussion by providing equity.



City of Wilson's RIDE micro-transit vans.

SWOT Analysis:

Strengths: Availability of water/wastewater infrastructure, strong road/highway transportation, water availability.

Weaknesses: Age of water/wastewater distribution systems, high cost to repair infrastructure, utility affordability in black and brown communities.

Opportunities: Innovative public transit models, strategic water/wastewater system partnerships or mergers, increased federal funding for infrastructure investments to address racial and geographic inequities.

Threats: Loss of critical institutional knowledge due to succession, lack of engineering capacity, high cost of materials globally.

Strategic Activities:

1. Coordinate planning to encourage strategic, regionally important water and wastewater infrastructure investments.
2. Seek funding to rehabilitate aging water or wastewater infrastructure, seal contaminated wells or septic tanks, remove drinking water contaminations, address environmental contamination, expand systems to disadvantaged communities and industrial areas, regionalize systems, and increase or maintain system capacity.
3. Provide technical assistance to water and wastewater utility providers to help address fiscal and operational challenges, including auditing rate structures to ensure a sustainable model.
4. Encourage all utility systems to maintain an up-to-date Capital Improvement Plan and Asset Management Plan to guide system growth.
5. Support the region's Metropolitan and Rural Planning Organizations as they prioritize transportation projects and attract state and federal transportation investments across the region.
6. Develop a central database to house the region's water and wastewater system maps.
7. Support the region's airports, CCX, and rail network, which are critical to the region's supply chain, through strategic partnerships and targeted investments.
8. Encourage local governments to stay up-to-date on audits to be ensure eligibility for water and wastewater funding programs.
9. Seek and identify incentives (e.g. grants, loans, tax programs) to encourage greater private investment by telecoms, electric cooperatives, and internet service providers in the region's broadband infrastructure.
10. Identify structural barriers that prevent innovative programs designed to leverage public and private investment that can improve broadband services in the region.
11. Seek and promote utility affordability programs, such as partnerships with electric utilities or non-profits.
12. Support food system infrastructure projects such as food hubs, processing centers, cold storage facilities, food transportation trucks and on farm needs for sale of items.

13. Support water capture and reuse methods such as on-farm ponds to increase biodiversity, irrigation, crop drought resilience, protect water quality, and mitigate flooding and promote investment in on-farm infrastructure and equipment such as seeders, high tunnel/caterpillar tunnels, well system irrigation, tractor/trailers, cold storage on farm, mobile refrigeration, and solar power/ sustainable equipment, prioritizing small, beginning and minority farmers.

Evaluation Framework

Vision 1: Social Foundation - All Residents of the Upper Coastal Plain Region have the resources necessary to lead a healthy and prosperous life.

Initiative 3: Establish, maintain, and expand an accessible public infrastructure.

Strategy	Partners	Timeline	Performance Measures
Coordinate planning to encourage strategic, regionally important water and wastewater infrastructure investments.	LG, NCDEQ, UCPCOG	3 - 5 years	Number of investments made in water and wastewater infrastructure
Seek funding to rehabilitate aging water or wastewater infrastructure, seal contaminated wells or septic tanks, remove drinking water contaminations, address environmental contamination, expand systems to disadvantaged communities and industrial areas, regionalize systems, and increase or maintain system capacity.	LG, NCDEQ, UCPCOG	1 - 3 years	Amount of funding secured to rehabilitate aging water/wastewater infrastructure
Provide technical assistance to water and wastewater utility providers to help address fiscal and operational challenges, including auditing rate structures to ensure a sustainable model.	FI, NCACC, NCDEQ, NCLM, NCRC, SOG, U, UCPCOG, UT	3 - 5 years	Rate at which utility systems are cut for affordability while still high enough to qualify for state and federal funding programs
Encourage all utility systems to maintain an up-to-date Capital Improvement Plan and Asset Management Plan to guide system growth.	LG, NCACC, NCDEQ, NCLM, NCRC, UCPCOG	5+ years	Number of Utility Systems that develop Capital Improvement Plans and Asset Management Plans
Support the region's Metropolitan and Rural Planning Organizations as they prioritize transportation projects and attract state and federal transportation investments across the region.	LG, MPO, NCDOT, RPO, UCPCOG	5+ years	Number of investments made towards transportation across the region
Develop a central database to house the region's water and wastewater system maps.	LG, NCDEQ, UCPCOG	3 - 5 years	A database of water and wastewater system maps is completed
Support the region's airports, CCX, and rail network, which are critical to the region's supply chain, through strategic	EDC, EDPNC, LG, NCDOT, NCEA	3 - 5 years	Number of partnerships facilitated to support the region's modes of transportation

Vision 1, Initiative 3 Evaluation Framework Continued

Strategy	Partners	Timeline	Performance Measures
Encourage local governments to stay up-to-date on audits to be ensure eligibility for water and wastewater funding programs.	FI, LG, NCACC, NCDOC, NCDEQ, NCLM, NCRC, UCPCOG	1 - 3 years	Percentage of local governments that stay up-to-date on their water and wastewater audits
Seek and identify incentives (e.g. grants, loans, tax programs) to encourage greater private investment by telecoms, electric cooperatives, and internet service providers in the region's broadband infrastructure.	IEI, ISP, LG, NCBIO, NCDEL, UT	3 - 5 years	Number of funding programs implemented to increase access to broadband.
Identify structural barriers that prevent innovative programs designed to leverage public and private investment that can improve broadband services in the region.	IEI, ISP, LG, NCBIO, NCDEL, NP, SOG, U, UCPCOG	3 - 5 years	Amount of regional convenings to discuss barriers and programs to leverage public and private investment to improve broadband.
Support food system infrastructure projects such as food hubs, processing centers, cold storage facilities, food transportation trucks and on farm needs for sale of items.	CE, LG, NP, UCPCOG	1 - 3 years	Amount of funding secured for food system infrastructure projects
Support water capture and reuse methods such as on-farm ponds to increase biodiversity, irrigation, crop drought resilience, protect water quality, and mitigate flooding and promote investment in on-farm infrastructure and equipment such as seeders, high tunnel/caterpillar tunnels, well system irrigation, tractor/trailers, cold storage on farm, mobile refrigeration, and solar power/sustainable equipment, prioritizing small, beginning and minority farmers.	CE, FI, NCDA	3 - 5 years	Number of on-farm ponds installed in the region Number of new, beginning and minority farms that secure new equipment for their farm needs

Vision 2: The region bolsters its ability to train, develop, and foster its diverse and talented population

Initiative 1: Improve access to quality and equitable dependent care services

According to the [2021-2022 North Carolina Infant-Toddler Child Care Landscape Study](#),

research time and again points to the pronounced effects that a high quality child care experience can have on a child’s school readiness and life-long success. As an equity strategy, high quality early care and education provides even greater benefits for young children living in poverty. Further, investments in high quality early care and education have a multi-generational effect, not only providing a safe and nurturing place for children, but also supporting families as they work or further their own education. With the ravaging worldwide effects of the COVID-19 pandemic also destroying the child care infrastructure that North Carolina has spent decades building, a specific, concerted effort at rebuilding this indispensable resource for working parents must emerge as priority one in our state.

