



Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy

Five Year Plan 2022-2026

Southeast Alabama Economic Development District Barbour, Coffee, Covington, Dale, Geneva, Henry and Houston Counties



October 2022



The Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy Overview.....	3
Executive Summary.....	5
Chapter 1: CEDS Regional Analysis.....	9
People	12
Income	12
Education.....	14
Workforce.....	15
Infrastructure.....	17
Public Safety and Healthcare.....	24
Geography, Environment, and Resources.....	25
Military Relations.....	29
Clusters.....	31
Chapter 2: SWOT Analysis.....	33
Economic Development Goals.....	35
Chapter 3: CEDS Strategic Direction and Plan of Action	36
Goals and Objectives.....	36
Plan of Action.....	40
Chapter 4: Economic Resilience.....	42
Chapter 5: Opportunity Zones.....	45
Chapter 6: Implementation and Performance Measures.....	49
CEDS Strategic Committee.....	50



The Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy Overview

This is the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) Five-Year Plan for the Southeast Alabama Regional Planning and Development Commission (SEARP&DC) prepared in accordance with U.S. Economic Development Administration guidelines. The CEDS contributes to effective economic development in America's communities and regions through a locally-based, regionally-driven economic development planning process. The CEDS should successfully serve as a means to engage community leaders, leverage the involvement of the private sector, and establish a blueprint for regional collaboration.

The CEDS planning process is intended to build capacity and guide the economic prosperity and resiliency throughout the multi-county district for area residents. The CEDS planning process provides the opportunity for individuals, organizations, local governments, institutes of learning and private industry to engage in meaningful conversation and debate about what capacity building efforts would best serve economic development in the region.

A CEDS is required for designation by EDA as an Economic Development District (EDD). Furthermore, regions must update their CEDS at least every five years to qualify for EDA assistance under the Public Works and Economic Adjustment Assistance programs. The CEDS is a document and a process of analysis, planning, and taking action to generate new economic development activity and improve community infrastructure and services.

The purpose of the CEDS is to establish a process that will help create jobs, attract public and private investments, promote a more stable and diversified economy, and improve living conditions in the region. Having this plan in place allows for better coordination among individuals, organizations, local governments and private industries concerned with economic development. This strategy is based upon a set of specific goals and objectives designed to address various economic challenges of the region, prepared through the local planning process. The regional strategy was developed with broad-based and diverse community participation that addresses the economic problems and potential for the area.

The SEARP&DC along with the CEDS committee developed the CEDS Five-Year Plan 2022-2027. The development of the five-year CEDS was a multi-faceted process, involving input from community, businesses, government, human and health services, and the financial sector, compiled in an effort to identify the region's priorities and overseeing implementation of the plan. The planning process included the development of a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) survey that was completed by partners throughout the region in order to prepare the SWOT analysis and develop the action plan by reviewing and updating existing goals, objectives and action.

The CEDS document consists of the following:

1. *CEDS Regional Analysis*: A summary background of the economic conditions of the region;
2. *SWOT Analysis*: An analysis of regional strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats;



3. *CEDS Action Plan*: The strategic direction and action plan developed from the SWOT analysis and other regional plans in the development of the CEDS;
4. *Economic Resilience*: An approach for becoming better prepared for future disasters;
5. *Opportunity Zones*: Low income rural areas in the Region where private-sector investments can foster; and,
6. *CEDS Implementation and Performance Measures*: An outline of SEARPDPC's implementation plan and performance measures towards meeting the CEDS overall goals.



Executive Summary

The Southeast Alabama Regional Planning and Development Commission (SEARP&DC) was created in June 1969 and is located in the extreme Southeast corner of Alabama. Elected officials and civic leaders initiated action to join several counties together in a common cause to promote and improve the economic status of all citizens residing in the six-county area. The counties consisted of Barbour, Coffee, Dale, Geneva, Henry and Houston, and the initial byline of the organization was “Planning Today to Preclude Problems of Tomorrow”.

The organization was originally known as the Southeast Alabama Economic Development District. The name was changed to the Southeast Alabama Regional Planning and Development Commission with the addition of Covington County in 1971. The commission now consists of a seven county area and is dedicated to the theme of “Progress through Planning”.



SEARP&DC has a staff of 144 individuals: Executive Director; Community and Economic Development Director; Community and Economic Development Specialist; Executive Secretary; Chief Financial Officer, Accountant and 2 fiscal assistants; IT Director; IT Technician; Human Resources Director; 17 employees in the Transportation Department, including Director; 49 employees in the Senior Aides Department, including Director; and 67 employees in the Early and Head Start Department, including Director.

Services provided by SEARP&DC include:

- Grant Services – SEARP&DC assist communities in the district with grant writing and grant administration. SEARP&DC has written and administered hundreds of state and federally-funded grant projects. The Economic and Community Development Departments assist communities with Community Development Block Grants, Economic Development Administration grants, Economic Development Infrastructure grants, Planning Fund grants, USDA/Rural Development grants, FEMA grants including Hazard Mitigation, Firefighter Assistance and Law Enforcement grants, Land and Water Conservation Fund and Recreational Trail grants, and Industrial Access grants.
- Economic Development – The Economic Development Department provides vital development assistance through various grant and small business loan programs which assist start-up and expanding businesses and industries create permanent jobs for the region. SEARP&DC manages 3 types of small business loan programs including the Intermediary Relending Program, Revolving Loan Fund and Microloan Program.



- Community Development – The Community Development Department provides a variety of planning services including: comprehensive planning, zoning ordinance creation and revision, transportation planning, land use planning, subdivision regulation planning and mapping services.
- Rural Planning Organization (RPO) – SEARP&DC oversees the Southeast Alabama RPO, which is a consultation process that emphasizes communication and transmittal of information between ALDOT and rural areas of the state for rural transportation planning. The last federal transportation bill, SAFETEA-LU, has provisions for states to allow consultation for rural transportation planning outside of urbanized areas.
- Head Start and Early Head Start– SEARP&DC operates 5 Head Start centers and 2 Early Head Start centers within the region. This effort directly touches the lives of over 300 children and their families. Head Start works toward bringing about a greater degree of social competence in pre-school age children of low income families. The program provides two meals and one snack per day and yearly medical, dental, eye and mental health examinations.
- Senior Employment Program – The Senior Employment Program places senior adults in host agencies throughout the region. Currently, SEARP&DC serves over 80 senior adults. Senior adults are afforded opportunities for growth, skill enhancement and economic independence. Participants must be age 55 or older and incomes based on the federal poverty level.
- Wiregrass Transit Authority – WTA provides transportation services to the general public in Dothan and Houston County. WTA also provides contract transportation to social services agencies within the Houston County and Dothan area.

SEARP&DC is governed by a 42-member Board of Directors, seven of which are at-large members. Each county in the EDD is represented by five directors. The Executive Director is responsible for the overall administration of all departments and personnel. SEARP&DC also has a Fiscal Department that is responsible for tracking and monitoring all costs.

SEARP&DC is a designated Economic Development District. Economic Development Districts are designated by EDA to create and retain full-time permanent jobs and increase income for the unemployed and underemployed in areas of economic distress. The following Five-Year Plan was a collaboration of over 40 people who participated in the development of this strategy.

SEARP&DC leads the CEDS process and adopts the plan on behalf of the region. SEARP&DC includes 7 counties and 57 towns/cities in the southeast corner of Alabama. The SEARP&DC Board of Directors together with local mayors, county commission chairpersons and economic development corporations act as the CEDS Strategy Committee.

The role of the CEDS Committee is to provide the SEARP&DC Region with a Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy and project priorities. The CEDS process is driven by the CEDS Committee and involves setting goals, examining options to reach them, and the selection



of courses of action. It is a continuous process designed to guide the economic growth of the Region.

The purpose of the CEDS Planning Process is to think and organize the activities required to achieve a desired goal. Planning involves the creation and maintenance of a plan. The planning process also includes forecasting or predicting what the future will look like. The development of the goals, strategies, and task lists was undertaken by the CEDS Committee to achieve the objectives of the CEDS.

Finally, there was a 30-day public comment period. The public had the opportunity to comment on the planning process as well as the priority projects. The draft report was posted on SEAR&PDC's website, www.searpgdc.org. There were no public comments received. The completed CEDS document was presented to the SEAR&PDC Board of Directors and adopted.

CEDS Regional Analysis: Chapter 1 draws attention to trends that make the Southeast Alabama Regional Planning and Development Commission Economic Development District unique. The regional analysis consists of sets of methods that allow us to measure the dimensions and dynamics of the SEAR&PDC population. Demographic analysis estimates are often considered a reliable standard for judging the accuracy of the census information gathered at any time. In the labor force, demographic analysis is used to estimate sizes and flows of populations of workers. Demographic analysis is used in a wide variety of contexts.

CEDS SWOT Analysis: Chapter 2 describes the SWOT analysis. Staff prepared a SWOT survey and submitted to mayors, county commissioners, economic developers, institutions of higher learning, chambers of commerce, utilities, etc. The SWOT was completed to identify what the Region does well, needs work on, challenges and opportunities. The regional economic development goals are the foundation of the CEDS. The CEDS Committee developed 5 goals.

CEDS Strategic Direction and Plan of Action: Chapter 3 is the economic development strategy for the Southeast Alabama Regional Planning and Development Commission Economic Development District over the next five years. Chapter 3 includes the vision statement which communicates both the purpose and values of the region. The CEDS Strategic Direction focuses on five regional goals, objectives and strategies. The CEDS Plan of Action is derived from these five regional goals.

Economic Resilience: Chapter 4 highlights Economic Resilience by discussing the framework for Economic Resilience that provides an approach for becoming better prepared for future disasters, including economic, manmade and natural, recovering from disasters, and then transitioning back to steady-state.

Opportunity Zones: Chapter 5 highlights the eight Low-Income Community Opportunity Zones in the Southeast Alabama Region. This program was created to attract investors to invest funds in low-income areas.

Implementation and Performance Measures: Chapter 6 outlines the plan for implementation and for the annual evaluation of specific projects listed and the CEDS as a whole. Quantitative and qualitative measures have been identified for the projects.



In summary, as you will read the Southeast Alabama Regional Planning and Development Commission region faces many of the same problems found in other rural areas including, loss of manufacturing jobs, lack of infrastructure, impacts of service industry jobs that do not pay living wages, a culture that is reliant on grant assistance in solving local problems, increasing operating costs for businesses and an aging workforce.

However, the SEARP&DC region has a lot to offer including a well-maintained state road network, numerous natural resources, effective training and education alignments. The level of leadership is a strength to the region and essential to creating a more economically independent region. The region has a foundation of assistance organizations that facilitate the growth and retention of local businesses and both communication and coordination are increasing. Coordination of their efforts will insure that the greatest possible progress is made toward shared and complimentary goals. The process of formulating the CEDS, and then using it as a resource into the future, will aid that coordination.



CHAPTER 1 CEDS REGIONAL ANALYSIS

The Southeast Alabama Regional Planning and Development Commission Region consists of the seven most southeastern counties of Alabama. The counties are Barbour, Coffee, Covington, Dale, Geneva, Henry, and Houston. These counties include fifty-seven towns or cities. The land area of the Southeast Alabama Region is 3,148,507 acres and is predominately rural.

Population

The population of the Southeast Alabama Region is estimated at 311,709 in 2021. Below are tables that show the population of the seven counties and the fifty-seven towns or cities in the Southeast Alabama Region.

