

# CEDS 2017-2021

Northeast Georgia Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy

Athens-Clarke, Barrow, Elbert, Greene, Jackson, Jasper, Madison, Morgan, Newton, Oconee, Oglethorpe, and Walton Counties



# Acknowledgements

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## Additional Thanks

**NEGRC PGS Committee**  
**Athens Technical College**  
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The Northeast Georgia Regional Commission (NEGRC) serves as the Economic Development District (EDD) for the 12-county Northeast Georgia Region, through the U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA). To retain EDD designation, NEGRC regularly maintains and updates the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) for Northeast Georgia, with guidance from local public and private stakeholders. This document is consistent with 13 C.F.R. § 303.7 and the CEDS standards and guidelines set forth by the U.S. EDA and the National Association of Development Organizations (NADO). It is intended to compliment the vision and initiatives articulated by the Northeast Georgia Regional Agenda.





# Chapter 1

## Introduction

The Northeast Georgia Region spans from the perimeter of Metro Atlanta to the rural border of South Carolina. As a result, the region contains a unique mixture of urban, small town, industrial, and pastoral spaces. Athens-Clarke County, located toward the center of Northeast Georgia, is home to the University of Georgia, Athens Technical College, and Piedmont College. Athens, along with portions of Oconee County to the south, makes up the region's central metropolitan core. Barrow, Jackson, Walton, and Newton counties have urbanized areas of their own as a result of their proximity to Atlanta and the major I-85 and I-20 interstate corridors. Elbert, Greene, Jasper, Madison, and Morgan counties contain small municipalities but remain considerably rural in character.

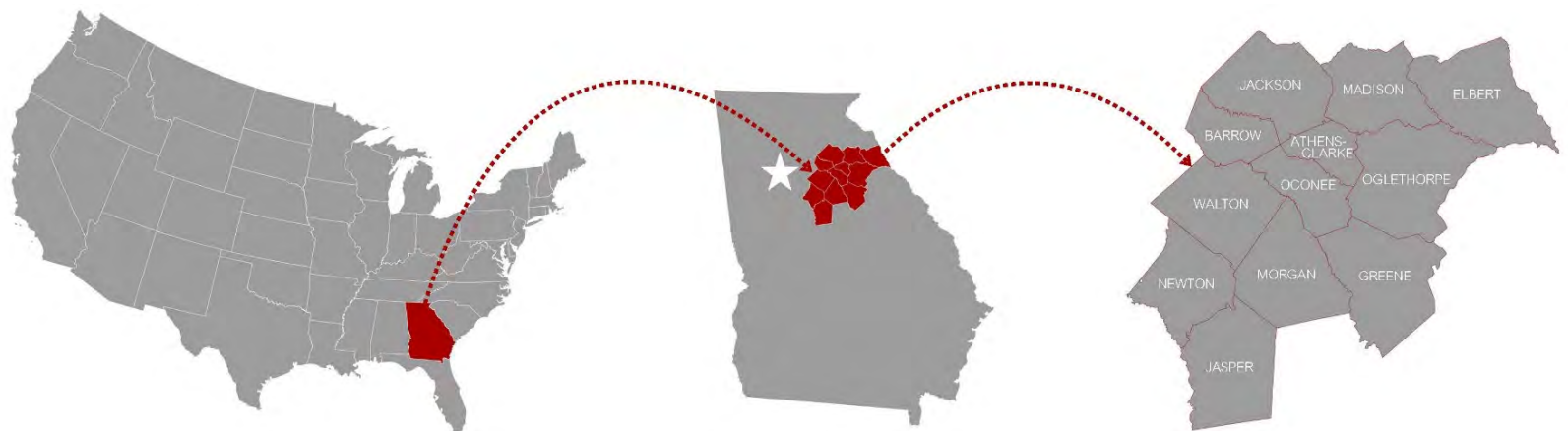


Figure 1. Location Map of Northeast Georgia

Northeast Georgia is **home to just under 607,300 people**, with an estimated 265,610 residents comprising the local labor force (Esri, 2016). Median household income is just under \$47K (ibid). The current 4.9% regional unemployment rate echoes pre-recession numbers for Northeast Georgia but still remains 0.4% higher than the national average (GDOL, 2016 & BLS, 2016).

A **competitive local labor force** is essential to retain and attract quality employers. Overall, educational attainment for Northeast Georgia falls below State and National averages (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015). With nearly all of the region's top 50 highest paying occupations requiring advanced education, vocational training and college-prep should be a primary focus. Specialized workforce training programs have proven successful in partnership with local colleges and universities. The region should seek opportunities for expanded training and skill-building programs for students of all ages in cooperation with State, County, and private entities.

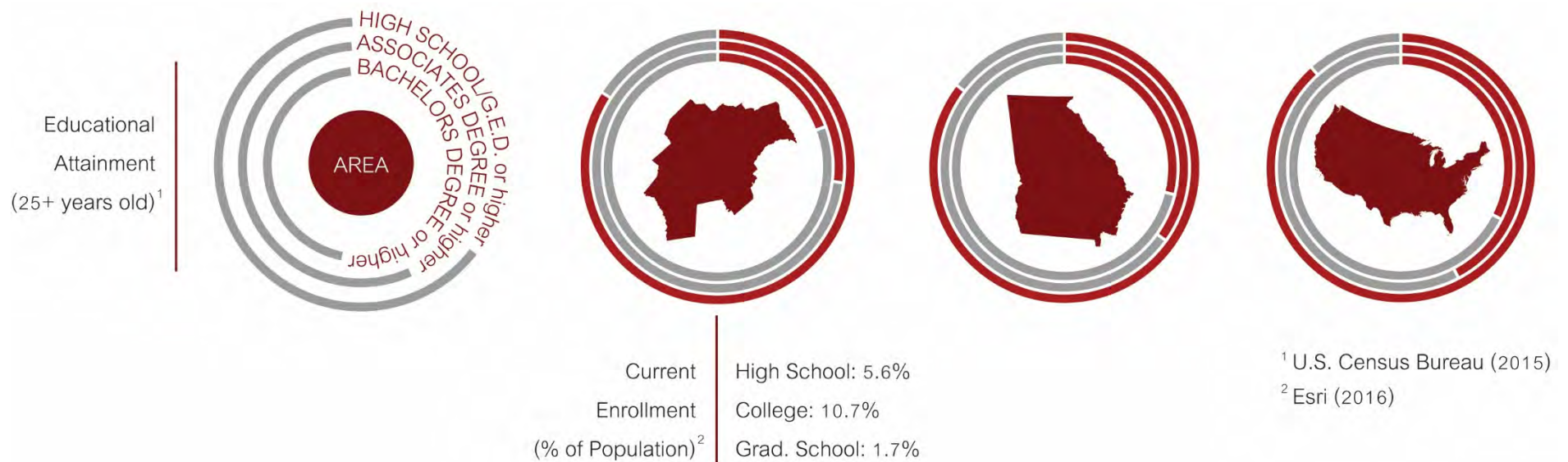
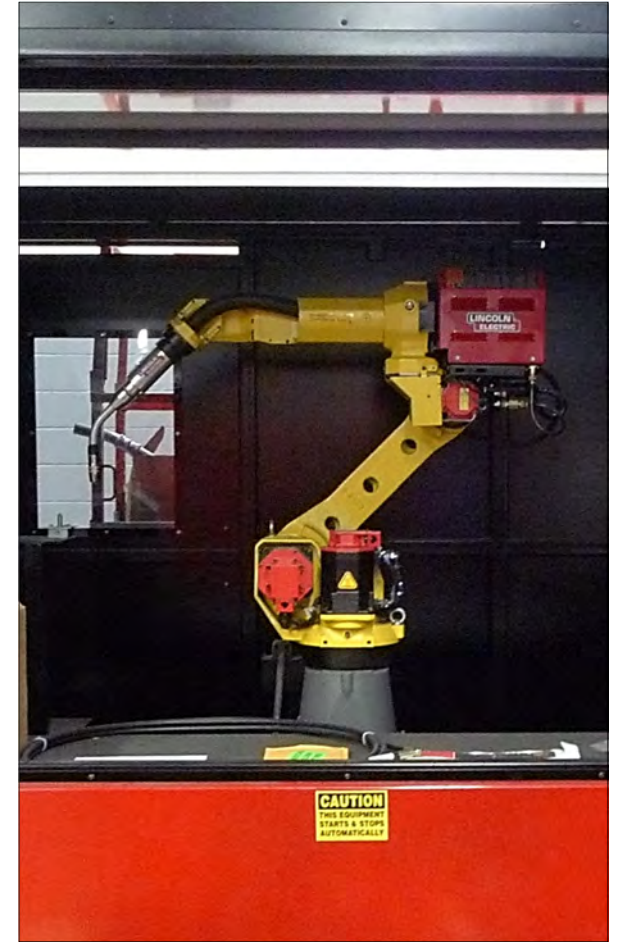


Figure 2. Educational Attainment and Enrollment





**Top ten industrial sectors** include: Education Services, Manufacturing, Health Care and Social Assistance, Construction, and sectors related to retail and service, such as Wholesale Trade and Transportation and Warehousing. Coordinated efforts to advance local infrastructure, particularly transportation improvements, expanded sanitary sewer, and high-speed internet access, will ensure local industries continue to thrive and proliferate.

The Northeast Georgia Region has a nuanced economy due to the unique positioning and character of the area. Industry cluster analyses identify local specializations by recognizing associated industries in the region (interconnected by services, trade, and/or products) and comparing them to national trends.

Strong local clusters between 2010 and 2014 included (U.S. EDA, 2014):



The CEDS 2017-2021 examines the region's character, top industrial sectors, and strong clusters to derive economic strategies and goals for Northeast Georgia.

The CEDS should guide economic development efforts across the region. It is intended to enhance regional "economic resilience" (ability to withstand and/or recover from any economic challenges) and identify opportunities for growth and improvement.





## Vision for Northeast Georgia:

*A region where quality of life is built on a foundation of community and history.*

*Where education, innovation, and prosperity thrive thanks to a blend of regional*

*and global connections, leveraged by world-class local infrastructure.*



## Crafting the CEDS

The CEDS 2017-2021 is the result of four months of public input from over 364 local public and private stakeholders. Outreach included regular CEDS Committee meetings and an online questionnaire; input guided the regional economic development strategies and tasks laid out in the Action Plan (described in Chapter 4). An inventory of economic development items from local County and Municipal Community Work Programs (a component of local comprehensive plans) provided additional guidance for strategy and goal development.

### CEDS Committee

The CEDS Committee served as a steering committee to articulate the regional vision, strategies, and goals. County commissioners from each of the Northeast Georgia counties appointed two CEDS Committee members; the result was a mix of public and private sector representatives with a variety of backgrounds. The CEDS Committee held three meetings: Meeting #1, to review the current economic conditions of the region and examine Northeast Georgia's economic strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats; Meeting #2, to outline the region's foci for economic development and draft strategies; and Meeting #3, to refine strategies, goals, and objectives with clear performance measures for each.

### Questionnaire

An online questionnaire was distributed to government staff, elected officials, residents, and business owners within the Northeast Region via NEGRG.org, a press release, and through county and municipal social media. Over 340 responses provided additional insight for the SWOT analysis and development of the strategy items.

