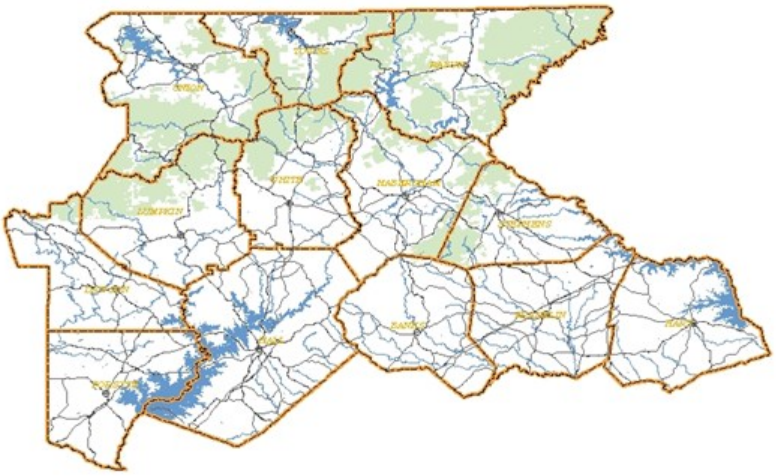
Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy & Regional Plan

DRAFT

Annual Update 2015

Georgia Mountains Regional Commission

GEORGIA MOUNTAINS REGIONAL COMMISSION



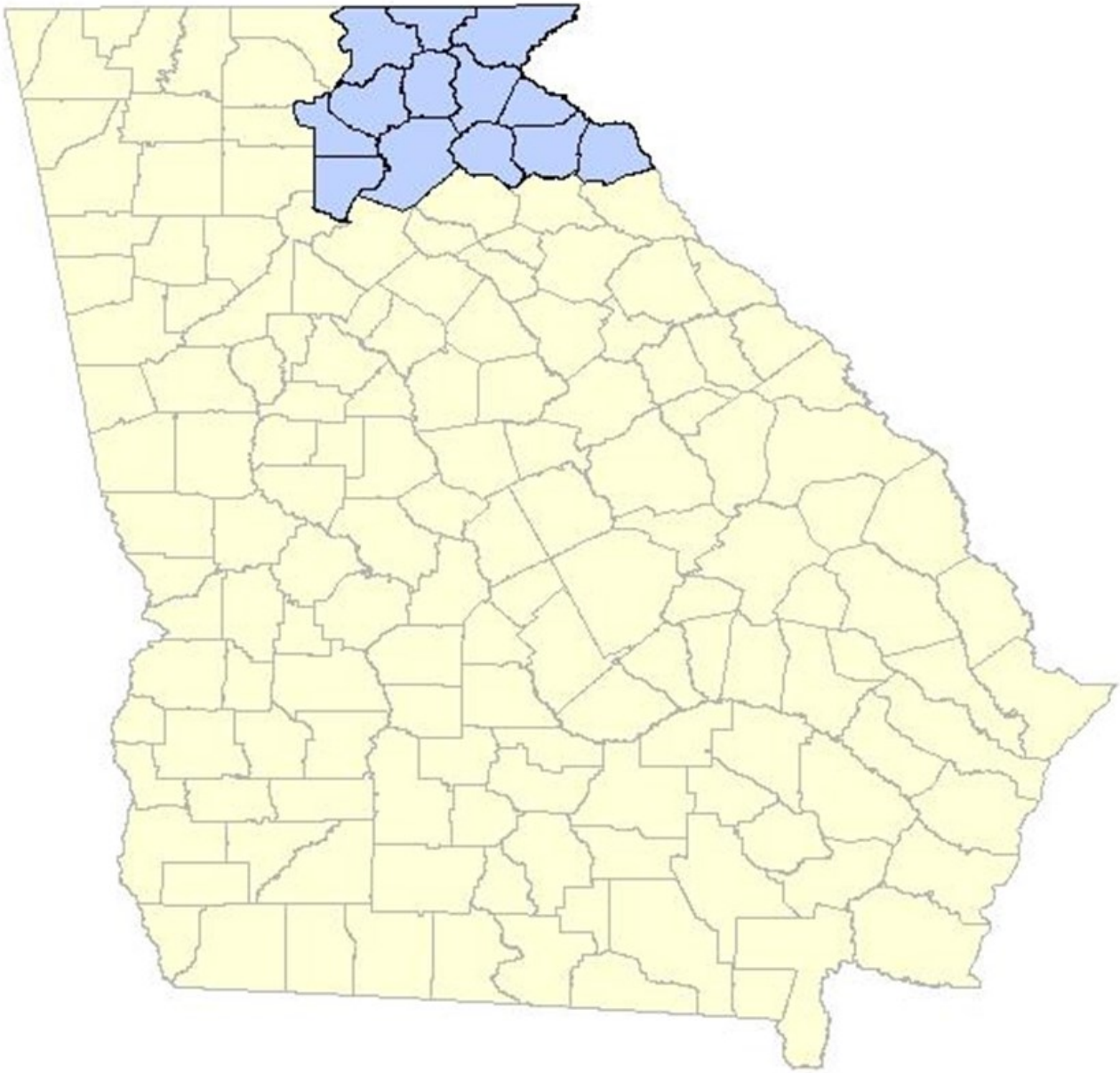


TABLE OF CONTENTS

Executive Summary	4
About the Update	6
CEDS Committee	7
Economic Climate/Regional Economy	8
2015 Assessment	14
Implementation & Performance Metrics	43
Regional Project Priority List	50

Georgia Mountains Regional Commission

Executive Summary

Encompassing approximately 3,500 square miles, the Georgia Mountains Region is located in the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains. The region is bordered by North Carolina to the north and South Carolina to the east, while other Georgia counties border the region to the south and west. At a total estimated population of 661,659, the Georgia Mountains Regional Commission serves the following 13 counties: Banks, Dawson, Forsyth, Franklin, Habersham, Hall, Hart, Lumpkin, Rabun, Stephens, Towns, Union, and White and 38 municipalities within these counties.

The Georgia Mountains Region has gradually transformed itself from an area reliant on manufacturing and agriculture, to one more diversified in health care, tourism, distribution, retail, and a variety of industrial and high-tech companies. Problems surrounding future economic and community development for the region include, but not limited to, shortages of skilled labor, out-migration of young adults, and lack of quality neighborhood housing for new executives and business employees. The availability of key quality sites and/or buildings for new business remains a continuing challenge. The one-time reliance on major employers has lessened, but there is still some vulnerability in several counties. Thus, continued diversification along with economic growth, are seen as the primary goals for the Georgia Mountains Region.

Additionally, the entire region has a solid manufacturing base and strong desire to maintain and expand manufacturing jobs. Most local manufacturing firms have marginal ties with other firms in the region and companies have located and expanded here due to quality labor force, low cost of doing business, historic location of company in the area, and quality of the transportation system.

Within the durable goods manufacturing sector, automotive parts manufacturing is an extremely important employment cluster within the Georgia Mountains Region. The last year has seen an increase within this cluster. In December 2014, Haering, a German automotive precision components company announced their location in the Gateway Industrial Park in Hart County, Georgia. At a total investment of $54M, Haering will create up to 800 jobs within 10 years. Additionally, in May 2015, Nifco Ktw, a German automotive supplier of injection molded components announced the location of its U.S. operations in Toccoa, Stephens County, Georgia creating 200 jobs and investing $27M within its first five years. Nifco Ktw supplies many automotive manufacturers around the world including BMW and Mercedes Benz. Virtually every county within the Georgia Mountains Region has been significantly impacted by the development and growth of this sector over the past twenty years. As the automotive industry continues to develop in the southeastern United States, the Georgia Mountains Region is strategically positioned to attract new investment capital and new jobs within this sector.

The region's infrastructure is continuing to provide top quality support to the region's economic clusters. Important components of the public infrastructure system to support all segments of the region's economy include, but not limited to: skilled labor force, strong workforce development facilities, advanced technological resources, and adequate physical infrastructure that includes a reliable water supply, reliable wastewater treatment capabilities, transportation, and a communications infrastructure system capable of handling the needs of today's firms.

The impact of tourism and tourism related industries has also had a profound effect on the economy of the Georgia Mountains Region. As a primary gateway to the Blue Ridge Mountains, the region annually hosts over seven million visitors to the many mountains, lakes, rivers, museums, downtowns that make the region unique from the rest of the state. At 729 feet, Amicalola Falls is the highest waterfall in Georgia and considered one of the seven "Natural Wonders of Georgia". One of the most breathtaking canyons in the Eastern U.S., Tallulah Gorge is 2 miles long and 1,000 feet deep and is one of the most visited attractions in Georgia. Tourism generates substantial employment, payroll income and tax revenues for the region.

Healthcare remains a thriving industry for the region. As the population of the region increases, additional medical services are needed to meet the demand for specialty services. Northeast Georgia Medical Center (NGMC) Braselton opened its doors, providing citizens access to cutting-edge technology and quality healthcare. The 100-bed facility represents the first new hospital (not a replacement or relocated) facility built in Georgia in nearly 20 years. The campus also house a Medical Office Building and an Urgent Care facility.

The Georgia Mountains Regional Commission (GMRC) Workforce Development Department provides day-to-day management of the Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act (WIOA) funds that are allocated to the Georgia Mountains Region through the Georgia Department of Economic Development Workforce Division. The department continues to provide oversight of training providers who provide job training and job placement to eligible persons.

GMRC Workforce Development (GMWD) Adult and Dislocated Services department served 520 individuals in FY 2015. Training for individuals 18 years or older was provided by Workforce Investment Act (WIA) funding. Additionally, GMWD assisted 356 youth through the Youth Program Division.

After thorough research, the general health of each county's real estate market as compared to the average national Inflation rate from April 2014 to June 2015 was assessed. Counties that are adjusting at a rate greater than inflation signify a more robust market, while those with adjusted rates less than inflation signify a weaker market. The data shows that only 6 of 13 counties outperformed the national inflation rate. Of those 6 counties, 5 of them are clustered around major arterial corridors, a possible indication that local home sales are tied to owners seeking cheaper land with accessibility to other employment centers.

Region 2 experienced a year of significant growth and prosperity with **2,322 jobs created** and **$352 million in private investment** generated.

While the overall regional economy has strengthened, there are still economic problems that need attention, and several opportunities remain to be built upon. Continued economic diversifications and strengthening the competitiveness of the region's economy are still problems that need to be addressed, as is the depth and quality of the local labor force. Economic growth that occurs from internal business growth rather than from in-migration of businesses must be addressed for business retention.

About the Update

About the Update

This document serves as the annual update for the combined Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) and Regional Plan for the Georgia Mountains Regional Commission (GMRC). This document serves a dual purpose, acting as the regional planning document required for both federal and state directives.

As the region's Economic Development District (EDD) designated by the United States Department of Commerce – Economic Development Administration (EDA), the GMRC must develop and maintain an approved CEDS. The CEDS document serves as the region's vision and plan for economic growth and development in advancing the region's economic prosperity, (merged) and collectively sets forth a coordinated economic strategy for all 13 counties in the Georgia Mountains Region.

Likewise, as the area's state designated regional planning agency, the GMRC is responsible for maintaining a Regional Plan in accordance with the rules established by the Georgia Department of Community Affairs (DCA). The *Regional Plan* identifies and coordinates remediation measures for issues and opportunities that impact multiple communities within the region in areas such as environmental management, community facilities, and land use. The resulting document then provides a forward-thinking work program for the GMRC that will better coordinate support services for local governments and direct state activities for the region.

The Planning Process

In 2013, the GMRC completed the first joint update of their CEDS/Regional Plan, a document which will be partially updated annually and updated in full every 5 years.

The annual updates for this document begin in January/February with an end-of-year review process carried out by GMRC staff. This includes a review of GMRC projects and key developments from the previous year. Additionally, GMRC staff begin surveying local governments for their comments on GMRC efforts and to update their own general issues and needs. This material builds the preliminary Regional Planning material required by the state, to be completed as the GMRC updates the local government performance assessment discussed later in the document.

Later in the spring, the GMRC staff begin working with the standing CEDS committee to update the federally mandated portion of the document. This includes a formal division into committees to review and assess various elements and SWOT analyses of regional needs and priorities, culminating in any necessary amendments to key issues and strategies for the region further described in this document.

Both efforts are moving toward a more streamlined approach, with both contributing to the development of the consolidated 5-year Work Program of recommended action items for the GMRC to address key issues.

2014—2015 CEDS Committee

The Georgia Mountains Regional Commission fulfilled its partnership role with the U.S. Department of Commerce – Economic Development Administration through the maintenance of a continuous, comprehensive economic development planning process, support of local economic development projects, and the promotion of new and expanding projects. GMRC has worked with stakeholders in the Georgia Mountains Region to implement the goals established in the Five-Year CEDS document. The activities undertaken this year principally focused on identifying and seeking funding for priority projects, implementation of projects, and supporting the economic development initiatives of the 13 counties and the 38 municipalities that comprise the Georgia Mountains Region.

The Georgia Mountains Regional Commission CEDS Committee met four times during the past year and continued to play an active role in prioritizing projects in the region and endorsing the CEDS Implementation Plan. The CEDS Committee also provided a forum for representatives of the private sector, local government elected officials, community colleges, and other economic development stakeholders to offer their views and input into the process.