The study identifies child care accessibility disparities across North Carolina. The table below shows the breakdown across the Upper Coastal Plain region:



County	Number of Infant/Toddler Spaces (desired capacity)	Number of Infants/Toddlers with Working Parents	Percentage of Infant/Toddler care need met	Total number of Infants and Toddlers	Vacancy Rate
Edgecombe	422	1,100	38.36%	1,649	50.24%
Halifax	650	2,562	25.38%	3,203	27.69%
Nash	210	1,156	18.17%	1,615	34.76%
Northampton	63	391	16.12%	525	57.14%
Wilson	690	2,221	31.07%	2,868	15.51%
TOTAL	2,035	7,436	27.36%	9,860	37.07% (mean)

According to the [Elaine Zuckerman](#), Communications Manager for the NC Early Education Coalition, the vacancy rates are likely explained by staffing shortages, which have been worsened by the COVID-19 pandemic. Increasing salaries for qualified staff significantly impacts the already tight early care and education center budgets, with centers in rural communities generally starting their teaching assistants at \$9.00 per hour. Raising salaries to retain staff is made more challenging by how expensive child care already is. The median monthly price for full-time infant care in a licensed center in North Carolina is \$883 — with a range of \$368 to \$2,433. Families with infants tend to be younger overall, thus are early in their careers and their wage-earning trajectories, making this high cost a heavy burden. As wages rise in other sectors, it becomes even more difficult for child care providers to keep up without significantly raising the cost burden on working families. For example, the average annual wage for Child Day Care Services in the Upper Coastal Plain region during the fourth quarter of 2021 was \$21,743, lower than Convenience Stores (\$25,962), Food Manufacturing (\$46,612), Agriculture (cluster) (\$55,643), and Health (cluster) (\$43,351).

SWOT Analysis:

Strengths: Quality childcare facilities are present across the region, strong partnerships facilitated by the Area Agency on Aging and Down East Partnership for Children

Weaknesses: Low wages for childcare workers, lack of support for working families to offset cost of dependent care, access to elder care and minimal access to quality care for families facing health disparities.

Opportunities: Additional employer support for dependent care expenses, increased partnerships and information sharing to influence policy and address inequities.

Threats: Competition for skilled workers from higher paying industries, state policy guiding childcare assistance programs

Strategic Activities:

1. Establish a region-wide task force or ad-hoc committee to include child care providers, adult day care providers, private employers, higher education providers, and local government representatives at a minimum.
2. While studying child care solutions, include a focus on increasing access to affordable, quality care for aging and disabled adults.
3. Identify structural barriers that prevent innovative programs designed to leverage public and private investment that can improve dependent care quality, affordability, and sustainability in the region.
4. Identify incentives (e.g. grants, loans, subsidies, benefit programs) to encourage greater private investment by the region's employers in contributing to their employees' dependent care needs.
5. Allow for and encourage public investment in dependent care infrastructure.
6. Support development of programs to improve employee retention and increase pay at child care facilities across the region and increase racial equity.
7. Partner with the Area Agency on Aging to assist in implementing the [Regional Aging Services Plan](#), which sets goals to support older adults and their caregivers across the Upper Coastal Plain region.

Evaluation Framework

Vision 2: Education & Advancement - The region bolsters its ability to train, develop, and foster its diverse and talented population.

Initiative 1: Improve access to quality and equitable dependent care services.

Strategy	Partners	Timeline	Performance Measures
Establish a region-wide task force or ad-hoc committee to include child care providers, adult day care providers, private employers, higher education providers, and local government representatives at a minimum.	AAA, CC, DEPC, EDC, K-12, NP, U, UCPCOG	1 - 3 years	Attendance rate at region-wide task force meetings
While studying child care solutions, include a focus on increasing access to affordable, quality care for aging and disabled adults.	AAA, NP, TPWDB, UCPCOG	1 - 3 years	Number of organizations that expand their focus to include care of aging and disabled adults
Identify structural barriers that prevent innovative programs designed to leverage public and private investment that can improve dependent care quality, affordability, and sustainability in the region.	AAA, DEPC, NP, TPWDB, U, UCPCOG	3 - 5 years	Number of educational opportunities hosted within the region or shared with the region's dependent care stakeholders
Identify incentives (e.g. grants, loans, subsidies, benefit programs) to encourage greater private investment by the region's employers in contributing to their employees' dependent care needs.	AAA, DEPC, FI, HP, K-12, LG, NP, TPWDB, U, UCPCOG	3 - 5 years	Number of employers that offer dependent care assistance as part of a benefits package.
Allow for and encourage public investment in dependent care infrastructure.	CC, EDC, DEPC, NP	5+ years	Amount of investment that is secured for dependent care infrastructure
Support development of programs to improve employee retention and increase pay at child care facilities across the region and increase racial equity.	CC, DEPC, NP, TPWDB	3 - 5 years	Number of dependent care facilities that are able to close the wage gap and attract and retain qualified employees.
Partner with the Area Agency on Aging to assist in implementing the Regional Aging Services Plan , which sets goals to support older adults and their caregivers across the Upper Coastal Plain region.	AAA, LG, TPWDB,	1 - 3 years	Number of strategies implemented from the Regional Aging Services Plan

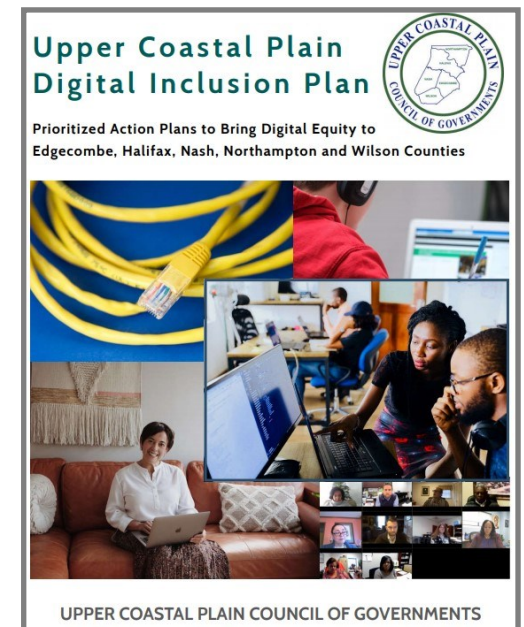
Vision 2: The region bolsters its ability to train, develop, and foster its diverse and talented population

Initiative 2: Ensure residents and businesses across the region have the connectivity, knowledge, and tools necessary to fully participate in the digital world