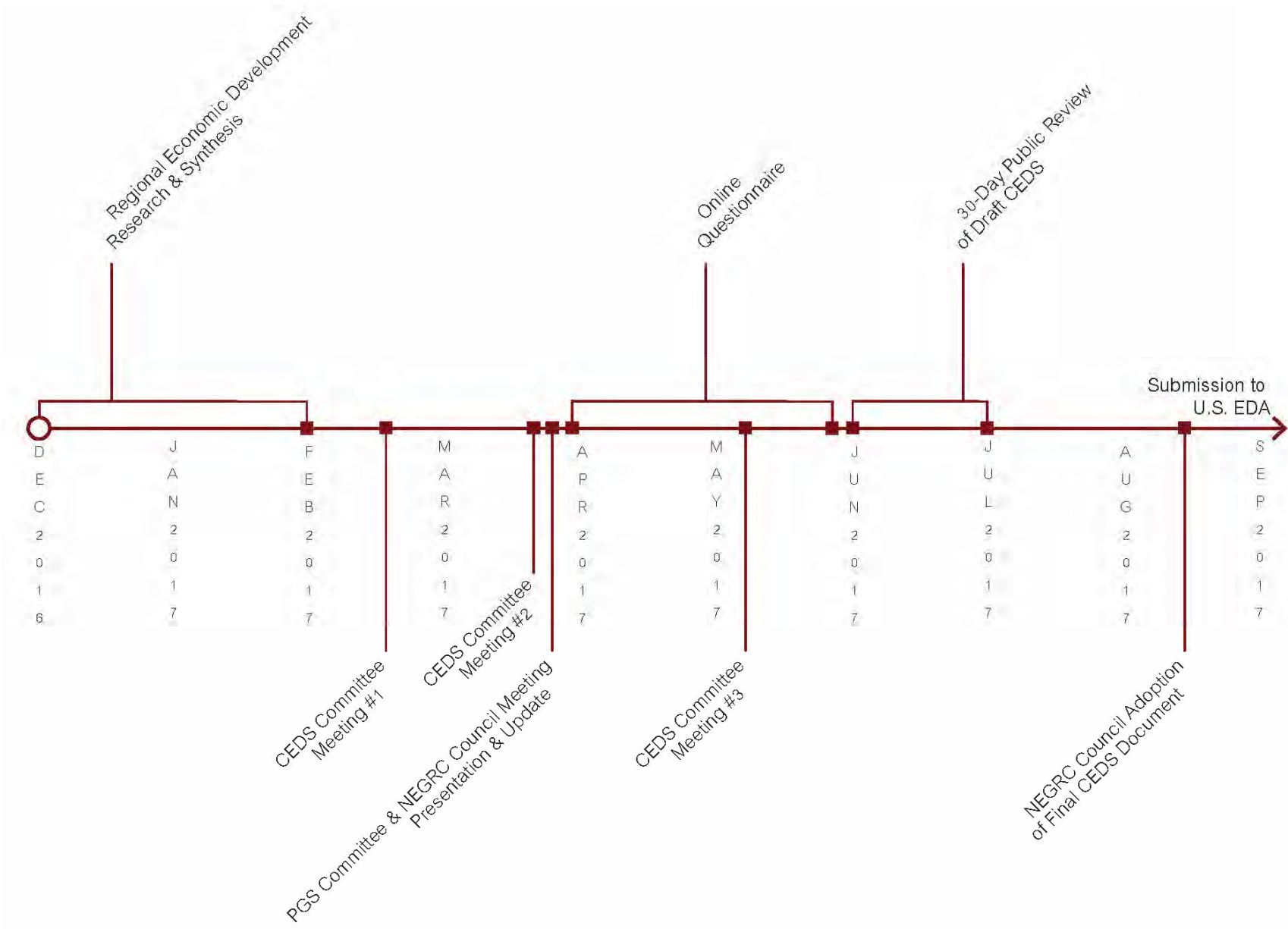
### Community Work Programs

The Georgia Department of Community Development (DCA) requires a Community Work Program component for every local comprehensive plan (DCA, 2014). These programs identify and prioritize community activities and initiatives and are updated every five years. Local government Community Work Program items specific to economic development were compiled and considered during development of the CEDS Action Plan.





## Timeline



# Chapter 2

## Where We Are

The 2012 CEDS update was completed in the wake of the recent recession (2007-2009). Since then, the region's economy has improved significantly: unemployment rates have dropped by 4.5% while per capita income has increased by 7.2% (GDOL, 2016). Local efforts to attract new industries, revive downtowns, and develop workforce training programs, as recommended by the 2012 CEDS, are proving successful.

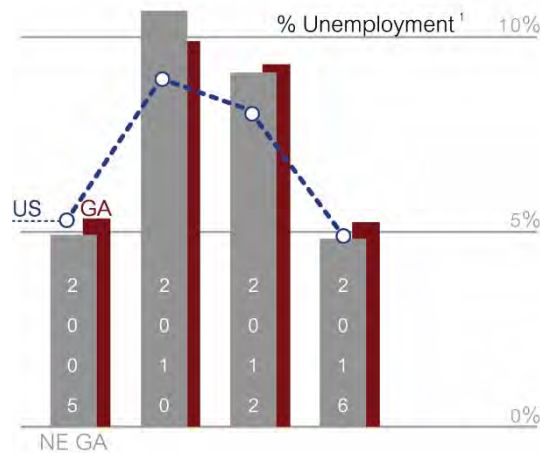


Figure 3. Unemployment Rates, 2005-2016

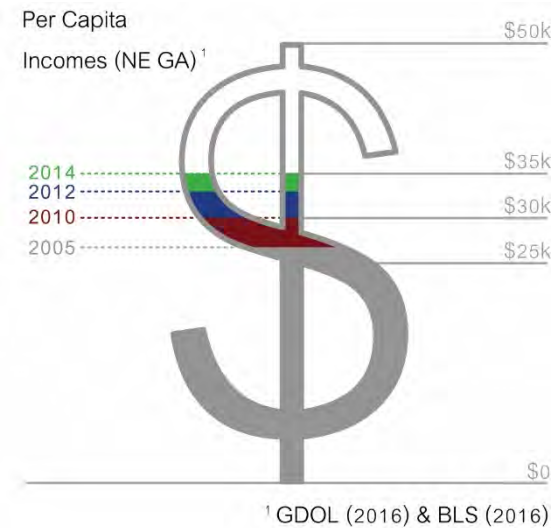


Figure 4. Per Capita Incomes, 2005-2014

The following [CEDS Snapshots](#) provide current demographic, household, and workforce data for the region. County snapshots are intended to capture the economic and demographic nuances not apparent at a regional scale (note that the “Top Employers” listed *do not* include local government entities, including public schools).

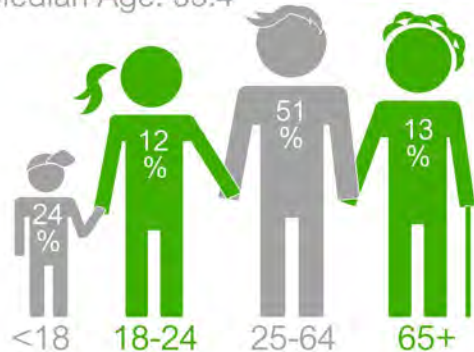


# Northeast Georgia

## CEDS SNAPSHOT

Population: 607,258 people (2016 estimate)<sup>4</sup>

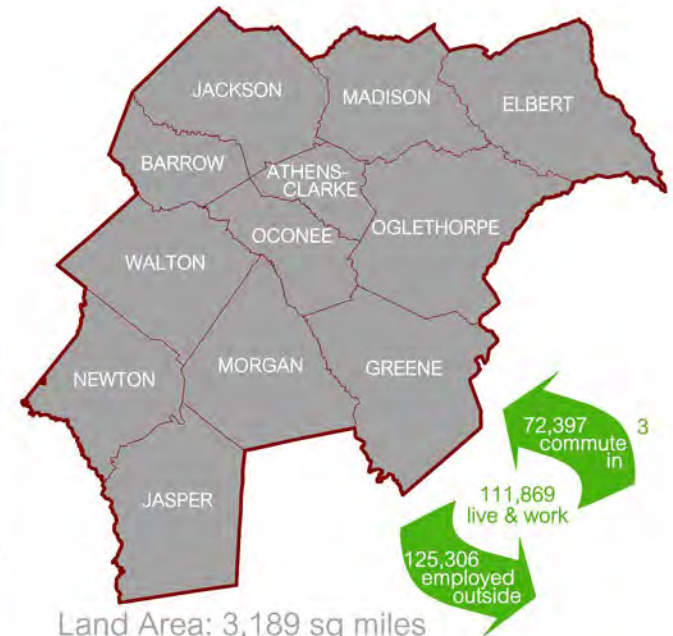
Median Age: 35.4



703,554 people by 2025<sup>4</sup>

Hispanic Population: 7.0%

Minority Population: 30.3%



Land Area: 3,189 sq miles

Metropolitan Area(s): Athens-Clarke

72,397 commute in

111,869 live & work

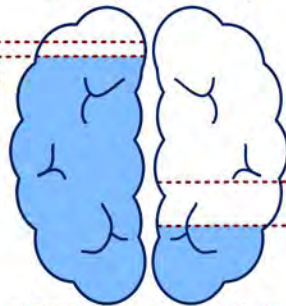
125,306 employed outside

Colleges/Universities: University of Georgia, Athens Tech., Emory-Oxford College, Piedmont College, University of North Georgia, Perimeter College, Lanier Tech., Georgia Piedmont Tech., and Troy University

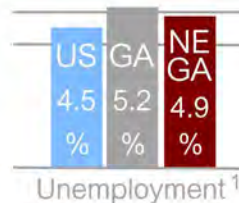
## Educational Attainment:<sup>2</sup> (25+ years old)

Nation: 88.4%

Region: 84.1%



High School/GED ▲ Minimum Associates Degree



Unemployment<sup>1</sup>

Nation: 42.3%

Region: 27.0%

## Top 10 Employers:

Athens Regional Medical Center  
Caterpillar, Inc.  
Chico's Dist. Services, LL  
Pilgrim's Pride Corporation  
The Kroger Company  
University of Georgia  
Walmart  
Waynes Farm, LLC  
Wellpoint, Inc.  
West Side Station

## Top 10 Industrial Sectors:

- 1 Education Services
- 2 Manufacturing
- 3 Retail Trade
- 4 Health Care & Social Assistance
- 5 Accommodation & Food Services
- 6 Wholesale Trade
- 7 Public Administration
- 8 Admin, Support, Waste Mgmt, Remediation
- 9 Construction
- 10 Transportation & Warehousing

Median Household Income:



Median Home Value:



Poverty: 17.0%

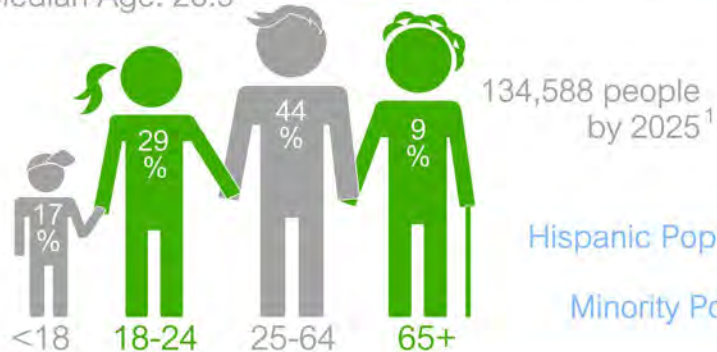


# Athens-Clarke County

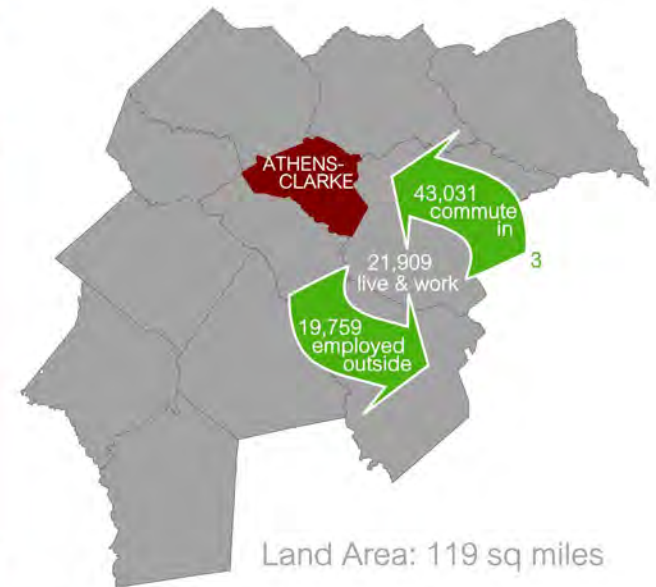
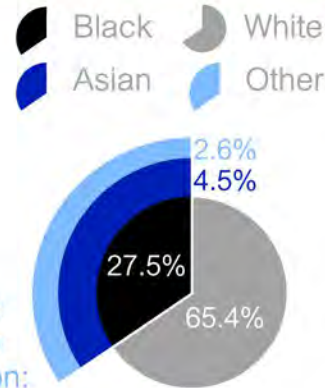
CEDS SNAPSHOT