The GMRC wishes to acknowledge the active participation and leadership from its economic partners and CEDS Committee in completing this document:

Charlie Auvermann ***(Chairman)***
Margaret Ayers
Jerry Boling
Erik Brinke
Tammy Caudell
William Chafin
JR Charles
Ray Coulombe
Pat Ellis ***(Vice - Chair)***
Gary Fesperman
Senator Steve Gooch
Mitch Griggs
Mark Ivester ***(Immediate Past Chair)***
Tim Martin
Tom O'Bryant
Jane O'Gorman
Kathy Papa
Danette Smith
Cheryl Smith
Annie Sutton
Randall Toussaint ***(Secretary)***
Judy Taylor

GMRC STAFF

W. Danny Lewis, *Executive Director*

Heather Feldman, *Economic Development Director*

Adam Hazell, *Planning Director*

John Phillips, *Workforce Development Director*

Patrick Larson, *Economic Development Rep.*

Nancy Smallwood, *Economic Development Rep.*

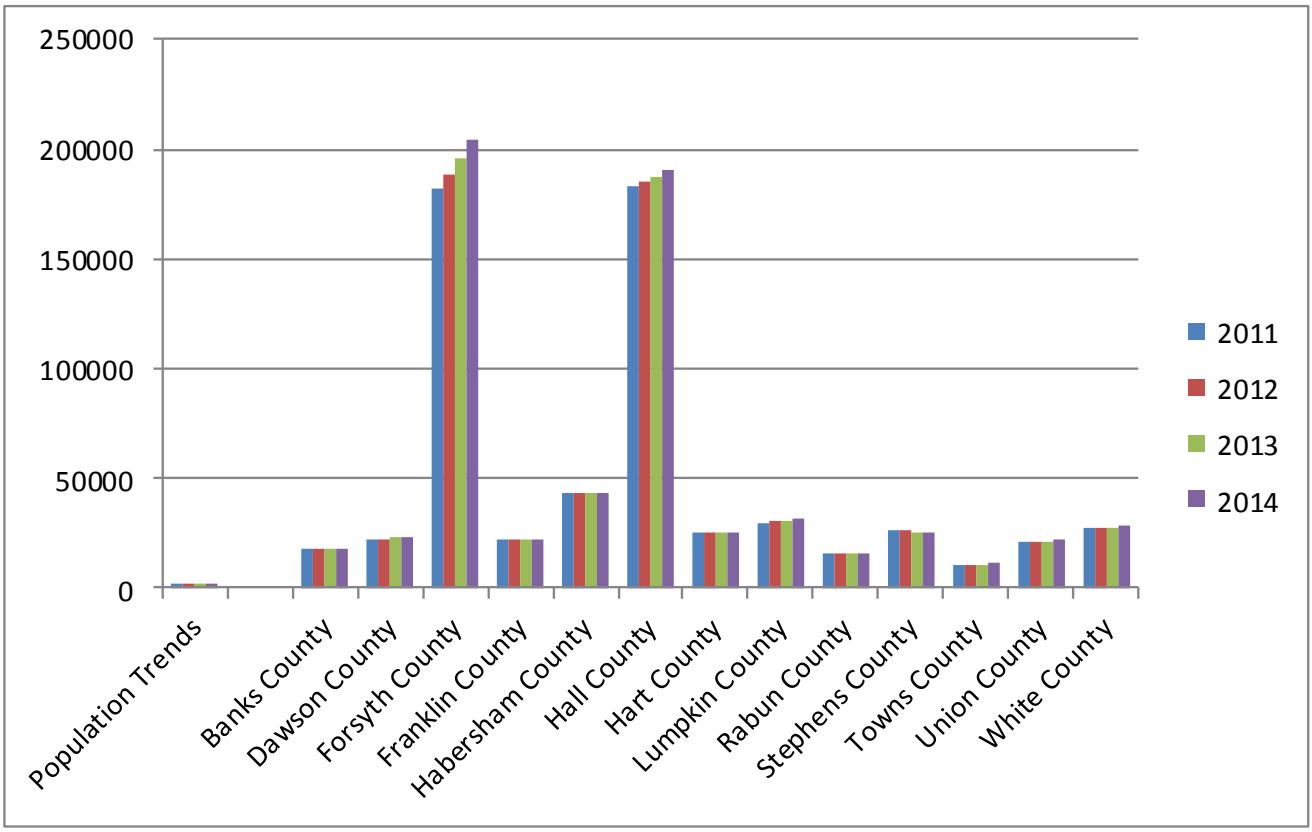
Economic Climate/Regional Economy

Efforts to predict the future economic profile of the Georgia Mountains Region can be assisted by an understanding of the historic population growth patterns of the region and the existing population profile. Through the understanding of current trends, decision makers can better prepare for regional changes in population age, location, and household makeup. Improving the economic health of the region is a common goal and requires policy makers to understand how changes in the region's population will affect the opportunities for economic growth.

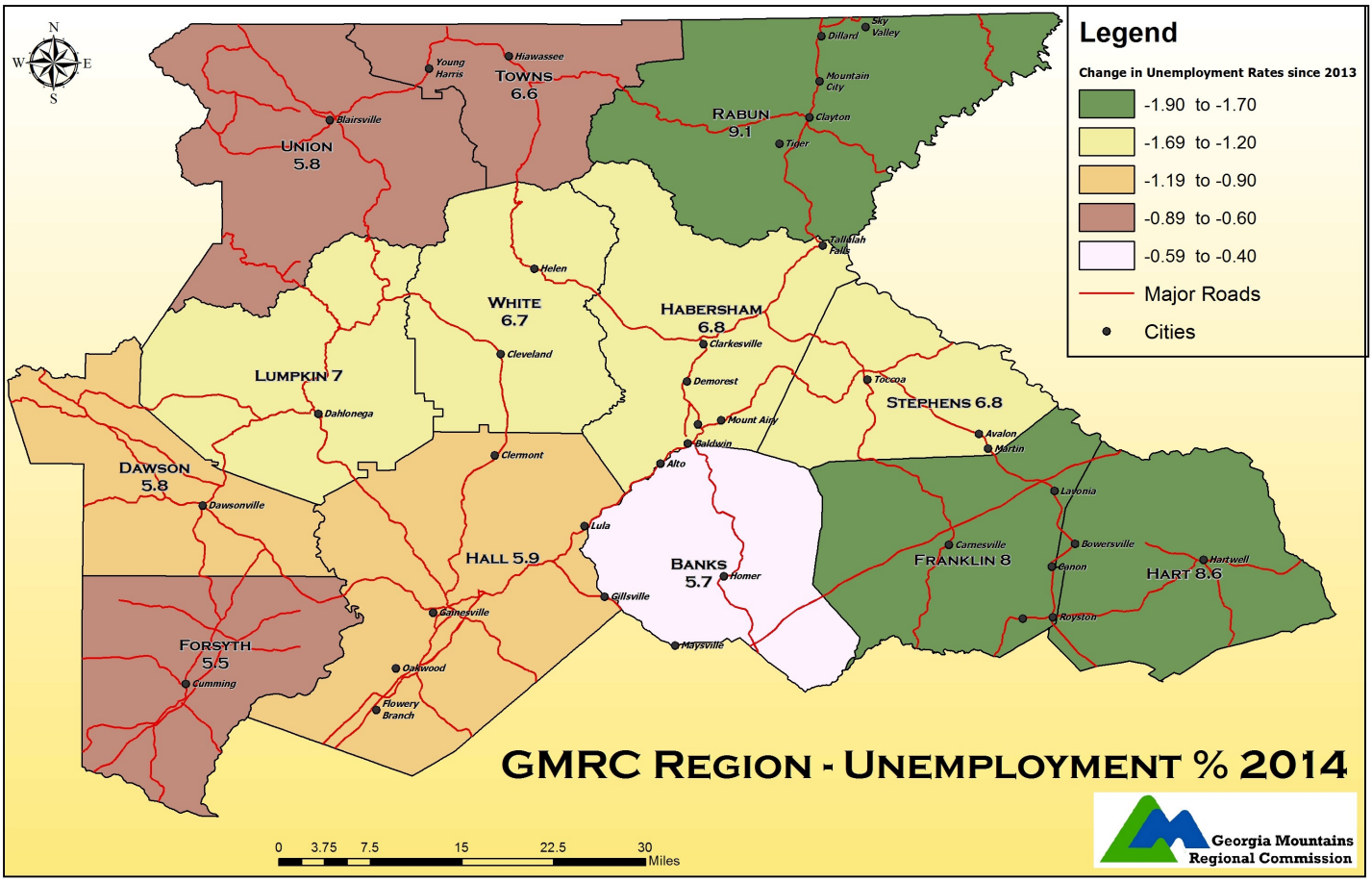
The Georgia Mountains Region has grown tremendously over the past several decades and is currently estimated at 661,659. In fact, the Georgia Mountains Region population growth exceeded both the state and national rates, and it appears that this trend will continue in future years. Much of the growth taking place within the region is occurring in areas where transportation corridors are present. Other migration factors can be attributed to individual economic factors, retirement population, and urban sprawl and spillover from Metropolitan Atlanta.

According to the Georgia Department of Labor, it is projected that the region's population in 2025 will reach 1,004,395 persons, reflecting a 62.6 % increase. Therefore, the goals identified in the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy—Regional Plan are more important than ever in maintaining the balance between growth and the rural character of the region.

Georgia Mountains Region—Population



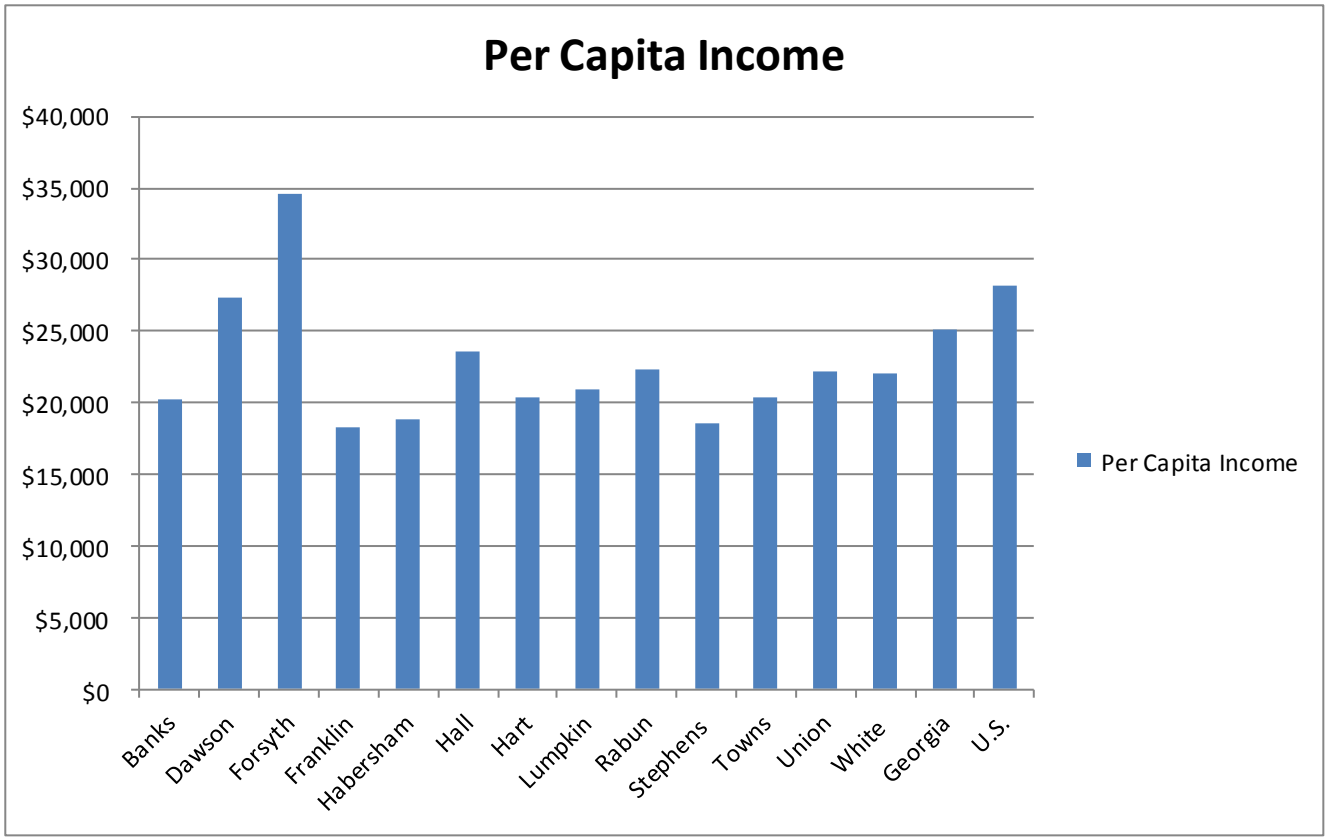
Source: U.S. Census Bureau



Unemployment in the Georgia Mountains Region has seen a tremendous decline over the past year with an average current unemployment rate for the region of 6.1% (June 2015) and is even with state at 6.3%, but higher than the U.S. rate of 5.3%. However, it is the lowest rate for regions in the state.