Digital Inclusion is defined by the National Digital Inclusion Alliance as “the activities necessary to ensure that all individuals and communities, including the most disadvantaged, have access to and use of Information and Communication Technologies.” Elements of digital inclusion focus on, among other things, digital equity, digital literacy, and access to the devices and communications networks necessary to participate in the constantly evolving digital world. This became a focus of the region during the COVID-19 Pandemic, when the Upper Coastal Plain Broadband Task Force called for an increased focus on digital literacy, equity, and inclusion as many students across the region were learning remotely for the first time without adequate broadband connectivity at home. The task force worked with partners in all five counties to develop the Upper Coastal Plain Digital Inclusion Plan, which studied each county’s unique digital inclusion priorities and provided an approach for action at a regional scale. The plan determined:

- ◇ Every county in the region needs better broadband infrastructure and more people capable of using it. The region is characterized by serious digital inequities that will continue to impede economic development, community sustainability, and quality of life until addressed.
- ◇ There is growing awareness of this problem and commitment to addressing it.
- ◇ The need for comprehensive broadband availability data is time sensitive and needed for all five counties.
- ◇ Shared priorities and common approaches to improving access creates equitable opportunities for cross-border and regional collaborations to extend Wi-Fi, technical assistance, and training.
- ◇ Unique demographic aspects create the need for specific approaches to reach different categories of non-adopters.
- ◇ No single approach or organization can solve these challenges, everyone is a stakeholder in the future of our region.
- ◇ Broadband is absolutely critical to empowering a better future and lived experience.

Broadband connectivity is also a driver of job creation and economic growth for businesses both small and large. Equitable access to high-speed broadband across the region will help to bring equitable access for economic prosperity across the region. Based on 1,732 [North Carolina Broadband Survey](#) responses collected across the UCP region, 288 (16.6%) had no wireline



Internet and 48 (2.8%) reported having no Internet at all. Of the 47,748 responses statewide, 13,521 respondents (28.3%) have no wireline Internet and 2,501 (5.2%) reported having no Internet at all. For those with internet access in the UCP region, 63.4% pay over \$80 per month for Internet only. The median download speed for respondents with Internet service was only 20Mbps and the median upload speed was only 4Mbps. 59% of respondents with Internet access were under the FCC threshold of 25 Mbps 3 Mbps Upload (25/3).

SWOT Analysis:

Strengths: The Broadband Task Force, strong interest in broadband infrastructure expansion, digital skills training at libraries/ community colleges/schools

Weaknesses: Lack of options for local governments to assist in expanding broadband infrastructure, high cost of connectivity and devices leading to less adoption, poor connectivity at public facilities.

Opportunities: Participation in federal funding programs, partnerships with internet service providers, Affordability Connectivity Program.

Threats: Potential for additional state policy limitations, loss of population and lack of broadband adoption leading to less interest from internet service providers.

Strategic Activities:

1. Continue to convene the Upper Coastal Plain Broadband Task Force, and formalize the committee to better position it to track and respond to emerging broadband and digital inclusion funding opportunities and provide training opportunities.
2. Promote computer refurbishment and donation programs to improve access to affordable devices.
3. Support and promote existing digital inclusion programs, such as the local [Lake Gaston Computer Club](#).
4. Utilize senior centers, libraries, town halls, or other public centers as a resource in developing telehealth access points. Partner with pharmacies, hospitals, clinics, or other medical centers to connect and legitimize these access points. These centers can also serve as centers for digital skills training, job application assistance, and online education.
5. Host regional broadband workshops in partnership with state agencies and internet services providers to increase exposure, build partnerships, and develop a deeper understanding of this complex issue for policy makers, business owners, and residents.
6. Partner with the NC Department of Information Technology's Broadband Infrastructure Office to develop a better understanding of the region's true connectivity needs, including mapping, outreach, or data collection assistance.

Upper Coastal Plain

**BROADBAND
TASK FORCE**



Evaluation Framework

Vision 2: Education & Advancement - The region bolsters its ability to train, develop, and foster its diverse and talented population.

Initiative 2: Ensure residents and businesses across the region have the connectivity, knowledge, and tools necessary to fully participate in the digital world.

Strategy	Partners	Timeline	Performance Measures
Continue to convene the Upper Coastal Plain Broadband Task Force, and formalize the committee to better position it to track and respond to emerging broadband and digital inclusion funding opportunities and provide training opportunities.	LG, ISP, NCBIO, NCDEL, NP, U, UCPCOG	1 - 3 years	Attendance of Broadband Task Force Meetings Completion of an action plan Number of funding proposals completed
Promote computer refurbishment and donation programs to improve access to affordable devices.	CC, IEI, ISP, K-12, NCBIO, NCDEL, UCPCOG	1 - 3 years	Number of computers refurbished and donated
Support and promote existing digital inclusion programs, such as the local Lake Gaston Computer Club .	LG, ISP, NCDEL, NP, UCPCOG	1 - 3 years	Attendance rate of digital inclusion programs
Utilize senior centers, libraries, town halls, or other public centers as a resource in developing telehealth access points. Partner with pharmacies, hospitals, clinics, or other medical centers to connect and legitimize these access points. These centers can also serve as centers for digital skills training, job application assistance, and online education.	AAA, CC, DDC, EDC, IEI, ISP, LG, NCBIO, NCDEL, SBTDC, U, UCPCOG, UT	3 - 5 years	Number of public spaces that are used as telehealth access points
Host regional broadband workshops in partnership with state agencies and internet services providers to increase exposure, build partnerships, and develop a deeper understanding of this complex issue for policy makers, business owners, and residents.	CC, IEI, ISP, NCBIO, NCDEL, NP, UCPCOG, UT	1 - 3 years	Attendance of regional broadband workshops Number of partnerships built with state agencies, internet providers, business owners and residents
Partner with the NC Department of Information Technology's Broadband Infrastructure Office to develop a better understanding of the region's true connectivity needs, including mapping, outreach, or data collection assistance.	LG, NCBIO, NCDEL, UCPCOG	1 - 3 years	Completion of mapping or data collection to outline region's connectivity needs

Vision 2: The region bolsters its ability to train, develop, and foster its diverse and talented population

Initiative 3: Develop, attract, and retain residents by providing them with the skills necessary to perform well in today's and tomorrow's jobs

The Upper Coastal Plain region strives to develop, attract, retain, and prepare flexible, entrepreneurial, globally-oriented, and skilled workers with the cross-cutting competencies that enable them to be successful employees and business owners. The region must build on its educational assets, particularly community colleges, which are functioning at a high level, so workers can be trained to meet employers' specific needs. A recent example of this is Wilson Community College's Fiber Technician Certification Course, which directly responds to the broadband industry's increased demand on fiber technology to provide quality, future-proof high-speed internet connectivity. The [FBA Fiber OpTIC™ Certification](#) course at WCC is designed to equip future fiber technicians with the skills and knowledge required to install, splice, test, and maintain "Fiber to the Home" (FTTH) and Fiber to the Building (FTTB) systems. At the completion of the course, graduates will be able to install, test, and troubleshoot components for completed systems, gaining the knowledge and skills required for a professional career with organizations such as telecommunications service providers, Internet service providers and contractors.