	<i>Barbour County</i>			
JURISDICTION	2010	2020	% CHANGE 10-20	2021
BARBOUR COUNTY	27,457	25,223	-8.1%	24,964
BAKER HILL	279	211	-24.3%	207
BLUE SPRINGS	96	84	-12.5%	81
CLAYTON	3,008	2,265	-24.7%	2,273
CLIO	1,399	1,220	-12.8%	1,203
EUFAULA	13,137	12,882	-1.9%	12,675
LOUISVILLE	519	395	-23.9%	391

	<i>Coffee County</i>			
JURISDICTION	2010	2020	% CHANGE 10-20	2021
COFFEE COUNTY	49,948	53,465	7.0%	54,174
ELBA	3,940	3,508	-11.0%	3,401
ENTERPRISE	26,562	28,711	8.1%	29,395
KINSTON	540	580	-7.4%	587
NEW BROCKTON	1,146	1,428	24.6%	1,437

	<i>Covington County</i>			
JURISDICTION	2010	2020	% CHANGE 10-20	2021
COVINGTON COUNTY	37,631	37,570	-0.2%	37,524
ANDALUSIA	8,794	8,805	0.1%	8,715
BABBIE	627	625	-0.3%	633
CAROLINA	248	286	15.3%	290
FLORALA	1,964	1,923	-2.1%	1,906
GANTT	241	196	-18.7%	198
HEATH	249	236	-5.2%	238
HORN HILL	235	207	-11.9%	209
LIBERTYVILLE	106	108	-4.7%	109
LOCKHART	548	445	-18.8%	445



ONYCHA	208	167	-19.7%	168
OPP	6,607	6,771	2.5%	6,653
RED LEVEL	556	432	-22.3%	431
RIVER FALLS	616	479	-22.2%	485
SANFORD	269	257	-4.5%	258

Dale County				
JURISDICTION	2010	2020	% CHANGE 10-20	2021
DALE COUNTY	49,129	49,326	0.4%	49,342
ARITON	772	662	-14.3%	655
CLAYHATCHEE	501	466	-7.0%	470
DALEVILLE	4,653	4,866	4.6%	4,862
GRIMES	459	573	24.8%	576
LEVEL PLAINS	1,544	1,825	18.2%	1,821
MIDLAND CITY	1,703	2,239	31.5%	2,264
NAPIER FIELD	404	409	1.2%	409
NEWTON	1,708	1,607	-5.9%	1,607
OZARK	15,119	14,368	-5.0%	14,313
PINCKARD	667	582	-12.7%	587

Geneva County				
JURISDICTION	2010	2020	% CHANGE 10-20	2021
GENEVA COUNTY	25,764	26,659	3.5%	26,701
BLACK	202	221	9.4%	226
COFFEE SPRINGS	251	206	-17.9%	208
GENEVA	4,388	4,245	-3.2%	4,185
HARTFORD	2,369	2,651	11.9%	2,651
MALVERN	1,215	1,536	26.4%	1,543
SAMSON	2,071	1,874	-9.5%	1,860
SLOCOMB	2,052	2,082	1.5%	2,094

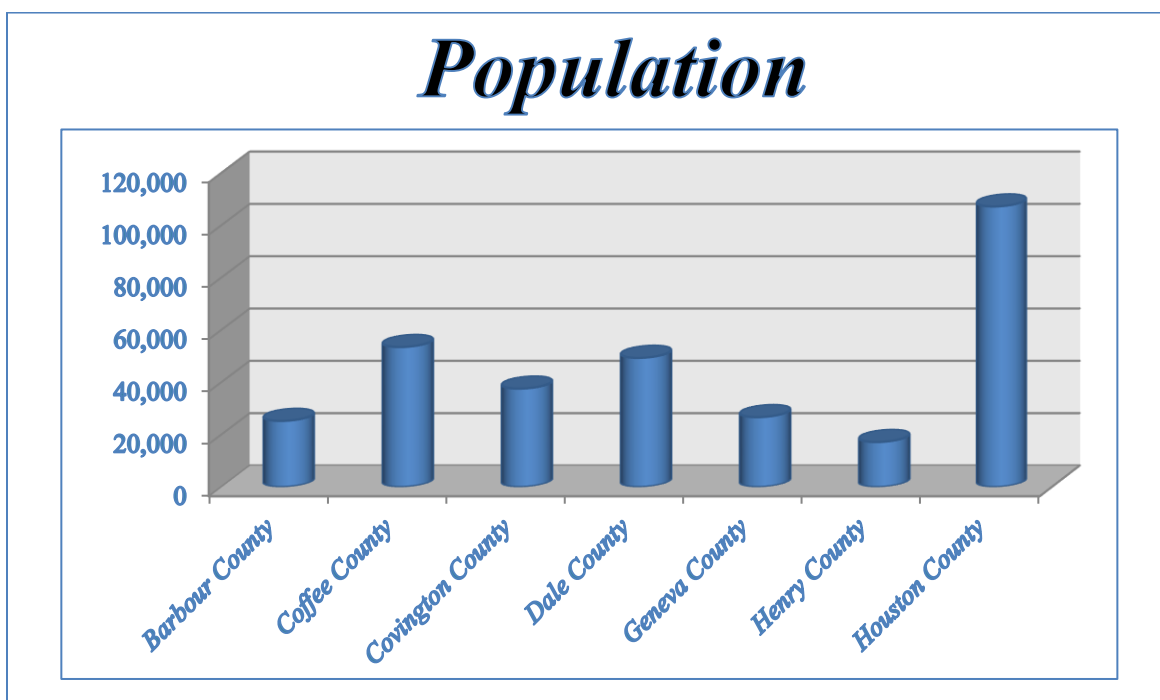
Henry County				
JURISDICTION	2010	2020	% CHANGE 10-20	2021
HENRY COUNTY	16,310	17,146	5.1%	17,459
ABBEVILLE	2,987	2,358	-21.0%	2,379
HALEBURG	108	112	3.7%	115
HEADLAND	3,523	4,973	41.2%	5,145
NEWVILLE	553	544	-1.6	549

Houston County				
JURISDICTION	2010	2020	% CHANGE 10-20	2021
HOUSTON COUNTY	88,787	107,202	20.7%	107,458
ASHFORD	1,853	2,246	21.2%	2,247



AVON	466	465	-0.2%	466
COLUMBIA	804	690	-14.2%	690
COTTONWOOD	1,170	1,048	-10.4%	1,046
COWARTS	1,546	1,930	24.8%	1,953
DOTHAN	57,737	71,072	23.1%	71,175
GORDON	408	294	-27.9%	292
KINSEY	1,796	2,203	22.7%	2,243
MADRID	303	265	-12.5%	265
REHOBETH	993	1,791	80.3%	1,821
TAYLOR	1,898	2,262	19.2%	2,268
WEBB	1,298	1,270	-2.2%	1,283

As seen in the above tables, the counties with growth in population since 2010 are Coffee, Dale, Geneva, Henry, and Houston Counties. The Southeast Alabama Region experienced growth of 28.4% since 2010. To see a comparison, the below graph of the population of the Region's counties was created.





Characteristics of the Region's population are shown in the below table. In the Region, 66.9 percent of the people are white, 5.2 percent are Hispanic or Latino, and 50.7 percent are females. The median age of the Southeast Alabama Region is 41.0, which is higher than Alabama's median age of 38.9.

	<i>Barbour</i>	<i>Coffee</i>	<i>Covington</i>	<i>Dale</i>	<i>Geneva</i>	<i>Henry</i>	<i>Houston</i>	<i>Region</i>	<i>Alabama</i>
Population (2020)	25,223	53,465	37,570	49,326	26,659	17,146	107,202	316,591	5,024,279
White	11,086	35,759	30,657	32,602	21,654	11,842	68,251	211,851	3,171,351
Black	11,850	8,643	4,563	10,100	2,231	4,232	28,232	69,851	1,288,159
Asian	103	892	240	648	86	73	1,260	3,302	75,918
American Indian/Alaskan Native	58	405	140	217	166	50	321	1,357	23,119
Native Hawaiian/ Other Pacific Islander	0	57	0	42	7	0	59	165	2,612
Other	1,573	5,082	725	3,418	1,368	383	4,835	17,384	278,502
Two of More Races	553	2,627	1,245	2,299	1,147	566	4,244	12,681	184,618
Hispanic or Latino	1,510	4,887	654	3,254	1,296	334	4,481	16,416	264,047
Non Hispanic or Latino	23,713	48,578	36,916	46,072	25,363	16,812	102,721	300,175	4,760,232
Male %	53.1%	49.4%	49.2%	49.2%	49.0%	48.1%	47.9%	49.3%	48.4%
Female %	46.9%	50.6%	51.3%	50.8%	51.0%	51.9%	52.1%	50.7%	51.6%
Median Age	39.9	39.3	43.9	37.5	42.4	44.1	39.8	41.0	38.9

The total number of households in the Southeast Alabama Region is 147,872. The number of occupied households for each county in the region is as follows: Barbour County – 9,677; Coffee County – 21,263; Covington County – 15,515; Dale County – 20,159; Geneva County – 10,874; Henry County – 7,169; and Houston County – 44,368.

Income

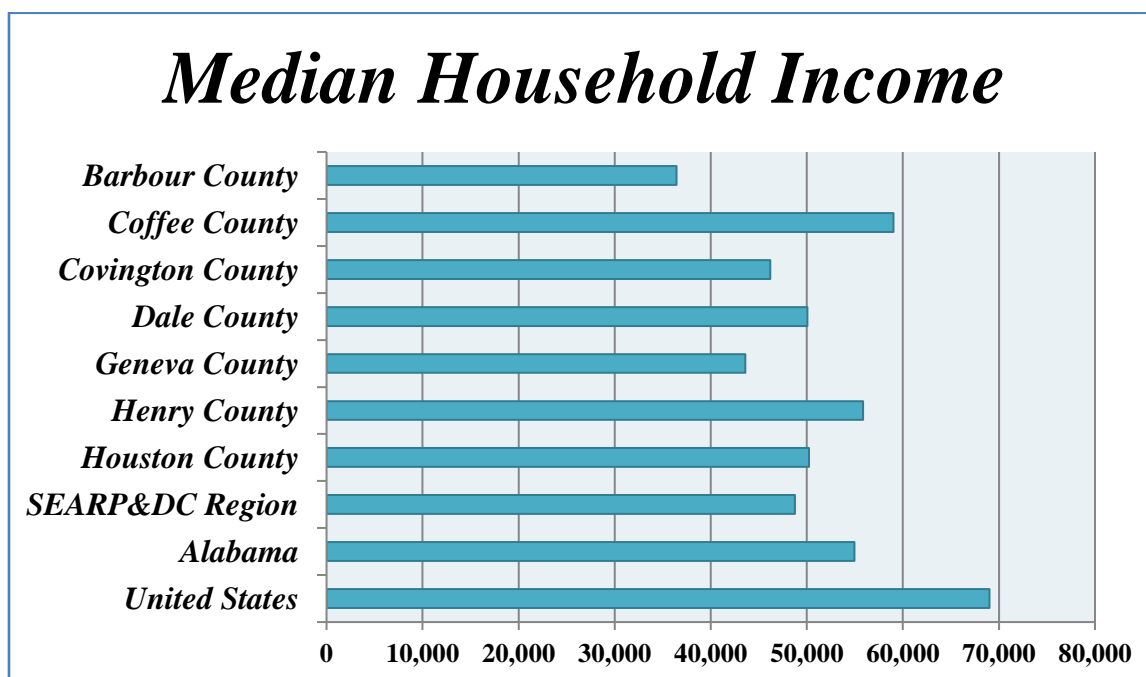
Per Capita Income is the average income or income per person and is a measure of mean income within an economic aggregate, such as a county or city. Per Capita Income is often used as a measure of wealth of the population of an area in comparison to other areas. The following table shows the per capita income for the Southeast Alabama Region's counties, Alabama, and the United States.



<i>Per Capita Income</i>	
Barbour County	\$21,325
Coffee County	\$29,688
Covington County	\$26,138
Dale County	\$26,469
Geneva County	\$23,338
Henry County	\$28,304
Houston County	\$29,388
Southeast Alabama Region	\$26,379
Alabama	\$30,458
United States	\$37,638

All of the counties in the Southeast Alabama Region have a per capita income lower than that of Alabama. All of the counties in the Region have a per capita income lower than the United States.

The Southeast Alabama Region's median household income is \$48,767, which is lower than that of Alabama and the United States. This was calculated by averaging the seven counties' median household income. However, Coffee County has a median household income higher than Alabama. All counties in the Region have lower median household incomes than the United States. The graph below shows the comparison.



The Poverty Rate is the percentage of people who are below poverty. Poverty is the state of privation or lack of usual or socially acceptable amount of money or material possessions. The



United States Poverty Rate in 2021 was 12.6%. The Alabama Poverty Rate in 2021 was 15.8%. As seen in the following table, the poverty rates for Barbour County, Coffee County, Covington County, Dale County, Geneva County, and Houston County are higher than the United States Poverty Rate and the Alabama Poverty Rate. The Southeast Alabama Region Poverty Rate of 19.0% is higher than both also.

<i>Poverty Rate</i>	
<i>Barbour County</i>	26.5%
<i>Coffee County</i>	15.9%
<i>Covington County</i>	18.0%
<i>Dale County</i>	16.7%
<i>Geneva County</i>	23.5%
<i>Henry County</i>	14.4%
<i>Houston County</i>	17.7%
<i>Southeast Alabama Region</i>	19.0%
<i>Alabama</i>	15.8%
<i>United States</i>	12.6%

Education

The percentage of individuals 25 years old and older with a high school diploma or higher in the Southeast Alabama Region is 83.4%; which is lower than the Alabama percentage of 87.4% and the United States percentage of 88.9%. Thus 16.6% of the Region's individuals 25 years and older do not have a diploma or equivalent. The following table gives the percentages for each county.

<i>Percentage of Individuals 25 years old and older with High School Diploma or More</i>	
<i>Barbour County</i>	75.7%
<i>Coffee County</i>	86.4%
<i>Covington County</i>	85.2%
<i>Dale County</i>	84.8%
<i>Geneva County</i>	82.5%
<i>Henry County</i>	81.3%
<i>Houston County</i>	87.8%
<i>Southeast Alabama Region</i>	83.4%
<i>Alabama</i>	87.4%
<i>United States</i>	88.9%

The Southeast Alabama Region's education system is comprised of approximately 108 public schools and 33 private schools. Also, 7 colleges are located in the Region as seen below.