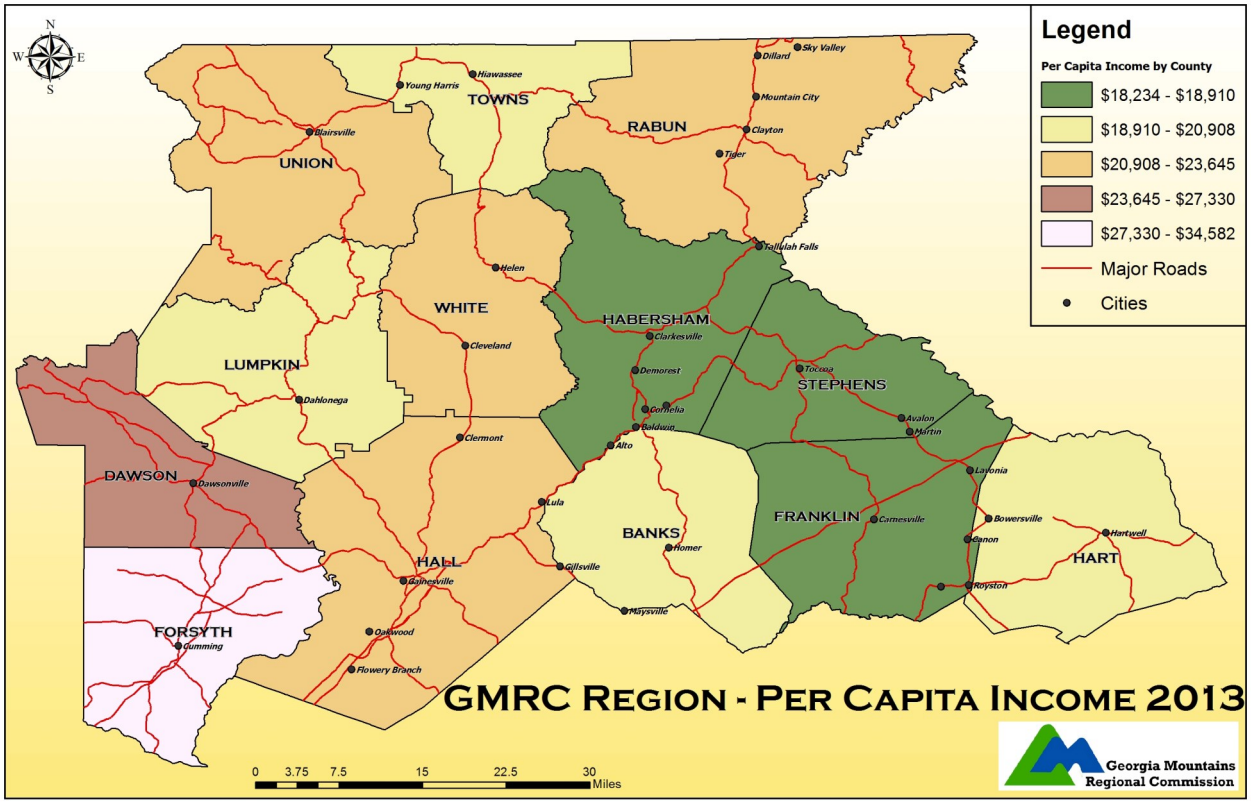
COUNTY	2013 UNEMPLOYMENT	2014 UNEMPLOYMENT	CHANGE
Banks	602	538	-10.60%
Dawson	748	661	-11.60%
Forsyth	5,777	5,171	-10.50%
Franklin	922	764	-17.10%
Habersham	1,552	1,318	-15.1%
Hall	6,055	5,338	-11.80%
Hart	984	801	-18.60%
Lumpkin	1,115	997	-10.60%
Rabun	680	548	-19.40%
Stephens	1,033	856	-17.10%
Towns	410	363	-11.50%
Union	708	613	-13.4%
White	1,017	874	-14.1%

Source: Georgia Department of Labor, Area Labor Profile

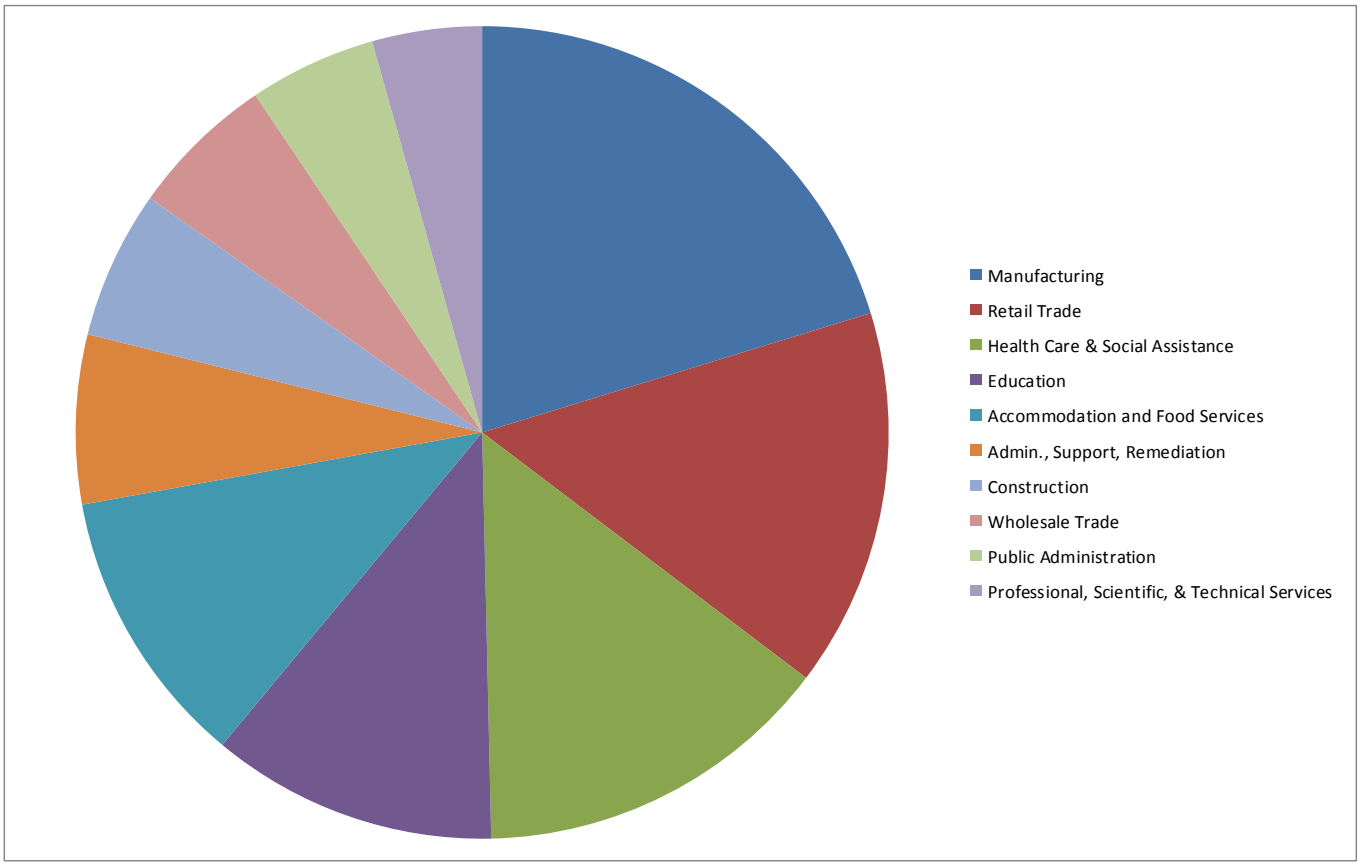


Source: U.S. Census Bureau and Georgia Department of Labor

Even with low unemployment rates in the Georgia Mountains region, per capita income throughout the region is lower than state and national averages. The average per capita income in the Georgia Mountains Region is $22,282 compared to the state average of $25,182 and the U.S. average of $28,155.



Industry Employment Distribution



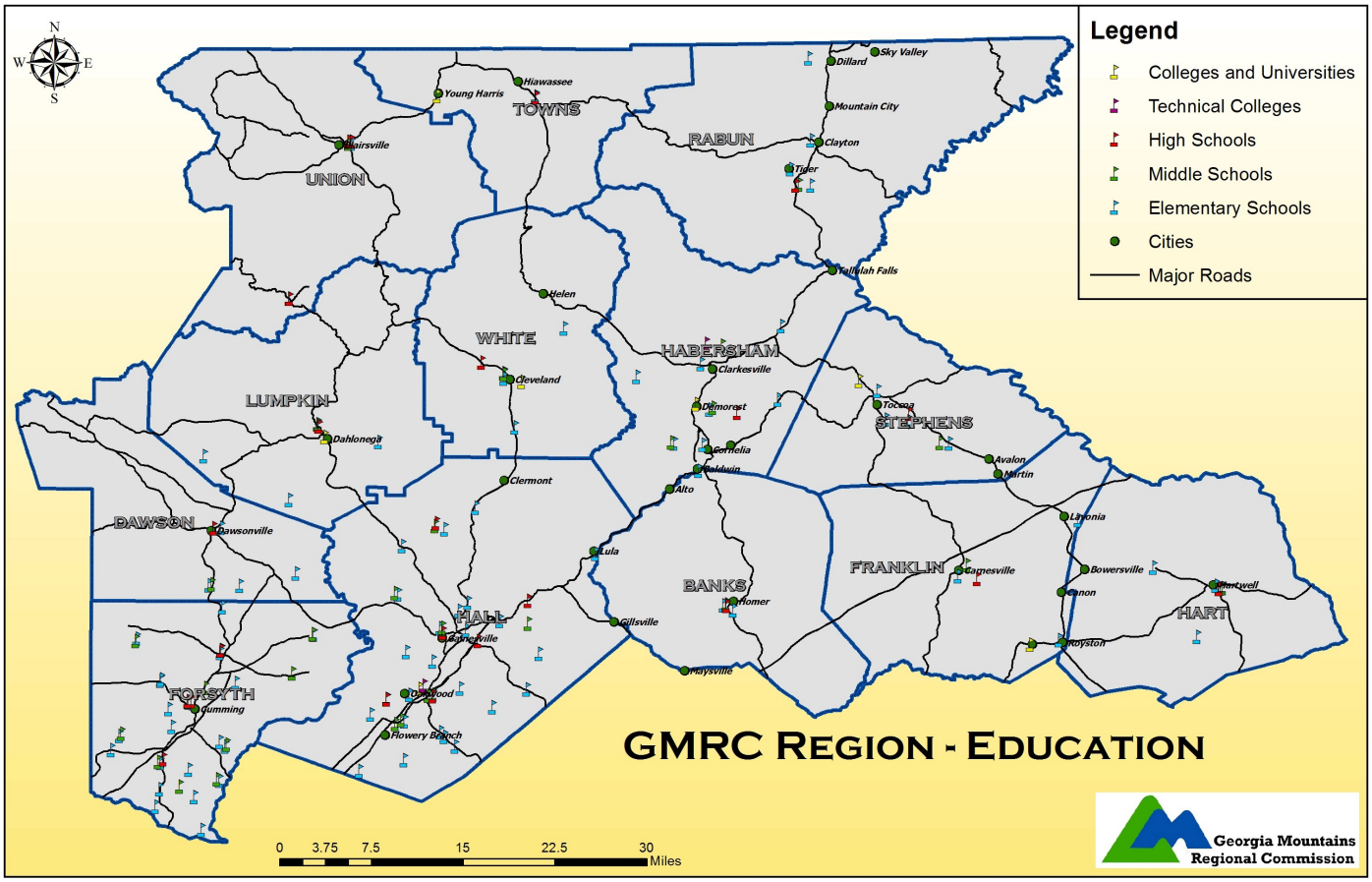
Source: Georgia Department of Labor

According to the Georgia Department of Labor, the ten largest employers in the region in 2014 were Fieldale Further Processing, Forsyth County School System, Hall County, Hall County School System, Ingles Markets, Northeast Georgia Medical Center, Northside Hospital, Publix Supermarkets, University of North Georgia, and Walmart.

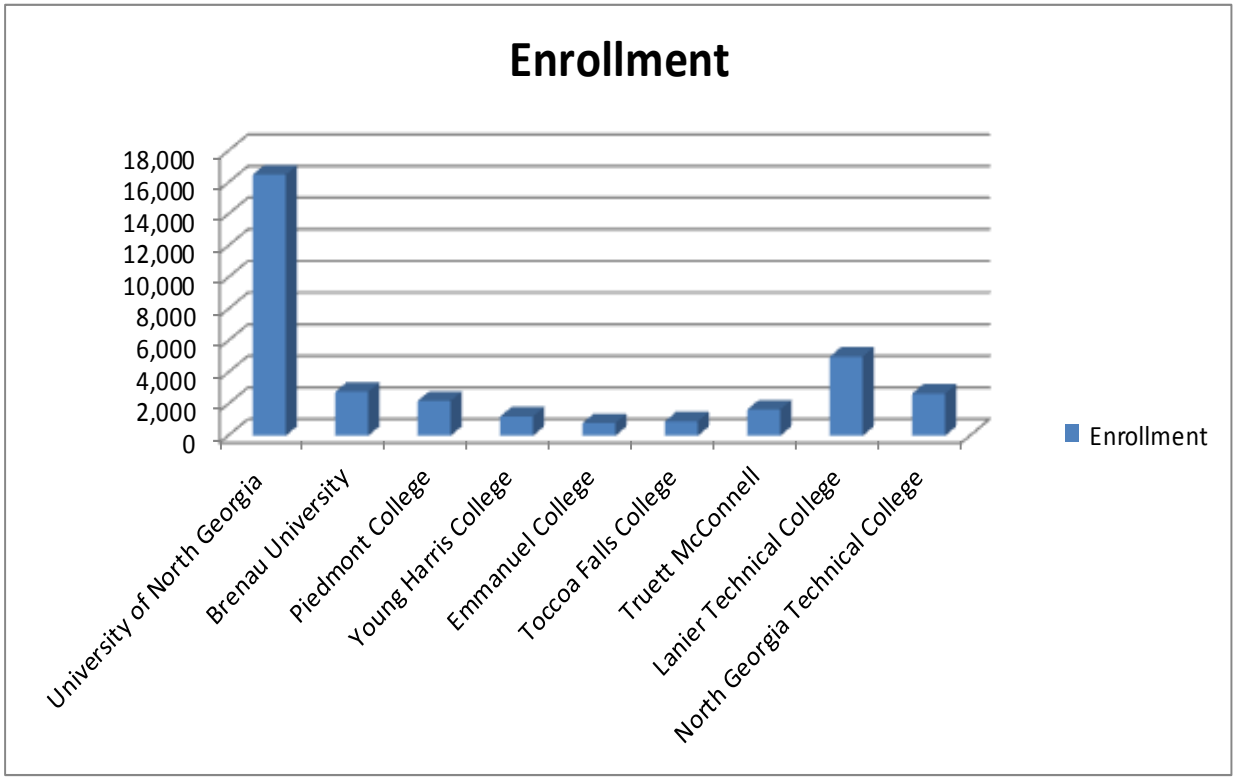
Education of the Labor Force

	PERCENT DISTRIBUTION BY AGE				
	18-24	**25-34**	**35-44**	**45-64**	**65+**
Elementary	4.9%	9.2%	6.4%	5.3%	13.6%
Some High School	19.5%	11.9%	9.2%	9.4%	14.8%
High School Grad/GED	34.9%	29.7%	27.3%	31.7%	31.2%
Some College	33.7%	20.4%	18.4%	20.2%	16.6%
College 2 Year	3.0%	6.3%	7.2%	7.1%	3.6%
College 4 Year	3.7%	16.0%	22.3%	17.0%	12.2%
Post Graduate Studies	.4%	6.5%	9.2%	9.3%	8.0%

Source: Georgia Department of Labor



The economic development programs provided through the colleges and technical colleges provide customized training and other services for business and industry to help existing companies remain in the area and succeed and to stimulate new business start-ups. Quick Start training and services are provided to attract new companies to the area, to assist companies to expand, and to help existing companies to implement new technologies.