Nash Community College's cleanroom, one of the only in the area, was developed through a partnership with Pfizer and the Golden LEAF Foundation. It enables students to learn the biopharmaceutical manufacturing trade, which is in high demand as [25 percent](#) of sterile injectable drugs administered in the United States are made at Pfizer in Rocky Mount.

As the four community colleges across the region are responding directly to employer training demand, it is important that other workforce development stakeholders across the region collaborate with and support them. The Turning Point Workforce Development Board and Area L AHEC, for example, share the goal of responding to a shortage of healthcare workers through certified pathways and targeted training programs. K-12 schools systems, small business training centers, non-profits (such as [Area L AHEC](#), [OIC](#) of Rocky Mount, and the [Center for Energy Education](#)), local governments, libraries, youth programs, and others can work together to improve access to and develop education opportunities. This network of workforce development organizations can collaborate to provide wrap-around services such as transportation, dependent care, and providing income during training programs through apprenticeships so students do not lose out on income while advancing their career.



Solar industry training at the Center for Energy Education

SWOT Analysis:

Strengths: Existing community college trade skill programs, strong partnerships among employers, K-12 systems, and community colleges

Weaknesses: Economic barriers to education, low performing schools in low-income areas, a “university-mindset” that does not always recognize the value of career/technical education

Opportunities: Increased access to education centers to limit transportation and cost burden, increased partnership between employers and K-12 systems

Threats: State policy decisions, lowering or stagnant population affecting school system investments or community college enrollment

Strategic Activities:

1. Launch workforce initiatives that align training and educational opportunities to target industries for critical, in-demand occupations, including occupations that may be in demand in the future such as off-shore wind technologies and electric vehicle component manufacturing.
2. Provide increased training support in rural population centers in areas that are connected by bike lanes, sidewalks, and in close proximity to other businesses that may support the student population and encourage new private investment.
3. Prepare youth for careers in emerging industries through career pathways and certifications, while providing them with soft skills necessary to perform well in the workforce (including teamwork, problem solving).
4. Provide assistance that address the effects of burnout and resilience on high-stress industries such as teaching, healthcare, and social services. Connecting directly with these employees to learn more about the burdens they carry, many of which were worsened by the COVID-19 pandemic, will help to identify solutions and partnership opportunities.
5. Better inform youth, unemployed, and underemployed individuals about opportunities for current and anticipated in-demand jobs by utilizing Labor Market Information.
6. Increase promotion and awareness of creative arts as an economic development strategy, considering its potential impact on tourism and cultural preservation.
7. Develop targeted training programs that provide students with appropriate, competitive pay as they train, through certified apprenticeships or novel partnerships with employers.
8. Address the unique challenges of training special populations of adult workers, including veterans, ex-offenders, and senior citizens.
9. Partner with and promote the region’s Small Business Centers to enhance small business support services.
10. Align educational opportunities and labor skills with the natural assets of the region such as agriculture.

Evaluation Framework

Vision 2: Education & Advancement - The region bolsters its ability to train, develop, and foster its diverse and talented population.

Initiative 3: Develop, attract, and retain residents by providing them with the skills necessary to perform well in today's and tomorrow's jobs

Strategy	Partners	Timeline	Performance Measures
Launch workforce initiatives that align training and educational opportunities to target industries for critical, in-demand occupations, including occupations that may be in demand in the future such as off-shore wind technologies and electric vehicle component manufacturing.	CC, K-12, EDC, EDPNC, LG, NCDOC, NCEA, TPWDB	3 - 5 years	Rate of students that graduate with technical certifications in industries that are in-demand occupations
Provide increased training support in rural population centers in areas that are connected by bike lanes, sidewalks, and in close proximity to other businesses that may support the student population and encourage new private investment.	BDC, CC, K-12, LG, MPO, RPO, TA	5 + years	Number of new training centers in areas close to population centers that are linked to multi-modal transportation options
Prepare youth for careers in emerging industries through career pathways and certifications, while providing them with soft skills necessary to perform well in the workforce (including teamwork, problem solving).	CC, K-12, NCDOC, NP, TPWDB	3 - 5 years	Number of youth that sustain jobs after hire in the region
Provide assistance that address the effects of burnout and resilience on high-stress industries such as teaching, healthcare, and social services. Connecting directly with these employees to learn more about the burdens they carry, many of which were worsened by the COVID-19 pandemic, will help to identify solutions and partnership opportunities.	AAA, CC, NCDOC, TPWDB, U	1 - 3 years	Number of programs that address burn out
Utilize Labor Market Information to better inform youth, unemployed, and underemployed individuals about opportunities for current and anticipated in-demand jobs.	CC, EDC, K-12, NCDOC, NCEA, NCRC, TPWDB	1 - 3 years	Number of advertisements for in-demand jobs that reach targeted audiences
Increase promotion and awareness of creative arts as an economic development strategy, considering its potential impact on tourism and cultural preservation.	CC, K-12, NCDOC, NCDNCR, TA, NP, TPWDB	1 - 3 years	Number of advertisements for creative arts
Develop targeted training programs that provide students with appropriate, competitive pay as they train, through certified	CC, EDC, K-12, NCDOC,	5 + years	Number of programs that provide students with comp

Vision 2, Initiative 3 Evaluation Framework Continued

Strategy	Partners	Timeline	Performance Measures
Assess the unique challenges of training special populations of adult workers, including veterans, ex-offenders, and senior citizens.	AAA, CC, EDC, K-12, NCDOC, TPWDB	1 - 3 years	Number of reports from organizations that work with special populations to assess barriers to workforce training
Promote and enhance small business support services.	CC, EDC, NCDOC, SBTDC, TPWDB	1 - 3 years	Number of individuals that receive small business support services
Align educational opportunities and labor skills with the natural assets of the region such as agriculture.	CC, K-12, NCDA, NCDOC, SBTDC, TPWDB, U	3 - 5 years	Number of youth that take agricultural courses in the region

Vision 3: Community wealth is generated throughout the Upper Coastal Plain region

Initiative 1: Improve the region’s ability to foster a diverse, thriving economy

According to the UNC School of Government’s [Economic Development Handbook](#),

economic development is the process of stimulating private investment through business attraction, creation, retention, and expansion (known as “A.C.R.E.”) activities. Private investment will lead to new jobs, higher incomes, increased tax revenues, greater wealth, and a higher standard of living. In this way, economic development is a means by which communities can rebuild, sustain, and transform themselves as needed in order to remain viable and thrive in a competitive environment. Economic development is ultimately a long-term process that involves numerous organizational players and a variety of tools and strategies. Much of what happens in the global, knowledge-based economy appears beyond the control of individual jurisdictions. Yet public officials and economic developers will do whatever they can to help their communities adapt, respond, and prosper in the midst of changing economic conditions and fiscal uncertainty. There are few quick fixes in economic development. An effective approach includes a mix of strategies and tools that is consistent with a community’s long-term vision and goals. Immediate results are more the exception than the rule. Jurisdictions that make strategic public investments over time and implement programs that look beyond the next election cycle are better positioned to withstand the ups and downs of the economy.