Population: 123,912 people (2015 estimate)

Median Age: 26.5



Hispanic Population: 10.6%  
Minority Population: 34.6%



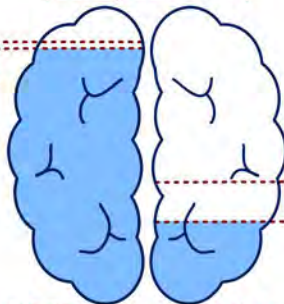
Municipalities/Cities: Athens\* and Winterville

\* County Seat

Colleges/Universities: University of Georgia, Athens Technical College, and Piedmont College

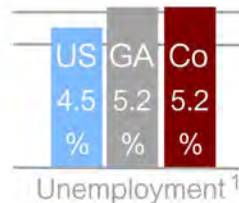
Educational Attainment:<sup>2</sup>  
(25+ years old)

Nation: 88.4%  
County: 86.3%



High School/GED ▲ Minimum Associates Degree

Nation: 42.3%  
County: 28.8%



## Top 10 Employers:

Athens Regional Medical Center  
Caterpillar, Inc.  
Express Services Inc  
Merial, Inc.  
Pilgrim's Pride Corporation  
The Kroger Company  
University of Georgia  
Walmart  
Wellpoint, Inc.  
West Side Station

## Top 10 Industrial Sectors:

- 1 Health Care & Social Assistance
- 2 Accommodation & Food Services
- 3 Retail Trade
- 4 Manufacturing
- 5 Wholesale Trade
- 6 Public Administration
- 7 Admin, Support, Waste Mgmt, Remediation
- 8 Finance & Insurance
- 9 Other Services (except Public Admin.)
- 10 Professional Scientific & Technical Services

Median Household Income:



Median Home Value:



Poverty:  
38.1%

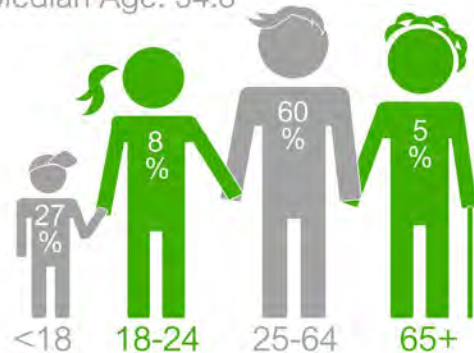


# Barrow County

## CEDS SNAPSHOT

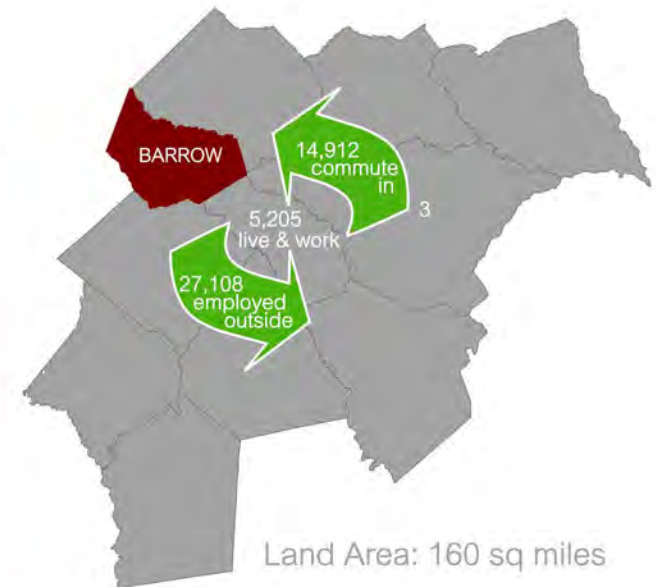
Population: 73,370 people (2015 estimate)

Median Age: 34.8



Hispanic Population: 10.0%

Minority Population: 18.3%



Municipalities/Cities: Auburn, Bethlehem, Braselton, Carl, Statham, and Winder\*

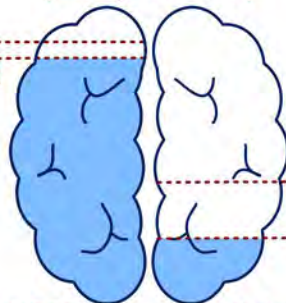
\* County Seat

Colleges/Universities: Lanier Technical College

## Educational Attainment:<sup>2</sup> (25+ years old)

Nation: 88.4%

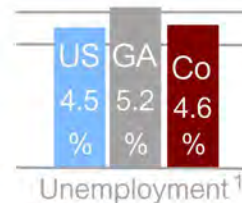
County: 81.9%



High School/GED ▲ Minimum Associates Degree

Nation: 42.3%

County: 22.5%



## Top 10 Employers:

Akin Ford Corp  
CEHR, LLC  
Chico's Dist. Services, LLC  
Harrison Poultry, Inc.  
Ingles Markets, Inc.  
Johns Manville Internat'l, Inc.  
Northeast Sales Distributing, Inc.  
Petco  
Publix Super Market, Inc.  
Walmart

## Top 10 Industrial Sectors:<sup>1</sup>

- 1 Retail Trade
- 2 Wholesale Trade
- 3 Manufacturing
- 4 Accommodation & Food Services
- 5 Health Care & Social Assistance
- 6 Construction
- 7 Public Administration
- 8 Transportation & Warehousing
- 9 Admin., Support, Waste Mgmt., Remediation
- 10 Professional Scientific & Technical Svc

Median Household Income:



Median Home Value:



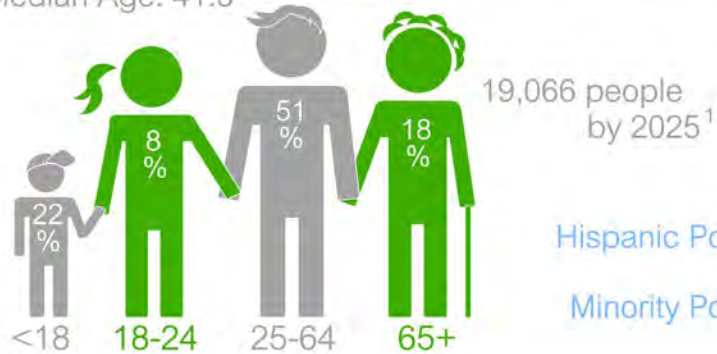
Poverty:  
15.6%

# Elbert County

## CEDS SNAPSHOT

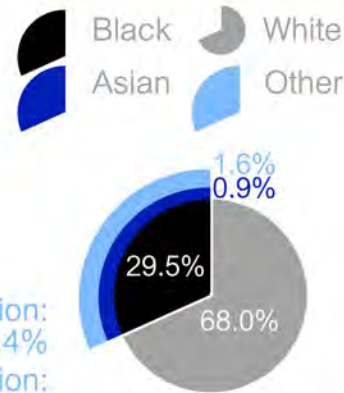
Population: 19,364 people (2015 estimate)

Median Age: 41.3



Hispanic Population: 5.4%

Minority Population: 32.0%



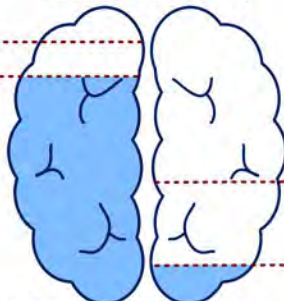
Colleges/Universities: Athens Technical College

Municipalities/Cities: Bowman and Elberton\*

\* County Seat

Educational Attainment:<sup>2</sup>  
(25+ years old)

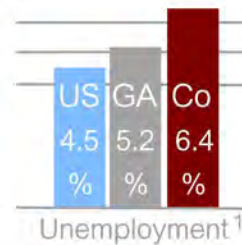
Nation: 88.4%  
County: 76.8%



High School/GED ▲ Minimum Associates Degree

Nation: 42.3%

County: 12.9%



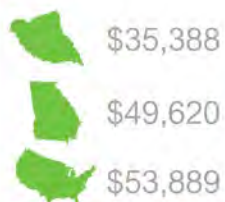
## Top 10 Employers:

- Eagle Granite Company
- Ingles Markets, Inc.
- Keystone Memorials, Inc.
- Matthews Granite Company
- Mollertech South, LLC
- Nancy Hart Nursing Ctr
- Pilgrim's Pride Corporation
- Pinnacle Bank
- Star Granite Co, Inc.
- Walmart

## Top 10 Industrial Sectors:

- Manufacturing
- Retail Trade
- Health Care & Social Assistance
- Public Administration
- Wholesale Trade
- Accommodation & Food Services
- Mining
- Finance & Insurance
- Transportation & Warehousing
- Professional Scientific & Technical Svc

Median Household Income:



Median Home Value:



Poverty:  
23.7%

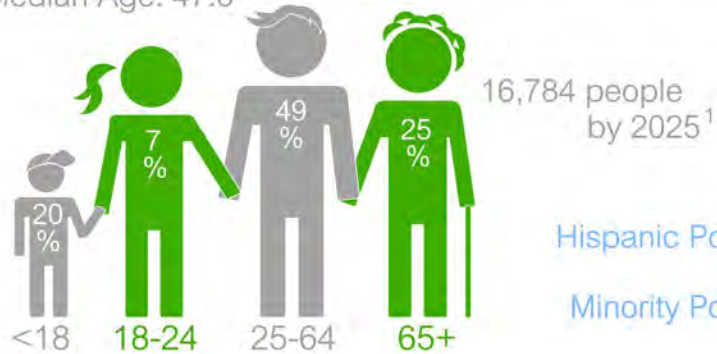


# Greene County

## CEDS SNAPSHOT

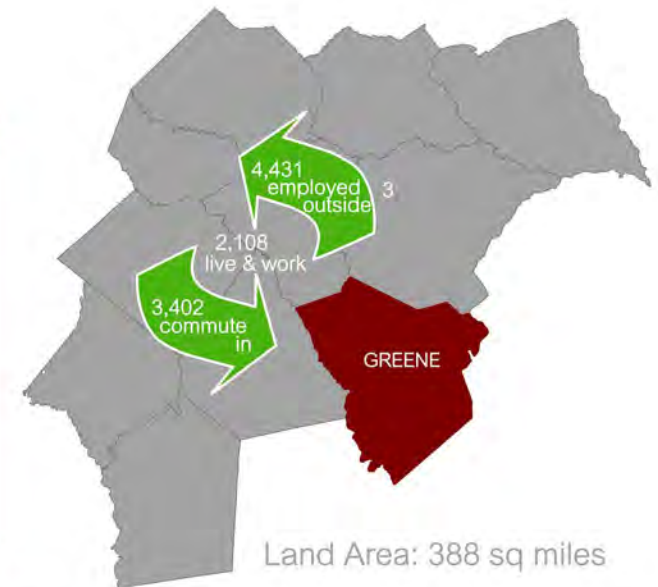
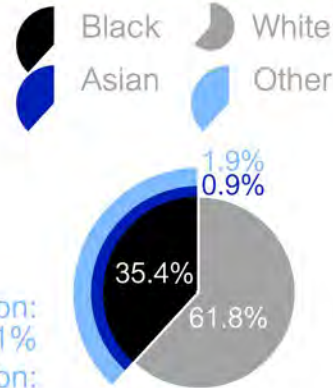
Population: 16,710 people (2015 estimate)

Median Age: 47.6



Hispanic Population: 6.1%

Minority Population: 38.2%



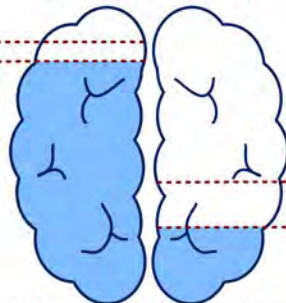
Municipalities/Cities: Greensboro\*, Siloam, Union Point, White Plains, and Woodville