Colleges in SOUTHEAST ALABAMA Region	
<u>College</u>	<u>County</u>
<i>George C. Wallace Community College</i>	<i>Barbour County and Houston County</i>
<i>Enterprise State Community College</i>	<i>Coffee County</i>
<i>Lurleen B. Wallace Community College</i>	<i>Covington County</i>
<i>Alabama Aviation College</i>	<i>Dale County</i>
<i>Troy University</i>	<i>Houston County</i>
<i>Alabama College of Osteopathic Medicine</i>	<i>Houston County</i>

Workforce

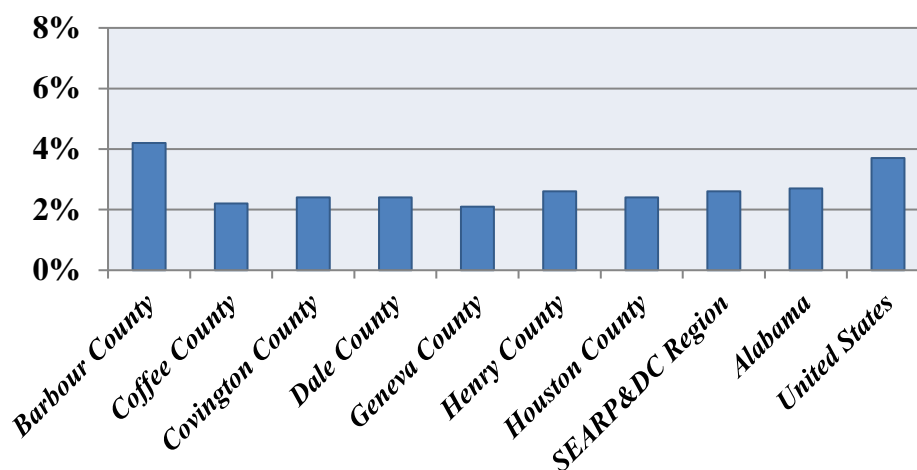
The Southeast Alabama Region has a total civilian labor force available of 133,895. The Region's current average unemployment rate is 2.6%, which is lower than the unemployment rate of Alabama (2.7%) and the United States (3.7%). The average yearly wage for the Region is \$35,703. The top three industry sectors ranked by greatest employment for the Southeast Alabama Region are Manufacturing, Retail Trade, and Health Care and Social Assistance. These three sectors employ 42,047 people in the Southeast Alabama Region. Tables and charts below show the labor force, unemployment rate, average yearly wage, and top three sectors of each county located in the Southeast Alabama Region.

	<i>Civilian Labor Force</i>	<i>Current Unemployment Rate</i>	<i>2022 Average Unemployment Rate</i>	<i>Unemployment Rate One Year Ago</i>
<i>Barbour County</i>	8,724	4.2%	4.4%	4.2%
<i>Coffee County</i>	22,260	2.2%	2.6%	2.3%
<i>Covington County</i>	15,750	2.4%	2.6%	2.3%
<i>Dale County</i>	21,362	2.4%	2.7%	2.5%
<i>Geneva County</i>	11,304	2.1%	2.5%	2.2%
<i>Henry County</i>	7,019	2.6%	2.8%	2.4%
<i>Houston County</i>	47,476	2.4%	2.7%	2.5%
<i>Southeast Alabama Region</i>	133,895	2.6%	2.9%	2.6%

As seen from the previous table, the Southeast Alabama Region's current unemployment rate is the same as the same time last year; whereas, Alabama's unemployment rate has decreased by 0.4% and the United States' unemployment rate has decreased by 0.5% in the last year.



Unemployment Rate



Average Annual Wage	
Barbour County	\$40,256
Coffee County	\$40,342
Covington County	\$41,361
Dale County	\$58,252
Geneva County	\$36,563
Henry County	\$49,182
Houston County	\$48,581
Southeast Alabama Region	\$44,934
Alabama	\$54,358
United States	\$67,599

As seen from the previous table, the average annual wage of the Southeast Alabama Region of \$44,934 is lower than that of Alabama and the United States.

Top 3 Industry Sectors			
Barbour County	Manufacturing	Retail Trade	Public Administration
Coffee County	Manufacturing	Retail Trade	Health Care and Social Services
Covington County	Manufacturing	Retail Trade	Health Care and Social Services
Dale County	Manufacturing	Public Administration	Retail Trade
Geneva County	Retail Trade	Manufacturing	Public Administration
Henry County	Manufacturing	Retail Trade	Transportation & Warehousing



Houston County	Retail Trade	Health Care and Social Services	Accommodation and Food Services
Southeast Alabama Region	Government	Manufacturing	Retail Trade

Alabama's top three industry sectors are Health Care and Social Services, Manufacturing, and Retail Trade. The Southeast Alabama Region has the same top three industry sectors. Total average employment of all industries in the Southeast Alabama Region is 130,603. The following table shows the average employment of several industries in the Southeast Alabama Region.

Average Employment	
Retail Trade	15,910
Manufacturing	12,576
Health Care and Social Services	11,283
Accommodation and Food Services	4,949
Public Administration	3,635

Infrastructure

Southeast Alabama Region's infrastructure is examined in this section of the CEDS. The Region's water supply and sewer facilities, business and manufacturing space, telecommunications/ broadband, transportation and energy distribution systems are reviewed.

➤ Water and Sewer Facilities

The following table shows communities throughout the Region that have and do not have community water and sewer services. Most communities have received state and federal funding through the years to install new infrastructure or improve existing infrastructure including water tanks and wells, sewage treatment plants, water and sewer mains and streets. Most communities simply cannot afford to construct or maintain infrastructure without assistance from state and federal agencies. The majority of the available funding is awarded on a competitive basis and some communities do not meet the eligibility requirements for assistance. Most of the communities in the Region are in need of infrastructure improvements, including street paving and resurfacing. More funding is needed to meet these needs throughout the Region.

Water and Sewer Facilities by County Source: Communities

Barbour County	Water	Sewer
Baker Hill	Yes	No
Blue Springs	Yes	No
Clayton	Yes	Yes
Clio	Yes	Yes
Eufaula	Yes	Yes
Louisville	Yes	Yes

Covington County	Water	Sewer
Andalusia	Yes	Yes

Coffee County	Water	Sewer
Elba	Yes	Yes
Enterprise	Yes	Yes
Kinston	Yes	No
New Brockton	Yes	Yes

Dale County	Water	Sewer
Ariton	Yes	Yes
Clayhatchee	Yes	No
Daleville	Yes	Yes



Babbie	Yes	No
Carolina	Yes	No
Floral	Yes	Yes
Gantt	Yes	No
Heath	Yes	No
Horn Hill	Yes	No
Libertyville	Yes	No
Lockhart	Yes	Yes
Onycha	Yes	No
Opp	Yes	Yes
Red Level	Yes	No
River Falls	Yes	No
Sanford	Yes	No

Houston County	Water	Sewer
Ashford	Yes	Yes
Avon	Yes	No
Columbia	Yes	Yes
Cowarts	Yes	Yes
Dothan	Yes	Yes
Gordon	Yes	Yes
Kinsey	Yes	Yes
Madrid	Yes	No
Rehobeth	Yes	No
Taylor	Yes	Yes
Webb	Yes	Yes

Grimes	Yes	Yes
Level Plains	Yes	No
Midland City	Yes	Yes
Napier Field	Yes	Yes
Newton	Yes	Yes
Ozark	Yes	Yes
Pinckard	Yes	No

Geneva County	Water	Sewer
Black	Yes	No
Coffee Springs	Yes	No
Geneva	Yes	Yes
Hartford	Yes	Yes
Malvern	Yes	No
Samson	Yes	Yes
Slocumb	Yes	Yes

Henry County	Water	Sewer
Abbeville	Yes	Yes
Haleburg	Yes	No
Headland	Yes	Yes
Newville	Yes	Yes

➤ Business/Manufacturing Space (Industrial Parks)

The Southeast Alabama Economic Development Region has five (5) small business incubators. These centers provide affordable space for lease, professional support staff, and internet access to new and expanding businesses.

1. Covington County Business Development Center – Andalusia/Opp Airport (Covington County)
2. Enterprise Business Incubator – Enterprise (Coffee County)
3. Mixson Business Center – Dothan (Houston County)
4. Ozark-Dale County Technology Center – Ozark (Dale County)
5. East Gate Business Park – Ozark (Dale County)

Industrial parks are a tremendous asset to communities in new industry recruitment by providing integrated infrastructure in one location. The Region has several industrial parks and available buildings that are advertised on state websites, advantagealabama.com, and local websites. Most of the parks have water, sewer and electricity available. Rail service is available at some parks, as well.

Barbour County

Eufaula Industrial Park (Eufaula); Lakepoint Industrial Park (Eufaula)



Coffee County

Coffee County Industrial Park (Elba); Yancey Parker Industrial Park (Enterprise); Yancey Parker Industrial Park Phase II (Enterprise)

Covington County

Floral Industrial Park (Floral); Huggins Southern Industrial Park (Andalusia); Opp Industrial Park (Opp); South Alabama Regional Airport Industrial Park (Andalusia); Sutton Road Industrial Park (Andalusia)

Dale County

Dothan Airport Industrial Park (Dothan); Ozark Corporate Park (Ozark)

Geneva County

Geneva County Industrial Park (Hartford)

Henry County

Abbeville Industrial Park (Abbeville)

Houston County

Ashford Industrial Park (Ashford); Golf Creek Business Park (Dothan); Houston County Port Authority Industrial Park (Columbia); Westgate Industrial Park (Dothan); Houston County Distribution Park (Dothan)

➤ **Telecommunications/Broadband**

The lack of quality broadband continues to be one of the biggest threats to the rural areas of the Southeast Alabama Region. The COVID-19 pandemic reinforced that broadband coverage is a major issue that must continue to be addressed. Many of the communities in southeast Alabama lack access to high-speed broadband internet. The State of Alabama continues to make efforts to upgrade the state's broadband infrastructure in rural and underserved areas of the state. In 2018, Governor Kay Ivey signed the Alabama Broadband Accessibility Act. The act created a fund to assist broadband providers in extending services to households, businesses, and community anchors in areas of the state without adequate service. Several projects in the Southeast Alabama Region have been funded for Troy Cablevision, Inc. (C Spire) and Covington Electric Cooperative to help serve those without adequate broadband service. In 2021, Governor Kay Ivey signed the Connect Alabama Act into law. This law created three new entities: The Alabama Digital Expansion Authority, which will oversee broadband expansion in the state; The Alabama Digital Expansion Division within the Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs (ADECA), which is charged with developing a statewide connectivity plan; and The Alabama Digital Expansion Finance Corporation, which will help fund broadband projects. The Southeast Region will benefit from these positive efforts, but there remains a long way to go. Thus, the Southeast Region remains at a great disadvantage in economic development without high speed internet in rural areas until the many projects come to fruition. Furthermore, the digital divide is widening, where there is a lack of access to high-speed internet leaving rural students, schools, and businesses further behind.



According to broadbandnow.com, 31% of the residents in Barbour do not have access to even the minimum 25 mbps wired or fixed wireless broadband. In Coffee County, 8% of the residents do not have access to the minimum 25 mbps wired or fixed wireless broadband. 12% of the residents in Covington County do not have access to even the minimum 25 mbps wired or fixed wireless broadband. In Dale County, 5% of the residents do not have access to even the minimum 25 mbps wired or fixed wireless broadband. 33% of the residents in Geneva County do not have access to even the minimum 25 mbps wired or fixed wireless broadband. In Henry County, 30% of the residents do not have access to even the minimum 25 mbps wired or fixed wireless broadband. Lastly, 12% of the residents in Houston County do not have access to even the minimum 25 mbps wired or fixed wireless broadband. Thus, an average of 19% of the Southeast Alabama Region does not have access to even the minimum 25 mbps wired or fixed wireless broadband.

Houston County, which includes Dothan, the largest city in Region, is a very competitive market, with 17 internet providers. Coffee County, which includes Enterprise, and Henry County, which includes Headland, both have 13 providers. However, these are not representative of the entire Region. Barbour, Covington, and Dale only have 10 providers. The biggest reason that high-speed broadband internet is lacking in rural southeast Alabama is the prohibitive cost of installing the infrastructure. Expanding broadband is very expensive. As the Region looks to the future, nevertheless, adequate broadband infrastructure is essential for local and regional economic growth.

Adequate broadband technology will provide for a more prosperous future for our children, allowing them to integrate technology into their classrooms and studies at home. High speed internet will improve healthcare by providing rural doctors with access to physicians at larger facilities in the United States through telemedicine. High-speed internet access also affords businesses the opportunities to work more efficiently and create jobs by bringing more employers and opportunities to rural communities.

➤ **Transportation**

A quality transportation infrastructure is important to economic development. Without a comprehensive and maintained infrastructure along which to move goods and other resources between industries and users, southeast Alabama will not be appealing to a company that wants to move or expand. The Southeast Alabama Region has a mixture of roads, rail, air, and water transportation. This section evaluates these modes of transportation within the Southeast Alabama Region.

Roadway

The Southeast Alabama Region does not have any existing interstates within it. Interstate Highway 10 (I-10), a primary route across the southern United States, passes 15 miles south of Houston County (35 miles from Dothan). Interstate Highway 65 (I-65), an important route between the Gulf Coast and the Great Lakes, passes 10 miles northwest of Covington County (30 miles from Andalusia). These two areas are the nearest to the interstate highway system in the Southeast Alabama Region. Many visitors travel down the interstate system to Montgomery and then travel U.S. 231, a four-lane highway, south through Dale and Houston Counties to connect with I-10. U.S. 231 is a heavily traveled highway and in some locations has a higher traffic



count than the nearby interstates. Federal highways are present in every county in the region except Geneva County.