During the development of this CEDS, a Strategy Development Group member asked: “What is better for our rural

economy? Bringing 1 business to our area who hires 100 employees, or creating 100 1 person businesses where the owner is able to earn a living wage on their own terms. Are they of equal value?” There is no simple, or even correct, answer, because it depends on so many factors unique to the community. However, it was concluded that many smaller businesses, particularly those that pay a living wage, defined as earning a family income equivalent to 300% or more of the federal poverty line by [MyFutureNC](#), can lead to a more sustainable, diversified, and resilient economy. Large employers, particularly those who pay a living wages as well, should still be attracted and retained by regional stakeholders in areas equipped to foster large investments, such as certified industrial sites and business parks. The Strategy Development Group ultimately determined that a balanced approach, to both business attraction, retention, and to the wages we seek, is needed. The most effective way to achieve balance is through meaningful collaboration between counties, municipalities, private industry, state and federal programs, and the workforce.

SWOT Analysis:

Strengths: Interstate access, proximity to ports and CCX, local models for entrepreneurial support, Small Business Centers

Weaknesses: Difficulty for small communities to attract new employers and support small businesses, access to capital for startups, high demand for skilled workers

Opportunities: Increased partnership among economic development organizations, seek employers who provide a living wage, and reduce geographic inequities

Threats: Inflation and its impact on business investments, COVID-19 pandemic’s changes to the workforce

Strategic Activities:

1. Research and partner with existing organizations to develop a system to determine and evaluate the potential or feasibility for new industry in the region.
2. Seek funding and provide services which assist in the creation and retention of jobs in the region.
3. Market regional economic development incentives for bringing business to the region, and promote the region’s exceptional quality of place to people and businesses to help encourage the attraction and retention of both.
4. Strengthen coordination and promote greater collaboration between the North Carolina Department of Commerce, the Economic Development Partnership of North Carolina, Turning Point Workforce Development Board, local economic development entities, and other support services to address short, immediate, and long-term recovery needs of specific sectors.
5. Facilitate greater regional industrial development collaboration by developing a regional industry advisory board.
6. Monitor the development of offshore wind and encourage potential suppliers in the region to target that market.
7. Develop studies that target the region’s industry clusters, such as a forestry supply chain study.
8. Foster and support small- and mid-sized businesses by developing coworking/innovation hubs (such as [Rocky Mount Mills](#) or

the [GigEast Exchange](#)), establishing internships/externships pipelines (example: [RuralWorks!](#) and the [Golden LEAF Scholar Experience](#)), supporting cooperative models to connect industries to supply chain networks, and increasing access to start up and micro funding.

9. Promote farm incubator programs to assist new and beginning farmers with affordable access to land and farm resources such as equipment and technical assistance from experienced farmers in business methods, marketing, labeling, pricing and product sales (i.e. [Breeze Farm](#), [Lomax Farm](#), [Good Hope Farm](#)).
10. Identify capital, resources and access to land for low-resourced farmers at the start of their careers.
11. Leverage the population and economic growth of the triangle to identify new markets for farmers in the Upper Coastal Plain region.
12. Develop a regional brand to attract new residents and businesses, and market the region.
13. Analyze the region’s economic development infrastructure needs to help regional stakeholders prioritize the most strategic investments at existing or additional business and industrial sites.

Evaluation Framework			
Vision 3: Thriving Economy - Community wealth is generated throughout the Upper Coastal Plain region			
Initiative 1: Improve the region’s ability to foster a diverse, thriving economy.			
Strategy	Partners	Timeline	Performance Measures
Research and partner with existing organizations to develop a system to determine and evaluate the potential or feasibility for new industry in the region.	EDC, EDPNC, NCDOC, NCEA, NCSEA	3 - 5 years	Number of new partnerships built around finding new industries for the region
Seek funding and provide services which assist in the creation and retention of jobs in the region.	CC, EDC, LG, TPWDB, UCPCOG	1 - 3 years	Amount of funding secured to create and retain jobs in the region. Percentage of residents employed and new jobs within the region.
Market regional economic development incentives for bringing business to the region, and promote the region’s exceptional quality of place to people and businesses to help encourage the attraction and retention of both.	EDC, EDPNC, LG, TA	1 - 3 years	Number of advertisements that promote economic development incentives yearly
Strengthen coordination and promote greater collaboration between the North Carolina Department of Commerce, the Economic Development Partnership of North Carolina, Turning Point Workforce Development Board, local economic development entities, and other support services to address short, immediate, and long-term recovery needs of specific sectors.	CC, K-12, EDC, EDPNC, NCDOC, NCEA, TPWDB, U, UCPCOG	1 - 3 years	Number of meetings conducted for collaboration between state and local economic development entities

Vision 3, Initiative 1 Evaluation Framework Continued

Strategy	Partners	Timeline	Performance Measures
Facilitate greater regional industrial development collaboration by developing a regional industry advisory board.	CC, EDC, TPWDB	3 - 5 years	Creation of a regional industry advisory board
Monitor the development of offshore wind and encourage potential suppliers in the region to target that market.	EDC, EDPNC, NCDOT, NCEA, NCSEA, U	3 - 5 years	Number of suppliers in the region that sell to offshore wind companies Revenue growth for key industries
Develop studies that target the region's industry clusters, such as a forestry supply chain study.	EDC, NCDOC, NCDOT, NCEA, U, UCPCOG	1 - 3 years	Number of studies conducted on the region's industry clusters
Foster and support small- and mid-sized businesses by developing coworking/innovation hubs (such as Rocky Mount Mills or the GigEast Exchange), establishing internships/externships pipelines (example: RuralWorks! and the Golden LEAF Scholar Experience), supporting cooperative models to connect industries to supply chain networks, and increasing access to start up and micro funding.	BDC, CC, DDC, EDC, K-12, TPWDB	5+ years	Number of coworking/innovation hubs designed Number of existing firms receiving business services Expanded, equitable access to startup and micro-funding
Promote farm incubator programs to assist new and beginning farmers with affordable access to land and farm resources such as equipment and technical assistance from experienced farmers in business methods, marketing, labeling, pricing and product sales (i.e. Breeze Farm , Lomax Farm , Good Hope Farm).	CC, CE, K-12, NCDA, NP, TPWDB, U	1 - 3 years	Number of farms or educational institutions interested in a farm incubator model Number of new entrepreneurs/businesses, including young farmers and farm businesses
Identify capital, resources and access to land for low-resourced farmers at the start of their careers.	CC, FI, NCDA, U	1 - 3 years	Number of beginning farmers that receive resources to start their farms
Leverage the population and economic growth of the Triangle to identify new markets for farmers in the Upper Coastal Plain region.	CE, EDC, NCDA, NP, U, UCPCOG	3 - 5 years	Number of contracts secured from the triangle to purchase from farmers in the UCP region Amount of increased revenue for small and mid-sized farmers in the Upper Coastal Plain
Develop a regional brand to attract new residents and businesses, and market the region.	EDC, LG, TA, UCPCOG	3 - 5 years	Number of advertisements to promote regional "brand"
Analyze the region's economic development infrastructure needs to help regional stakeholders prioritize the most strategic investments at	EDC, NCDOC, NCEA, U	3 - 5 years	Number of studies or plans that identify the region's economic development infrastructure needs