\* County Seat

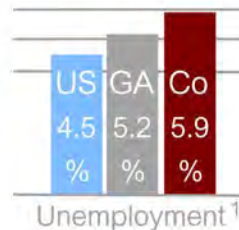
Colleges/Universities: Athens Technical College

## Educational Attainment:<sup>2</sup> (25+ years old)

Nation: 88.4%  
County: 81.9%



High School/GED ▲ Minimum Associates Degree



Nation: 42.3%  
County: 26.9%

## Top 10 Employers:

Daniel RP Management, LLC  
Nibco, Inc.  
Novelis Corporation  
Publix Super Market, Inc.  
Pure Beauty Farms, Inc.  
Quail International, Inc.  
Ritz-Carlton  
St Joseph's at East Georgia  
Tendercare Clinic, Inc.  
The Home Depot

## Top 10 Industrial Sectors:

- 1 Accommodation & Food Services
- 2 Health Care & Social Assistance
- 3 Retail Trade
- 4 Manufacturing
- 5 Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing & Hunting
- 6 Public Administration
- 7 Admin., Support, Waste Mgmt., Remediation
- 8 Transportation & Warehousing
- 9 Finance & Insurance
- 10 Wholesale Trade

Median Household Income:



Median Home Value:



Poverty: 21.2%

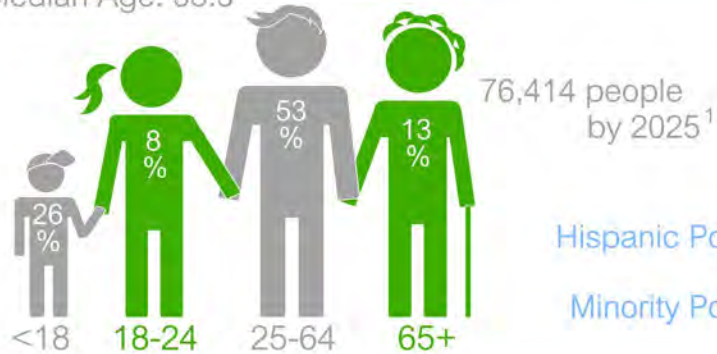


# Jackson County

## CEDS SNAPSHOT

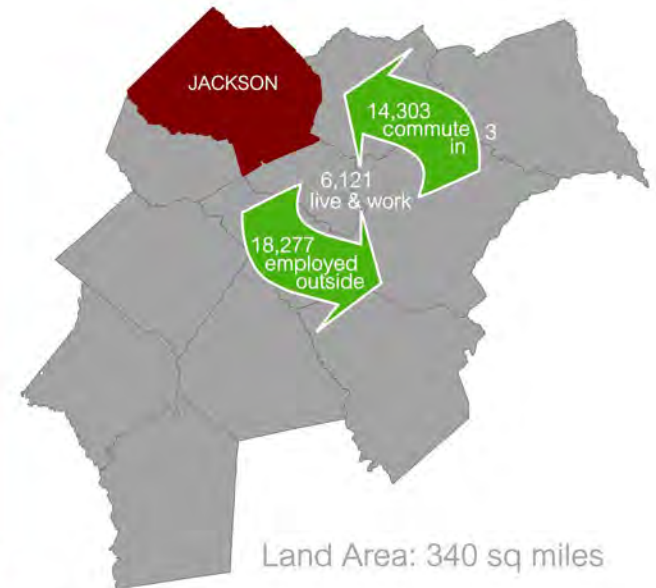
Population: 63,360 people (2015 estimate)

Median Age: 38.3



Hispanic Population: 7.0%

Minority Population: 11.5%



Municipalities/Cities: Arcade, Braselton, Commerce, Hoschton, Jefferson\*, Nicholson, Pendergrass, and Talmo

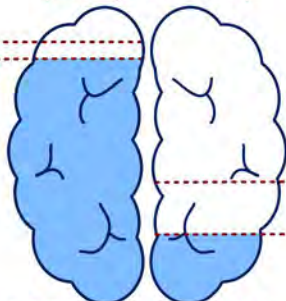
\* County Seat

Colleges/Universities: Lanier Technical College

## Educational Attainment:<sup>2</sup> (25+ years old)

Nation: 88.4%

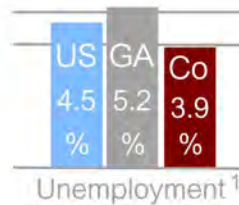
County: 82.7%



High School/GED ▲ Minimum Associates Degree

Nation: 42.3%

County: 23.2%



## Top 10 Employers:

- Baker & Taylor, LLC
- Etcon Employment Solutions
- HG Georgia Merchants, Inc.
- Kubota Industrial Equipment Corporation
- Mission Foods - Jefferson
- Restoration Healthcare of Commerce
- TD Automotive Compressor Georgia, LLC
- The William Carter Company
- Toyota Industries Compressor Parts America
- Waynes Farm, LLC

## Top 10 Industrial Sectors:<sup>1</sup>

- Manufacturing
- Retail Trade
- Transportation & Warehousing
- Wholesale Trade
- Education Services
- Accommodation & Food Services
- Admin, Support, Waste Mgmt, Remediation
- Health Care & Social Assistance
- Public Administration
- Real Estate Rental & Leasing

## Median Household Income:



## Median Home Value:



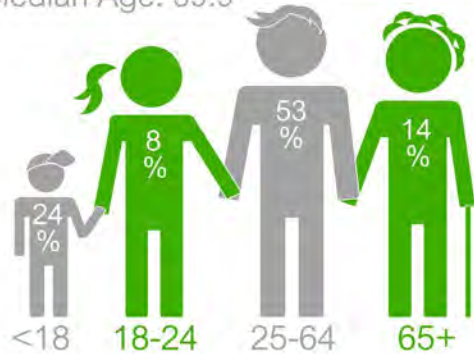
Poverty: 13.0%

# Jasper County

## CEDS SNAPSHOT

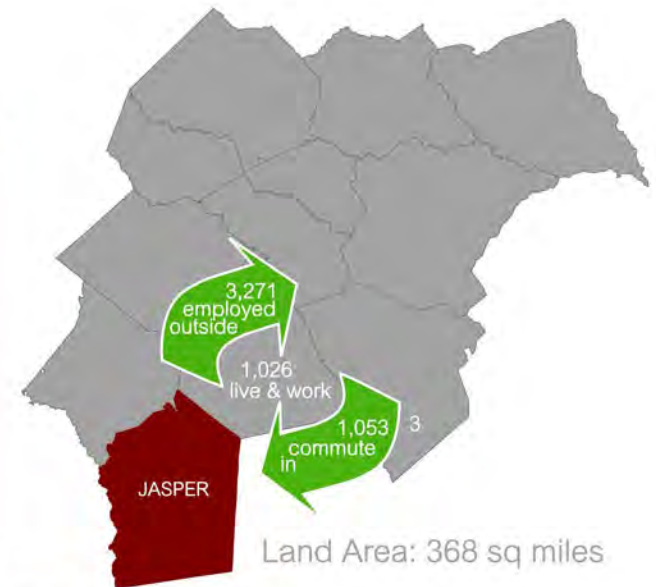
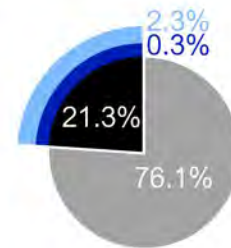
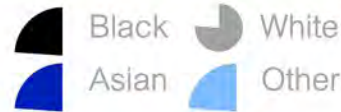
Population: 13,635 people (2015 estimate)

Median Age: 39.9



Hispanic Population: 4.0%

Minority Population: 23.9%



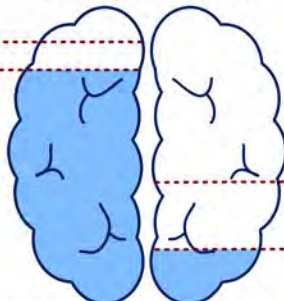
Municipalities/Cities: Monticello\* and Shady Dale

\* County Seat

Colleges/Universities: —

## Educational Attainment:<sup>2</sup> (25+ years old)

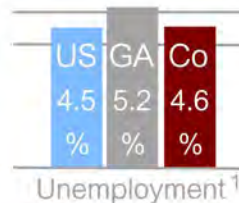
Nation: 88.4%  
County: 78.7%



Nation: 42.3%

County: 19.1%

High School/GED ▲ ▲ Minimum Associates Degree



## Top 10 Employers:

Associated Staffing Services, Inc.  
Dairy Queen.  
Dexter Axle Company  
Georgia-Pacific Wood Products, LLC  
Ingles Markets, Inc.  
Jasper Memorial Hospital  
Pallets Acquisition, LLC  
Permatherm, Inc.  
Piedmont Academy, Inc.  
Venture Medical Associates, LLC

## Top 10 Industrial Sectors:

- 1 Manufacturing
- 2 Public Administration
- 3 Health Care & Social Assistance
- 4 Retail Trade
- 5 Accommodation & Food Services
- 6 Construction
- 7 Finance & Insurance
- 8 Arts, Entertainment & Recreation
- 9 Wholesale Trade
- 10 Transportation & Warehousing

Median Household Income:



Median Home Value:



Poverty:  
17.4%

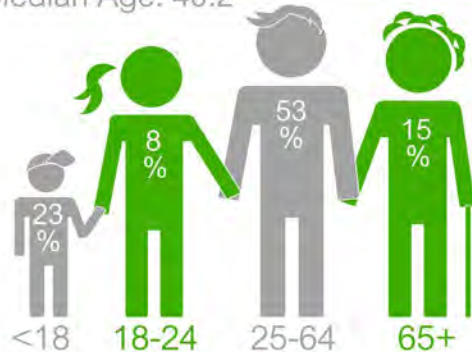


# Madison County

## CEDS SNAPSHOT

Population: 28,441 people (2015 estimate)

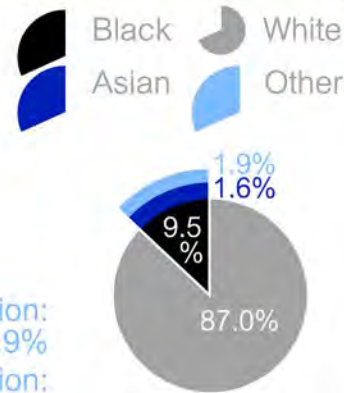
Median Age: 40.2



30,269 people by 2025<sup>1</sup>

Hispanic Population: 4.9%

Minority Population: 13.0%



Municipalities/Cities: Carlton, Colbert, Comer, Danielsville\*, Hull, and Ila

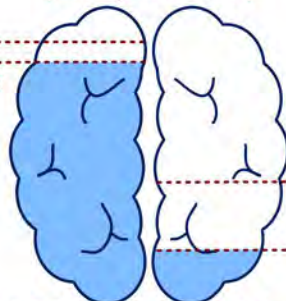
\* County Seat

Colleges/Universities: –

## Educational Attainment:<sup>2</sup> (25+ years old)

Nation: 88.4%

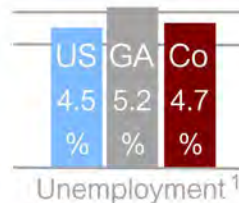
County: 81.6%



High School/GED ▲ Minimum Associates Degree

Nation: 42.3%

County: 19.1%



## Top 10 Employers:

Dollar General  
First Madison Bank & Trust, Inc.  
Georgia Metals, Inc.  
Golden Pantry Food Stores, Inc.  
Hardee's  
Ingles Markets, Inc.  
Jackson Electric Membership Corporation  
Madison County Health & Rehabilitation  
Medlink Rabun  
Superior Trailers Of Georgia, Inc.

