

THREE RIVERS REGIONAL COMMISSION Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS)

2024 Annual Update

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Three Rivers Economic Development District CEDS Annual Report 2024

The following is a report of the CEDS implementation for the period of October 1, 2023 to September 30, 2024.

Regional Initiatives, Local Government Assistance, and Project Funding

The projects that are underway or needed to achieve the vision and goals of the CEDS are dependent on local government funding and the support the Partnership Planning Grant from the Economic Development Administration (EDA), which creates the Three Rivers Economic Development District (TREDD). Other support comes from the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) and the Southeast Crescent Regional Commission (SCRC). Over this reporting period, TREDD has assisted the region's 10 counties and 42 cities with education and technical assistance to seek federal funding for local projects. Over this reporting period, TREDD has provided the following assistance through the following efforts:

- Worked with City of Manchester for SCRC grant funding for the revitalization of the downtown community building
- Developed the Northeast Thomaston Urban Redevelopment Plan (URP) for the City of Thomaston
- Worked with City of Thomaston for SCRC grant funding for City of Thomaston urban redevelopment plan implementation projects
- Worked with Heard County for ARC grant funding for priority infrastructure projects
- Worked with the City of Carrollton for ARC grant funding for downtown redevelopment and infrastructure funding
- Worked with the City of West Point on a Georgia Recreational Trails (RTP) grant application and related public engagement
- Georgia Environmental Protection Department Solid Waste grant for City of Griffin Recycling Equipment
- Supported discussions of Georgia CDBG Tornado Recovery in region for 2023 tornadoes
- Supported Connect Senoia growth and conservation strategy planning initiative
- Reviews of Developments of Regional Impact for proposed projects
- Support of Artificial Intelligence in Manufacturing regional plan preparation for TRR
- GARC Economic Development Committee
- Participation in I-75 Central Corridor Coalition
- Preparation of comprehensive plans for Lamar County, City of Barnesville and Aldora, City of Milner, City of Roopville, City of Mount Zion, City of Bowdon, and City of Whitesburg.
- Supported the City of Thomaston trail development planning with PATH Foundation
- Discussed future downtown redevelopment and master planning for the City of Bowdon
- Participated in GARC facilitator training
- GARC Economic Development Conference and Economic Development Committee
- Georgia Supportive Housing Institute Informational Webinar
- Georgia Regions 4 and 8 Housing Symposium
- Completed the 5-year update to the Regional Plan

Regional Economic and Demographic Updates

- Per the most recent American Community Survey 5-year estimates, the region’s population has increased by 3,014 people at a rate slightly faster than the state’s
- Per the Georgia Department of Labor, the region has a labor force of 260,140 people, a change of 1.8% from 2023
- From 2022-2023, the median household income in the region increased by 1.4%, a lower rate than Georgia’s 9.7%. However, each county’s median income increased from a range of 7.0% (Carroll County) to 20.8% (Lamar County). The overall median income in the region, however, has stayed lower than the state
- From 2022-2023, the poverty rate in the region decreased by 4.5% (from 16.7% to 16.0%), representing a bigger reduction in poverty levels than the state (from 13.9% to 13.5%). However, the region has an overall poverty rate several percentage points over the state, with the lower local wages being a probable correlation
- Per The US Bureau of Labor Statistics, the local wages in the region range from \$895 (Pike County) to \$1,260 per week (Heard County). Even at the highest level, these weekly wages are lower than the weekly average for the state (\$1,441). These lower wages can reduce the savings and spending capacities of the region’s residents, including on daily needs such as housing, food and transportation. These lower regional wages also create a higher number of people who commute outside of the region to work, creating commuting impacts and potential bedroom communities

District Population Data 2020-2022

Area	2020 Population	2022 Population	2020-2022 # Change	2020-2022 % Change
Butts	25,434	25,522	88	0.35%
Carroll	119,148	120,060	912	0.77%
Coweta	146,158	147,449	1,291	0.88%
Heard	11,412	11,489	77	0.67%
Lamar	18,500	18,676	176	0.95%
Meriwether	20,613	20,679	66	0.32%
Pike	18,889	19,145	256	1.36%
Spalding	67,306	67,415	109	0.16%
Troup	69,426	69,527	101	0.15%
Upson	27,700	27,638	-62	-0.22%
Region	524,586	527,600	3,014	0.57%
Georgia	10,711,908	10,722,325	10,417	0.10%