Vision 3: Community wealth is generated throughout the Upper Coastal Plain region

Initiative 2: Define and promote the region's sense of place

Small towns and rural communities across Eastern North Carolina have largely been left behind in the last decade's race to create thriving, livable communities. By working together to improve a community's sense of place, the region can improve the quality of life for its citizens overall, attract new residents and visitors, collectively reimagine, improve racial equity, and reinvent public spaces at the heart of every community, and preserve its unique cultural heritage and history. According to [StrongTowns](#),

it's always been "cool" to have a charming, vibrant downtown. Now it's necessary. That's because place attracts talent and talent attracts investment. This trend has been rising for a while, but the pandemic has underscored its validity. More and more, people can work from anywhere. Increasingly they will choose where they want to live, regardless of where their employer is located—and the communities that give them what they want will be the winners.

As the state of practice in placemaking and walkability is surging nationwide, the Upper Coastal Plain region should take every opportunity to bring that benefit home. It is crucial that communities across the region seek the community's involvement and cross-sector partnerships when developing placemaking initiatives. Many of the region's small towns can start by continuing to invest in their downtowns, which are essential.

Placemaking (creating amenable, accessible public spaces), has tremendous value for our region's goals, because it:

- ◇ Stimulates job creation
- ◇ Increases equity and access
- ◇ Increases local business development
- ◇ Builds community capacity and strengthens social linkages
- ◇ Leverages the value of public investment spending, by increasing the potential for generating private investment and spinoffs near public spaces
- ◇ Addresses the lack of gathering places/community places/iconic or memorable focal points of identity for rural communities

Placemaking, in practice, has a major focus on public markets. Relevant to the goals of the region, public markets typically support the local food economy and can cheaply incubate startup retail and service businesses (food-focused and otherwise).



Stantonburg's "Seal Building" or Applewhite Lumber Building on Main Street decorated for the Holidays.

Placemaking can increase tourism region-wide as well. Tourism comes in many forms, several of which are evident across the Upper Coastal Plain region. Outdoor activities such as hiking, hunting, fishing, and boating abound across the region, particularly those surrounding the Roanoke and Tar Rivers and Lake Gaston. Heritage tourism leverages the colonial history of [Northampton](#) and [Halifax](#) Counties, including [Historic Halifax](#) and the [Roanoke Canal Trail](#). Sports tourism attracts visitors throughout the year across [Nash](#) and [Wilson](#) Counties, and unique, culturally significant experiences for visitors can be found in many of the region's communities, including the [Vollis Simpson Whirligig Park](#) in Wilson, the [Rocky Mount Mills](#) in Rocky Mount, and [Medoc Mountain State Park](#) in Halifax County. One SWOT Analysis Survey response succinctly highlighted the region's vast tourism opportunities: "Agritourism (Farm Stays, Event Venues, Farm to Table, Farm Tours, School Education Visits) Tourism (Professional Craft Arts Trail, Whisky Trails, Antiques Trail, Main Street Adventures) Resort Tourism (airbnb Development, airbnb Host Experience Development, Escape Rooms, Crafts Festivals, Art Festivals, Twilight Markets, Wine Tastings, etc.) Outdoor Economy Tourism (River Raft, Canoes, Fishing Boat Rentals, Lake Kayaks, ski, or pontoon boat rentals, guided sunset cruise or ski/wake/tub tours, duck hunting guides, back to nature wellness, yoga, glamping, corporate retreats." Simply put, tourism in North Carolina is more than beaches and mountains, and this region is well-equipped to increase economic activity through tourism.



The Owens House in Historic Halifax



Whirligig at Wilson's Vollis Simpson Whirligig Park

SWOT Analysis:

Strengths: Historic central business districts, active and creative festivals throughout the year, strong interest in historic and cultural preservation even among the region's smallest communities, riverfront tourism investments, facilities to support sports tourism

Weaknesses: Vacant buildings often with absentee owners, lack of residential development downtown, non-central location of many public centers.

Opportunities: Participation in state-sponsored Main Street program, additional state and federal funding for downtown redevelopment and transformation, eco-tourism and increased riverfront development, ample local food assets to spur local shopping and address inequities.

Threats: Increasing rent prices discouraging small businesses and residents from locating downtown, rising cost of gas and goods limiting travel and tourism revenue, crime surrounding abandoned/vacant buildings

Strategic Activities:

1. Encourage local governments to adopt a vacant building registration ordinance, and maintain an inventory of vacant buildings.
2. Work with the region's small towns to develop public incentives and realign development regulations to remove barriers to downtown infill and building reuse, and encourage mixed-use development, pop-up shops, shared merchant hubs, and other uses that encourage entrepreneurship, enable development of creative spaces, and support micro-experimentation of local crafts, goods, and services (such as food halls/food hubs or craft centers).
3. Invest in retrofits and improvements to public space in the right-of-way (e.g., sidewalks and streets) in centrally located areas to create greater amenity and usability for people and economic activity. For example, ensure that sidewalks include room for all three functional zones in commercial areas; adapt street crossings to create safety and amenity and allow better foot-traffic connections between buildings and uses; recover unused or excessive road pavement for productive use by people and activities.
4. Centrally locate public facilities such as new schools, libraries, local government administrative offices, parks, health centers to reduce health disparities, etc, and encourage private development to do the same, for example, Halifax County's [Community Education Centers](#) which were funded through the Golden LEAF Foundation.
5. Leverage the region's abundant agricultural resources by supporting local organizations with resources to host farmer's markets, community gardens, and food truck events in downtown districts.
6. Utilize the online hospitality market (airbnb, VRBO, etc) to market the region as a rural destination and a unique, affordable alternative to traditional vacation sites.
7. Increase collaboration and participation between jurisdictions along the Tar and Roanoke Rivers, and implement NC Growth's [Field Guide to Blueways: Leveraging Natural Assets for Economic Development](#).
8. Continue to develop and promote historic tourism to preserve the region's heritage and educate residents and visitors on the region's past.
9. Continue to promote sports tourism, creative arts, and downtown festivals/events as an economic driver.
10. Expand the use of successful state-sponsored programs that leverage economic development, downtown revitalization, historic preservation, and tourism such as the NC Department of Commerce's Main Street & Rural Planning Center programs, including the Downtown Associate Community and Community Economic Recovery and Resiliency programs.