## Top 10 Industrial Sectors:<sup>1</sup>

- 1 Retail Trade
- 2 Health Care & Social Assistance
- 3 Construction
- 4 Manufacturing
- 5 Accommodation & Food Services
- 6 Finance & Insurance
- 7 Admin., Support, Waste Mgmt., Remediation
- 8 Professional Scientific & Technical Svc
- 9 Transportation & Warehousing
- 10 Wholesale Trade

## Median Household Income:



## Median Home Value:



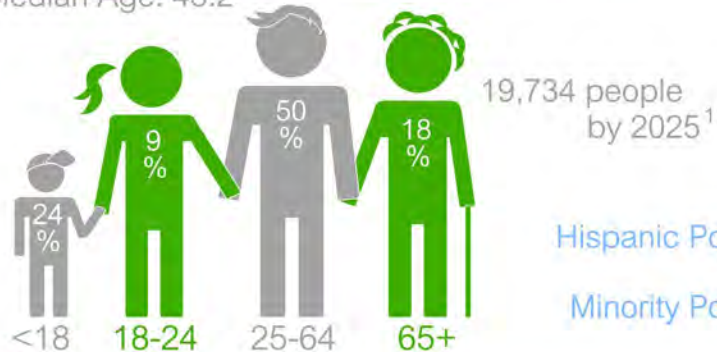
Poverty: 15.1%

# Morgan County

## CEDS SNAPSHOT

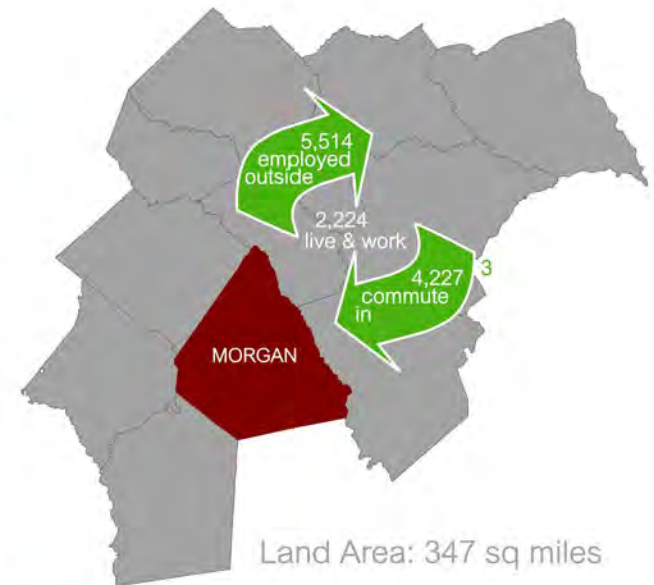
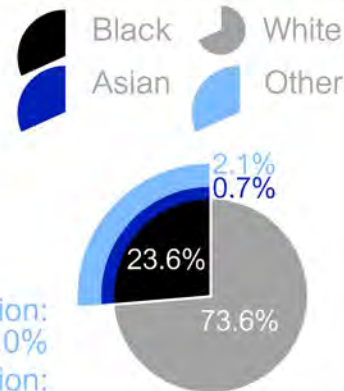
Population: 18,046 people (2015 estimate)

Median Age: 43.2



Hispanic Population: 3.0%

Minority Population: 26.4%



Colleges/Universities: —

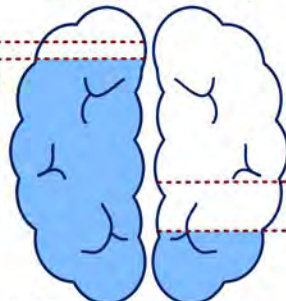
Municipalities/Cities: Bostwick, Buckhead, Madison\*, and Rutledge

\* County Seat

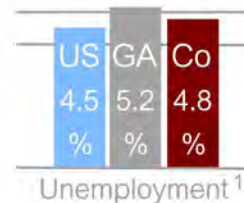
## Educational Attainment:<sup>2</sup> (25+ years old)

Nation: 88.4%

County: 82.4%



High School/GED ▲ Minimum Associates Degree



Nation: 42.3%

County: 25.5%

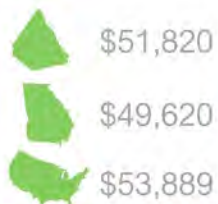
## Top 10 Employers:<sup>1</sup>

Bard Manufacturing Company, Inc.  
Camp Twin Lakes, Inc.  
Etcon Employment Solutions  
Flambeau Corporation  
Georgia-Pacific Wood Products, LLC  
Ingles Markets, Inc.  
Mannington Carpets  
Pennington Seed, Inc.  
Townsend Tree Service Company, LLC  
Walmart

## Top 10 Industrial Sectors:<sup>1</sup>

- 1 Accommodation & Food Services
- 2 Manufacturing
- 3 Retail Trade
- 4 Admin., Support, Waste Mgmt., Remediation
- 5 Health Care & Social Assistance
- 6 Public Administration
- 7 Other Services (except Public Administration)
- 8 Wholesale Trade
- 9 Construction
- 10 Finance & Insurance

Median Household Income:



Median Home Value:



Poverty:  
14.3%

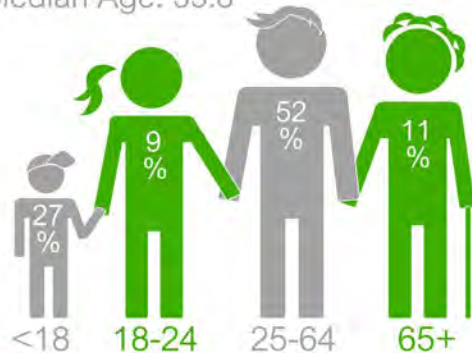


# Newton County

## CEDS SNAPSHOT

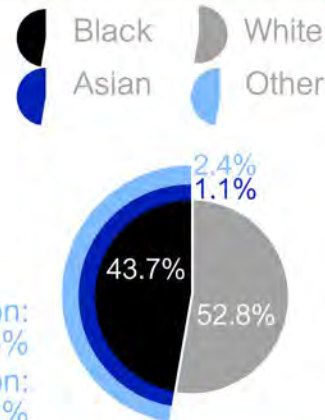
Population: 105,473 people (2015 estimate)

Median Age: 35.8



Hispanic Population: 5.3%

Minority Population: 47.2%



Municipalities/Cities: Covington\*, Mansfield, Newborn, Porterdales, and Oxford

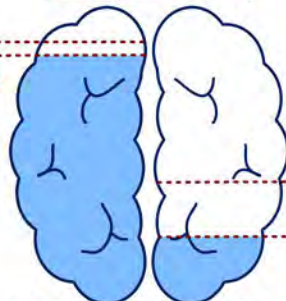
\* County Seat

Colleges/Universities: Emory-Oxford College, Perimeter College, Georgia Piedmont Tech., and Troy University

### Educational Attainment:<sup>2</sup> (25+ years old)

Nation: 88.4%

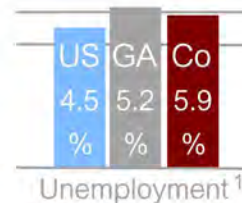
County: 84.3%



Nation: 42.3%

County: 23.5%

High School/GED ▲ Minimum Associates Degree



### Top 10 Employers:

C R Bard, Inc.  
Covington Moulding Co  
General Mills Operations, Inc.  
Newton Health System, Inc.  
Nisshinbo Automotive Manufacturing, Inc.  
Pactiv Corporation  
SKC, Inc.  
South East Employee Leasing Service  
The Kroger Company  
Walmart

### Top 10 Industrial Sectors:<sup>1</sup>

- 1 Manufacturing
- 2 Retail Trade
- 3 Accommodation & Food Services
- 4 Health Care & Social Assistance
- 5 Admin., Support, Waste Mgmt., Remediation
- 6 Construction
- 7 Public Administration
- 8 Wholesale Trade
- 9 Professional Scientific & Technical Svc
- 10 Transportation & Warehousing

Median Household Income:



Median Home Value:



Poverty: 14.9%

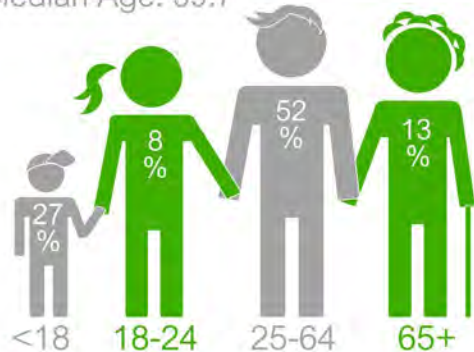


# Oconee County

## CEDS SNAPSHOT

Population: 35,965 people (2015 estimate)

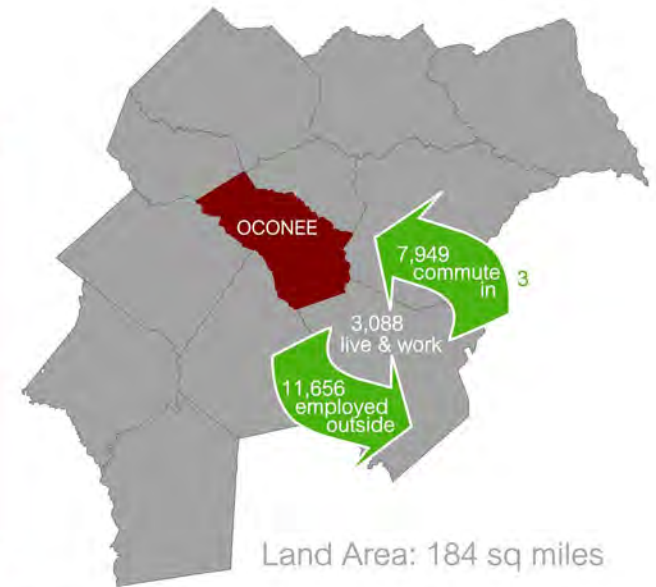
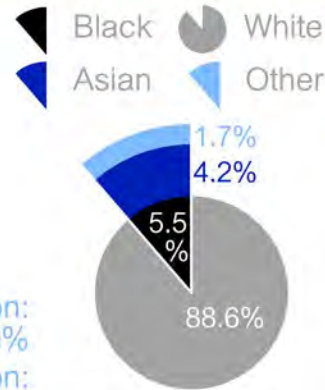
Median Age: 39.7



42,056 people by 2025<sup>1</sup>

Hispanic Population: 4.9%

Minority Population: 11.4%



Municipalities/Cities: Bishop, Bogart, North High Shoals, and Watkinsville\*

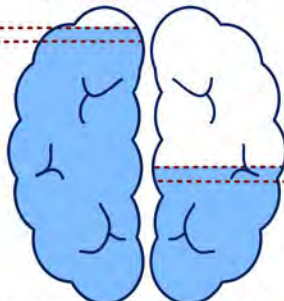
\* County Seat

Colleges/Universities: University of North Georgia

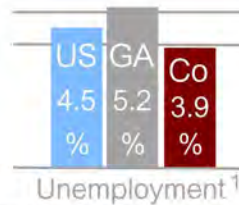
Educational Attainment:<sup>2</sup>  
(25+ years old)

County: 93.2%

Nation: 88.4%



High School/GED ▲ Minimum Associates Degree



County: 46.5%

Nation: 42.3%

## Top 10 Employers:

Athens Academy, Inc.

Benson's Bakery

Caterpillar

Family Life Enrichment Center

Industrial Mechanical Inc.

Lowe's Home Centers, Inc.

St. Mary's Health Care

University of North Georgia

Wal-Mart

Zaxby's Inc.