Sources: 2020 Decennial Census; American Community Survey 2022 5-Year Estimates

District Economic and Socioeconomic Data

Area	Household Income			Average Local Wage	Household Poverty Rate		
	2021	2022	2021-2022 Percent Change		2021	2022	2021-2022 Percent Change
Butts	\$53,613	\$60,076	12.1%	\$925	19.1%	15.8%	-17.3%
Carroll	\$62,498	\$66,895	7.0%	\$1,156	17.3%	16.9%	-2.3%
Coweta	\$83,486	\$90,031	7.8%	\$1,032	8.5%	8.3%	-2.4%
Heard	\$55,635	\$62,965	13.2%	\$1,260	20.4%	16.7%	-18.1%
Lamar	\$53,802	\$64,966	20.8%	\$949	12.5%	11.2%	-10.4%
Meriwether	\$46,789	\$52,392	12.0%	\$944	21.9%	22.1%	0.9%
Pike	\$76,152	\$83,866	10.1%	\$895	8.5%	8.1%	-4.7%
Spalding	\$51,972	\$57,367	10.4%	\$959	17.4%	18.8%	8.0%
Troup	\$49,042	\$53,599	9.3%	1,052	19.1%	19.2%	0.5%
Upson	\$43,257	\$48,740	12.7%	\$953	22.4%	22.4%	0.0%
Region	\$57,625	\$58,447	1.4%	\$1,051	16.7%	16.0%	-4.5%
Georgia	\$65,030	\$71,355	9.7%	\$1,441	13.9%	13.5%	-2.9%

Sources: American Community Survey, 2021 and 2022 5-Year Estimates; US Bureau of Labor Statistics, Weekly Wages by County, First Quarter 2024

CEDS Regional Goals and Strategies

The TREDD continues to pursue the regional goals of the 2022 CEDS, categorized with related strategies into: Local Assets, Business Environment, Human Factors, and Necessary Infrastructure. These goals are reaffirmed below with an update on activities and performance measures for the reporting period.

Local Assets

Goals

- Support thriving downtowns
- Expand tourism opportunities
- Expand movie and film production
- Promote and protect local identity and sense of place
- Promote quality development, economic resilience, and equity

Implementation Update

- Filming in the region continues in cities in the region, including Jackson and Griffin.
- Several cities are actively pursuing or anticipating downtown hotel projects.
- The following plans were completed in the region that will strengthen downtowns and a sense

of place:

- City of Carrollton Downtown Master Plan
- City of Thomaston Urban Redevelopment Plan
- The region has projects that will increase or improve the availability of workforce and senior housing:
 - The City of Thomaston was accepted into the Georgia Institute for Community Housing (GICH) multiyear program to analyze and implement housing challenges and solutions
 - Several cities are exploring former mill sites for mixed-use and residential developments

Business Environment

Goals

- Increase the number of businesses and industries that establish, expand and maintain operations
- Strengthen the regional commercial districts
- Promote redevelopment of former industrial areas and plan for the reuse of underutilized buildings
- Promote and expand agriculture in the district

Implementation Update

- The region's local governments are actively partnering with the business community to remove any barriers and strengthen opportunities to business development in existing and emerging sectors.
 - The Three Rivers Workforce Development program has partnered with community stakeholders for roundtable discussions within industrial sectors such as healthcare, education, and technology over the year
 - The City of Thomaston held an Entrepreneurship Summit in October 2024
- The region continues to see a rapid pace of development, including Development of Regional Impacts (DRI) that meet certain land use and size thresholds. Three Rivers Regional Commission has numerous DRI reviews completed or underway for the reporting period as shown in the table on the following page.