Evaluation Framework

Vision 3: Thriving Economy - Community wealth is generated throughout the Upper Coastal Plain region

Initiative 2: Define and promote the region's sense of place

Strategy	Partners	Timeline	Performance Measures
Encourage local governments to adopt a vacant building registration ordinance, and maintain an inventory of vacant buildings.	DDC, LG, NCDOC, UCPCOG, UT	3 - 5 years	Number of vacant building ordinances that are adopted Number of vacant building inventories that are developed
Work with the region's small towns to develop public incentives and realign development regulations to remove barriers to downtown infill and building reuse, and encourage mixed-use development, pop-up shops, shared merchant hubs, and other uses that encourage entrepreneurship, enable development of creative spaces, and support micro-experimentation of local crafts, goods, and services (such as food halls/food hubs or craft centers).	CC, DDC, EDC, FI, NCDOC, SBTDC, UCPCOG	3 - 5 years	Number of downtown buildings and centrally located public spaces used to encourage entrepreneurship and private investment. Number of towns assisted with update of regulations to remove barriers to downtown infill and building reuse
Invest in retrofits and improvements to public space in the right-of-way (e.g., sidewalks and streets) in centrally located areas to create greater amenity and usability for people and economic activity. For example, ensure that sidewalks include room for all three functional zones in commercial areas; adapt street crossings to create safety and amenity and allow better foot-traffic connections between buildings and uses; recover unused or excessive road pavement for productive use by people and activities.	DDC, LC, NCDOC, NCDOT	3 - 5 years	Number of retrofits and improvements to public space in the right-of-way in central areas
Centrally locate public facilities such as new schools, libraries, local government administrative offices, parks, health centers to reduce health disparities, etc, and encourage private development to do the same, for example, Halifax County's Community Education Centers which were funded through the Golden LEAF Foundation.	DDC, HP, LG, NP	5 + years	Number of public facilities that are centrally located
Leverage the region's abundant agricultural resources by supporting local organizations with resources to host farmer's markets, community gardens, and food truck events in downtown districts.	DDC, LG, NCDA, NP, TA	1 - 3 years	Number of active outlets for locally grown food (community gardens, farmer's markets, etc), that are centrally located
Utilize the online hospitality market (airbnb, VRBO, etc) to market the region as a staycation destination and a unique, affordable alternative to traditional vacation sites.	DDC, LG, TA	3 - 5 years	Number of rural destinations promoted through online apps and social media

Vision 3, Initiative 2 Evaluation Framework Continued

Strategy	Partners	Timeline	Performance Measures
Increase collaboration and participation between jurisdictions along the Tar and Roanoke Rivers, and implement NC Growth's Field Guide to Blueways: Leveraging Natural Assets for Economic Development .	EDC, LG, TA, NCDNCR, UCPCOG	1 - 3 years	Number of strategies implemented from NC Growth's Field Guide to Blueways
Continue to develop and promote historic tourism to preserve the region's heritage and educate residents and visitors on the region's past.	CC, K-12, TA, NP, U	1 - 3 years	Number of historic tourism initiatives developed
Continue to promote sports tourism, creative arts, and downtown festivals/events as an economic driver.	EDC, LG, TA	1 - 3 years	Number of sports, creative arts and downtown events held
Expand the use of successful state-sponsored programs that leverage economic development, downtown revitalization, historic preservation, and tourism such as the NC Department of Commerce's Main Street & Rural Planning Center programs, including the Downtown Associate Community and Community Economic Recovery and Resiliency programs.	DDC, EDC, TA, NCDOC	3 - 5 years	Number of downtown buildings revitalized with businesses and/or residences.

Vision 3: Community wealth is generated throughout the Upper Coastal Plain region

Initiative 3: Build on the region's competitive advantages & leverage the marketplace

According to the UNC School of Government's [Economic Development Handbook](#),

virtually every state in the country has an economic development program working to recruit and retain industry, and several thousand cities, towns, and counties across the United States are vying for new business investment. With an increasing number of communities participating and making greater use of economic development strategies, North Carolina must constantly assess its competitive position and retool as needed. This requires a commitment to enhancing the programs that led to past success and a renewed effort to remain innovative in the face of new economic realities...Localities throughout the U.S. are also developing programs to become more attractive as business destinations. These include financial incentives, public-private partnerships to develop business parks and buildings, workforce development initiatives, and other programs focused on the needs of business. The result is that there are many more communities seeking business locations than there are projects. The number of large industrial recruitment projects has declined over time while the use of incentives to lure them has increased. In a given year it is estimated that, on average, some 15,000 communities vie for roughly 1,500 major industrial development projects available nationally. This means that North Carolina's communities face increasingly aggressive competition for every major business location project. North Carolina also continues to support economic

development as a way to raise the standard of living and quality of life for all of its residents, particularly those in economically distressed urban and rural areas who are at risk of being left behind in the new economy. This policy goal of promoting “widely shared prosperity” has seen renewed emphasis lately amidst a growing concern about rising inequality and the deepening economic divide between the state’s urban and rural areas.

The Upper Coastal Plain region must identify, recognize, and leverage its competitive advantages to retain existing employers and attract and grow the diversity of investment and new employers, and should also work together to foster widely shared prosperity. Developing partnerships, adopting policy, and seeking funding that leverage the region’s unique competitive advantage will lead to a more inclusive, resilient regional economy.

SWOT Analysis:

Strengths: Relatively lower cost of living compared to nearby urban areas, proximity to major transportation assets, potential to join the green economy.

Weaknesses: Population loss, lower wages, lower community wealth generation, lack of public transit.

Opportunities: New funding programs targeted at traditionally underserved areas, new partnerships, history, strong economic development organizations and addressing inequities.

Threats: Competition with neighboring regions, climate change and natural disasters, challenging regulations.

Strategic Activities:

1. Leverage I-95, which is centrally located through the region and connects us to the entire eastern seaboard, by locating industrial sites and business parks in close proximity, as well as I-87 and I-795, and encourage NCDOT to develop the remainder of US-64 to I-87 and the remainder of US-264 to I-587.
2. Build upon Amtrak’s passenger rail connections across the region, which currently operates stations in Rocky Mount and Wilson, and encourage the development of a new passenger rail station in Weldon.
3. Further connect parts of the region to the Research Triangle Park, and market it as a more affordable alternative to the Raleigh/Durham area in easy-to-reach, close proximity to its resources, by improving public transit between the region and the triangle and by collaborating with triangle industry leaders.



[Rocky Mount Wilson Airport \(RWI\)](#) located in Nash County. The RWI Airport Authority is appointed by the Cities of Rocky Mount, Tarboro, and Wilson and Edgecombe, Nash, and Wilson Counties.