Tourism plays an important role throughout the Georgia Mountains Region driving significant business growth and revenue for companies. With moderate climates, advanced transportation infrastructure, long travel seasons, and diversity of attractions, tourism related businesses in the Georgia Mountains Region are able to leverage attractions for both in and out-of-state visitors to increase sales and revenues. According to the Georgia Department of Economic Development, tourism is a $51.2 billion industry in the State of Georgia. The Georgia Mountains Region is third in annual travel volume by domestic visitors behind only Metro Atlanta and the Georgia Coast. Visitors to the region are attracted by the abundance of outdoor activities, numerous state parks and historic sites, museums, wineries, and mountain arts and crafts just to name a few.

The rowing and kayaking site of the 1996 Olympics is located at 3105 Clarks Bridge Road on Lake Lanier in Gainesville, Hall County, Georgia. It is the only 1996 Olympic Venue still used for its original purpose. The venue is host to year-round competitions, training and special events. The Lake Lanier Olympic Venue has shown as economic impact of $6.2 million for fiscal year 2015 and a $7.8 million overall impact for the calendar year 2014-2015.

At an economic impact of $5.1 billion in 2014, the film industry in Georgia continues to flourish, especially in the Georgia Mountains. All 13 counties within the Georgia Mountains Region are certified as "Camera Ready". The mountains, lakes, and small towns make the Georgia Mountains an ideal location and as a result, several movies and television shows have been filmed in the Georgia Mountains Region in the last year.

2013 IMPACT OF DOMESTIC TOURISM EXPENDITURES NORTHEAST GEORGIA MOUNTAINS

Source: Excerpted from Study Prepared for GDEcD by the U.S. Travel Association, Washington, DC

GMRC Counties	Expenditures ($ Millions)	Payroll ($ Millions)	Employment (Thousands)	State Tax Receipts ($ Millions)	Local Tax Receipts ($ Millions)
Banks	14.37	3.22	.15	.57	.43
Dawson	42.32	9.56	.43	1.74	1.21
Forsyth	145.74	35.75	1.60	5.90	4.15
Franklin	35.40	5.11	.28	1.14	1.02
Habersham	45.86	8.81	.45	1.72	1.25
Hall	264.47	54.39	2.51	9.62	7.91
Hart	21.95	5.15	.24	.88	.64
Lumpkin	36.56	6.78	.31	1.34	1.04
Rabun	48.69	11.31	.50	1.92	1.41
Stephens	29.94	5.34	.29	1.05	.84
Towns	42.01	9.21	.41	1.72	1.21
Union	22.94	4.41	.23	.84	.65
White	56.87	12.00	.54	2.10	1.57
Georgia	22,354.00	7,002.66	221.83	988.98	629.75

Prepared by Cheryl Smith, Regional Tourism Representative, Georgia Department of Economic Development

2015 Assessment

This chapter summarizes the updated analysis of conditions, needs and objectives within each of the required elements. It builds upon the material developed in the last 5-year CEDS update, evaluating the performance and impact of applied actions and outlining any recommended changes and additions to the region's plan.

Each element's assessment includes the following sections:

Goals and Strategies

Each element within the CEDS includes a specific, overarching *Goal* that represents the ideal for which the GMRC and its partners are striving. This is designed to complement the goals for each individual community within the region as well as the related goals and initiatives being sought by the State of Georgia. Originally conceived during the 5-year CEDS update in 2012, these *Goals* serve as the primary barometer by which each action will be measured for its appropriateness and impact for the Georgia Mountains Region.

In addition, *Goals* may be accompanied by one or more regional *Strategies*. These are more specific guidelines that the GMRC will use in shaping policy and action measures to achieve the related goal. These have been established to help clarify areas where an element may require more detailed discussion and/or to help illustrate the key values and objectives inherit within the *Goal*.

Assessment

This section provides a brief overview of the updated conditions and issues pertaining to the particular element. It is a summary of the evaluations, surveys and discussions held with stakeholders during the annual update process. These assessments provide the groundwork for updating the list of *Issues and Mitigation Measures* for each element.

Regional Issues and Opportunities

The planning process asks regions to assess the information to identify issues and opportunities that should be considered when trying to plan for the future. In doing so, the regions can more effectively define their objectives and actions so as to better achieve the desired vision.

Natural and Cultural Resources

GOAL: *To conserve, protect and promote the environmental, natural and cultural resources of the region.*

Strategy NR1: *Promote conservation design ideas and other best management practices for new development.*

Strategy NR2: *Improve and promote the knowledge of existing historic resources and preservation programs*.

Strategy NR3: *Support efforts to implement the State's River Basin Management Plans*.

Strategy NR4: *Promote tighter coordination between land use planning and water supply management.*

ASSESSMENT

On several fronts, the GMRC and other stakeholders continued efforts to improve education and management of water resources. The North Georgia Watershed Partnership, acting as the lead agency in implementing the Coosa-North Georgia Watershed Plan, guided the efforts of both the GMRC and the Northwest Georgia RC in surveying local utilities, performing a connectivity study for public water authorities, and began development of a new database of sewer infrastructure. These are part of a series of projects that will work toward goals stated within the Coosa-North Georgia Watershed Plan for protecting resources in the area and ensuring the region has abundant and viable supplies for future water systems.

A Lake Lanier Stakeholders association was convened in FY14 to help stakeholders north of the Buford dam work with EPD in preparing for the results of a forthcoming TMDL about nutrient loading within the reservoir and the policy changes that might be required as a result. The first part of this effort concluded a series of meetings in the middle of 2014 to raise awareness of the issue, began a dialogue of how the local utilities and governments can respond to the issue, and provided EPD staff with recommendations on load modeling for development of mitigation strategies.

Projects completed or nearing completion during the past year include:

- The development of a region-wide GIS dataset of sewer lines, to assist with both watershed protection and long-term utility planning.
- A Watershed Improvement Plan and preliminary implementation for Coldwater Creek in Hart and Elbert Counties.
- The first round of surveys regarding the implementation Best Management Practices (BMPs) among regional water and sewer service providers was issued for the region's Coosa-North Georgia counties.

Issue	Mitigation Strategy
Some local communities lack regulations that meet State minimum standards	• Develop new template for local water planning • Education re: environmental impacts of various materials and products placed in landfills
Lack of awareness about conservation design and best management practices	• Develop new template for local water planning • Education re: environmental impacts of various materials and products placed in landfills • Inventory of septic system management programs. • Update Regional Source Water Assessment Plan • Assessment of septic system inventory • Update NHRGIS, survey of regional historic resources
Lack of education about all types of environmentally sensitive areas	• Develop new template for local water planning • Inventory of septic system management programs. • Update Regional Source Water Assessment Plan • Assessment of septic system inventory
Lack of local greenspace plans	• Template for greenspace planning to be incorporated into local comprehensive plans during respective dates
Decreasing funds for State parks and wildlife management areas	• Policy: Continue to support sustained or increased funding at DNR for operation of state parks and wildlife management areas
General habitat degradation caused by growth and development	• Develop new template for local water planning • Education re: environmental impacts of various materials and products placed in landfills • Develop regional development build-out scenario
Need to coordinate implementation of the three Water Planning District management plans developed for the region	• Regional Plan update in 2017 will include guide to coordinate state water planning activities in the region. • Template for watershed planning to be incorporated into local comp plans during updates

Land Use

GOAL: *To promote and coordinate land use planning and management that supports the other goals and ambitions for the region.*

Strategy LU1: *Promote development patterns that maximize existing utilities and infrastructure.*

Strategy LU2: *Support communities looking to preserve and expand their historic town centers*.

Strategy LU3: *Promote coordinated land use management along critical arterials, supporting both local needs and the demands of through traffic critical for tourism and industry*.

Strategy LU4: *Promote neighborhood scale planning.*

Strategy LU5: *Support efforts that preserve rural and agricultural uses where desired.*

Strategy LU6: *Support advanced development practices within in the metropolitan areas.*

ASSESSMENT

With the recession of 2008-2012 now a fading impact on regional markets, development within the Georgia Mountains Region has begun to resemble earlier years when demand for the area was stronger and more dynamic. Most subdivisions and larger developments that had been placed on hold during the recession have now seen renewed construction and land sales, with the only noticeable impact being a downsizing in some unit designs. However various real estate professionals have suggested the housing market for the region is down to a 6 month supply or less in parts of the region, implying strong demand and correlating employment options for prospective buyers.

Notable land use developments and factors from the past year include:

- Completion of the Northeast Georgia Medical Center's Braselton Campus, bringing a new, large-scale hospital to the region's southernmost point. Already additional affiliated office space is under construction nearby, as well as more housing.
- Road construction in Forsyth and Hall Counties has been aggressively pursued with State and local dollars to achieve plans for alleviating congestion, including Lanier Parkway/ Friendship Road, Spout Springs Road, the completion of the Exit 17 interchange and a new bond declaration for improvements on GA 400.
- Habersham County completed an assessment of the Highway 365 corridor and identified objectives and strategies for recruiting new industrial development in the southern half of the county, adjacent to similar patterns in Hall County. This is seen as a precursor to bringing more detailed land use policies to the County.

Issue	Mitigation Strategy
The rapid transition of land use from farms and forest to residential and commercial	• Develop regional development build-out scenario • Develop updated concept for, and inventory of, primary agricultural areas • Develop template for comprehensive neighborhood plans and standards • Review regional Future Development Strategy; Amend as needed
The lack of adequate and innovative land use planning tools and lack of enforcement of existing land use regulations	• Create growth management programs that provide developer incentives and guidelines as well as methods of increased responsibility and accountability to the local community. • Review regional Future Development Strategy; Amend as needed
Insufficient infrastructure for the demands of changing land uses	• Review regional Future Development Strategy • Develop regional development build-out scenario • Develop in-house service for calculating cost-benefit analyses for new development & utility improvements
Lack of/limited capacity for identification and protection of sensitive areas (environmentally and historically) as the population grows	• Review regional Future Development Strategy; Amend as needed
Land use conflicts (i.e. Poultry and livestock operations vs. residential development, or high density development occurring in sensitive areas.)	• Develop template for comprehensive neighborhood plans and standards • Create growth management programs that provide developer incentives and guidelines as well as methods of increased responsibility • Review regional Future Development Strategy; Amend as needed • Education re: environmental impacts of various materials and products placed in landfills
Insufficient land use regulations (do not consider impacts and consistency beyond jurisdictional boundaries)	• Develop template for comprehensive neighborhood plans and standards • Create growth management programs

The deterioration of downtown areas, buildings and infrastructure, and loss of economic activity as suburbanization occurs in the region	• Review regional Future Development Strategy; Amend as needed • Initiate GMRC Downtown Association • Develop a region wide downtown economic database that includes historic resources • Develop single map redevelopment plans for historic downtowns • Create model design standards and incentive programs for downtown areas
The eroding downtown tax base of the cities throughout the region resulting from suburbanization	• Review regional Future Development Strategy; Amend as needed • Initiate GMRC Downtown Association • Develop a region wide downtown economic database that includes historic resources • Develop single map redevelopment plans for historic downtowns • Create model design standards and incentive programs for downtown areas
Impact of population growth for impact on rural character	• Inventory and map agri-tourism assets of the region. • Develop regional growth and tourism strategy specifically for historic downtowns • Develop promotional material for area farmer's markets and canneries • Develop updated concept for, and inventory of, primary agricultural areas

Community Facilities and Services

GOAL: *To provide adequate facilities and infrastructure in all areas to support existing business and industry, enable expansion, and recruit new business, and to support efficient growth and development patterns that will protect and enhance the region's quality of life.*

ASSESSMENT

Transportation

Goal: *Enhance all segments of transportation networks in the region to promote economic development and personal safety.*

Strategy CFS1: *Utilize existing inventories of current roadways, air, and rail needs to support economic development.*

Strategy CFS2: *Improve current transit, local public transportation systems, and encourage green methods of transportation.*

Public investments in infrastructure add value to land and thus encourage private development and job creation. Highways and state routes within the Georgia Mountains Region provide a connection to the rest of the United States, linking cities and counties, providing a transportation route for exporting goods, bringing in tourist dollars and assisting commuters on their routes to and from work.

Recognizing the need of improving roadways and understanding the importance of transportation to the region's economy, the Georgia Mountains Regional Commission (GMRC) continues to work with local governments to assist with transportation needs and track improvements and new routes added to the area's transportation system. However, funding for road improvements continues to be a struggle for the region, state, and the cities and counties. To address Georgia transportation needs, legislators introduced and passed House Bill 170 on Jan. 29, 2015. Highlights from this legislation:

- Increasing the state gas tax to 26 cents-per-gallon, and diesel to 29 cents-per-gallon
- Removing the 4 percent sales tax on all motor fuel
- Instituting a $200 fee for non-commercial electric vehicles
- Eliminating a $5,000 tax credit for new purchases or leases of electric cars
- Creating a new annual highway impact fee for heaving trucks
- Continuing Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax (SPLOST) on motor fuel, as long as the generated revenue is dedicated to transportation
- Restructuring the Georgia Transportation Infrastructure Bank to provide loans and grants to local governments for the purpose of transportation construction projects
- Instituting a $5 per night hotel fee

Despite the problems of finding methods of funding road improvements, construction on regional transportation projects is continuing. In November 2014, Forsyth County voters approved a new method of funding transportation within their county. Voters approved up to $200 million general obligation bond to finance a variety of transportation projects. Of the $200 million, $81 million is proposed for projects in partnership with the Georgia Department of Transportation, leveraging state and federal funding, with the remaining $119 million proposed for county wide projects.