Developments of Regional Impact in the District (for 2023 and 2024 Reporting Periods)

County	2023	2024	DRI Identification #	Land Uses
Butts	2	3	3973, 4031, 4080, 4116, 4182	Truck Stops, Industrial, Wholesale & Distribution
Carroll	1		4002	Truck Stop
Coweta	5	5	3880, 3976, 3993, 4079, 4142, 4143, 4164, 4194, 4301	Truck Stops, Mixed-Use Residential, Warehousing, Data Center
Heard	None			
Lamar	4	1	3893, 3895, 3896, 3897, 4272	
Meriwether	1	1	3968, 122	Housing, Mixed-Use
Pike				
Spalding	1	1	3922, 4286	Mixed-Use, Industrial
Troup	2	1	3915, 4028, 4114	Housing, Truck Stop, Cement Plant
Upson	None			
Regional Totals	16	12		

Source: Georgia Department of Community Affairs, DRI Submissions Page

Human Factors

Goals

- Create equitable opportunities for individuals of all backgrounds to succeed economically in the region, in turn creating a more prosperous and resilient economy
- Establish program initiatives, through public and private partnerships, to improve employment skills, including both soft and technical skills, of the workforce
- Increase employment within the district
- Expand and improve access to rural healthcare in the district
- Expand care infrastructure in the region for people of all ages and abilities to stay economically and socially engaged and self-sufficient

Implementation Update

- The Three Rivers Workforce Development program continues to work to increase the number of students in career and technical education programs, including apprenticeships, internships, and on-the-job training programs
- The total number of youths involved in training programs during the year was 272. The total number of adults and dislocated workers involved in training programs was 214.
- Three Rivers Workforce Development continues to work to increase participation in human services programs that remove barriers to participation in workforce development. The programs include:
 - Customized Training (**0 participants**) - is designed to meet the special training needs of

an employer or a group of employers by allowing them to tailor and design work-based skills training

- On-the-Job Training (**1 participants**) - provided by an employer in the public, private non-profit, or private sector to a paid participant while engaged in productive work train new employees for the specific job duties required by that employer
- Incumbent Worker Training (**11 participants**) - designed to improve the skills of employees and the competitiveness of an employer (including a group of employers) to retain a skilled workforce or avert the need to lay off employees by assisting the workers in obtaining the skills necessary to maintain or retain employment or have the opportunity for increased earnings potential through promotion
- Pre/Registered Apprenticeships (**0 participants**) - is an employer-driven training model that combines on-the-job training with job related instruction
- Supportive Services (**39 participants**) - enable an individual to participate in activities such as, but not limited to, assistance with transportation, child care, housing, health care, educational testing, and work-related tools
- Financial Literacy Education (**0 participants**) - provides youth with the knowledge and skills that they need to achieve long term financial stability. Financial literacy education encompasses information and activities on a range of topics, such as creating budgets; setting up checking and saving accounts; managing spending, credit, and debt; understanding credit reports and credit scores; and protecting against identify theft
- Entrepreneurial Skills Training (**0 participants**) - provides the basics of starting and operating a small business. This training helps youth develop the skills associated with entrepreneurship, such as the ability to take initiative, creatively seek out and identify business opportunities, develop budgets and forecast resource needs, understand various options for acquiring capital and the trade-offs associated with each option, and communicate effectively and market oneself and one's ideas
- Paid Work Experience (**8 participants**) - is structured learning experience that takes place in a workplace and provides youth with opportunities for career exploration and skill development. A work experience may take place in the private for-profit section, the non-profit sector, or the public sector. Work experience for youth: summer employment and other employment opportunities available throughout the school year, pre-apprenticeship programs, internships and job shadowing, and on-the-job training
- Occupational Skills Training (**49 participants**) - is an organized program of study that provides specific vocational skills that lead to proficiency in performing actual tasks and technical functions required by certain occupational fields at entry, intermediate, or advanced levels
- GED and Alternative Secondary School (**20 participants**) - services assist youth who have struggled in traditional secondary education. Dropout recovery services are those that assist youth who have dropped out of school. Both types of services help youth to re-engage in education that leads to the completion of a recognized high school equivalent

- The region continues to strive to increase the number of residents that have high school diplomas. The total number of recent high school graduates for the Three Rivers Region is 5,264 and the regional graduation rate increased by 2.7% to 89.6% (lower than the state graduation rate). Graduation data is broken down by county in the table found on the following page.