## Top 10 Industrial Sectors:

1 Education Services

2 Retail Trade

3 Accommodation & Food Services

4 Health Care & Social Assistance

5 Professional Scientific & Technical Svc

6 Admin., Support, Waste Mgmt., Remediation

7 Management of Companies & Enterprises

8 Manufacturing

9 Construction

10 Wholesale Trade

Median Household Income:

\$72,182

\$49,620

\$53,889

Median Home Value:

\$235,700

\$148,100

\$178,600

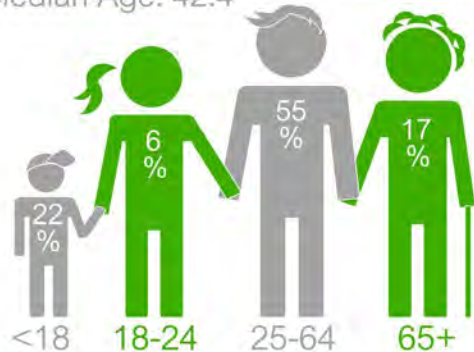
Poverty: 6.8%

# Oglethorpe County

CEDS SNAPSHOT

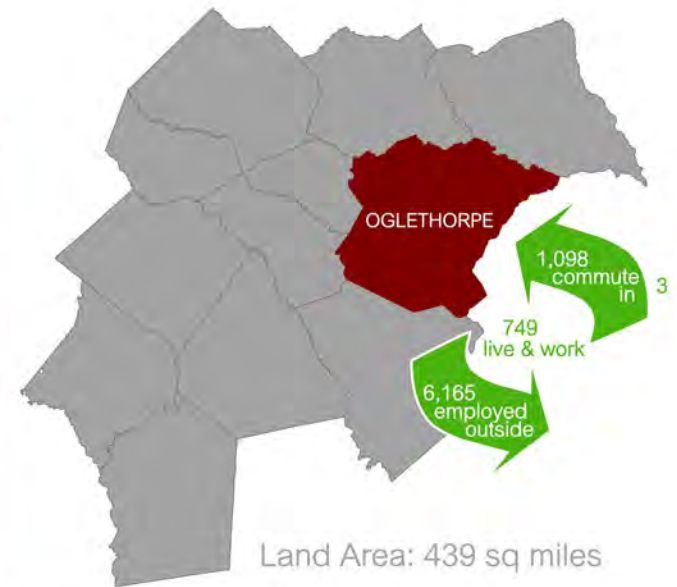
Population: 14,871 people (2015 estimate)

Median Age: 42.4



Hispanic Population: 3.9%

Minority Population: 20.5%



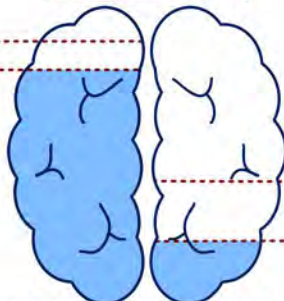
Municipalities/Cities: Arnoldsville, Crawford, Lexington\*, and Maxeys

\* County Seat

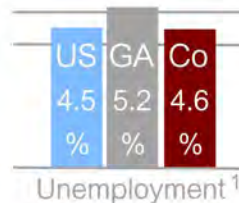
Colleges/Universities: --

Educational Attainment:<sup>2</sup>  
(25+ years old)

Nation: 88.4%  
County: 79.2%



High School/GED ▲ Minimum Associates Degree



## Top 10 Employers:

Bells Food Market, Inc.  
Centurion Poultry  
Greater Georgia Printers, Inc.  
Hill Phoenix, Inc.  
J & J Chemical Company  
James Greenhouses, Inc.  
Laurelwood Log Homes, LLC  
Madison Health & Rehab  
Pristine Golf, LLC  
The Commercial Bank

## Top 10 Industrial Sectors:

- 1 Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing & Hunting
- 2 Construction
- 3 Manufacturing
- 4 Retail Trade
- 5 Health Care & Social Assistance
- 6 Admin., Support, Waste Mgmt., Remediation
- 7 Mining
- 8 Other Services (except Public Admin.)
- 9 Accommodation & Food Services
- 10 Transportation & Warehousing

Median Household Income:



Median Home Value:



Poverty: 16.9%

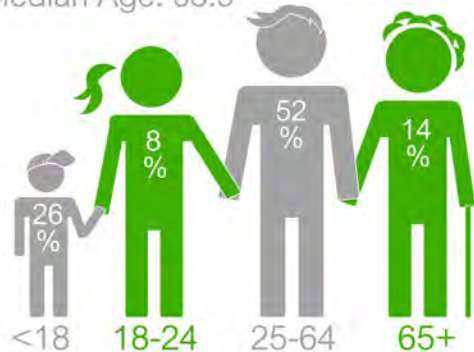


# Walton County

## CEDS SNAPSHOT

Population: 88,399 people (2015 estimate)

Median Age: 38.5



Hispanic Population: 4.1%

Minority Population: 20.7%



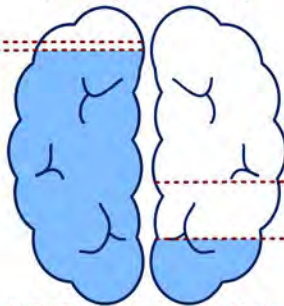
Municipalities/Cities: Good Hope, Loganville, Monroe\*, Social Circle, and Walnut Grove

\* County Seat

Colleges/Universities: Athens Technical College

## Educational Attainment:<sup>2</sup> (25+ years old)

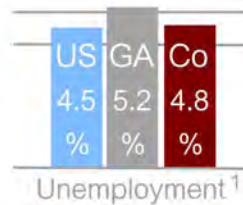
Nation: 88.4%  
County: 85.3%



High School/GED ▲ Minimum Associates Degree

Nation: 42.3%

County: 22.3%



## Top 10 Employers:<sup>1</sup>

Apollo Staffing  
Bxl Covington  
Excel Logistics  
Hitachi Automotive Products (USA), Inc.  
L & P Materials Manufacturing, Inc.  
Pike Electric, LLC  
Standridge Color Corporation  
Tucker Door & Trim, LLC  
Walmart  
Walton Regional Medical Center

## Top 10 Industrial Sectors:<sup>1</sup>

- 1 Retail Trade
- 2 Manufacturing
- 3 Construction
- 4 Education Services
- 5 Accommodation & Food Services
- 6 Health Care & Social Assistance
- 7 Admin., Support, Waste Mgmt., Remediation
- 8 Public Administration
- 9 Wholesale Trade
- 10 Professional Scientific & Technical Svc

Median Household Income:



Median Home Value:



Poverty:  
12.7%

# Chapter 3

## SWOT Analysis

The CEDS Committee and NEGRC staff conducted a regional Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) analysis following a review of county and regional demographic and economic data. In addition, 343 regional community members, elected officials, and local government staff provided insight via an online survey.

The following page lists the [key themes and topics](#) identified by the SWOT analysis; this investigation assisted the CEDS Committee in articulating the Action Plan, presented in Chapter 4. Refer to Appendix A for the complete SWOT analysis results.



## Strengths:

- Intermodal transportation
- Local colleges, universities, & K-12 schools
- Quality of life
- Central location (city, mountains)
- Natural & cultural resources
- Supply of available land
- Cooperation
- Strong & growing clusters
- Local economic development staff
- Charities & non-profits
- Creativity
- Independence
- Skilled & educated citizenry
- Lack of traffic congestion
- Destinations & events
- "Small town feel"

## Weaknesses:

- Lack of high-speed internet
- Gaps in cellular coverage
- Lack of industry-ready sites
- Lack of infrastructure improvements
- Disconnect between employers & qualified applicants
- Lack of professional jobs
- Outflow of talent ("brain drain")
- Poor "soft skills" in youth
- Limited workforce housing
- High poverty rates
- Insufficient local code enforcement
- Lack of public participation
- Resistance to change
- Lack of health & safety services

## Opportunities:

- Grants & tax credits
- Collaboration & partnerships
- New wireless technologies
- Local training programs
- Local entrepreneurs & start-ups
- Agricultural & boutique businesses
- Tourism
- For-sale land
- Nearby clusters & development
- Metro Atlanta's increasing cost of living
- Commercial air & rail transportation
- County-level economic development plans
- After-school spaces & programs

## Threats:

- Potential rise in energy costs
- Increased burden on infrastructure
- Inadequate tax revenue to balance demands on public utilities and infrastructure
- Gaps in workforce development
- Societal view of "blue-collar" jobs
- Falling unemployment rates
- Future of the water supply
- Environmental threats (pests, disease, changing climate)
- Lack of established public information & marketing (regional scale)
- Aging rural populations
- Rising housing costs & other living expenses
- Loss of unique local identity







## Action Items

The Action Items identified herein are intended to guide economic development throughout Northeast Georgia by building upon existing strengths and pursuing opportunities that will overcome weaknesses and reduce the impacts of threats to the region's economy. The CEDS Committee, with additional stakeholder input, identified the following economic development Action Items for the Northeast Georgia Region:

- Develop and Implement **Public Information & Marketing** for the Region
- Support and **Encourage Local Entrepreneurs & Artists**
- Public- Private- Non-Profit **Partnerships to Address Local Weaknesses & Threats**
- Foster a **Skilled & Dedicated Workforce**
- Establish Information Systems and Partnerships to **Face Environmental Threats**

Chapter 4 presents the Action Plan and identifies strategies, tasks, and performance measures for each Action Item. Strategies that build Northeast Georgia's economic resilience are highlighted.

A decorative image on the left side of the page. It features a close-up of a torch with a bright orange and yellow flame. The torch has a dark, perforated metal body. In the background, there is a red brick building with white architectural details, including a balcony and arched windows. Bare tree branches are visible against a clear blue sky.

# Chapter 4

## Action Plan

The Action Plan identifies strategies, tasks, key facilitators, and performance measures for each Action Item. The plan is intended to reinforce and grow Northeast Georgia's nuanced economy while identifying methods to strengthen the region's economic resilience. This plan aligns with the Georgia Department of Economic Development's (GDEcD) mission to "attract new business investment, encourage the expansion of existing industry and small businesses, align workforce education and training with in-demand jobs, locate new markets for Georgia products, attract tourists to Georgia, and promote the state as a destination for arts and location for film, music and digital entertainment projects [...]" Local elected officials, government staff, the NEGRC, business owners, and educators are essential to champion the following initiatives.



The Resilience Builder emblem highlights opportunities to strengthen economic resilience against natural disasters, changing weather patterns, economic downturns, pests or disease, and other threats facing the region's economy.

## Note:

Action Items are not numbered in order of importance. Key facilitators should prioritize the following based on existing capabilities, available funding, and achievability.



## Action Item 1

### Develop and Implement **Public Information & Marketing** for the Region

The CEDS Committee identified Northeast Georgia's current lack of an efficient system for the comprehensive collection, synthesis, and distribution of local marketing, event, and tourist information as a substantial weakness. Due to much of the region's rural nature, local entities are experiencing a lack of visibility to outside entities and difficulty establishing and maintaining a web presence. The SWOT analysis identified Northeast Georgia's numerous historic, agricultural, cultural, and natural resources as strong, but underappreciated assets. It also identified the available land and industrial sites as attractive incentives for new businesses and development. The following strategies intend to increase the visibility of local communities and provide tools to those with limited resources.

**Vision:** Comprehensive, widespread, and easy-to-use maps and information that facilitate regional and global connections.

**Key Facilitators:** Joint Development Authority of Northeast Georgia (JDANEG), Main Street Managers, Chambers of Commerce, local government staff, GDEcD Tourism Division, Georgia Regional Tourism Project Managers (Classic South, Historic Heartland, and Northeast Georgia Mountains), NEGRC Planning & Government Services (PGS) Division



## Strategy 1.a | Promote a Northeast Georgia web presence

### Tasks:

- Create and manage a Northeast Georgia economic development website.
- Explore feasibility and potential impact of a Northeast Georgia economic development social media presence and smartphone App.
- Catalog and capitalize upon existing tourism and economic development-related promotional efforts in Georgia and the Southeast (ex. Georgia Power's Select Georgia Maps, Historic Heartland travel region, Georgia Agritourism Association, GDEcD).
- Support local community and regional development and maintenance of online materials (including the JDANEG website and ED Pros Trails Connectivity Project).

### Performance Measures:

- Identify desired "hits" per month for applicable webpages
- Northeast Georgia listing counts on GDEcD site and other national or global databases
- Word of mouth (local officials & staff)
- Set goals for numbers of social media followers (if account(s) established)
- Periodic polling: "How did you hear about \_\_\_?"
- Number of App downloads (if created)

Northeast Georgia's web presence will serve as a gateway to the region for developers, business owners, visitors, and prospective residents. Region-wide maps, projects and event highlights, and links to local governments should be readily available online. Residents and business owners from Northeast Georgia and surrounding areas should have easy access to updates regarding regional events, little-known local destinations, new businesses, and other Northeast Georgia economic development news.



Economic development-focused social media and a comprehensive website would serve as a regional platform for the exchange of ideas and dissemination of information: a powerful tool when confronted with threats to the regional economy including pests, disease, drought, and damaging storms.