It is obvious from viewing a U.S. Interstate Highway map (Figure 29) that an interstate highway connector needs to be built from Montgomery to I-10. This is in part due to the fact that U.S. 231 was not designed for the increasingly heavy traffic and its quality has diminished over the years. However, improvements are taking place including widening, shoulder paving, turn lanes and road resurfacing. The Dothan bypass, known as the Ross Clark Circle, has been widened to six lanes in portions.

With the continued growth of both Georgia and Florida, there should be excellent regional business and development opportunities for the region. While most of the region is within three to four hours from Atlanta, Birmingham, and Mobile by auto or truck, the proximity of these two emerging states allows for increased activity for interstate commerce and development. Within the past decade, many highway improvements have taken place and development barriers have been reduced greatly. This has not only helped economic development efforts, but also has created numerous construction jobs throughout the region providing an economic stimulus to the area. Continued improvements and additions have become a major priority for the state and for local officials.

In 2020, the Southeast Alabama Regional Planning and Development Commission was awarded a Better Utilizing Investment Leverage Development (BUILD) grant. This grant stemmed from a vital regional partnership between the Wiregrass Economic Development Corporation, Dothan Area Chamber of Commerce, Wiregrass Foundation, Wiregrass Electric Cooperative, Grow Southeast Alabama and SEARP&DC. The BUILD grant will specifically determine the feasibility of widening Alabama Highway 167 and Alabama Highway 52 from two-lane undivided roadways to four-lane divided roadways, including the Highway 167 corridor from the Alabama/Florida State Line to the Boll Weevil Circle around Enterprise, which touches Coffee, Dale and Geneva counties, and the Highway 52 corridor from Hartford to connect with the Alabama Department of Transportation's (ALDOT's) widening project from Dothan west into Geneva County. The BUILD grant is a major step in implementing two top priorities in the Southeast Alabama Rural Planning Organization's (RPO) *Long Range Transportation Needs*, a plan developed with extensive regional input. The BUILD grant will be used to determine the purpose and need of the widening project, collection of vital data, corridor demand analysis, and provide engineering work.

Air

The Southeast Alabama Region has twelve state licensed airports. Runway lengths are from near 3,000 feet in some of the more rural communities to 8,500 feet at the Dothan Regional Airport. Andalusia/Opp, Enterprise, and Eufaula all have 5,000-foot runways. The Dothan Regional Airport is the only airport with scheduled passenger service.

Airport industrial parks exist in Headland, Dothan, Andalusia, and Ozark. Dothan and Andalusia Airport Industrial Parks were funded in part through the Economic Development Administration and continue to have favorable economic development potential.



Commercial air service is important to the attractiveness of the region as employee travel is necessary for most businesses. The Dothan Regional Airport currently only offers daily scheduled non-stop jet service connecting to Atlanta, provided by Delta connection regional service ExpressJet. An additional carrier would be advantageous to the customers of the airport. Currently, the Dothan/Houston County Airport Authority has a public awareness program to inform citizens of the importance of planning trips from Dothan rather than other nearby regional airports located at Panama City, Tallahassee, Columbus, and Montgomery. Together with the increased air travel of recreational and occasional travelers, this service is expected to remain for an indefinite period.

The advent of several air based industries in the area over the past few years has greatly enhanced the Region's ability to market itself as an air flight service and maintenance base. The Dothan Regional Airport has industries, such as Commercial Jet, that provide needed services for pilots and airport customers.

Rail

Railroads have become limited in the Region over the past decade. There is only one primary long haul carrier in the Region: CSX. The Region is also serviced by several "short line" carriers: the Bay Line R.R., the Georgia Southwestern R.R., Wiregrass Central R.R., and the Chattahoochee Bay R.R. Geneva County has no rail service.

With right of ways continuing to be sold, it is unlikely that communities that have lost service will have railroad services in the future, however, the upside to this is that those communities with the remaining rail service are becoming more viable for heavy industrial project sites that require heavy load, long hauling, such as saw and steel mills, fabricators, or other large product manufacturers.

Water

The Southeast Alabama Region has only one navigable waterway, the Chattahoochee River. State dock facilities are located at Columbia in northern Houston County and Eufaula in Barbour County. There has been considerable discussion among water transportation advocates and organizations about problems related to waterway traffic, particularly the lack of traffic. The problems surrounding the use of the Chattahoochee River System for agricultural and industrial barge usage are many. First of all, Alabama leaders are in an ongoing feud with Georgia over Georgia's attempt to withdraw more water from the Chattahoochee River and the discharging of large amounts of wastes back into the system that cause effluent levels that fail to meet acceptable standards of water discharge quality. Also related is the lack of sufficient water flow that is necessary in order to maintain the minimal depth of water necessary for barge traffic. This has become an environmental concern to both Alabama and Florida. Florida additionally has numerous other environmental concerns about the dredging and industrial pollutants that affect their fishing industry.

Several other issues are of concern to the waterway including the development of sites along the route. The Houston County Port Authority has over 200 acres of land available adjacent to the state dock facility. This site is adequately served with good highways and the Chattahoochee Bay Railroad. This has excellent potential, but marketing remains dormant at this time. The Eufaula State Docks Facility has very limited acreage available for industrial expansion.



On a positive note, the Chattahoochee, Choctawhatchee, Pea, and Conecuh Rivers, as well as other fisheries throughout the Region, provide valuable recreational and tourism economic development benefits and are all undergoing transition development in which to enhance the usage of these waterways as secondary development markets.

Public/Private Transportation

According to *The Human Services Coordinated Transportation Plan for the Southeast Alabama Region 2020-2023*, the primary mode of transportation within southeast Alabama is use of a private vehicle. Within the Southeast Alabama Region, there is a range of transportation options, including public demand-response transit, specialized elderly bus or van programs, and private taxi or charter services. Though these resources exist and provide services to areas within the region, many of these operations are underutilized and can be inefficient. Also, there are many areas that individuals are unable to access those services, due to geography, fiscal circumstances, or disabilities. The limitations in the current system provide a barrier for multiple elements of the population to access essential services. In this era of increasingly limited public funding, increased efficiencies and partnerships are very important to expand transportation options to the citizenry. Increased mobility for individuals may improve local economic conditions by providing increased options for working hours if the transportation is available and quality of life by growing connections to social and health networks. The ability to be mobile and utilize transportation is a vital need for individuals, in order to connect with other people, to reach jobs, education, commerce, and recreation, and for many other needs.

The Southeast Alabama Rural Planning Organization (RPO) is a rural transportation planning process in the areas of Southeast Alabama (Barbour, Coffee, Covington, Dale, Geneva, Henry, and Houston counties) not represented by the Southeast Wiregrass Area Metropolitan Planning Organization. The RPO is sponsored by the Alabama Department of Transportation (ALDOT) and the Southeast Alabama Regional Planning and Development Commission to effectively manage the rural transportation planning process. Policy Committee and Technical Coordinating Committee meetings and local public forums are held to gather, maintain, and distribute data related to the transportation planning process and to inform the public of the rural transportation planning process and to actively seek public involvement. The Southeast Alabama Rural Planning Organization is committed to ensuring public participation in the development of all transportation plans and programs. It is the goal of the RPO that the transportation planning process will be accessible, transparent, and inclusive.

The Human Services Coordinated Transportation Plan for the Southeast Alabama Region 2020-2023 is the most recent coordinated transportation planning process, which is in coordination with the ALDOT and the Alabama Association of Regional Councils (AARC). The Plan's primary focus pertains to the needs of the target populations that are more susceptible to transportation challenges. However, the goals for coordinated transportation planning also benefit the general public.

Overall, the Southeast Alabama Region has very significant transportation needs. More than half of the region does not have any service from public transportation agencies. The Southeast Alabama Region is underserved, or not served in many areas, by public transportation services. More than half of the Southeast Alabama Region does not have public transportation services, and the services offered in areas with established public transportation are limited. Currently,



there is no public transportation service in three counties within the Southeast Alabama Region: Coffee, Geneva and Henry. There is limited service in Dale County through the Wiregrass Transit Authority. The Eufaula-Barbour Transit Authority operates in Barbour County, but primarily serves the City of Eufaula only. Covington County has a countywide public transportation system administered by the Covington Area Transit System (CATS). However, their resources are limited and Covington County is a very large spatial area, so many needs are unmet due to those limitations. Houston County has the most comprehensive transportation coverage of the Southeast Alabama Region's seven counties administered by the Wiregrass Transit Authority, but services, especially outside of Dothan, are limited.

In many instances there are some resources for transportation of target populations to specific purposes, including nutrition programs or specialized medical services, which may be reimbursed or facilitated through agency contracts. The Department of Human Resources (DHR) Jobs Program also provides transportation opportunities for the target population groups with the coordination of service agencies and transportation providers.

For most local governments in the Region, including Barbour, Coffee, Dale, Geneva, and Henry counties, the resources required to fund and operate systems are deemed infeasible for the level of use that is estimated. For those local governments that operate public transportation system, including the cities of Dothan and Eufaula and Covington and Houston counties, any expansion of services requires additional local funding, as well.

➤ **Energy Distribution Systems**

The Southeast Alabama Region is home to the Joseph M. Farley Nuclear Plant, located along the Chattahoochee River near Dothan and is owned by Alabama Power Company and operated by Southern Nuclear. Farley generates electricity through a pressurized water reactor type system. As people continue to move to the southeastern United States and use greater amounts of electricity, additional power plants using nuclear energy, are needed. Nuclear power plants continue to be an important and strategic energy resource for the United States. Farley is one of the largest employers in the Region, employing approximately 950 people and is a vital economic development resource for southeast Alabama.

The Southeast Alabama Region's primary energy distribution systems are Alabama Power Company and PowerSouth Energy Cooperative headquartered in Andalusia. PowerSouth provides wholesale power needs to 20 members in Alabama and northwest Florida. Members in the Southeast Alabama Region include Wiregrass Electric Cooperative, Pea River Electric Cooperative, and Covington Electric Cooperative. In addition, some municipalities have energy distribution systems including City of Andalusia, City of Opp, City of Dothan, City of Elba, and City of Hartford.

Public Safety and Health Care

According to the U. S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, the Southeast Alabama Region has over 6,200 protective service, fire protection, and law enforcement workers. This does not include the volunteers of these type services in the Region. The Southeast Alabama Region has many health care facilities including: assisted living facilities, end stage renal disease treatment centers, federally qualified health centers, home health agencies, hospitals,



independent clinical laboratories, nursing homes, rural health clinics, sleep disorder centers, ambulatory surgical centers, community mental health centers, hospices, independent physiological laboratories, rehabilitation centers, and residential treatment facilities. The following chart lists some of the facilities in our region, county locations, and number of licensed beds.

Health Care Facilities		
<u>Facility</u>	<u>County</u>	<u>Licensed Beds</u>
<i>Medical Center Barbour</i>	Barbour	74
<i>Crowne Health Care of Eufaula</i>	Barbour	180
<i>Medical Center Enterprise</i>	Coffee	131
<i>Enterprise Health & Rehabilitation Center</i>	Coffee	257
<i>Elba Nursing and Rehabilitation Center</i>	Coffee	111
<i>Andalusia Health</i>	Covington	88
<i>Mizell Memorial Hospital</i>	Covington	99
<i>Andalusia Manor</i>	Covington	154
<i>Floral Health and Rehabilitation</i>	Covington	85
<i>Opp Health and Rehabilitation</i>	Covington	197
<i>Dale Medical Center</i>	Dale	89
<i>Oakview Manor Health Care Center</i>	Dale	138
<i>Ozark Health and Rehabilitation</i>	Dale	149
<i>Wiregrass Medical Center</i>	Geneva	83
<i>Hartford Health Care</i>	Geneva	86
<i>Wiregrass Rehabilitation Center & Nursing Home</i>	Geneva	96
<i>Henry County Health & Rehabilitation Facility</i>	Henry	142
<i>Flowers Hospital</i>	Houston	235
<i>Encompass Health Rehabilitation Hospital</i>	Houston	51
<i>Laurel Oaks Behavioral Health Center</i>	Houston	118
<i>Noland Hospital</i>	Houston	38
<i>Southeast Health</i>	Houston	420
<i>Extendicare Health Center</i>	Houston	170
<i>Wesley Place</i>	Houston	166
<i>Westside Terrace Health and Rehabilitation</i>	Houston	165

Geography, Environment, and Resources

Geography involves the physical features of an area, the land use of an area, the climate of an area, the environment of an area, and the resources in an area. Natural resources include water, land and location. Land is the primary resource and has a number of basic economic uses including agricultural production, forestry, commercial and residential development, mineral value and recreational use. Lakes, ponds and streams provide utility to the land resources in the Region.

The Southeast Alabama Region is in the Coastal Plain. Soils in the Southern Coastal Plains range from sandy to clayey and from somewhat excessively drained to very poorly drained. The



topography in the region is varied, ranging from highly dissected uplands that have high relief to broad, nearly level stream terraces and floodplains along the Chattahoochee and Pea Rivers and other major streams.