Recent Graduation Rates in the District

Area	# 2024 Graduates	2023 Graduation Rate	2024 Graduation Rate	% Change 2023-2024 Graduation Rate
Butts	226	83.1	89.6	7.8%
Carroll	928	94.9	97.2	2.4%
Coweta	1705	91.5	91.4	-0.1%
Heard	141	94.0	93.6	-0.4%
Lamar	186	85.3	90.4	6.0%
Meriwether	116	80.0	87.4	9.3%
Pike	293	95.4	93.9	-1.6%
Spalding	593	83.8	84.7	1.1%
Troup	788	86.0	85.8	-0.2%
Upson	288	87.9	91.6	4.2%
Region	5,264	88.2	89.6	2.7%
Georgia	117,658	84.4%	90.6	7.3%

Source: Georgia Department of Education 4-Year Cohort Graduation Rate, October 2023

Necessary Infrastructure

Goals

- Expand broadband to underserved rural communities and increase opportunities for business development
- Facilitate achieving economic development goals by the implementation of transportation strategies
- Support the maintenance and expansion of infrastructure to support economic development

Implementation Update

- On-demand public transit services continue to be administered and provided by the Three Rivers Regional Transit System in all ten counties in the region.
- The TREDD continues to participate in the Georgia Department of Transportation Vulnerable Road User Task Team to implement complete streets and road safety planning in the region and state
- The TREDD continues to participate in the I-75 Central Corridor Coalition to advocate for transportation improvements, including passenger rail, that will make this interstate more efficient for freight traffic, connect residents between Atlanta and Macon to employment and

- recreational opportunities, and make travel safer for vehicular users
- The TREDD participates in the Griffin-Spalding Area Transportation Committee to provide outreach and technical assistance on program, projects, and funding for complete streets, road safety, and land use and transportation planning
- The region continues to increase coverage and accessibility of high-speed internet.
- The region’s economic development stakeholders continue to work to increase ready to develop and promote industrial parks and commercial/office/speculative buildings

Economic Development Sites in the District

County	Available Buildings	Available Land Sites	County	Available Buildings	Available Land Sites
Butts	9	1	Meriwether	6	None listed
Carroll	38	2	Pike	None listed	None listed
Coweta	57	2	Spalding	23	2
Heard	1	1	Troup	16	2
Lamar	8	None listed	Upson	12	1

Source: Georgia Site Selector Industrial Property Search – Searched October 2024

Action Plan

The following action plan builds upon the goals and strategies identified through the SWOT analysis, data collection, and stakeholder collaboration to answer the questions “where do we want to go?” and “how are we going to get there?”. The Three Rivers Regional Commission, the TRRC CEDS Committee, local governments and stakeholders are all responsible for implementation of the CEDS goals, strategies, and work program. The TRRC, utilizing Economic Development Administration Planning Investment funds, will assist and guide responsible parties in the implementation of the CEDS. In addition to EDA grant funds, the TRRC will employ the following implementation tools in meeting the CEDS goals:

- Georgia Department of Community Affairs Grant and Loan Funds
- Appalachian Regional Commission Grant Funds
- Southeast Crescent Regional Commission Grant Funds
- US Department of Agriculture-Rural Development Economic Development Programs
- One Georgia Authority
- Georgia Recreational Trails Program
- Land and Water Conservation Fund
- Federal and state transportation funding

In addition, local and statewide initiatives such as Freeport Exemption, Job Tax Credits, Enterprise Zones and job training programs will be assessed as additional resources to implement the CEDS goals.

The action plan of the CEDS details high priority projects that will have a significant impact on regional economic development. Regional priority projects are documented along with several localized priorities within each county. Each of these action items could be successfully implemented through public/private partnerships and leveraging funding.

TRRC Priority Actions

Action	Partners
<p>Georgia Import/Export Highway</p> <p>This project proposes the expansion of Georgia’s Import Export Highway Corridor, which spans approximately 80 miles from I-85 near LaGrange to I-75 near Macon.</p>	<p>GDOT, Federal Highway Administration</p>
<p>West Georgia Broadband Project</p> <p>Projects continue to be needed to expand broadband services to underserved rural counties including Heard, Troup, Meriwether, and Upson Counties.</p>	<p>West Central GA Broadband Authority</p>
<p>Mill Redevelopment</p> <p>The region has many former mill and mill village sites that should be redeveloped to activate economic potential in communities that have lost substantial industry. These projects could include housing, mixed-use, and economic development that will boost industrial recruitment opportunities as well as reduce blight and brownfield.</p>	<p>Local governments, private and nonprofit partnerships, historic preservation</p>
<p>Airport Expansions and Improvements</p> <p>The region prioritizes providing modernized airport facilities in order to maintain and recruit corporate partners. Projects are underway, including the new Griffin-Spalding County Airport that will be a major economic development asset.</p>	<p>Local governments, state agencies, federal and state grant authorities, private economic stakeholders</p>
<p>Trails of Regional Significance</p> <p>This region will benefit from a regional trail system that provides quality of life benefits for residents and tourism opportunities similar to other notable trails in the region (e.g. the Silver Comet). Projects should be pursued for property acquisition, planning, design, engineering and construction of a regionally significant trail. The region also has many communities with trail systems that are planned or already underway. These trail systems will need additional projects for construction, maintenance, and enhancement. These trails are, or will be, located in conjunction with regionally beneficial assets, such as along the Chattahoochee, Flint, Ocumulgee and other rivers, and/or along abandoned or unused rail corridors.</p>	<p>Local governments, private and nonprofit partnerships</p>