## Strategy 1.b | Aggregate a public, comprehensive, and accessible directory of opportunities and incentives for development in the region

### Tasks:

- Monitor and improve regional presence on existing economic development directories (ex. Georgia Power's Select Georgia Maps).
- Create and manage an inventory of vacant land, vacant buildings/spaces, Opportunity Zones (OZs), Revitalization Area Strategy (RAS) designations, Camera-Ready Communities, and other economic incentives and opportunities.
- Create static maps and graphics; explore options for interactive maps.
- Create and manage a list of funding and other opportunities for local entrepreneurs and artists (see Action Item 2).
- Connect visitors to county and municipal websites and resources.

### Performance Measures:

- Word of mouth (local officials & staff)
- Periodic polling: "How did you hear about \_\_\_?"

Northeast Georgia has a supply of vacant land and development incentive programs in place. Creating and maintaining an inventory of available properties and industry-friendly programs (such as Camera-Ready Communities, Opportunity Zones, and Job Tax Credits) throughout the 12-county region will increase visibility for all areas of Northeast Georgia and connect developers and entrepreneurs with the appropriate local government staff (see Strategy 3.d for regional business-incentive objectives).

Easy-to-find information is essential to recruit desired businesses and new development; with 12 counties and over 50 municipalities, Northeast Georgia's communities should coordinate recruiting and marketing efforts to attract profitable and diverse industries to all areas of the region.

## Strategy 1.c | Comprehensive and accessible regional tourism

### Tasks:

- Create and manage a publicly accessible inventory of historic landmarks, festivals and events, tours, and other visitor attractions.
- Support local, regional, and statewide efforts to improve and expand existing tourism-related programs (including Georgia Main Street Communities, the Georgia Department of Economic Development's (GDEcD) "Explore Georgia," historic preservation efforts, and park and trail improvements).
- Create static maps and graphics; explore options for interactive maps.
- Make information available via regional economic development websites, social media, and county/municipal websites.

### Performance Measures:

- Northeast Georgia listing counts on GDEcD site and other national or global databases
- Periodic polling: "How did you hear about \_\_\_?"
- Track webpage "hits"

The 12 Northeast Georgia counties encompass over 290 square miles of local, State, and federal park and forest lands, along with portions of three major water bodies (including Lakes Oconee and Sinclair). The region is also home to over 200 sites and districts on the National Register of Historic Places. Thirteen municipalities are designated Georgia Main Street Communities; two are recognized Georgia Exceptional Main Streets (GEMS). In addition to everyday tourism opportunities, the region offers annual festivals, seasonal sporting events and recreation, and unique art and cultural experiences.

Comprehensive, easy-to-find information for the entire Northeast Georgia Region will attract first-time visitors and illuminate new options for those returning to the region.



Tourism helps fund the maintenance and protection of natural resources that support the region's quality of life through improved air quality, water access, and physical and mental health. Robust environmental systems boost resilience to drought, storms, and disasters affecting clean air and water.



## Strategy 1.d | Highlight the efforts and successes of local partnerships

### Tasks:

- Create and manage a publicly accessible inventory of philanthropic projects, inter-jurisdictional partnerships, and other stories of cooperative efforts in the region.
- Incorporate examples of charitable efforts into promotional materials.

### Performance Measures:

- Recognition of local philanthropy by state or nationally distributed publications
- Word of mouth (local officials & staff)
- Track webpage “hits”

Successful partnerships exist throughout Northeast Georgia. From paving projects to new industrial parks to improved access to locally grown foods, local public- private- non-profit partnerships are developing out-of-the-box solutions to regional issues. Sharing success stories and unique solutions will promote the region's dedication to public service and offer local partnership models for other areas of the region and nation.

## Action Item 2

### Support and Encourage Local Entrepreneurs & Artists

Northeast Georgia is a region of creativity and ingenuity. From renowned music groups (such as The B-52s, R.E.M., of Montreal, Widespread Panic, and Drive-By Truckers) to commercial startups (including Zaxbys, Red Dress Boutique, Barberitos, and Terrapin Beer Co.), the region has historically fostered artistic and entrepreneurial spirit.

Today, Northeast Georgia is home to 13 local college and university campuses with over 500 undergraduate programs of study, encouraging new ideas and leadership. However, results of the SWOT analysis identified a number of threats to regional retention of entrepreneurs. Local efforts to improve communications technology, expand access to discounted or shared workspaces and tools, and organize local seminars will continue Northeast Georgia's tradition of building success from the ground up.

**Vision:** A region built on a history of entrepreneurship that embraces new technologies and creative innovation.

**Key Facilitators:** JDANEG, Chambers of Commerce, local government staff & elected officials, local educational institutions (including the Small Business Development Center at UGA and Northeast Georgia SCORE), Downtown Development Authorities (DDAs), Main Street Managers, NEGRG PGS Division



*Photo Credit: Town of Braselton*



## Strategy 2.a | Improve understanding of existing and preparedness for future communication technologies

### Tasks:

- Educate the community on existing and upcoming broadband and next-generation internet options.
- Identify potential barriers to and issues with expansion of cellular and broadband or 5G internet services and educate local government staff and elected officials.
- Pursue incentives and funding for cellular and broadband expansion.
- Support initiatives and legislation that subsidize rural internet and cellular service expansion, particularly via urban area expenditures.

### Performance Measures:

- Regular reports identifying local providers' service area expansions
- Newly awarded grants or established incentives

Areas of Northeast Georgia still experience gaps in cellular coverage and limited access to high-speed internet service. Internet providers are working to extend fiber and new 5G wireless technology; however, many rural areas are experiencing a reduction in coverage as these new technologies are implemented. Local government staff and elected officials should consider potential opportunities and threats when updating regulations and permits to allow for further internet and cell tower expansion. Education is also important with regards to existing technology: while comprehensive fiber and 5G service may not reach the more rural, isolated areas of the region for some time, there are retrofitting options available.



Cellular and internet access are essential communication tools. High-speed internet connects local businesses to the global market and provides opportunity for diverse sources of revenue. Ensuring local residents and business owners are using the latest technologies facilitates distribution of important information leading up to a foreseen threat or following a disaster.

## Strategy 2.b | Create new and expand existing business incubators and shared spaces and/or equipment

### Tasks:

- Incorporate new technologies (ex. 3D printers, high-speed internet access, computers equipped with engineering and design software) into new public facilities such as libraries and community centers.
- Work with local high schools and technical colleges to expand existing business incubators and program new shared spaces and equipment.
- Facilitate the transfer of knowledge, particularly through expanded apprenticeship and/or internship opportunities for students, trainees, and novice entrepreneurs to work alongside experienced professionals.

### Performance Measures:

- Track the number of jobs created and retained by businesses within business incubators
- Use tools like Innovation 2.0 to track regional business incubators in comparison to the rest of the county
- Track annual business “births”

New technologies, tools, and professional workspaces are often cost-prohibitive for entrepreneurs, artists, and small businesses. Shared facilities, tools, and materials offer opportunities for creativity and entrepreneurship for all ages. Membership programs, subsidized rentals, and educational partnerships minimize costs and encourage collaboration. In addition, they encourage the dynamic transfer of knowledge, building a knowledgeable workforce with hands-on experience. Existing programs and projects in the region include the UGA Innovation Gateway, Northeast Georgia SCORE, the City of Auburn’s Whistlestop Shops, and UGA Small Business Development Center.



Shared costs and minimized overhead increases small business’ resilience against economic downturns. Collaborative environments also encourage multi-generational and interdisciplinary partnerships, which help inspire new business concepts and unique responses to economic shifts.



## Strategy 2.c | Connect local artists and entrepreneurs with funding and promotional opportunities

### Tasks:

- Create and manage a publicly accessible inventory of competitions, grants, and other sources of funding (coordinate with Action Item 1).
- Collaborate with local businesses to showcase local artists.
- Collaborate with local artists or startups to revitalize vacant storefronts.
- Develop programs that highlight local entrepreneurs, artists, and small businesses.

### Performance Measures:

- Reduced vacancies of downtown storefronts
- Quantity of awarded funds to local artists and/or entrepreneurs
- Number of attendees to related local events
- Track associated webpage “hits”

Local governments, artists, and startups generally have limited monetary resources. State, Federal, non-profit, and private funding is available, but often difficult to navigate. The region should develop methods to actively connect citizens to these opportunities.



Many Northeast Georgia communities are working to revitalize their historic downtowns and create central live-work-play districts. Simultaneous promotion of local artists, entrepreneurs, and business opportunities creates a synergy between the character and economy of an area. Happenings that mix business, art, and culture (ex. pop-up art exhibits in vacant storefronts, art shows hosted at downtown businesses, or events that spotlight local entrepreneurs) help to sustain an active downtown environment and support the local economy.

## Action Item 3

### Public- Private- Non-Profit Partnerships to Address

#### Local Weaknesses & Threats

The region's small town and agricultural background has instilled a tradition of successful and unique partnerships. Counties and municipalities are improving infrastructure, expanding utilities, and creating local jobs through interjurisdictional and public-private partnerships. Businesses and non-profits in the region are teaming up to address issues such as homelessness, hunger, and the protection of natural resources.

Continued cooperation is crucial to locate new development, manage infrastructure and natural resources, and provide outstanding access to medical care and other services. The SWOT analysis identified poverty, infrastructural insufficiencies, and limited tax revenues as significant weaknesses and threats in the region. The following strategies promote a pooling of local government resources, with additional support from State, Federal, and private funds, to open doors to projects otherwise out of reach.

**Vision:** A model community for volunteerism and world-class infrastructure.

**Key Facilitators:** JDANEG, Chambers of Commerce, local government staff & elected officials, local businesses and non-profits, NEGRC PGS & Area Agency on Aging divisions



*Bear Creek Regional Reservoir & Treatment Plant*

*Photo Credit: Online Athens*



## Strategy 3.a | Distinguish Northeast Georgia as a socially responsible community

### Tasks:

- Connect residents and businesses with opportunities to volunteer and donate.
- Identify needs that could be filled by specific local groups (such as retirees or students) and coordinate key stakeholders.

### Performance Measures:

- Track increases in local charity event participation, organization memberships, and donations
- Identify new partnerships or organizations that address local issues
- Inventory recurring fundraisers and events
- Note the number of non-profit and charity organization jobs

Social responsibility is an invaluable asset that benefits all aspects of a community. Businesses and non-profits throughout Northeast Georgia already team up to tackle local issues. This cooperation mutually benefits all parties by supporting a cause and demonstrating private companies' dedication to the community. To increase participation and avoid duplication of efforts, residents and nearby businesses should be connected with volunteer and sponsorship opportunities. Volunteerism benefits the economy by attacking local weaknesses and as an attractive community feature for new residents, businesses, and retirees.

## Strategy 3.b | Address existing gaps in utilities and public services through interjurisdictional partnerships

### Tasks:

- Ensure comprehensive and timely access to emergency medical services and hospitals throughout the region.
- Compare future land use maps and utility expansion plans to identify and pursue shared cost or resource opportunities.
- Explore and pursue alternative energies (including solar and wind).
- Identify and pursue opportunities to extend public transit and improve multi-modal transportation options across county lines.
- Pursue the expansion of high-speed internet access to all areas of the region.

### Performance Measures:

- New utility or infrastructure projects that benefit multiple jurisdictions
- New bus routes, bicycle lanes, sidewalks, rail lines, and road projects
- New or improved medical services
- Increased sanitary sewer or water capacity

Northeast Georgia is beginning to transition from its traditional rural, low-density development patterns to a higher-density mix of uses along highway corridors and adjacent to metropolitan areas. To continue the attraction of new industry and development, reliable public services must be available. Access to medical facilities, particularly in rural areas, is essential, as are water and sanitary sewer connections. Alternative energy technologies create local supplies of energy, avoid rate fluctuations caused by rising fossil fuel prices, and should be explored and implemented where viable. Successful partnerships have already been achieved in parts of the region; local governments should continue to combine resources to facilitate projects that make sense economically and physically, not dictated by jurisdictional boundaries.