According to the Soil Conservation Service and Auburn University, the Southeast Alabama Region comprises the largest contiguous area of prime farmland in Alabama. The predominate soil types are: Troup-Luverne-Dothan-Orangeburg, which is well drained, deep and moderately deep soils on gently sloping to sloping ridgetops and sideslopes. The Luverne soils are clayey and Troup soils have thick (40 to 60 inches) sandy surface layers. These soils are found in eastern and northern **Barbour County**, eastern and western **Henry County**, and over most of **Dale County**. Predominate soils found in central and southern **Henry County**, much of central and southern **Coffee County**, and northern **Covington County** are Orangeburg-Red Bay-Dothan-Troup, which are well drained deep soils on broad gently sloping to sloping ridgetops. Dothan-Orangeburg-Esto, are well drained deep soils on broad nearly level to gently sloping plateaus and are found covering **Houston County**, eastern and western **Geneva County**, and southern **Covington County**.

Problems associated with the Region's soils include erosion, sedimentation, low fertility, and drought. Sheet erosion of soils in the Region is due primarily to poor farming practices. Low fertility is a characteristic of Coastal Plains soils because the subsoil contains a high sand content that causes rapid leaching of mineral elements. Water holding capacities are also low for the same reason, resulting in drought damage to crops in certain areas during times of either limited or unevenly distributed rainfall. Most of the problems associated with soil conditions can be overcome with proper planning and conservation techniques.

There is an estimated 1.1 million acres of land in the Region classified as prime farmland. This represents nearly 35% of the total land area in the Region. The Alabama Soil Conservation service describes prime farmland as "land that has the best combination of physical and chemical characteristics for producing food, fuel, fiber, forage and oilseed crops and is available for these uses. It has the soil quality, growing season, and moisture supply needed to economically produce sustained high yields of crops when treated and managed according to acceptable farming methods". Some factors considered in classifying prime farmland are adequate soil moisture, favorable temperature and growing season, acceptable pH, few or no rocks, not excessively erodible, not saturated with water for long periods of time, and not prone to frequent flooding events during the growing season.

Agriculture and forest products have sustained the economy of the region and are the main use of the land in the Southeast Alabama Region. Cotton, corn and peanuts are the principal crops. Beef cattle, hogs and dairy cattle are the main livestock enterprises. In addition, Barbour County has experienced significant growth in the pond-raised catfish industry. Forest land use accounts for approximately 66% of the land area in the region. The forest industry provides raw materials for local sawmills and pulp and paper producers.

The Region continues to have a valuable resource in its high quality prime farmland, which could be used as a regional advantage in attracting new and diversified agricultural partners for economic development and job growth. This potential development advantage needs to be fully explored to determine how new investment and jobs can be brought to the region. Diversification



efforts have begun and farm producers are looking into new ways to develop additional cash incomes from other crops. These diversification efforts must continue and be accelerated in order to develop new strategies to sustain and grow the agricultural base in the region. With the dramatic end of the peanut quota program, producers are uncertain of the future profitability of peanuts, and other crops may be considered that have the potential of earnings above production costs.

Three main river basin systems flow through Southeast Alabama, which are important water resources for the Southeast Alabama Region. The Apalachicola basin consists of the Chattahoochee and Chipola Rivers in the Region. It encompasses the eastern sections of Barbour, Henry, and Houston counties. The Choctawhatchee basin consists of the Choctawhatchee, Pea, and Yellow Rivers. It encompasses Dale County entirely, nearly all of Coffee and Geneva counties, the western sections of Barbour, Henry, and Houston counties, and southeastern Covington County. The Escambia basin consists of the Conecuh and Blackwater Rivers. It encompasses most of Covington County and a small portion of Coffee County.

The Chattahoochee River is the only navigable waterway in the Region. It has two inland docks, in Eufaula and Columbia. A 9 foot deep by 100 foot wide channel is available to barge traffic at most times. However, times of low water levels occur that impede navigation.

The largest reservoir of the Region, Walter F. George Lake (Lake Eufaula), covers 45,200 acres and borders Barbour and Henry Counties. The lake has the seventh highest visitation of any impoundment in the country. It provides considerable economic benefit to Barbour and Henry Counties. Lake George W. Andrews covers 1,540 acres bordering Henry and Houston Counties. Lake Seminole primarily is in Florida and Georgia, but the Chattahoochee River up to the Andrews Lock and Dam is considered part of that reservoir. All three reservoirs are part of the Apalachicola-Chattahoochee-Flint River (ACF) system. The ACF system provides hydroelectric power, flood control, and recreation. Currently, there are more than 3,500 man-made small ponds and lakes in the Region that provide water for fish and wildlife, livestock, fire control, spray purposes and recreational uses.

Due to the critical importance of the Region's water resources, maintenance and enhancement need to be coordinated. A regional water authority can address these needs by assessing the quality and supply of water in Southeast Alabama. An authority would also integrate planning and implementation of grants and other forms of funding to coordinate management of the Region's water resources.

The climate of the Southeast Alabama Region consists of long, hot summers because moist tropical air from the Gulf of Mexico persistently covers the area. Winters are cool and fairly short. Precipitation is fairly heavy throughout the year and prolonged droughts are rare. Summer precipitation, mainly in the form of afternoon thunderstorms is usually adequate for all locally grown crops. However, in 2007, 2012, 2013, and 2016, all counties in the Southeast Alabama Region were declared natural disaster areas by the Federal Government due to the persistent drought conditions that the Region had suffered.

The average high temperature for the Southeast Alabama Region is 92 degrees. The average low temperature is 37 degrees. Therefore, the average temperature for the Region is 64.5 degrees.



The average annual total precipitation is about 56 inches. Of this, 36 inches, or about 64 percent, usually falls in March through October. The average seasonal snowfall is 0.3 inches. On an average, less than 1 day per year has at least 1 inch of snow on the ground. The average relative humidity in mid-afternoon ranges from about 45 percent in April to about 60 percent in July and August. Humidity is higher at night, and the average at dawn is about 90 percent in most months.

The Southeast Alabama Region's location provides exposure to several natural hazards. The three natural hazards that are commonly regarded as most significant include flooding, hurricanes, and tornadoes. Other natural hazards that potentially affect the region, at least minimally, include dam failures, drought and extreme heat, wildfires, and winter storms. More explanation of the primary regional hazards are below.

Flooding

Flooding is the most widespread hazard that occurs in the Southeast Alabama Region, causing substantial property and public infrastructure damage. Flash flooding primarily occurs due to sustained rainfall events (sometimes tropical-related) that overwhelms drainage capacity and can affect the area substantially, potentially affecting most households in the Region. The Choctawhatchee and Pea Rivers, in central areas of the Region, are susceptible to riverine flooding and have heavily inundated and damaged the Elba and Geneva areas multiple times. Though historically Elba and Geneva have been the regional communities most affected by flooding, other areas along rivers and streams also have some susceptibility to riverine flooding. Riverine flooding can be forecasted over a few days, but flash flooding is normally a quick onset hazard with little warning. Flooding can occur any time of year, but sustained rainfall events are more prevalent in winter and spring, and tropical systems affect the Region during the summer.

Hurricanes

Portions of the southern periphery of Southeast Alabama are only 50 miles from the Gulf of Mexico, which makes the Region susceptible to hurricanes. Flooding from torrential rains may affect extensive areas and is the primary threat to the Region, while impacts from high winds and weak tornadoes that occur from hurricanes also normally occur. In the past 20 years, approximately ten (10) hurricanes or tropical storms have impacted the Region. Normally, there are a few days of warnings before a hurricane impacts Southeast Alabama, allowing for preparations.

Tornadoes

The entire Southeast Alabama Region is susceptible to tornadoes. The most likely period for tornadoes are during the spring months from March through May, with a secondary peak of activity in November, but tornadoes have occurred in every month. Tornadoes are the most frequent major hazard in the Region. Tornadoes are possibly more destructive than hurricanes, but their impacts are far more localized.

Regional Vulnerability

The following table assesses the Southeast Alabama Region's vulnerability based on the geographic breadth of the hazard's impact, the probability of being affected by the hazard, and the magnitude of the damage likely to occur as a result. An explanation of the table is below.



Hazard Ranking for the Southeast Alabama Region				
Type	Location	Frequency	Magnitude	Total Rank (Max. Score = 10)
Dam Failure	1	1	2	4
Drought / Extreme Heat	3	2	2	7
Earthquake	3	1	1	5
Flooding	3	3	3	9
Hurricane	3	3	3	9
Landslide	1	1	1	3
Severe Thunderstorm	3	3	1	7
Tornado	3	3	3	9
Wildfire	2	2	3	7
Winter Storm	3	1	1	5

Location of Impact

1 = small (isolated)

2 = medium (multiple areas)

3 = large (widespread areas)

Frequency of Occurrence

0 = none (no probable occurrence with damage)

1 = low (possible major damage in a 100 year period)

2 = medium (probable major damage in a 10-50 year period)

3 = high (probable major damage in a 1-10 year period)

Impact of Damage

1 = limited (minor injuries; shutdown of critical facilities and services for less than one day; low property damage)

2 = significant (moderate injuries; shutdown of critical facilities for up to one week; severe property damage)

3 = critical (major injuries; shutdown of critical facilities for weeks; severe property damage)

4 = catastrophic (casualties; complete shutdown of facilities for months; total property damage)

All counties in the Southeast Alabama Region have FEMA-approved and adopted hazard mitigation plans that provide a risk assessment, vulnerability overview, and mitigation goals and strategies for all jurisdictions.



Military Relations

Fort Rucker, the United States Army Aviation Center of Excellence, is located in southeastern Coffee and southwestern Dale counties. The main reservation encompasses 57,785 acres, while an additional 3,626 acres are owned outside of the main reservation (aviation facilities), and an additional 1,734 acres are leased. Since Fort Rucker is the training center for U.S. Army aviators, the entire Southeast Alabama Region is part of the “Local Flying Area” of 32,000 square miles (encompassing much of southern Alabama, southwestern Georgia, and northwestern Florida) in which flight operations occur. Fort Rucker is adjacent to the municipalities of Daleville, Enterprise, Level Plains, Newton, and Ozark. The base is occupied by the following military assignments, as well as several U.S. Army Reserve and National Guard units:

- ❖ 1st Aviation Brigade
- ❖ 1st Battalion, 13th Aviation Regiment
- ❖ 2nd Battalion, 13th Aviation Regiment
- ❖ 1st Battalion, 145th Aviation Regiment
- ❖ 110th Aviation Brigade
- ❖ 1st Battalion, 11th Aviation Regiment
- ❖ 1st Battalion, 14th Aviation Regiment
- ❖ 1st Battalion, 212th Aviation Regiment
- ❖ 1st Battalion, 223rd Aviation Regiment
- ❖ 128th Aviation Brigade
- ❖ 1st Battalion, 210th Aviation Regiment
- ❖ 2nd Battalion, 210th Aviation Regiment
- ❖ 1st Battalion, 222nd Aviation Regiment
- ❖ Directorate of Evaluation and Standards
- ❖ Directorate of Simulation
- ❖ Directorate of Training and Doctrine
- ❖ Noncommissioned Officers Academy

The cantonment area is on the southern periphery of Fort Rucker. Much of the remaining reservation is undeveloped, with the exception of scattered aviation facilities. Fort Rucker is primarily forested, with plentiful water resources, including rivers, streams, lakes, and wetlands throughout the reservation. Fort Rucker has a substantial environmental compliance program, and is involved with the Southeast Regional Partnership for Planning and Sustainability (SERPPAS), which promotes regional conservation efforts by promoting sustainable operations, resource conservation, and compatible development around military properties.

Military training in the area to become Fort Rucker (then known as Camp Rucker) began early in World War II, when the U.S. Army trained several divisions on property that was purchased by the federal government in the 1930s. After World War II, the U.S. Army camp was vacated, but was reactivated temporarily during the Korean War, and permanently reopened as the Army Aviation School in 1954. Camp Rucker was changed to Fort Rucker in 1955. Army rotary-wing training was consolidated at Fort Rucker in 1973, and today Fort Rucker supports a daily population of over 20,000 people, in addition to almost 50,000 other military, dependent, and retiree populations within 40 miles of the base.



Fort Rucker is a significant economic engine for the Southeast Alabama Region. Fort Rucker provides an economic impact of approximately \$1.5 billion annually and is responsible for over 23,000 jobs in the region. During the 2005 Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) process, Fort Rucker was slated to receive the Aviation Logistics School (and over 2,000 jobs) from Fort Eustis, but the recommendation was reversed and the Army Aviation Technical Test Center was moved to Redstone Arsenal causing Fort Rucker to lose approximately 350 highly technical positions. Support organizations, including Friends of Fort Rucker, and local communities are taking a highly proactive approach in preparation for future rounds of BRAC in order to demonstrate Fort Rucker's prime importance to the United States military, as well as the economic importance to the Region.

Fort Rucker and adjacent regional communities prepared a Joint Land Use Study, completed in 2009, that was a cooperative land use planning exercise to provide guidance to Fort Rucker and local governments to implement objectives to increase future land use compatibility in the region and strengthen the relationship between the military and civilian communities. This study was spawned from increasing growth and development in communities surrounding Fort Rucker and its outlying aviation facilities that gave concern to incompatible development in areas that might restrict aviation training, jeopardizing Fort Rucker's mission in the future.