To obtain more detailed information regarding the area's transportation projects, the GMRC requested information from GMRC member governments to complete an infrastructure survey requesting details on infrastructure projects for the area.

City or County	Road Improvements
Cumming	.59 resurfaced, .24 paved, intersection improvement, repair trip hazards
Dawson County	10 miles road resurfaced
Forsyth County	Approved up to $200 million general obligation bond to finance a variety of transportation projects. 159 roads covering 50.17 miles were resurfaced.
Hall County	Voters approved SPOLST VII to invest a projected $158 million for road improvements, water and sewer and other municipal projects. Clarkes Bridge replacement project features a pedestrian tunnel connecting Lake Lanier Olympic Venue on both sides of Clarks Bridge Road.
Dawsonville	1,500 feet Memory Lane sidewalk
Lavonia	Roadway improvements to Bowman Street, Victoria Lane (1.12 miles)
Lavonia	Downtown square repaved, construction of street, paving of Hwy. 59 & 77
Mt. Airy	Regular road maintenance
Sky Valley	Regular road maintenance
White County	Cleveland By Pass (Appalachian Parkway) Phase 1 under construction, Phase 2 initiated by Georgia DOT. 9 miles of County Road resurfaced, 1.5 miles of new paving. ¾ mile of bike trail at recreation department.

There continues to be a need for walking and multi-use trails throughout the region. Several communities received Georgia Department of Natural Resources (DNR) Recreational Trails Grants:

- City of Maysville—Nature Trails at City Park
- Hart County—Hart Trails
- White County—Yonah Preserve Multi-Use Trails
- Union County—Byron Herbert Reece Connector Trails

Water & wastewater

Goal: *Provide adequate water supply and promote conservation.*

Strategy CFS3: *Support the development of water supply to ensure stable infrastructural support for businesses and residents.*

Strategy CFS4: *Improve water quality and wastewater planning to ensure stable infrastructural support for businesses and residents.*

Strategy CFS5: *Develop water conservation education and public awareness program to promote water conservation and reuse.*

Currently, several of the region's municipalities depend on federal, state and local monies for the construction or improvement of water and wastewater infrastructure through programs like the Georgia Environmental Finance Authority (GEFA). The below table outlines major projects funded by GEFA in FY 2015.

Date	Community	Amount	Fund	Project
August 2014	Hart County Water & Sewer Authority	$2,000,000	Drinking Water State Revolving Fund	Extend water lines to Bethany Church area - southwest portion of county
August 2014	Etowah Water & Sewer Authority	$10,000,000	Georgia Reservoir Loan Fund	Russell Creek Reservoir project
August 2014	Lumpkin Water and Sewerage Authority	$1,000,000	Drinking Water State Revolving Fund	Water supply well, 12- inch piping to existing water supply, rehabilitate water storage tank
August 2014	Baldwin	$1,842,520	Drinking Water State Revolving Fund	500,000 gallon water tank, booster pump station & pressure reducing valve distribution system
October 2014	Dawsonville	$1,000,000	Clean Water State Revolving Fund	Water supply well, well house, replace leaking lines, water meters along Hwy. 53
October 2014	Etowah Water & Sewer Authority	$1,270,000	Georgia Fund Award	Upgrade and relocate water mains and install sewer for GDOT intersection improvements
January 2015	Helen	$350,000	Drinking Water State Revolving Fund	Rehabilitate 1,500 linear feet of sewer line
May 2015	Maysville	$1,350,000	Drinking Water State Revolving Fund	Replace 15,000 linear feet of waterline, install automatic meter readers
May 2015	Toccoa	$2,500,000	Clean Water State Revolving Fund	Construct 15,000 linear feet of sewer mains & sewer pump stations to serve Veterans Memorial Parkway
May 2015	Rabun County Water and Sewer Authority	$2,500,000	Drinking Water State Revolving Fund	1.5 mgd potable water treatment plant and appurtenances.

Telecommunications

Goal: *Ensure new telecommunication networks for needed accessibility and reliability.*

Strategy CFS6: *Prepare to meet industry and business telecommunication needs by assisting with fiber optic network development.*

The development of telecommunications in the region is critical to the future economic viability of the Georgia Mountain region. Funding for telecommunication related projects is a constant need by cities and counties in the region. Many businesses and industries in the area desire data capacity for video applications of data sharing between company locations, distance learning, telemedicine and surveillance but there continues to be a digital divide between metro areas and rural areas in the region. The region worked together to develop a Digital Economy Plan for the region in 2014. The goal of the Digital Economy Strategy is to, "Ensure new telecommunication networks for needed accessibility and reliability to support the growth of the regional economy." The strategy of the plan includes meeting the needs of the business community by assisting with fiber optic network development. The second strategy of the plan involves the promotion and support of health information technology.

Healthcare

Goal: *To foster community-based wellness initiatives and increase the availability of affordable high-quality health care services.*

Strategy CFS7: *Encourage and support multi-jurisdictional approaches to provide health services for economic development purposes.*

Strategy CFS8: *Support efforts to improve community-based prevention and wellness.*

Strategy CFS9: *Promote and support the use of health information technology (IT)***.**

Source: www.nghs.com

On April 1, 2015, Northeast Georgia Medical Center (NGMC) Braselton opened its doors, providing citizens access to cutting-edge technology and quality healthcare to residents in the southern part of the county and region. The 100-bed facility represents the first new hospital (not a replacement or relocated) facility built in Georgia in nearly 20 years. The Braselton Campus is also home to Medical Plaza B and Medical Plaza 1. Medical Plaza B is home to a variety of physician offices and Medical Plaza 1 houses an urgent care center, imaging center, endoscopy suite, outpatient rehabilitation center, as well as many physician offices representing more than 20 medical specialties. The hospital employs more than 800 staff members.

Waste Management

Goal: *Provide adequate waste management for domestic and industrial usage.*

Strategy CFS10: *Update and improve the region's waste management plans to ensure availability for current and future economic growth.*

Demonstration of waste capacity and capacity assurance is highly dependent upon the permitting process in Georgia. This process typically takes several years, during which time permits for surrounding facilities may lapse or private sector business arrangements to accept varying rates of material for disposal can greatly alter the projected life expectancy of existing landfills. Businesses searching for site facilities need assurances from the municipalities that capacity is available for their waste and recycling needs. In order to preserve waste capacity, waste conservation and reduction is an essential method of waste management.

Promoting responsible stewardship and updating waste disposal plans, encouraging waste reduction, and recycling continues to be a priority for the Georgia Mountains Region. Staff at the Georgia Mountains Regional Commission support planning and economic development that promotes revitalization and good stewardship of the region's natural resources.

Many of the counties in the Georgia Mountains Region support the waste reduction and education efforts of Keep Georgia Beautiful. Hall, Dawson, Forsyth, Hart have individual programs and Union, Lumpkin and Banks Counties belong to a regional organizational effort called, Keep Our Mountains Beautiful.

Energy

Goal: *Ensure adequate energy supplies for the region and promote environmental standards in all infrastructures.*

Strategy CFS11: *Support the development of low-cost energy and maintain energy reliability.*

Strategy CFS12: *Promote environmental standards in the development of businesses and industries.*

The Georgia Mountains Region continues to promote energy efficiency to enhance the region's economic competitiveness. The region recognizes the efforts of the local businesses and industries to include the use of renewable energy resources in their production such as wind and solar.

Energy efficiency rebate and education programs are some of the methods energy providers in the Georgia Mountains region perform to promote efficiency. The region receives its energy from Sawnee EMC, Georgia Power, Habersham EMC, Blue Ridge EMC, Jackson EMC, and Hart EMC.

Issue	Mitigation Strategy
Growing demand for water supply sources, from both within and outside the region	• Develop new template for local water planning • Develop regional development build-out scenario • Update Regional Source Water Assessment Plan • Develop in-house service for calculating cost-benefit analyses for new development & utility improvements • Develop a metro-area growth strategy to support urbanizing communities • Develop regional water infrastructure map • Inventory and assessment of local water service rates
Growing demand and environmental need for public sewer services	• Develop regional development build-out scenario • Develop in-house service for calculating cost-benefit analyses for new development & utility improvements • Develop regional water infrastructure map • Inventory of septic system management programs. • Assessment of septic system inventory
Strong need for, and great potential with, health care services and facilities	• Develop and implement a public awareness campaign about health information technology
Impact of growth and changing demographics on transportation needs	• Update Regional Bike/Pedestrian Strategy and related work program • Develop comprehensive road improvement plan combining local and State goals • Develop Commuter Traffic Study • Develop a freight/ truck route transportation plan • Develop long-range management plans for targeted corridors in conjunction with GDOT and local stakeholders • Develop an I-85 corridor access and multi-modal study

Several State arterials struggle to sustain efficiency in serving both local and through traffic	• Develop comprehensive road improvement plan combining local and State goals • Develop Commuter Traffic Study • Develop a freight/ truck route transportation plan • Develop long-range management plans for targeted corridors in conjunction with GDOT and local stakeholders • Develop Highway 441 Tourism Study
Growing need for bike trails and on-road bike lanes	• GMRC to update regional bicycle and pedestrian plan • GMRC to support new bicycle safety and planning committee
Lingering potential for 2nd commercial passenger service airport to support metro Atlanta	• Inventory and develop plans to improve local and regional airports
Potential support for revenues through the Transportation Investment Act of 2010	• Develop Commuter Traffic Study
Demand for improvements to I-85 and intersection arterials	• Develop an I-85 corridor access and multi-modal study. • Develop long-range management plans for targeted corridors in conjunction with GDOT and local stakeholders • Develop a metro-area growth strategy to support urbanizing communities
Impact of changing demographics, specifically the growing volume of retirement age residents and growing numbers of households with Hispanic/Latino ethnicity	• Develop Regional Rural Transit Plan • Explore potential for increased rural transit services within the region • Inventory local housing programs, leaders and policies in each community • Produce survey and distribute to local housing leaders • Develop a regional strategic housing plan

Economic Development, Business and Industry

GOAL: *To stimulate and strengthen the regional economy through a collaborative effort embracing global trends resulting in job creation and retention, capital investments, and thereby enhancing the tax base and quality of life in the Georgia Mountains Region.*

ASSESSMENT

Tourism

Goal: *Promote awareness of the Georgia Mountains Region as a tourism destination by fostering viable and sustainable initiatives.*

Strategy ED1: *Develop a master database of tourism assets in the Georgia Mountains Region.*

Strategy ED2: *Develop promotional and educational materials for the Georgia Mountains Region*

Strategy ED3: *Foster regional partnerships to create and grow tourism product(s)*

Strategy ED4: *Improve infrastructure that supports tourism development.*

Tourism plays an important role throughout the Georgia Mountains Region driving significant business growth and revenue for companies. With moderate climates, advanced transportation infrastructure, long travel seasons, and diversity of attractions, tourism related businesses in the Georgia Mountains Region are able to leverage attractions for both in and out-of-state visitors to increase sales and revenues. According to the Georgia Department of Economic Development, tourism is a $51.2 billion industry in the State of Georgia. The Georgia Mountains Region is third in annual travel volume by domestic visitors behind only Metro Atlanta and the Georgia Coast. Visitors to the region are attracted by the abundance of outdoor activities, numerous state parks and historic sites, museums, wineries, and mountain arts and crafts just to name a few.

- Atlanta Botanical Garden Gainesville opened in Hall County in the spring of 2015. A 186-acre preserve, this $20 million development includes gardens, children's garden, and a visitor center.

- The Lake Lanier Olympic Venue continues to be a regional tourism attraction drawing hundreds of thousands visitors annually. The venue is host to year-round competitions, training and special events. The Lake Lanier Olympic Venue has shown an economic impact of $6.2 million for fiscal year 2015 and a $7.8 million overall impact for the calendar year 2014-2015. It will host the 2016 Pan-Am Championships for Canoe/Kayak and the 2016 Continental Olympic Qualifier for the Americas.

Entrepreneurship

Goal: *To focus on creating new small, high-growth companies in the Georgia Mountains Region.*

Strategy ED5: *Provide the Georgia Mountains Region's residents with innovative educational resources to help them learn about entrepreneurship and start a new business*.

Strategy ED6: *Better connect venture capital, investors, and entrepreneurs within the Georgia Mountains Region.*

Strategy ED7 *Improve access to capital for startup and small businesses.*

Strategy ED8: *Promote successful entrepreneurs and entrepreneurial practices in the region.*

The Georgia Mountains Regional Commission Revolving Loan Fund (GMRC-RLF) was very active in FY 2015. The program works in partnership with the Economic Development Administration (EDA) and allows GMRC to assist Region 2 in creating and retaining jobs. As a local economic development initiative, the RLF Program helps expand the region's economy through business development and expansion.

The Revolving Loan Fund is available to businesses of all sizes and varieties. Borrowers are eligible for financing only when credit is not otherwise available. Since inception, the program has loaned out a total of $4.9 million to 53 businesses throughout the Georgia Mountains Region. Those investments have translated to just over 547 jobs being retained or created.

In FY 2015, the GMRC received numerous inquiries into the RLF Program. Of those inquiries, six applications were submitted and reviewed by the staff. Three of the six applications were analyzed and approved by the RLF committee. The GMRLF Program was able to support community growth in industries such as: wedding and meeting venues, accounting, and landscape to name a few. In FY 2015, the GMRC RLF Program loaned a combined $215,000 to businesses in the GMRC Region.

The Lanier Technical College Business Incubator is a public/private partnership housed at Featherbone Communiversity. Eighteen businesses have been launched from the program, and 12 more start-ups are in development. Thirteen patents and three copyrights have been developed. The Business Incubator provides entrepreneurs affordable space, access to professional services and educational and technical assistance. Small businesses launched in the Business Incubator have been responsible for the creation of more than 800 jobs since the organization opened seven years ago.