Action	Partners
<p>Strategic Sewer and Water Expansion Projects</p> <p>The region has numerous economic development projects (e.g. business and industrial parks) that will require comprehensive plans, expanded and/or improved delivery lines, pump stations, and upgraded storage and treatment capacity.</p>	<p>Local governments, state agencies, federal and state grant authorities</p>
<p>Drinking Water Treatment Upgrades</p> <p>The region’s growth and legacy pollution issues in some areas will require improvements to water treatment capabilities in some communities. Projects will include adding water sources and storage, increasing treatment capacity, upgrading with more efficient equipment, adding generators for power outages, and implementing security measures.</p>	<p>Local governments, state agencies, federal and state grant authorities</p>
<p>Business/Industrial/Agricultural/Technology Park Development</p> <p>The region continues to need business, industrial, agricultural, and technology parks ranging from small acreage to over 1,000 acre sites with infrastructure in place for corporate recruitment and local industry development. The region would benefit from having at least one site certified through the Georgia Ready for Accelerated Development (GRAD) program. Projects are needed for infrastructure, buildings, and industrial-grade pads to ensure the region can meet the needs of current and future sectors.</p>	<p>Local governments, state agencies, federal and state grant authorities</p>
<p>Complete Streets Initiatives</p> <p>The region has numerous roads and corridors that will benefit from Complete Street projects that will strengthen safety and connectivity for people inside and out of vehicles, as well as enhance the appearance and marketability of these areas. Complete Streets projects can include adding sidewalks, bike/golf cart lanes, multiuse trails, streetscapes, green infrastructure, traffic calming features, and landscaping to achieve enhanced human-scaled design and connectivity.</p>	<p>Local governments, state agencies, federal and state grant authorities</p>
<p>Road Corridor Improvements</p> <p>The region’s rapid pace of regionally significant projects, residential growth, as well as several college campuses, will necessitate safety and capacity improvements to the region’s road corridors, such as SR 16. These projects could include collaborative planning and agreements, adding capacity, safety countermeasures, building by-passes, and other improvements.</p>	<p>Local governments, state agencies, federal and state grant authorities</p>

Action	Partners
<p>Redevelopment and Revitalization</p> <p>The region contains many areas, largely located within cities, where both commercial and residential blight is widespread. Urban redevelopment planning can address these issues, renew economic development investment, and preserve the sense of identity. The regional has a substantial number of unique and/or historic areas, sites, and structures that should be rehabilitated and adaptively reused for economic development. These buildings include former public schools, community centers, as well as downtown city and rural commercial or residential buildings that can be given new life and economic opportunity to spaces that have been in the region for years.</p>	<p>Local governments, state agencies, federal and state grant authorities, philanthropic organizations</p>
<p>Business Incubators/Accelerators</p> <p>The region’s commitment to strengthening the workforce and business growth requires facilities for business training and resources. Projects will include refurbishing and equipping facilities to provide mentorship, hosting, workforce recruitment, and other business development support.</p>	<p>Local governments, state agencies, federal and state grant authorities</p>
<p>Housing</p> <p>The region’s housing needs include the lack of availability, affordability, and areas of residential blight. Communities can address housing through various actions and programs. These include participation in the Georgia Initiative for Community Housing (GICH) program, utilizing housing focused funding programs such as Community Development Block Grants (CDBG), Georgia Rural Workforce Housing Initiative, conducting housing assessments and market studies, and keeping local zoning and development codes updated and enforced.</p>	<p>Local governments, state agencies, federal and state grant authorities, universities and other educational institutions</p>