In 2021, SEARP&DC received additional grant funds through the Office of Economic Adjustment to develop a Compatible Use Study for Fort Rucker and surrounding communities. The goal of the CUS is to assist state and local governments in addressing and preventing encroachment of civilian communities from impairing operational utility of military installations. This encroachment presents an immediate threat to the sustainability of Fort Rucker's mission and long term solutions much be evaluated in order to ensure the future of Fort Rucker's train mission. The CUS will assist Fort Rucker in understanding concerns and opportunities in order to improve intergovernmental coordination and communication between the base and surrounding local governments.

Clusters

A cluster refers to a geographic concentration of interconnected businesses, suppliers, and associated institutions in a particular field. Clusters make regions uniquely competitive for jobs and private investment. Clusters are typically considered to increase productivity with which companies can compete, nationally and globally. This section of the CEDS focuses on total employment by clusters for the Southeast Alabama Region.

Clusters play a fundamental role in driving regional economic competitiveness by encouraging higher rates of job growth, wage growth, new business formation, and innovation in the regions they are located in. Every regional economy has its own distinct profile of clusters. In order to standardize clusters and allow for useful comparisons of clusters across regions, the U.S. Cluster Mapping Project provides a set of benchmark cluster definitions that are the same in all U.S. regions. The U.S. Cluster Mapping website is where the cluster profile for the Southeast Alabama Region was derived.

The top ten "Strong **Traded** Clusters" (clusters that have high employment specialization) identified in the Region include:



Transportation and Logistics
Livestock
Business Services
Distribution and Electronic Commerce
Textile Manufacturing
Electric Power Generation and Transmission
Vulcanized and Fired Materials
Downstream Metal Products
Food Processing and Manufacturing
Hospitality and Tourism

The top ten “Strong **Local** Clusters” identified in the Region include:

Health Services
Hospitality
Real Estate, Construction, Development
Motor Vehicle Products and Services
Retail Clothing and General Merchandise
Commercial Services
Food and Beverage Processing and Distribution
Community and Civic Organizations
Financial Services
Personal Services (non-medical)

While the Region has many growing clusters, it has also suffered due to a decline in some clusters including Apparel & Textiles and Agribusiness in some counties. One cluster that was not mentioned above is Defense and Security. This cluster is an extremely important cluster for the Region due to the Region’s economic dependence on Fort Rucker located in Dale County. Another cluster important to the Region is Wood Products and Forestry.



CHAPTER 2 SWOT ANALYSIS

As part of the planning process for the CEDS Five-Year Plan, SEARP&DC staff performed a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) analysis of the Region. Determining and analyzing what the region already possesses that could be leveraged better to build the capacity for growth is critical to developing the strategic direction and implementation plan to promote regional economic vitality. Staff prepared a SWOT survey and submitted to mayors, county commissioners, economic developers, institutions of higher learning, chambers of commerce, utilities, etc. Below is the region-wide SWOT survey results. The SWOT was completed to identify what the Region does well, needs work on, challenges and opportunities.

Strengths and Opportunities

- ✓ Low Cost of Living
- ✓ Career Tech-Post Secondary Educational Opportunities
- ✓ Low Property Taxes
- ✓ Inexpensive Real Estate
- ✓ Agriculture – Poultry, Farming, Timber
- ✓ Strong Partnerships between State and Local Leadership

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- ✓ Vacant Buildings
- ✓ Available/Affordable Land
- ✓ Alternative Agriculture Products
- ✓ Fresh Food/Farmer's Markets
- ✓ Career Tech Education
- ✓ Youth Job/Career Recruitment
- ✓ Increase in Available Jobs
- ✓ Increase in Medical Jobs and Education/Training
- ✓ More Funding Resources (local, state and federal)

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Potentials of the Region include, agricultural land, vacant buildings, alternative agricultural products, farmer's markets with fresh foods, and career tech education opportunities to recruit youth and keep local youth.

Agriculture and open land are important resources for the Region. Quality agriculture products including poultry, cattle, peanuts and cotton are produced in the Region. Agriculture makes up a good percentage of employment within the Region. One major growing industry is the timber industry. According to the Alabama Forestry Commission 2021 Forest Resource Report, there is 2,077,474 timberland acres in the Region. A large amount of land for industrial expansion is also available in the Region. Some communities have set aside land as industrial sites for future development.

The development of local farmers markets is an economic development opportunity for the Region. The Region has local farmers markets in many of the communities including Dothan, Enterprise, Elba, Andalusia, Headland and Ozark. The farmers markets afford the opportunity to purchase locally grown fruits and vegetables. Farmers markets are also a great benefit to the local farmers allowing them to bypass the middle man and benefit a little more. The farmer then



circulates his profits throughout the community local merchants creating a cycle that helps build the economy.

Weaknesses and Threats

<div><div>✓ Aging Infrastructure</div><div>✓ Lack of Good Paying Jobs (Quality Jobs)</div><div>✓ Population Decline</div><div>✓ Emergency Services</div><div>✓ Limited Broadband/Tech Access</div><div>✓ Lack of Rural Healthcare Providers</div></div> <div>W</div>	<div><div>✓ Lack of High Skill, High Wage Job Opportunities</div><div>✓ Lack of Federal Awareness of Rural Needs</div><div>✓ Local Leadership Development in Smaller Communities</div><div>✓ High School Graduates/Young Adults leaving the Region</div><div>✓ Lack of Work Ethic</div><div>✓ Aging Workforce-Many Retiring</div></div> <div>T</div>
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There are challenges to economic development in the Region. Population decline in rural areas is one of the most hindering factors for economic development. Outmigration trends have sent young people and working adults out of many of the areas within the Region. Lack of job opportunities for highly trained workers and educated job seekers force those individuals to look outside of the region for jobs, which is hurting the labor force of skilled workers.

In efforts to retain businesses and industries, more incentives for local job training are needed. The Region must educate young people on the benefits of developing skills and proper work ethic. An increased and prepared labor force can be extremely beneficial in retaining businesses and attracting new businesses. The lack of good paying, quality jobs is an issue that faces the Southeast Alabama Region.

Another threat to economic development in the Region is infrastructure. This includes municipal sewer, water, communication services and roads. Many communities are in need of improvements to current sewer and water systems, as well as, roads. This improvement can only be completed with grant dollars because of limited budgets of most of the small, rural communities in the Region. Communication services is also a need in many of the rural communities. This includes high-speed internet, which is non-existent in much of the Region with the exception of the larger cities, such as Dothan, Enterprise, Ozark and Andalusia.

Without improvements to the above mentioned threats and weaknesses, chances for future economic development in the Region are severely limited. While the separate counties and municipalities have their own lists of problems, these threats and weaknesses represent issues that are hampering economic development in the Region, as a whole. Specific economic development goals have been developed and are addressed in the CEDS Action Plan.



Economic Development Goals

- Goal 1:** Provide adequate infrastructure throughout the Region that will improve the quality of life for citizens and support the expansion needs of existing and development of new industries that will provide employment opportunities and increase tax revenues.
- Goal 2:** Promote a balanced regional economy with a broad business, industry, and employment mix capable of supporting quality employment opportunities, including high wage, high skill jobs.
- Goal 3:** Support efforts that encourage workers to join or remain in the labor force.
- Goal 4:** Support efforts to expand availability of high speed broadband access in the Region for businesses, citizens, education and healthcare.
- Goal 5:** Strengthen and sustain the long-term economic vitality and resiliency of the Region.



CHAPTER 3

CEDS STRATEGIC DIRECTION AND ACTION PLAN

“The Southeast Alabama Regional Planning and Development Commission envisions a regional comprehensive economic development strategy that emphasizes regional cooperation and collaboration, supports existing businesses, encourages development of new technologies, and promotes the regional workforce. This will be accomplished by strengthening local community capacity for planning and management resulting in greater opportunities for meaningful employment and improved quality of life.”

The Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy establishes the prioritized goals and measurable objectives. These goals and objectives, properly prioritized and based on the region’s strengths and capabilities, will drive the overall implementation. The goals are broad in scope and address the overall economic expectations of the Region based on the SWOT analysis. Objectives are more precise than the goals and their outcomes are measurable.

The CEDS Action Plan centers on regional priorities. The first section focuses on five regional goals and objectives that will serve as a roadmap to coordinate regional resources to achieve the greatest impact. The next section outlines the CEDS Plan of Action.

Goal 1: Provide adequate infrastructure throughout the Region that will improve the quality of life for citizens and support the expansion needs of existing and development of new industries that will provide employment opportunities and increase tax revenues.

Objectives:

- Maintain and improve critical public infrastructure, such as water, sewer, highways and rails to meet the needs of existing population and future growth.
- Support local government efforts in developing and maintaining adequate infrastructure to support attractive development and future employment opportunities.
- Take advantage of vacant buildings and developed industrial parks throughout the Region to locate new industries.
- Improve public highway infrastructure in smaller, rural communities throughout the Region.





Goal 2: Promote a balanced regional economy with a broad business, industry, and employment mix capable of supporting quality employment opportunities, including high wage, high skill jobs.

Objectives:

- Strengthen communication and collaboration between industrial businesses and community colleges, workforce organizations, Small Business Development Centers, chambers of commerce, economic developers, and state and federal agencies.
- Promote use of local, state and federal financing tools to assist in attraction of potential employers and expansion of existing business.
- Promote entrepreneurship and small business start-up by providing technical and information resources.
- Solicit and retain young professionals by emphasizing to local governments the importance of innovation and technology in the type of businesses that are recruited.
- Focus recruitment, expansion and retention efforts on growing value-added industries that pay at or above the national average wage, with special attention to identified regional clusters. Educate and encourage local governments to actively work to attract new or expanding business that complement existing business.
- Develop and sustain strategies to promote the establishment of new target industries and quality jobs.
- Identify local, state, federal and private funding sources available for business expansion/retention programs in the Region.





- Partner with local and regional businesses to educate high school students, their parents, teachers and school counselors about the types of employment available within the region and the training or education required for the positions.
- Promote economic diversification by targeting emerging clusters or industries that build upon the region's assets, strengths and existing industries.

Goal 3: Support efforts that encourage workers to join or remain in the labor force.

Objectives:

- Through coordination with workforce development programs, monitor the educational resources to ensure the needs of the region's employers are met.
- Encourage effective input from employers on course and program development.
- Monitor changes and issues with educational institutions. Support and promote improvements that will benefit students and area businesses and allow for growth.
- Increase childcare availability by expanding the capacity of existing providers and supporting the establishment of new high-quality childcare options.
- Support public transportation, ride-share, remote work and other options that make work possible for individuals who lack access to transportation.

Goal 4: Support efforts to expand availability of high speed broadband access in the Region for businesses, citizens, education and healthcare.

Objectives:

- Prioritize investments that will increase broadband capacity.
- Work with local providers to determine future opportunities.
- Identify sources to implement.





- Work with the private sector through chambers, realtors and employers to promote the availability of high speed broadband where it exists.

Goal 5: Strengthen and sustain the long-term economic vitality and resiliency of the Region.

Objectives:

- Protect the region's industries, employee wages, and overall productivity by mitigating against critical supply chain shortages by strengthening and tightening local supply chains.
- Build upon lessons from the COVID-19 pandemic to strengthen and formalize resources and networks for sharing critical information at the local and regional levels.
- Establish immediate communication and deployment plans at the local and regional levels to minimize the impacts of any future unanticipated events or economic disturbances.
- Utilize development communications networks to share best practices from throughout the region.



CEDS Plan of Action

Based on community engagement and priority development, the SEARP&DC has created the following Plan of Action in order to target specific objectives pulled from the goals and objectives. The section below discusses the major work elements of the Region.

1. Expand availability of high speed broadband access in the Region for businesses, citizens, education and healthcare. Identify funding sources to implement.

- Collaborate on a region-wide analysis focusing on broadband access.
 - Survey counties and cities on needs and current services.
 - Identify funding sources.
-

2. Support efforts to obtain federal, state and regional funding to upgrade and maintain aging infrastructure (water, sewer, streets), while supporting the expansion of infrastructure to underserved areas.

- Support and assist with funding applications that best serve the needs of the Region.
 - Work with local governments to develop and maintain Capital Facilities Plans in order to identify and prioritize capital improvement and maintenance project needs.
 - Identify sources of funding to implement the capital facilities and infrastructure improvements.
-

3. Encourage efforts to increase labor force participation.

- Work with local legislative delegation to promote policies that encourage workers to join or remain in the labor force.
 - Continue to support public transportation efforts through organizations such as Wiregrass Transit Authority, Covington Area Transit Systems (CATS), and Eufaula Barbour Transit Authority.
 - Evaluate expanded childcare options and funding sources including SEARP&DC's Revolving Loan Fund program to help people get back to work.
 - Support initiatives and programs that train, retrain and upgrade skills of the area's labor force such as School-to-Work programs and On-the-Job training programs.
-



4. Promote a prosperous regional economy by developing an economic base that will be able to prevent, withstand, and rapidly recover from major shocks.