4. Preserve the region's abundant natural assets through thoughtful zoning and land-use decisions, protection of the environment and farmland, establishment of additional natural areas, increased outdoor recreation opportunities, and well-managed forests.
5. Leverage the region's proximity to the Ports of North Carolina in Wilmington and Morehead City and the Port of Virginia in Norfolk by strengthening physical connections and studying supply chain needs and potential.
6. Invest in the region's two airports, the Halifax-Northampton Regional Airport in Halifax and the Rocky Mount-Wilson Airport in Sharpsburg, to further serve private pilots and industry.
7. Recognize and leverage the region's potential to be a hub for clean energy alternatives and electric vehicle infrastructure.
8. Build upon the region's agricultural sector by linking to logistics hub, with vertical integration of value chains, while taking advantage of strong interest in the healthy, local food and farm-to-table movement.
9. Establish an [Agricultural Development and Farm Preservation Trust Fund](#) in counties that development is likely to occur, to use as a funding mechanism for efforts such as conservation easements, capital investment for food system related businesses, and funding for other food and ag-related projects

Evaluation Framework

Vision 3: Thriving Economy - Community wealth is generated throughout the Upper Coastal Plain region

Initiative 3: Build on the region's competitive advantages & leverage the marketplace

Strategy	Partners	Timeline	Performance Measures
Leverage I-95, which is centrally located through the region and connects us to the entire eastern seaboard, by locating industrial sites and business parks in close proximity, as well as I-87 and I-795, and encourage NCDOT to develop the remainder of US-64 to I-87 and the remainder of US-264 to I-587.	EDC, LG, NCDOT, NCEA, UCPCOG	5 + years	Number of industrial sites located near I-95 and I-87 The development of the remainder of US-64 and US-264
Build upon Amtrak's passenger rail connections across the region, which currently operates stations in Rocky Mount and Wilson, and encourage the development of a new passenger rail station in Weldon.	EDC, LG, NCDOT	3 - 5 years	The creation of a passenger rail state in Weldon
Further connect parts of the region to the Research Triangle Park, and market it as a more affordable alternative to the Raleigh/Durham area in easy-to-reach, close proximity to its resources, by improving public transit between the region and the triangle and by collaborating with triangle industry leaders.	CC, K-12, EDC, EDPNC, LG, NCDOT, TA	1 - 3 years	Number of partnerships developed amongst the region's industry leaders Number of initiatives to connect the region to the Research Triangle

Vision 3, Initiative 3 Evaluation Framework Continued

Strategy	Partners	Timeline	Performance Measures
Preserve the region's abundant natural assets through thoughtful zoning and land-use decisions, protection of the environment and farmland, establishment of additional natural areas, increased outdoor recreation opportunities, and well-managed forests.	LG, SOG, UCPCOG	3 - 5 years	Number of ordinance and zoning decisions that are implemented to protect the environment and farmland
Leverage the region's proximity to the Ports of North Carolina in Wilmington and Morehead City and the Port of Virginia in Norfolk by strengthening physical connections and studying supply chain needs and potential.	EDC, EDPNC, LG, NCDOT, UCPCOG, U	5 + years	Number of studies conducted on supply chain needs to connect the region with NC ports
Invest in the region's two airports, the Halifax-Northampton Regional Airport in Halifax and the Rocky Mount-Wilson Airport in Sharpsburg, to further serve private pilots and industry.	EDC, LG, NCDOT	5 + years	Amount of investment in the region's airports
Recognize and leverage the region's potential to be a hub for clean energy alternatives and electric vehicle infrastructure.	EDC, NCDOT, NCSEA, NP, UCPCOG	3 - 5 years	Additional research is conducted to determine the region's potential, funding opportunities are considered.
Build upon the region's agricultural sector by linking to food hubs with vertical integration of value chains, while taking advantage of strong interest in the healthy, local food and farm-to-table movement.	CC, EDC, K-12, NCDA, NP, UCPCOG	3 - 5 years	Number of partnerships between farmers and their local food hubs and between food hubs and buyers

Acknowledgements

Strategy Development Group

A Better Chance, A Better Community (ABC2)	Nash County
Area L AHEC	Nash County Economic Development
Carolinas Gateway Partnership	North Carolina Department of Commerce
Center for Energy Education (C4EE)	North Carolina State University
Choanoke Area Development Association (CADA)	Northampton Chamber of Commerce
City of Roanoke Rapids	Northampton County
City of Rocky Mount	Peanut Belt Rural Planning Organization
City of Wilson	Project Momentum
CloudWyze, Inc.	Roanoke Rapids Sanitary District
Community Medicine Foundation	Rocky Mount Chamber of Commerce
Diversified Opportunities	Rocky Mount Wilson Airport Authority
Down East Partnership for Children	Rural Health Group
Economic Development Partnership of North Carolina	Town of Bailey
Edgecombe County	Town of Nashville
Edgecombe County Public Schools	Town of Sims
Greenlight Community Broadband	Turning Point Workforce Development Board
Halifax Community College	Twin Counties CoLab
Halifax County	Upper Coastal Plain Area Agency on Aging
Halifax County Council on Aging	Upper Coastal Plain Rural Planning Organization
Halifax Horizons	Wilson Community College
Living Better Life, Inc.	Wilson County
MB Consulting	Wilson County Chamber of Commerce
Nash Community College SBC	

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Appendix

Evaluation Framework Agency Acronyms

BDC - Upper Coastal Plain Business Development Center	NCDEQ - North Carolina Department of Environmental Quality
CC - Community Colleges	NCDNCR - North Carolina Department of Natural & Cultural Resources
CE - Cooperative Extension at NCSU	NCDOC - North Carolina Department of Commerce
DDC - Downtown Development Corporations & supporting groups	NCDOT - North Carolina Department of Transportation
DEPC - Down East Partnership for Children	NCEA - NCEast Alliance
EDC - Local/Regional Economic Developers	NCHFA - North Carolina Housing Finance Agency
EDPNC - Economic Development Partnership of North Carolina	NCLM - North Carolina League of Municipalities
FI - Financial Institutions	NCRC - North Carolina Rural Center
HP - Healthcare Providers	NCSEA - North Carolina Sustainable Energy Association
IEI - Institute for Emerging Issues at North Carolina State University	NP - Non-profits (State, Regional, and Local)
ISP - Internet Service Providers	RPO - Rural (Transportation) Planning Organization
K-12 - Elementary through high-school educational systems	SBTDC - North Carolina Small Business Technology Development Center
LG - Local Governments	SOG - University of North Carolina School of Government
MPO - Metropolitan (Transportation) Planning Organization	TA - Tourism Agents/Authorities (local, state, regional)
NCACC - North Carolina Association of County Commissioners	TPWDB - Turning Point Workforce Development Board
NCBIO - North Carolina Broadband Infrastructure Office	U - Universities
NCDA - North Carolina Department of Agriculture	UCPCOG - Upper Coastal Plain Council of Governments
NCDEL - North Carolina Office of Digital Equity and Literacy	UT - Electric Utility Provider

Cover Page Photos:

Top right: Weldon Mills Distillery in Weldon (photo by Visit Halifax (visithalifax.com))

Left: Kayak along the Tar River (Photo by Tar River Life (tarriverlife.com/))

Bottom right: Northampton Peanut in Severn (photo by UCPCOG)

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