Agri-Business

Goal: *To foster sustainable agriculture by creating and/or retaining jobs and private investment within the agricultural sector and by adding value and developing new products and niche markets.*

Strategy ED9: *Encourage and support the development of community supported agricultural cooperatives to sustain small and mid-sized producers.*

Strategy ED10: *Expand opportunities for production based on the byproducts of value-added processing.*

Strategy ED11: *Expand and upgrade infrastructure to support farms.*

Strategy ED12: *Support efforts to expand agri-tourism in the region.*

Farmer's Markets continue to flourish throughout the region in many downtown areas, bringing people and the community together. The potential economic impacts of public markets and farmers markets include direct benefits (ex: profits to business owners in the market, job creation, sales and real estate tax revenues, etc.) and indirect benefits (ex: stimulating development downtown, enhancing the park and waterfront as a place, farmland preservation, etc.).

- Hall County's Food and Agribusiness sector has by a wide margin, the largest county economic impact in Georgia with over $5 billion in economic output and 17,642 direct jobs

- The Georgia Poultry Laboratory Network opened a new science laboratory and headquarters in the Gateway Industrial Centre to fulfill an important food-safety role for Georgia's Poultry industry.

- At a total investment of approximately $3.2 million, Lake Foods, LLC opened a poultry processing facility in the Hart County Industrial Park and added 110 jobs for area residents.

- As follow up to a 2014 Local Foods Assessment for Georgia Mountains, the GMRC updated inventories of local farmer's markets, public farms, and other agri-business assets throughout the region. The GMRC is working with these and other farmers and stakeholders to increase communication between local growers and consumers. For FY15, the GMRC developed a promotional poster/brochure about publicly accessible local growers based on a template used elsewhere in Georgia. The scope will expand to include all 13 counties.

Existing Business and Industry

Goal: *Increase expansion and retention of the region's existing businesses and industries.*

Strategy ED13: *Promote regional leadership and collaboration.*

Strategy ED14: *Invest in the beautification and revitalization of downtowns.*

Region 2 experienced a year of significant growth and prosperity with **2,322 jobs created** and **$352 million in private investment** generated. The below list are a few of the highlights from the last year.

- Wrigley is adding 170 new jobs at the Hall County facility, making it the largest fully integrated chewing gum manufacturer in the world.
- Kubota is developing a new 180-acre campus on Highway 365 in the Gateway Industrial Centre with a $100 million investment and 650 jobs.
- German automotive supplier of high quality injection molded components will locate its U.S. Operations in Toccoa, creating 200 jobs and investing $27 million within the first five years.
- Foundations Recovery Network created approximately 180 new jobs in White County.

- King's Hawaiian, a state-of-the-art bakery and distribution company doubled their size of its facility in Oakwood by constructing an additional 120,000 square foot expansion. King's Hawaiian plans to add nearly 400 new jobs and triple its current production.
- Sark announced their decision to open their second copper wire manufacturing/distribution facility in the U.S. in Toccoa, Stephens County.
- Haering, a leading global manufacturer of precision components and subassemblies for the automotive industry will locate a new facility in the Gateway II Industrial Park in Hart County. At a total investment cost of $54 million, the project will create 400 jobs within the first 5 years.

Economic Resiliency

Goal: *Ensure that every community has a strategy and resources in place that specifically directs how to respond in economic recessions and/or when major employment centers are lost.*

In response to the recent global economic recession of 2008-2012, governments and communities are exploring ways of future-proofing their economic development processes. Specifically, while communities know they can't fully immunize themselves from economic downturns, they are strategizing for how best to project potential cycles and prepare and react when downturns occur so that they can more swiftly and more effectively restore their own economies.

Strategy ED15: *Ensure all communities have access to, and are aware of, resources providing economic forecasts for their region, county and, where possible, municipality.*

Strategy ED16: *Establish a proper chain of communication regarding economic concerns.*

Strategy ED17: *Develop, and routinely update, a report assessing the complete arrangement of resources, providers and services for implementing economic crisis response actions.*

Strategy ED18: *Conduct a forum or concentrated assessment of the economic health and needs of the region's most prominent industries.*

Rapid Response encompasses the strategies and activities necessary to plan for and respond as quickly as possible following an announcement of closure or layoff. Rapid response delivers services to enable dislocated workers to transition to new employment as quickly as possible. The purpose of Rapid Response is to promote economic recovery and vitality by developing an ongoing, comprehensive approach to identifying, planning for and responding to layoffs and dislocations, and preventing or minimizing their impacts on workers, business and communities. The Georgia Mountains Regional Commission Workforce Development Rapid Response area 2 has provided services to approximately 532 dislocated workers since July of 2013.

The photo to the right was a job fair that Georgia Mountains Regional Commission—Workforce Development's Rapid Response performed on site at McKesson Medical Dispensing for its dislocated workers.

Issue	Mitigation Strategy
Comparably limited support for agribusiness, especially agri-tourism	• Creation of a regional food hub • Develop promotional material for area farmer's markets and canneries • Establish a local food guide based on local assessments. • Develop an inventory of tourism industry resources
Potential for continued growth within tourism sub-markets	• Develop an inventory of tourism resources • Develop Highway 441 Tourism Study • Initiate GMRC Downtown Association • Assist local governments and business in the development of multi-county tourism task force focusing on Lake Hartwell
Lack of diversity within economic base; too much reliance on a few large industries	• Develop a region wide downtown economic database that includes historic resources • Develop a hi-tech strategy for the region • Host a one-day entrepreneurial education workshop in conjunction with the SBDC and Universities
Demand for expansion of goods-production industries	• Host a one-day entrepreneurial education workshop in conjunction with the SBDC/colleges
Potential within existing cities to nurture small business and entrepreneurship	• Develop and distribute educational materials for entrepreneur programs • Initiate GMRC Downtown Association • Assist local governments and business in the development of multi-county tourism task force focusing on Lake Hartwell • Host a one-day entrepreneurial education workshop • Develop an entrepreneurship training program for teachers • Identify and create a database of entrepreneur support resources in the region

Strong potential in health service industries, particularly around existing/ proposed hospitals	• Develop and implement a public awareness campaign about health information technology
Competition from South Carolina and North Carolina – border region	• Develop 1-page fact sheet with state tax incentive information and distribute to local chambers, economic development professionals, and city and counties. • Actively market existing industrial parks
Need for coordinated informational and directional signage along entrance corridors	• GMRC to develop new Urban Revitalization Plans for area town centers and historic urban centers • GMRC to develop/collect and distribute guidance material for wayfinding in small cities and towns • Annually—host state tourism representatives tour 1-2 cities in the region to advise on wayfinding strategies

Workforce Development

GOAL: *To attract and retain business and industry by promoting education and workforce development.*

Strategy WD1: *Lower the high school dropout rate.*

Strategy WD2: *Retain graduates and the educated workforce within the region.*

Strategy WD3: *Partner with local schools, businesses/industries, and civic organizations to promote the importance of an educated workforce.*

Strategy WD4: *Increase basic and technical skills.*

Strategy WD5: *Help alleviate unemployment and underemployment in the Georgia Mountain Region.*

Strategy WD6: *Address lack of family support.*

ASSESSMENT

The Georgia Mountains Regional Commission (GMRC) Workforce Development Department provides day-to-day management of the Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act (WIOA) funds that are allocated to the Georgia Mountains Region through the Georgia Department of Economic Development Workforce Division. The department continues to provide oversight of training providers who provide job training and job placement to eligible persons. This department provides assistance to adults, youth, and dislocated workers who meet program criteria. ***The Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act (WIOA) went into effect July 1, 2015 thus abolishing the Workforce Investment Act of 1998. There are many changes in Adult, Dislocated, and Youth Services within the new WIOA regulations.***

Highlights from 2015 include the following:

Adult and Dislocated Worker

GMRC Workforce Development (GMWD) Adult and Dislocated Services department served 520 individuals in FY 2015. Training for individuals 18 years or older was provided by Workforce Investment Act (WIA) funding. WIA funding allowed these individuals to attend a technical school or college for up to 24 months to receive specialized training to enter today's competitive job force in a Growth and Demand field in the Georgia Mountains.

- Worked with State and Local Offender Transition Centers to train returning inmates to enter the workforce.

- Incumbent Training is available for assistance to qualifying employers to assist with expenses associated with new or upgraded skills training for full-time, permanent employees.

- WIOA offers an opportunity to improve job and career options for Georgia's workers and companies to fill positions thru the On-the-Job Training (OJT) Program. By promoting OJT, Georgia has the great opportunity to increase its economic health and improve economic competitiveness. We have been working to implement the changes for WIOA as it applies to job seekers and employers in our region.

- Georgia Mountains Workforce Development's OJT Program assists employers with training costs while putting Georgians back to work. OJT provides employers with the opportunity to train new employees and receive up to 75% reimbursement for their salary during the OJT training period. It also helps employers fill the gap between a potential employees current skills and what is required to fully perform the job.

Mobile Training Units

- From July 31st 2013 to present approximately 3,100 people have visited the Mobile Training Vehicles for individualized services. Over 5,100 different actions have been tracked on board the Mobile Units. This includes 1,420 on-line job searches, 1,103 online job applications placed, 974 resumes developed/critiqued, 99 Unemployment Claims, 38 individuals assisted with GED and skills testing, 385 career assessment surveys, and 1,204 people receiving information on the WIOA program and the services provided by Georgia Mountains Workforce Development.

Youth Activities

The GMWD served 356 youth in FY 2015 in the following youth programs:

- Beginning in 2015, an Apprenticeship Program was created with the goal of working with business and industry in coordination with Georgia Department of Economic Development Workforce Development, U.S. Department of Labor, local Technical Colleges, and business and Industry within the Georgia Mountains Region.

- GED Training in the Gainesville Regional Youth Detention Center. The program provides a tutor to WIOA qualified youth to work on their GED combined with a learning coach to teach life skills that will improve their chances of success upon release. This year saw 5 GED's acquired.

- <u>2015 Summer Work Experience</u>

  40 youth started Summer Work Experience
  39 youth successfully completed
  97.5% Completion

- <u>Tutor Programs</u>

  Franklin, Habersham, Hall (Chestatee High School and Project SEARCH) Hart, Union and Towns

- <u>Youth Employment Apprenticeship Resource</u> (Y.E.A.R.)

  Franklin, Lumpkin, Union, and Banks Counties

- <u>Credit Recovery Assistance</u>

  Forsyth, Habersham, Rabun, Stephens, Towns, Union, and White Counties

Issue	Mitigation Strategy
Lack of labor skills to support a diverse group of industries	• Work directly with the businesses to identify lack of skills levels needed for their business. • Work with high school, technical colleges to prepare individuals in the needed skill sets.
Perception of low educational attainment by local residents	• Publicize with area newspapers the positive educational and skills attainment achieved in the region.
Increasing demand for high quality education facilities and programs	• Start a school mentor / Junior Achievement program in every junior high and high school in the region • Program promoting Career Days in primary and secondary schools • Develop program linking local schools with area Technical Colleges • Develop an entrepreneurship training program for teachers • Identify and create a database of entrepreneur support resources in the region • Creation of an entrepreneurial network • Develop a hi-tech strategy for the region

Housing

GOAL: *Facilitate the availability and accessibility of affordable housing and facilitate coordination of housing development with planning for infrastructure and overall community development for long-term sustainability, in every community in the region.*

Strategy H1: *Establish an inventory of current housing supply in the region to identify present and future needs.*

Strategy H2: *To inform local leaders and citizens on available housing programs and services.*

Strategy H3: *Develop a regional strategic housing plan.*

ASSESSMENT

Communities review and assess housing information as an indicator of the relative economic and social health of local residents. As the principal expense and investment for most households, key facets of housing market data provide a sense of stability, growth or recession based on the extent households are investing in the community, especially when paired with general economic indicators. For the FY15 update, the housing subcommittee reviewed 3 key datasets for gauging any changes and trends with regards to home values and sales, plus the committee examined the progress with a relatively new State program designed to support struggling households with homeownership.

Average Active Home Sales Prices – April, 2014 – June, 2015							
County	**Avg. Price**	**Avg. Price**	**% Change**		**Avg. Price (Per Sq. Ft.)**		**Months w/no sales**
Towns	$345,000	$497,000	44.1%		$126.00		14
Banks*	$171,132	$222,379	29.9%		n/a		-
Hart*	$222,645	$276,730	24.3%		n/a		-
Lumpkin	$295,000	$360,000	22.0%		$75.93		-
Forsyth	$418,000	$454,000	8.6%		$109.40		-
Dawson	$413,000	$433,000	4.8%		$99.87		-
Avg. National Inflation Rate (4/1/14- 6/30/15)			*1.0%*				
Hall	$428,000	$429,000	0.2%		$96.67		-
White	$304,000	$297,000	-2.3%		$83.40		-
Union	$473,000	$436,000	-7.8%		$101.67		9
Stephens	$517,000	$461,000	-10.8%		$59.71		8
Franklin*	$206,806	$176,767	-14.5%		n/a		-
Rabun	$1,221,000	$905,000	-25.9%		$100.00		14
Habersham	$499,000	$341,000	-31.7%		$79.08		3

Average home values are regularly measured through sales price data. Communities generally seek higher prices as an indication of properties worth owning and investment, but at price points that are affordable for average wage levels for local residents and employees.

The data above provides a barometer of the general health of each county's real estate market as compared to the average national Inflation rate from April 2014 to June 2015. (Approximately 1.0%) Counties that are adjusting at a rate greater than inflation signify a more robust market, while those with adjusted rates less than inflation signify a weaker market. The data shows that only 6 of 13 counties outperformed the national inflation rate. Of those 6 counties, 5 of them are clustered around major arterial corridors, a possible indication that local home sales are tied to owners seeking cheaper land with accessibility to other employment centers.

On a price per-square-foot basis, Forsyth, Dawson, and Hall had the highest average prices for the time frame, which are the three most populous counties in the Georgia Mountains Region and feature the most direct connectivity to metro Atlanta, a reflection of the high demand for housing near urbanizing areas and employment centers.