- Assess the Region's advantages and limitations as a guide to determine appropriate opportunities for new and existing businesses.
- Educate and encourage local governments to actively work to attract new or expanding businesses that complement existing businesses.
- Work with local economic developers to identify high-impact industries that are overly dependent upon suppliers from outside of the Region.
- Add warehouse storage capacity so industries and businesses will not be stalemated by future supply chain issues.
- Work with existing high-impact industries to help reduce supply chain vulnerabilities by targeting and recruiting critical suppliers and identifying existing companies within the Region who might replace distant suppliers allowing industries to tighten up supply chains and reduce risk and vulnerability.
- Establish information networks among regional partners to encourage active and regular communications between the public, private, and education sectors.

5. Continue to serve as an economic development resource to local elected officials and economic development professionals and organizations.

- Encourage local governments to plan for industrial and commercial development.
- Assist communities in identifying eligible projects and prepare proposals and applications for EDA, State of Alabama and/or USDA Rural Development funding.
- Collaborate on business expansion and retention efforts.
- Support regional and local analyses to determine gaps and opportunities in diversification.

The Region will work in partnership with communities, organizations, private sector, state and federal agencies to actively pursue implementation of the identified goals, objectives, strategies and action plan. State, federal and private funding sources will be sought after to assist in providing the funds needed to implement them.



CHAPTER 4 ECONOMIC RESILIENCE

According to the US Economic Development Administration (EDA), Economic Resilience is the ability to recover quickly from a shock, the ability to withstand a shock, and the ability to avoid a shock altogether. In this section, we have prepared a framework for Economic Resilience that provides an approach for becoming better prepared for future disasters, including economic, manmade and natural, recovering from disasters, and then transitioning back to steady-state.

Funded with EDA Technical Assistance CARES Act funds, SEARP&DC partnered with the Auburn University Government & Economic Development Institute (GEDI) to develop an economic resilience plan, *COVID-19: An Investigation of Impacts, Lessons Learned, and Experiences "On the Front Lines"*. Through data analysis and lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic, Auburn University's GEDI staff made strategic recommendations for incorporating resilience into the SEARP&DC's CEDS. Through this process, SEARP&DC, based on these recommendations, developed specific goals and actions for planning and implementing resilience to bolster the long-term economic durability of the region and incorporated into the 2022-2026 Five Year CEDS.

The four (4) phases of disaster are: 1) preparedness; 2) response; 3) recovery; and 4) mitigation. Each phase has particular needs, requires distinct tools, strategies, and resources and faces different challenges. Each of the phases and actions that the SEARP&DC should work towards are further described below.

Preparedness

Preparedness focuses on understanding how a disaster might impact the community and how education, outreach and training can build capacity to respond to and recover from a disaster. Various economic shock factors have varying levels of severity and devastation, including natural disasters; manmade disasters; economic fluctuations; closure of a military base; exit of a major employer; and availability of funds for grants, as examples. Preparation steps are taken to ensure that key local employers and supporting resources are ready to jump into action quickly and that local businesses and governments understand their roles and responsibilities in preparing for and responding to disasters.

Several major actions that the Region should work towards completing for Preparedness include:

- Encourage local governments to develop a plan that identifies economic vulnerabilities as well as the resources to harness in the event of a disaster. Action strategies and steps should be established to indicate who leads what strategy/step and resources needed to complete the effort.
- Develop a contact list of key stakeholders throughout the region and state. This list will be used to coordinate information-gathering and economic analysis in the event of a disaster.
- Develop a communication strategy utilizing telecommunications and broadband networks and social media with the key stakeholders including all groups that serve local businesses to ensure that the broadest possible range of businesses can be reached in a



post-disaster situation. Possibly designating one group to take the lead in coordinating communications in a post-disaster situation.

- Identify potential funding sources for disaster recovery and redevelopment, including federal, state and local sources.
- Provide workshops to aide businesses in preparing for disaster situations, including having sessions led by experts in law, finance and disaster preparation for local businesses.
- Encourage local economic developers and officials to employ safe development practices in business districts and surrounding communities, including locating outside of floodplains, preserving natural lands that act as buffers from storms and protecting business developments from the impacts of extreme weather.

Response

Response addresses immediate threats presented by the disaster, including saving lives, meeting humanitarian needs (food, shelter, clothing, public health and safety), cleanup, damage assessment and the start of resource distribution. During this time the immediate actions are to save lives and protect property. As the response period progresses, focus shifts to repairs, restoring utilities, and finishing the cleanup process.

Several major actions that the Region should work towards completing for Response include:

- During the Response period, it is vital to have social media sites operational to provide current information and resources. Develop and promote the site to businesses as the place to turn for key information post-disaster. This could also be a place where displaced businesses can provide updated contact information.
- Develop a plan to set up a Business Recovery Center to centralize small business recovery resources, local bank officers, technical assistance providers and other critical assistance for maintaining business continuity and get businesses up and running.
- SEARP&DC staff should begin to meet with businesses and communities as soon as possible to conduct one-on-one damage assessments that will help gauge the impact on business operations, commerce, and the local economy. Data will help in developing recovery programs and can later assist with grant writing.

Recovery

Recovery involves the development, coordination and implementation of operations, services, infrastructure, facilities, and programs. The recovery phase of disaster can typically be broken into two periods. The short-term typically lasts from six-months to at least one year and involves delivering immediate services to citizens and businesses. The long-term phase, which can range up to decades, requires thoughtful strategic planning and action to address more serious or permanent impacts of a disaster.

Community recovery after a disaster includes maintaining a healthy economy and reestablishing a strong, vibrant economy that is equal to or better than before the disaster. Furthermore, the recovery process can offer a series of unique and valuable opportunities to improve on the status quo. Capitalizing on these opportunities can advance the long-term health, resilience, and sustainability of communities and better preparing them for future challenges.



Several major actions that the Region should work towards completing for Recovery include:

- Protecting critical infrastructure is a key component of recovery. Repairing and reconstructing water, sewer, utilities, transportation and cyber systems should be a priority.
- Development of a pre-and post-disaster housing recovery plan for communities recovering from disaster.
- Continue to utilize communication systems that were set up during the Preparation phase to ensure business owners are able to access their property.
- Connect with local, state and federal partners to tap into new funding sources.
- Inform businesses about the availability of recovery loan resources that may be made available through the SBA Disaster Division.
- Encourage business to re-evaluate their business plan and redefine themselves and their markets. Recovery steps can present opportunities to change or grow.

The bigger the disaster, the more important it is for a community to have a common vision of what successful recovery will look like. Future economic strength will depend on how well the vision and opportunities for recovery assistance are communicated and pursued. Local governments, economic developers, chambers of commerce and business leaders must maintain communications over the entire course of recovery, however long it may last.

Mitigation

Mitigation is the effort to reduce the loss of life and property by lessening the impact of disasters. The purpose of Mitigation is to find better ways of doing things; enhance environmental and social benefits; avoid, minimize or remedy adverse impacts; and ensure that residual impacts are within acceptable levels. Effective mitigation requires that we all understand local risks, address the hard choices, and invest in long-term community well-being. The actions can be as simple as elevating a water heater and appliances in a garage that sometimes flood. Mitigation actions can take a much larger approach such as pursuing a FEMA buyout program or updating land use ordinances and building codes.

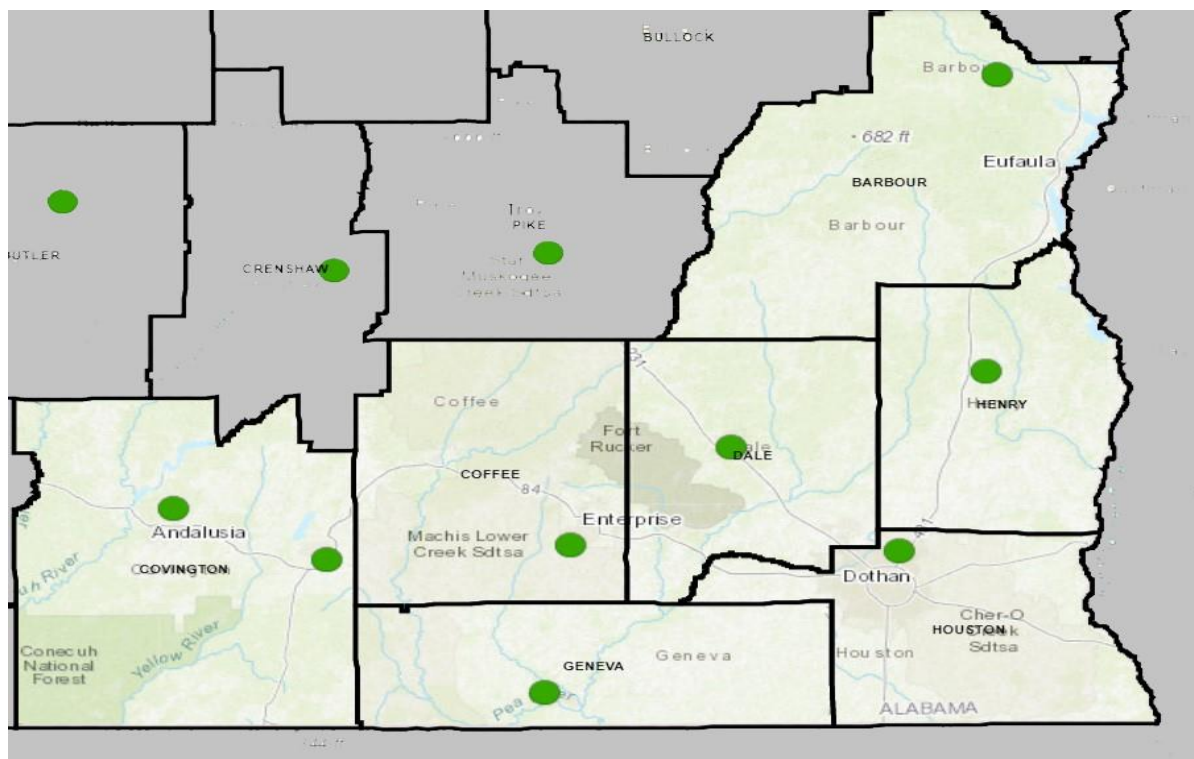


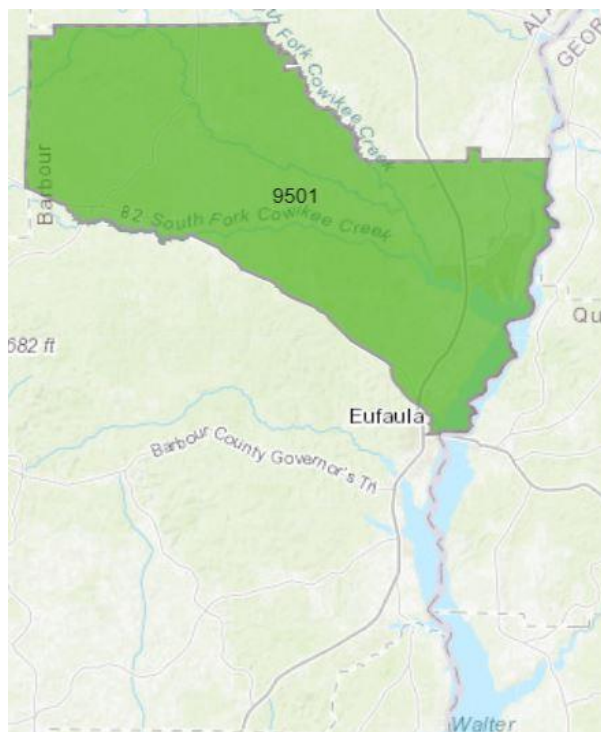
CHAPTER 5 OPPORTUNITY ZONES

Opportunity Zones are a community development program established by Congress in 2017 through the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act. The goal of the program is foster private-sector investments in low-income rural and urban areas. Opportunity Zones are low income census tracts with a poverty rate of at least 20 percent and a median family income of less than 80 percent of the statewide or area median income based on the 2017 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates. Through the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act of 2017, federal tax incentives are provided for investors to re-invest their unrealized capital gains into Opportunity Funds dedicated for investing in the designated Opportunity Zones.

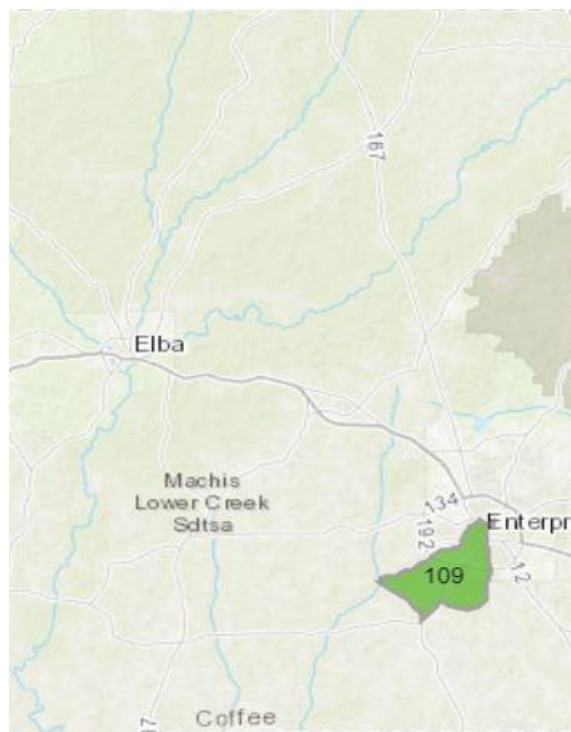
The SEAR&DC region is home to 8 Low-Income Community Opportunity Zones. Six counties in the SEARP&DC region contain one Opportunity Zone and Covington County contains two Opportunity Zones. These zones provide an excellent opportunity to maximize development in the SEARP&DC region by spurring economic growth and job creation in areas where accessing traditional capital may be not be easy.