Number of Homes for Sale			
County	**# - April-June 2014**	**# April-June 2015**	**% Change**
Stephens	11	23	109.1%
Rabun	14	18	28.6%
White	65	74	13.8%
Hart*	143	159	11.2%
Forsyth	1,260	1,314	4.3%
Franklin*	86	89	3.5%
Hall	971	991	2.1%
Union	18	18	0.0%
Dawson	358	347	-3.1%
Lumpkin	222	207	-6.8%
Banks*	54	48	-11.1%
Habersham	34	28	-17.6%
Towns	27	18	-33.3%

*NOTE: The data provided in the above is supplied by Fair Market Listing Service (FMLS) and Georgia Multiple Listing Services (GAMLS). FMLS and GAMLS Data Provided by The Norton Agency unless otherwise indicated by *, where those counties' data was provided by Coldwell Banker - Fort Realty. The data provided in the following tables is limited and may not reflect all real estate activities in each county's market.*

While housing prices provide an indication of property values and local economies, their value is weighted against the volume of sales activity supporting those rates. The sales volume data for the Georgia Mountains Region shows that the housing market is still active with 8 of 13 counties either having as many or more homes for sale in April-June 2015 as the same quarter in 2014. As with the high home prices, the three counties closest to metro Atlanta featured the most sales with Lumpkin County (also on GA 400 corridor) and Hart County (along Lake Hartwell) the only others with significant sales volume. As the regional market continues to grow, the GMRC will monitor to see if the other rural counties begin to show changes in construction and sales.

HomeSafe Georgia Update

The table below shows the number of homeowners that benefitted from the HomeSafe Georgia Program, which helps Georgia homeowners who have experienced a substantial decrease in income due to job loss or underemployment by providing a mortgage payment bridge while they seek new or better employment. Of the total allocations made over 2 fiscal years, over 50.4% was disbursed to residents from Forsyth County. Another 22.8% of the allocations were disbursed to residents form Hall County. This means that 73.2% of the allocations went to only 2 of the 13 counties in the Georgia Mountains Region. This could possibly be attributed to a large segment of the region's population being concentrated in these same two counties.

County	Recipients				Allocation		
	FY14	FY15	Since 2011		FY14	FY15	FY14+FY15
Banks	0	1	6		$0.00	$29,723	**$29,723**
Dawson	4	6	18		$94,819	$166,175	**$260,994**
Forsyth	33	18	108		$828,591	$510,548	**$1,339,139**
Franklin	2	1	5		$34,891	$48,222	**$83,113**
Habersham	0	4	12		$0.00	$92,914	**$92,914**
Hall	13	11	58		$332,828	$272,574	**$605,402**
Hart	2	0	7		$20,278	$0.00	**$20,278**
Lumpkin	1	1	8		$19,616	$22,238	**$41,854**
Rabun	2	1	6		$33,556	$11,904	**$45,460**
Stephens	2	0	5		$56,742	$0.00	**$56,742**
Towns	1	0	3		$25,750	$0.00	**$25,750**
Union	0	0	8		$0.00	$0.00	**$0.00**
White	2	1	5		$43,232	$10,926	**$54,158**
TOTAL	***62***	***44***	***249***		***$1,490,303***	***$1,165,224***	***$2,655,527***

Source: Georgia Department of Community Affairs

This table shows that a total of 249 recipients have received temporary mortgage payment assistance from the HomeSafe Georgia program since April 1, 2011. Over 43% of these homeowners are from Forsyth County, likely indicative of that community's high number of homeowners rendered unemployed during the recession. Similarly, the other leading counties for homeowners assisted are Hall County and Dawson County, showing that the majority of assistance is being provided to homeowners that live in counties closest to Metro Atlanta. The Subcommittee sees a continued opportunity to market this program to the region's smaller, more rural counties. The lack of marketing of this program to non-metro Atlanta counties could explain the large disparity in numbers of recipients.

2015 Notable Housing Updates

Source: https://www.senioradvisor.com/ local/myrtle-terraces-gainesville-ga

- Myrtle Terraces, an 84-unit senior independent living facility in Gainesville, opened in early 2015. The facility boasts many amenities for its residents, including a library, game room, beauty salon, club room, business center, TV lounge, and a courtyard. The facility was built utilizing the Georgia Department of Community Affairs (DCA)'s Low Income Housing Tax Credit Program, tax credits allocated to developers who successfully compete DCA's highly competitive annual process. The tax credits come from the federal government with a dollar-for-dollar match from the State of Georgia.

- The City of Gainesville received a $1 million Community Home Investment Program (CHIP) grant from DCA for the development of 4 new homes.

2015-16: Georgia Mountains Region Housing Looking Forward

The CEDS Housing Subcommittee will continue its work through 2015 and into 2016 on establishing a more comprehensive housing inventory for the Georgia Mountains Region. Strategy #2, informing local leaders and citizens throughout the Georgia Mountains Region about new and available housing programs, will remain a priority in trying to distribute information to communities (especially small towns). Finally, another main priority for the Subcommittee is to develop a regional strategic housing plan with the goal of eliminating homelessness in the region. All of this work will require the communities to be engaged in developing partnerships with one another and EDA. With the recession continuing to dissipate and industries expanding and creating new jobs, the Subcommittee will be interested in observing the effect this will have on the inventory and affordability of workforce housing. The Subcommittee will also continue to analyze the rebounding economy's impact on the secondary/seasonal home market, especially in northernmost counties in the region. Finally, the Subcommittee will continue to analyze the affordability of workforce housing and the need for more senior housing around the region.

Issue	Mitigation Strategy
Shortage of specialty housing to accommodate retirement age population	• Inventory of local housing programs, leaders and policies in each community • Produce survey and distribute to local housing leaders • Develop a regional strategic housing plan • Provide educational seminars and workshops on housing programs and services • Develop summary report on housing survey findings
Need to ensure sustainable quality of workforce housing	• Inventory local housing programs, leaders and policies in each community • Produce survey and distribute to local housing leaders • Develop a regional strategic housing plan • Provide educational seminars and workshops on housing programs and services • Develop summary report on housing survey findings • Develop a metro-area growth strategy to support urbanizing communities
Slow/limited responsiveness to issues of the housing and development industry	• Produce survey and distribute to local housing leaders • Develop a regional strategic housing plan • Provide educational seminars and workshops on housing programs and services • Develop summary report on housing survey findings
Need to monitor long-term impacts and sustainability of the second-home market	• Inventory local housing programs, leaders and policies in each community • Produce survey and distribute to local housing leaders • Develop a regional strategic housing plan • Provide educational seminars and workshops on housing programs and services

Pre-Disaster Mitigation

GOAL: *Encourage disaster resiliency, extending beyond emergency responsiveness to planning and organizing in advance to address these vulnerabilities, and to enable rebuilding and recovery afterwards in ways that offer healthier, sustainable communities, and more robust regional economies.*

Strategy DM1: *Creation of a Regional Pre-Disaster Mitigation Plan.*

Strategy DM2: *Create public awareness of plan/community outreach.*

Strategy DM3: *Establish a regional post-disaster response framework.*

ASSESSMENT

The Georgia Mountains Region is committed to becoming resilient with respect to disaster mitigation and preparedness. Disaster resiliency can best be defined as the ability to anticipate threats, reduce the impact of these threats by taking preemptive action, respond appropriately and efficiently when these threats materialize, and have a plan in place for recovery. These threats can be natural events (weather related) or technological threats, such as hazardous material accidents, pandemic diseases, terrorism, etc. and can greatly cause an economic disruption or collapse within a community. The Georgia Mountains Region's resilience will be determined by the magnitude and severity of such threats and the region's capacity to contend with them based on its inherent vulnerabilities and available resources.

One aspect of regional resiliency that should be emphasized is the increasingly interconnectedness and interdependence across a broad array of critical infrastructures, notably in energy, telecommunications, transportation, water, and wastewater treatment systems, emergency services, government services, healthcare and hospitals, agriculture and food systems, etc.

In an effort for the GMRC to achieve and sustain disaster resiliency, the region should adhere to the following:

- Anticipate that there may be multiple hazards or threats to their citizens and their property;
- Understand its physical, economic, and social vulnerabilities to these hazards and take mitigating action;
- Respond to events as they happen, mobilize resources, and coordinate relief efforts; and
- Organize itself through stages of emergency response, restoration, and reconstruction

Implementation & Performance Metrics

This section concerns the actual measures and efforts made to achieve the objectives outlined throughout the CEDS/Regional Plan. After reviewing the assessments for each element and defining any needed changes to the issues and strategies identified for the region, the recommended actions are incorporated in to the action plan in this section. Further, tracking the progress with past projects and their relative impact on the issues will help monitor the CEDS/ Regional Plan for the overall performance in meeting the stated goals over time.

Regional Plan Monitoring and Evaluation

Procedures

Progress with the Regional Work Program as a whole is reviewed as part of the annual update process with the GMRC Council. However, monitoring and evaluation of progress with the Regional Work Program is performed regularly throughout the year. This involves several layers of status reports and meetings, and involved input from various committees, local government officials, and other stakeholder groups.

Staff Project Reports – Following the approval of each annual update, the Planning Department holds a work session to review the proposed tasks, objectives and strategies and assigns work items to appropriate staff (planning, historic, mapping, environmental, transportation, economic, etc.,). The progress of these projects is reported to the Executive Director and the full GMRC Council in monthly Staff Project Reports (SPRs). The SPRs identify the status of each project and is displayed by jurisdiction. The SPRs also provide primary staff contact for each work item and a brief description of progress as needed. Copies of these are found with the minutes of each Council meeting packet.

End of Year Review – The update process begins in earnest in November of each year when the GMRC Planning Department reviews the Regional Work Program to evaluate the status of each project and feasibility of remaining work items. This was done in preparation for the GMRC Annual Meeting held each December, and the results provide the first indication of how priorities may need adjusting going forward. This becomes the basis of the draft update and is circulated to local governments for review and comment, providing the first opportunity for nominating new projects for the coming year.

Correlating RC Programs - Additional review of progress with the Regional Plan includes cross-over work with other regional reporting efforts and projects. Several components of the Regional Work Program must be consistent with the Georgia Mountains Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS), which includes a copy of the Regional Agenda and is also updated annually. Other documents regularly referenced for coordination include the Regional Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan, GDOT's State Improvement Program update, the recently completed Regional Resource Plan, and any other regional projects underway at the time.

Local Government Interaction – Copies of the Regional Work Program were also distributed to local communities for review and input on the identified objectives and work items. No new regional projects were added as a result of this effort, with most local governments currently requesting assistance with local planning or plan implementation projects. There were some needs with regards to transportation planning cited, but that was in conjunction with ongoing GDOT support for the regional Transportation Investment Act activities.

Status of full Plan Update – Completed and adopted.

The following is a summary of progress made on several primary GMRC initiatives during FY 2015:

- Though this Regional Work Program Update is being submitted in accordance with the annual requests of DCA, the GMRC has proposed shifting the update process to the fall, to comply with the process and submittal schedule for the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) update. That process will begin in earnest during 2015, beginning with the annual CEDS committee meetings and with the implementation of the new CEDS standards outlined by the Federal Economic Development Administration.

- The GMRC is now two years into implementation of the Department of Human Services (DHS) Coordinated Transit program, and as a result there is now a request from both the State and the local governments to update individual transit plans for each county. This will be done for each county in the region on a rotating three year basis beginning with 3 plans in FY16 plus a regional overview, followed by four county plans each of the next two years, with the cycle beginning over again in FY19.

- Environmental projects for Mud Creek and Coldwater Creek will be closed out in FY15. As these projects move to close, the GMRC has been working with Habersham and Hart County respectively to draft material for amending their local comprehensive plans to reflect the latest status of these watersheds. Mud Creek is on pace for formal testing to have the watershed removed from the State 303(d) list. A watershed management plan has also been completed for the Upper Chestatee River in Lumpkin County, clearing the way for proposals of implementation projects under DNR funding, while a comparable watershed plan for the Towns/Testnatee Creek watershed in White County is now awaiting formal issuance of DNR funding. Preliminary work on that project has begun with the identification of stakeholders and collection of past testing data.

- The GMRC's downtown assessment projects have been formally initiated with three cities scheduled for completion in FY15: Dawsonville, Cleveland, and Hartwell. These projects will formalize each community's plans and proposals for downtown revitalization projects, as guided by the Main Street four point approach and other recommendations. Three more communities will be slated for FY16 and the process will continue until each county seat and several other prominent cities have a development strategy for the long-term sustainability and economic viability of their urban cores. This is a part of the GMRC's economic strategies based on the growing appeal of these small town centers as part of the region's tourist appeal.

- The GMRC is now seeing requests come in for local plan updates in accordance with the new Planning Standards provided by DCA. Hartwell and White County are underway with comparable measures for 4 other communities under proposal.

- The GMRC's effort to collect/develop a regional master map/dataset for water and sewer lines within the region has been met with some resistance on the part of service providers. Competing plans and interests regarding service delivery and system expansion has left several providers with a desire to withhold information. Others are still updating their GIS-compatible data. The GMRC is still working to collect the data available for purposes of gauging long-term utility capacity and to monitor the extent of septic system use within the region. (This is a FY15 Regional Plan implementation project.) Pending progress and results, this project may need to be extended into FY16.

- More counties within the region are exploring new or more land use management measures. White County has held forums about a proposal for the county's first land use regulation policy. Habersham County is exploring a shift away from the current land intensity district model to more formal land use regulation. The GMRC is assisting with each effort as needed.

- The GMRC's Regional Bike/Pedestrian Plan is being updated in FY15. This includes a new approach regarding the Safe-Routes-to-School program. In the absence of implementation funds there has been little interest from local schools, so the GMRC has instead moved to rank the schools by density of districts and begun moving down the list performing lay assessments of pedestrian accessibility for each campus. Eventually the goal is to have this assessment done for each elementary and middle school, laying the groundwork for their potential formal SRTS implementation projects when funds become available, and/or identifying ways some projects can be pursued through other funds.

- Current levels of web or multi-media based interaction among regional government entities remains very low. Part of this is based on limited needs, especially as small customer bases mean direct emails work best for project sharing and communication. However, there is a desire among various offices to explore ways local and regional governments offices can and should feature more hi-tech applications for project development and possible services.

CEDS Performance Metrics

An important component of the implementation of the Georgia Mountains Regional Commission's CEDS is a monitoring system to track regional performance in the future as a result of this Strategic Plan. Several data sets have been identified that local governments can showcase good measures of economic performance. This will serve to be a good indicator of the overall economic health of the region's communities and citizens.

Many regional economic development organizations already use performance metrics, known as "benchmarks" and should make this process very easy for local communities to adapt to. The metrics provided in this plan provides an excellent opportunity to demonstrate the positive results of the CEDS efforts and policies and help build confidence among citizens that the economy is headed in the right direction for the Georgia Mountains Region.

The following lists the Performance Metrics for each strategic CEDS focus area:

Community Facilities and Services

- Existence and creation of business parks and sites
- Available developable acreage with utility services
- Expansion and improvement of regional roadways and total miles constructed
- Development of a regional public transportation system with routes across the region
- Accessible water infrastructure throughout the region
- Implemented plan for water management and water protection for the region
- Suitable wastewater capacity to meet future growth of region
- Available broadband access across the region
- Adequate waste disposal and recycling abilities in the region

Economic Development, Business and Industry

- Number of new start-up businesses or business expansions
- Job creation and retention
- Increase in capital investment
- Number of new tourism venues
- Increase visitation, overnight stays, and capital expenditures spent on tourism in the region
- Value added production in niche agriculture markets

Workforce Development

- Job Growth in non-manufacturing industries
- Average wage growth
- Unemployment Rate
- SAT scores
- Educational Attainment
- Drop-out rates

Housing

- Regional housing sales in 2012 vs. regional housing in sales in 2017
- Total amount of grant awards to member governments from housing programs
- Homelessness Rate in 2012 vs. Homelessness Rate in 2017
- Creation of regional housing Advisory Committee

Pre-Disaster Mitigation

- Governmental efficiency and response time
- # of mitigation projects put in place and funded
- # of local plan updates

Coordinated Performance Standards

As part of the State's regional planning standards, the GMRC must establish two achievement thresholds for local governments. These standards, rated as Minimum and Excellence Standards, identify specific ordinances, programs, or requirements that may be implemented by local governments in order to realize the Regional Vision and/or address the Regional Issues and Opportunities. The Regional Commission may choose to establish multiple tiers for both standards in order to accommodate the varying size and capacity of local governments in the region, or it may choose to establish a schedule for local governments to comply with these measures during the 3 year timeframe.

In establishing these standards for the GMRC, the approach was to create a framework that works with the current level of planning requirements expected of local governments, then encouraging each community to pursue their own higher standards for community development. In this regard the Minimum is something every local government can readily achieve by simply maintaining their existing level of obligations, and for which the GMRC is available to assist. To achieve the Excellence Standard communities must then employ/adopt a certain volume of policies and practices from the list included here. Communities achieving the Excellence Standard will be eligible for extra assistance from the GMRC and DCA.

Going forward these performance measures will be used to help a) evaluate the effectiveness of the GMRC's Regional Plan implementation efforts, and b) to help identify the various levels of planning and community development desired by the local communities. When the Plan is updated in 5 years, these measures will be reviewed, assessed and amended as necessary.

Minimum Standard

Items included here are considered essential activities for local governments to undertake for achieving their own planning ambitions and for consistency with the regional plan. The intent is to ensure a consistent and predictable basic level of local requirements across the region. All local governments in the region will be expected to attain the Minimum Standard within three years of adoption of the regional plan, or risk losing Qualified Local Government status.

- Maintain a local Comprehensive Plan, approved by DCA and adopted by the local government
- Maintain and be compliant with all necessary Service Delivery Strategies
- Maintain and participate in a local Hazard Mitigation Strategy
- Maintain and participate in a Local Emergency Operations/Response Plan
- Maintain compliance with State requirements for solid waste management and reporting
- Adopt the necessary minimum rules established by the DNR Part V Environmental Planning Criteria

Excellence Standard

Items within the Excellence Standard are considered desirable activities for local governments to undertake for achieving their own planning aspirations and for consistency with the regional plan. The intent is to lay out a menu of recommended best practices for local governments to select for implementation. Each recommended best practice a local government implements will count toward achieving the Excellence Standard threshold established by the Department.

The Excellence Standard will be awarded to any community employing any 20 of the standards listed below and practicing at least 1 standard in each element. The GMRC will annually survey local governments regarding these practices, inviting demonstration/evidence of the standards applied. Any local government that attains this threshold will then be eligible for the Regional Steward Incentives Package identified and publicized by the Department.

GMRC Regional Work Program— Report of Accomplishments

Work Item	Status	Comment
Develop a region wide downtown economic database that includes historic resources; Place on the web	In Progress	
Develop single-map redev. plans for historic downtowns	In Progress	3 due completed in FY15
Develop Regional Rural Transit Plan	Postponed	GDOT priority for FY16
Encourage local governments in the SR 17 corridor to adopt and implement standards and guidelines.	Complete	
Create growth mgmt. programs that provide developer incentives and guidelines as well as methods of increased responsibility and accountability to the local community.	Postponed	Models available; local staff considering; Currently set for FY17
Develop in-house service for calculating cost-benefit analyses for new development & utility improvements	In Progress	
Develop Regional Hazard Mitigation Plan	In Progress	
Develop regional development build-out scenario	In Progress	To be completed in FY15
Develop regional growth and tourism strategy specifically for historic downtowns	Postponed	Moved to FY16
Develop a metro-area growth strategy to support urbanizing communities	Postponed	Moved to FY16
Develop regional water infrastructure map.	In Progress	To be completed in FY15
Establish a local food guide and local assessments.	In Progress	To be completed in FY15
Inventory and map agri-tourism assets of the region.	In Progress	To be completed in FY15
Inventory local housing programs, leaders and policies.	Complete	
Develop Highway 441 Tourism Study	In Progress	
Develop Commuter Traffic Study	In Progress	
Update and redress GIS database to improve regional analyses and for faster EIP assistance	Complete	
Develop conservation design guidebook	Complete	
Initiate GMRC Downtown Association	In Progress	To be completed in FY15
Develop wastewater edu. and public awareness program.	Complete	Done, with CCRC&D
Inventory and assessment of local water service rates	In Progress	To be completed in FY15
Develop a hi-tech strategy for the region	In Progress	To be completed in FY15
Develop inventory of parks and rec. plans in the region.	Complete	
Develop a plan for using social media technologies to further promote the region.	Complete	
Expand scope of the Camera Ready program.	Complete	
Develop an inventory of tourism industry resources.	In Progress	To be completed in FY15
Develop promotional material for area farmer's markets and canneries	In Progress	To be completed in FY15
Create a regional industry roundtable.	Complete	

Regional Project Priority List

The CEDS Priority Project List represents a major component of the overall CEDS effort. These projects are funded by multiple funding sources and each one addresses a specific goal or goals within the CEDS. All of the listed projects are important to the local communities and have been included because they help move the Georgia Mountains Region closer to its vision. A limited number of projects are eligible for EDA funding and will be reported when initiated or completed. The list of issues and projects outlined below is comprehensive, but by no means exhaustive. The list reflects the participant's ideas, concerns, and efforts and is expected to be continually updated as new projects emerge and existing projects are completed.

GOVERNMENT	PROJECT	FUNDING SOURCE (S)	AMOUNT
BANKS COUNTY	Wastewater Treatment	GEFA/USDA/Local	$5,000,000
	Water System Upgrades	CDBG/Local	$500,000
	Martin Bridge Sewer	ARC/EDA/USDA	$3,000,000
	Banks Crossing 109 Infrastructure	OneGeorgia/ARC	$500,000
Town of Homer	Water Upgrades	ARC/EIP/CDBG	$1,500,000
City of Maysville	Ridgeway Waterline	USDA/Local/CDBG	$1,500,000
DAWSON COUNTY	Etowah River Road Improvements	DOT/Local	$500,000
	Bridge Repair	DOT/Local	$700,000
	Road Improvement Project	DOT/Local	$1,500,000
	Blanchard Development	ARC/EDA/EIP/1GA	$4,500,000
	Shiery Development	ARC/EDA/EIP/1GA	$2,500,000
City of Dawsonville	Sewer Expansion	ARC/Local	$600,000
	Sewer Expansion – Company Expansion	ARC/GEFA	$600,000
FORSYTH COUNTY	Business Expansion	CDBG-EIP Loan	$500,000
	Wastewater Expansion	EDA/Local	$10,000,000
	McGinnis Ferry Interchange	DOT/EDA/FHA/Local	$36,000,000
	Water Expansion/Water Plant	EDA/Local	$2,000,000
	Major Road Widening	EDA/Local/SPLOST	$45,950,000
	Traffic Safety Improvements	Local/SPLOST/DOT	$2,500,000
	Intersection Improvements	EDA/Local/SPLOST	$4,600,000

FRANKLIN COUNTY	Sewer Collection/WWTF	USDA/ARC	$6,374,000
	Central Franklin Industrial Park	ARC/EDA/SPLOST	$2,000,000
City of Franklin Springs	Sewer System Improvements	ARC/Local	$700,000
City of Lavonia	Raw Water Intake	ARC/Local	$991,000
	Northern Sewer Trunk Line	EDA/ARC/Local	$1,400,000
	Lake Hartwell Increased Allo-cation	GEFA/ARC	$1,000,000
City of Royston	Infrastructure Improvements	CDBG/Local	$500,000
	Lift Station Improvements	ARC/OneGeorgia	$285,000
	Storm Drainage	CDBG/Local	$500,000
HABERSHAM COUNTY	Infrastructure – Industrial Park	ARC/Local	$620,000
City of Clarkesville	Sewer Improvements	ARC/Local	$600,000
	Downtown Development	USDA/Local	$750,000
City of Cornelia	Sewer Improvements	CDBG/Local	$700,000
	Road Improvements	ARC/Local	$350,000
	Water & Sewer – Fieldale	ARC/EDA	$2,000,000
City of Demorest	Sewer System Improvements	ARC/Local	$600,000
Town of Tallulah Falls	Terrora Building - Solar	ARC/Local	$500,000
	Water/Sewer Infrastructure	ARC/Local/GEFA	$3,000,000
HALL COUNTY			
	Lake Lanier Olympic Venue	ARC/OneGeorgia/Local	$1,700,000
City of Lula	Road Improvements	DOT/ARC/Local	$600,000
City of Oakwood	Sewer Improvements	CDBG-ITAD	$225,000
	Road Improvements	EDA/ARC/EIP	$2,000,000
	Industry Way Extension	ARC/Local	$400,000

City of Gainesville	**Roosevelt Square Renovation**	**Local**	**$250,000**
	Midtown Greenway – Phase 4	Local, TE, DNR	$1,000,000
	Stormwater Planning	Local	$200,000
HART COUNTY	Sewer Expansion	GEFA	$400,000
	Infrastructure Expansion	ARC/EDA/EIP	$2,500,000
	I-85 Norther Sewer Trunk Line	EDA/ARC	$1,700,000
City of Hartwell	Sewer Expansion	ARC/EIP/Local	$500,000
	Railroad Street	CDBG-RDF/ARC/Local	$1,200,000
Town of Bowersville	Water Improvements	OneGeorgia/Local	$200,000
LUMPKIN COUNTY	Water Improvements	CDBG	$558,000
	Water & Sewer Improvements	ARC/Local	$600,000
	Broadband Expansion	CDBG-EIP	$160,000
City of Dahlonega	Sewer Plant Upgrade	ARC/GEFA/Local	$4,000,000
RABUN COUNTY	Water Improvements	CDBG-ITAD	$150,000
	Business Park Improvements	CDBG-EIP/ARC/Local	$2,000,000
	NEGA Food Hub	EDA/ARC/Private	$2,500,000
	US441 Widening	DOT/Local	$10,000,000
	Potable Water Plant – Business Park	ARC/EIP/GEFA	$3,000,000
	Sewer Line Sky Valley to Dillard	ARC/GEFA/USDA	$1,000,000
	Water Line Distribution System	GEFA/ARC/Local	$2,500,000
City of Clayton	Downtown Infrastructure	ARC/Local	$428,300
City of Mountain City	Drainage Improvements	CDBG/Local	$500,000
City of Sky Valley	Sewer Infrastructure	ARC/Local	$600,000
	Road and Drainage Improvements	CDBG/ARC/Local	$500,000

STEPHENS COUNTY	**WWTF**	**CDBG-EIP/ARC/OneGA**	**$2,500,000**
	Memorial Drive Upgrades	DOT/Local	$500,000
	Road Improvements	DOT/Local	$2,000,000
	Water Supply & Distribution	ARC/GEFA	$1,500,000
	Wastewater Collection & Treatment	ARC/EDA/GEFA/USDA	$5,000,000
	Broadband	OneGeorgia/Local	$6,000,000
City of Toccoa	Veterans Parkway/Big A Infrastructure Improvements	ARC/EDA/GEFA/ OneGeorgia	$4,000,000
	Natural Gas Extension	Local	$100,000
	Historic Theater Renovation	ARC/Local/Private	$300,000
TOWNS COUNTY	Sewer Improvements	Local/ARC/EDA	$4,000,000
City of Hiawassee	Water & Sewer Improvements	ARC/GEFA/OneGA	$500,000
City of Young Harris	Sewer Improvements	ARC/Local	$300,000
UNION COUNTY	US129 Connector	DOT/Local	$10,000,000
	BHR- Amphitheater	OneGA/Local	$500,000
City of Blairsville	Infrastructure Improvements	CDBG-EIP/ARC/Local	$600,000
	Water & Sewer Upgrades	ARC/Local	$1,100,000
WHITE COUNTY	Water Extension/Fiber	CDBG-EIP	$500,000
	Road/Fiber	CDBG-EIP/ARC	$500,000
	Infrastructure – Bypass Technology Park	ARC/EDA/CDBG-EIP	$1,500,000
	Broadband Extension	ARC/Local/Private	$400,000
City of Cleveland	Water Tank	ARC/Local	$500,000