The SEARP&DC regional Opportunity Zone partners include lending institutions, community foundations, economic development organizations, chambers of commerce, and two and four-year colleges. The State of Alabama has a 501c3 organization called Opportunity Alabama (OPAL) and its primary focus is on capital formation in Opportunity Zones across all 67 counties in Alabama. Opportunity Alabama unites investors, projects, communities and partners.

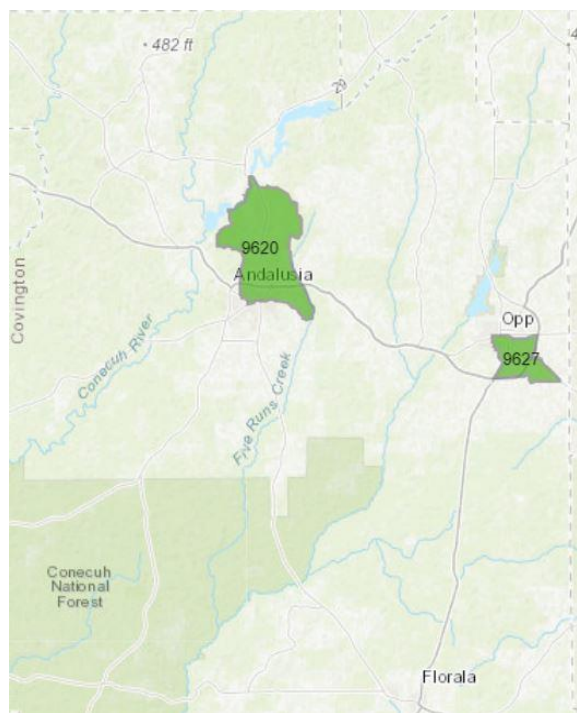




Barbour County Census Tract 9501
Median Household Income
\$36,595
Percent of Population Below Poverty
31.6%

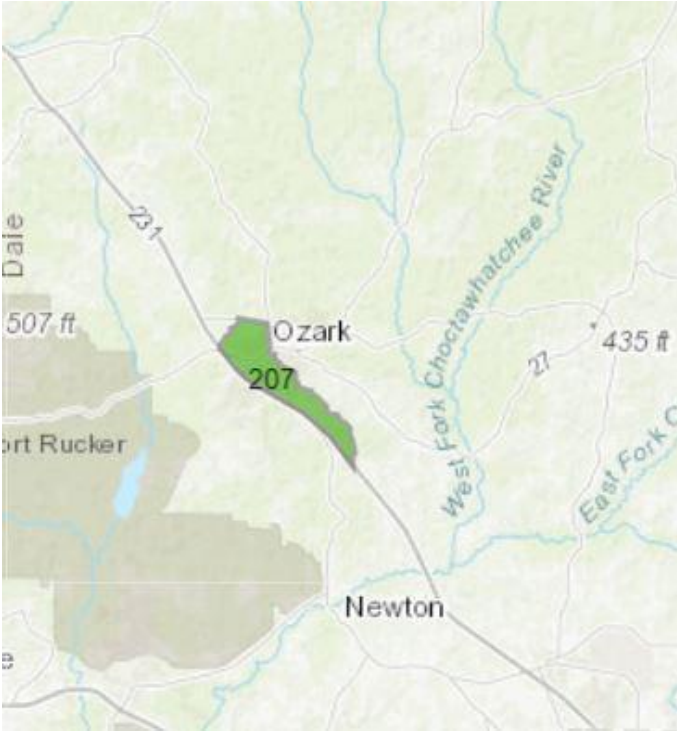


Coffee County Census Tract 109
Median Household Income
\$39,006
Percent of Population Below Poverty
22.1%



Covington County Census Tract 9620
Median Household Income
\$33,931
Percent of Population Below Poverty
20.0%

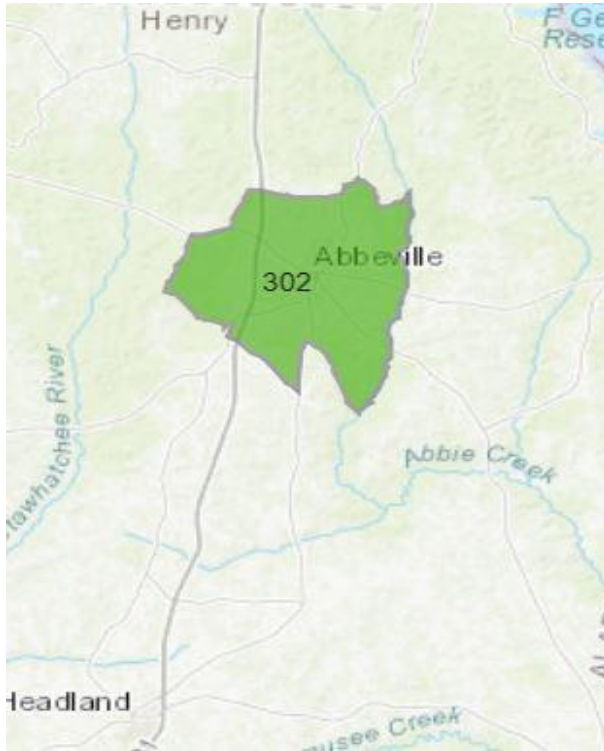
Covington County Census Tract 9627
Median Household Income
\$27,104
Percent of Population Below Poverty
32.0%



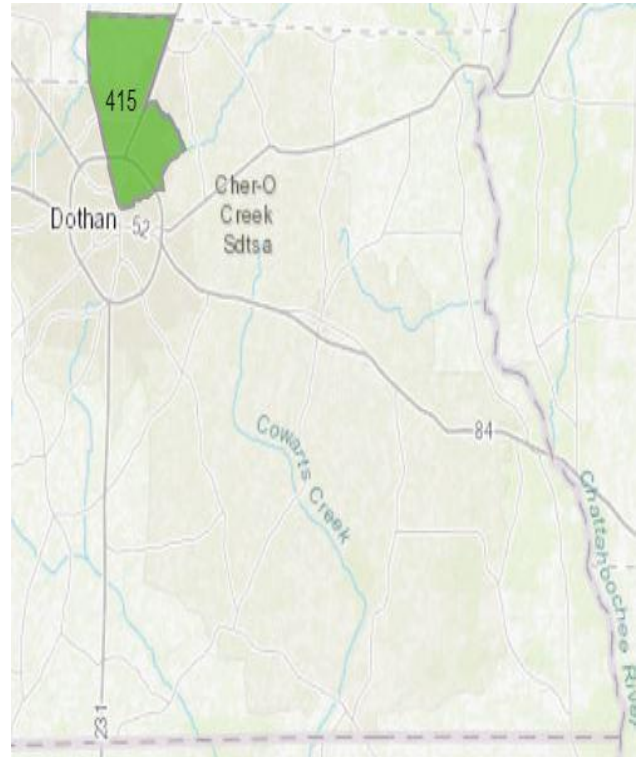
Dale County Census Tract 207
Median Household Income
\$16,746
Percent of Population Below Poverty
41.3%



Geneva County Census Tract 503
Median Household Income
\$36,551
Percent of Population Below Poverty
29.7%



Henry County Census Tract 302
Median Household Income
\$41,612
Percent of Population Below Poverty
20.7%



Houston County Census Tract 415
Median Household Income
\$29,523
Percent of Population Below Poverty
31.3%



CHAPTER 6 IMPLEMENTATION AND PERFORMANCE MEASURES

Southeast Alabama Regional Planning & Development Commission COMPREHENSIVE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY (CEDS)

The Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) is mandated to contain a performance measures component and should be an element of an ongoing planning process. The evaluation should answer the questions of *“How are we doing?”* and *“What can we do better?”* Performance measures are to be an integral part of the evaluation process so that the progress of development activities can be identified in achieving the vision and goals of the CEDS.

The Southeast Alabama Regional Planning & Development Commission CEDS Committee and the Economic Development Staff (Economic Development Director and Economic Development Specialist) will be responsible for periodically evaluating the CEDS to ensure that regional economic development goals and objectives are being accomplished. The CEDS evaluation will be completed on an annual basis and any recommendations from the CEDS Committee will be incorporated into the annual CEDS update submitted to the Economic Development Administration (EDA). It is important to include broad and diverse regional participation into the CEDS evaluation process through the membership of the CEDS Committee.

This evaluation method will measure the performance and effectiveness of the CEDS and will include the following measurement criteria:

- ❑ Number and amount of state and/or federally funded investments which improved or provided infrastructure/facilities in the Southeast Alabama Region (approved projects);
- ❑ Number and amount of state and/or federally funded investments which will improve or provide infrastructure/facilities in the Southeast Alabama Region (submitted projects);
- ❑ Number and amount of state and/or federally funded investments which provided technical assistance and/or planning assistance in the Southeast Alabama Region;
- ❑ Estimated number of new jobs created/retained in the Southeast Alabama Region as a result of project(s);
- ❑ Estimated amount of private sector investment generated by project(s) in the Southeast Alabama Region;
- ❑ Estimated amount of public sector investment generated by project(s) in the Southeast Alabama Region; and
- ❑ Changes in the economic environment of the Southeast Alabama Region.



CEDS STRATEGIC COMMITTEE			
NAME	COUNTY	OCCUPATION	RACE
BARBOUR			
Jack Tibbs, Jr.		Mayor	W-M
Frances Crews		Mayor	B-F
Thomas E. Crossley		Businessman	B-M
Earl Gilmore		Chairman, Co Commission	W-M
Ken Novak		Businessman	W-M
Rachel Smith		Commissioner	B-F
COFFEE			
Rod Morgan		Businessman	W-M
Gladys Yelverton		Attorney	B-F
Tom Maddox		Mayor	W-M
Dean Smith		Commissioner	W-M
AL Britt		Commissioner	W-M
Jonathan Lockett		City Councilman	B-M
COVINGTON			
Charlotte Hunt		City Councilwoman	W-F
Terry Holley		Mayor	W-M
Sammy Glover		Businessman	B-M
Joe Richburg		Businessman	W-M
Patricia Gunter		Mayor	W-F
Greg White		Chairman, Co Commission	W-M
DALE			
Steve McKinnon		Commissioner	W-M
Jayne Stayton		Mayor	W-M
Derek Dickens		Businessman	W-M
Frankie Wilson		Commissioner	W-M
Mark Blankenship		Mayor	W-M
Leah Harlow		City Councilwoman	W-F
GENEVA			
William Birdsong		Agriculture	W-M
Toby Seay		Chairman, Co Commission	W-M
Rob Hinson		Attorney - Mayor	W-M
Neil Strickland		Mayor	W-M
Kevin Ammons		Educator	W-M
Kelli Brannon		Business Woman	W-F
HENRY			
Henry Grimsley		Commissioner	B-M
David Money		Judge of Probate, Chairman	W-M
Jimmy Money		Mayor	W-M
Gregory Reynolds		Commissioner	B-M
Mercedes Wilson		Education	B-F
John Glover		City Councilman	B-M
HOUSTON			
Kevin Dorsey		City Commissioner	B-M
Lori Wilcoxon		Businesswoman	W-F
Matt Parker		Chamber President	W-M
Brandon Shoupe		Chairman, Co Commission	W-M
Kim Trotter		Mayor	W-F
Adam Hartzog		Businessman	W-M

**ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION
COMPREHENSIVE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY**

RESOLUTION # 439

WHEREAS, the Board of Directors of the Southeast Alabama Regional Planning and Development Commission (SEARP&DC) recognizes that Public Law 105-393, the Economic Development Administration (EDA) Reform Act of 1998, a comprehensive amendment of the Public Works and Economic Development Act of 1965, as amended (PWEDA), requires a strategy to qualify for assistance under most EDA programs; and

WHEREAS, the SEARP&DC Board is aware that the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) Five-Year Plan has been completed by the SEARP&DC Economic Development department staff to meet the requirements of the EDA; and

WHEREAS, the CEDS will be submitted to the Atlanta Regional office of EDA and will serve as the SEARP&DC CEDS Five-Year Plan for the period of October 1, 2022 through September 30, 2027.

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED AND ORDERED, that this Board hereby certifies to and adopts the 2022-2027 CEDS Five-Year Plan as the regional comprehensive economic development strategy for the Southeast Alabama Economic Development District.

ADOPTED THIS THE 22nd DAY OF September, 2022.

Rori Wilcox

Chairperson

Glenda Chancey

Glenda Chancey, Executive Assistant

9/22/22

Date

9/22/22

Date

(SEAL)