Multi-county and public- private- non-profit partnerships are powerful in building a robust economy. The diversity of funding sources provides stability in the face of economic shifts; multi-jurisdictional cost sharing can shorten project timelines and mitigate the effects of unforeseen impacts.



## Strategy 3.c | Prioritize regional transportation projects and secure funding

### Tasks:

- Compare applicable MPO plans and county comprehensive plans to identify regional transportation priority projects (including multi-use trails).
- Encourage involvement of local governments in their respective MPOs.
- Identify and pursue sources of funding and cost-sharing options for road, rail, and other transportation projects.
- Explore and incentivize related industries including warehousing, distribution, and logistics.

### Performance Measures:

- Regular reports of resurfaced and newly paved lane mileage
- Awarding of DOT, GDOT, and other transportation project funding
- Regular reports of new rail mileage

Northeast Georgia is situated along major transportation routes between Atlanta, Augusta, and seaports in Georgia and South Carolina. Three Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) cover portions of the region (Athens-Clarke County MPO, Atlanta Regional Commission, and Gainesville-Hall MPO). Interstates I-85 and I-20 run along the northwestern and southern portions of the region; just over 330 linear miles of active freight rail lines cross through 11 of Northeast Georgia's counties. The deepening of the Port of Savannah, upcoming expansion of Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport, and increase in the online sale of goods and services, indicate an escalating demand for transportation, distribution, logistics, and warehousing.



Infrastructure projects boost economic resilience both during and after construction, if approached correctly. Sharing project costs and labor spreads the burden as well as the benefit. Cooperative efforts can also expedite critical repairs to aging structures. Locally sourced supplies and employees maximize redistribution of public funds into the region's economy. Once complete, world-class infrastructure attracts a diversity of industries, increases outside investment, and facilitates disaster response.

## Strategy 3.d | Identify and pursue opportunities to attract businesses or industries, including multi-county efforts

### Tasks:

- Identify opportunities to attract new businesses or expand on nearby specialized clusters.
- Identify available sites and assess feasibility and benefits of publicly-funded site preparation (utilities, grading, infrastructure, construction, and certification).
- Implement incentives to attract new development and local job creation (ex. OZs, RAS designations).

### Performance Measures:

- Number of jobs created through projects that received grant-funding
- Inventory active incentive areas (OZs, RAS designations, and others)
- New multi-county projects
- Newly certified sites (ex. Georgia Ready for Accelerated Development (GRAD) certification)

Georgia Job Tax Credits (JTC) are available for businesses engaged in manufacturing, warehousing and distribution, processing, telecommunications, broadcasting, tourism, or research and development. JTCs are broken into four tiers; the Georgia Department of Community Affairs (DCA) ranks each county's tier annually, based on unemployment rates, per capita income, and poverty rates. 2017 JTCs are as follows:<sup>1</sup>

Tier 1 (2+ new jobs = \$3,500 credit/job)	Athens-Clarke
Tier 2 (10+ new jobs = \$2,500 credit/job)	Elbert, Greene, Newton
Tier 3 (15+ new jobs = \$1,250 credit/job)	Barrow, Jasper, Madison, Oglethorpe, Walton
Tier 4 (25+ new jobs = \$750 credit/job)	Jackson, Morgan, Oconee

Additional State and Federal incentives are also available for the active recruitment of new businesses and industries into the region. Fourteen communities in Northeast Georgia have designated Opportunity Zones, which offer credits similar to JTCs, while the cities of Winder and Porterdale are awaiting Revitalization Area Strategies (RAS) designation from the Georgia DCA.

Multi-county efforts to attract businesses to the region and create local jobs have proven successful. This strategy identifies the need for county and municipal collaboration to directly recruit commercial and industrial development.

<sup>1</sup> Refer to the Georgia DCA for most recent JTC Rankings.



## Strategy 3.e | Improve relationship between agricultural land uses & nearby development

### Tasks:

- Provide opportunities for the public to directly benefit from local agriculture (ex. farmers markets, farm-to-table or farm-to-school programs).
- Provide publicly accessible information on the economic impacts of local industries including timber and agriculture.
- Update local land use plans and development regulations to mitigate conflicts between intense agricultural uses and residential development.

### Performance Measures:

- Number of jobs created and retained by agricultural industries
- New agriculture-based partnerships (ex. Farm-to-table, farmers markets)
- Expansion of local agritourism

Agriculture is an important component to the region's economy. Overall, agricultural land uses demand less from public services, like schools and utilities, than residential and many commercial uses. In addition, poultry operations are consistently top employers in the region. Unfortunately, increases in the scale of poultry operations and industrial-scale agriculture have decreased agriculture's compatibility with neighboring land uses.

Development will continue to push up against agricultural operations throughout the region as aging farmers subdivide land amongst their heirs, new residents are drawn to rural areas' bucolic scenery, and developers recognize the quantity of available land. Land use and development regulations that balance the demands of residential development and the needs of agricultural operations should be addressed in local Comprehensive Plan updates and Zoning Ordinances. Efforts should be made to educate the public of the benefits of the region's agricultural businesses.

## Action Item 4

### Foster a Skilled & Dedicated Workforce

Unemployment rates have fallen significantly since the recent recession. Successful workforce training programs have been implemented through cooperative efforts between local employers, technical colleges, and the State. Local universities and colleges offer opportunities for higher education while High School Academies offer skill-building programs to younger students. The SWOT Analysis identified concern for younger generations' underdeveloped interpersonal ("soft") skills and a shortage of workers trained to service and maintain the machinery used for manufacturing and agriculture. The CEDS Committee found residents' low educational attainment for two and four-year degrees and the rising median ages of counties along the eastern portion of the region suggestive of a regional "brain drain" (loss of locally educated youth). The following strategies are intended to retain, train, and attract educated and skilled workers.

**Vision:** A diligent, self-disciplined culture supported by a collaboration of education institutions, local employers, and industry leaders to meet existing and future business demands.

**Key Facilitators:** JDANEG, local educational institutions, Chambers of Commerce, local government staff, GDOL, NEGRC PGS & Workforce Development divisions



## Strategy 4.a | Support and expand advanced (high school and higher) skill-building programs

### Tasks:

- Advocate the expansion of existing High School Career Academies.
- Continue to open High School Career Academies throughout the region.
- Provide input in curriculum development based on statistical data and projections (identify and target high-paying market sectors).
- Expand programs that build soft skills alongside certification or training.
- Expand apprenticeship and internship programs in cooperation with local technical colleges, businesses, and industries.

### Performance Measures:

- Opening of new academies
- Student academy enrollment numbers
- Internship placement in local jobs
- Post-graduate placement in local jobs

Hands-on training, certification, and soft-skill building programs are essential to combating poverty and unemployment and attracting and industries and employers to the region. Residents and students of all ages should have access career building opportunities. Programs that combine certifications or apprenticeships with soft-skill building (such as Morgan Works Certification Program and GDOL's GeorgiaBEST) should be emphasized.

High School Career Academies are the result of collaborative efforts between local departments of education, technical colleges, and business communities. They offer specialized training programs in engineering, biomedicine, technology, robotics, and other valuable areas of expertise. Seven of Northeast Georgia's 12 counties will have Career Academies by 2018. Efforts should be made to expand student access to these academies throughout the region.



## Strategy 4.b | Encourage programs that target preschool, elementary, and middle school students

### Tasks:

- Research and share case studies for successful programs (particularly in rural areas).
- Support and build programs that incorporate parental education.
- Advocate for STEAM (Science, Engineering, Technology, Art, and Math) programs in local schools.
- Identify barriers and opportunities to incorporate STEAM curricula into K-12 schools.
- Consider opportunities for multigenerational interaction when programming new public facilities.
- Introduce “blue-collar” jobs as lucrative and skilled career options.

### Performance Measures:

- Local student achievements in the STEAM fields (ex. competitions, awards)
- Number of new programs and/or events that encourage cross-generational interactions
- Number of new STEM or STEAM programs

Students of all ages should have the opportunity to build valuable career skills. Imparting the hands-on and interpersonal skills that make Northeast Georgia an exceptional place for social service, technology, the arts, manufacturing, and agriculture to younger generations perpetuates the region's skilled and dedicated citizenry.

## Strategy 4.c | Connect employers with skilled and dedicated employees

### Tasks:

- Support the efforts of the Northeast Georgia Workforce Investment Board (NEGRC Workforce Development Division) to work with education providers in promoting the region's educational attainment and linking career paths to existing and forthcoming employment opportunities.
- Connect area employers with local university and college career centers and job boards.
- Identify the inherent skills of local residents (particularly marginalized groups) and create training and job opportunities that align with those skills.
- Identify and eliminate barriers that prevent or discourage commuters from both living and working in Northeast Georgia.
- Encourage a mixture of housing to ensure a variety of options are available to all income brackets.

### Performance Measures:

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| • Increase in residents that live and work in the region | • Incorporation of affordable housing options into new developments |
| • Decrease in unfilled positions at local businesses     | • Track and compare home values to local incomes                    |

Successful workforce training programs require regular communication between local educators and employers to ensure graduates are prepared to meet the demands of new technologies and local sectors. These connections are also important to connect program graduates with employers who are looking to hire.

The SWOT Analysis identified the falling unemployment rates as a threat to local businesses since skilled job applicants are becoming increasingly scarce. There is also concern that workers will be drawn out of the region toward the greater number of job opportunities in Metro Atlanta. Current commuter patterns show more than half of Northeast Georgia's working residents commuting outside of the region for work while 40% of local employees reside outside of the region and commute in. Initiatives should be taken to match residents' skills with local business demands, identify why such a high percentage of employees in the region live outside the area, and encourage a supply of workforce housing options to compete with nearby metropolitan areas.

## Action Item 5

### Establish Information Systems and Partnerships to

### Face Environmental Threats

Poultry, timber, mining, and other natural resource-reliant industries make up a significant portion of Northeast Georgia's economy. As a result, changing weather patterns, drought, pests, and disease are real threats to regional prosperity. The SWOT Analysis identified locally based State and Federal regulatory and research facilities as an important strength. There are opportunities to improve education and information systems to ensure local stakeholders are aware of current threats, best practices, and ongoing efforts to study and combat pathogens and drought.

Extended drought and the projected increase in storm severity are also safety concerns, particularly due to the rural nature of much of the region. Shelter, emergency medical services, rounding up livestock, and other emergency needs are traditionally met through cooperative community efforts. Procedures for threat responses (including established information networks and support systems) should be formalized to facilitate communication and resourcefulness in the face of a local disaster.

**Vision:** Prepared and resilient timber and agricultural industries.

**Key Facilitators:** NEGRC PGS Division, UGA, EPA, USDA, Regional Water Planning Councils, local police & fire departments





## Strategy 5.a | Improve education of and communication between local agriculture and timber industry stakeholders

### Tasks:

- Open communications with local UGA, EPA, and USDA offices and labs to identify preventative measures, proper precautions, and current actions being taken to prevent and address threats.
- Work with local agriculture and timber industry stakeholders to implement preventative measures and take recommended precautions.
- Develop active information network(s) between UGA, EPA, USDA, and local agriculture and timber stakeholders to advance education, ensure continued use of BMPs, and improve resilience against potential future threats.

### Performance Measures:

- Implementation of new BMPs
- Continued absence of local infections
- Establishment of local professional networks

Spread of pests and disease has increased due to the connectedness of the global community and new shifts in weather patterns. The first case of Avian Influenza in Georgia was detected last March (2017) and extensive wildfires have burnt sections of North Georgia and the Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge in recent months; these serve as reminders of the severity of threats that may face the Northeast Region's agriculture and timber industries.



The University of Georgia (UGA), U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), and other Federal and State agencies located within Northeast Georgia are actively involved in researching preventative measures and solutions to pests and diseases that threaten local agriculture. Local stakeholders should be educated about Best Management Practices (BMPs), proper detection and responses to pests and disease, and current prevention and research efforts at the State and Federal level. Regular communication between local entities will decrease contagion response times and boost creative problem solving.

## Strategy 5.b | Monitor and encourage progress on key issues identified by the Middle Ocmulgee, Savannah-Upper Ogeechee, and Upper Oconee Regional Water Planning Councils

### Tasks:

- Maintain current information on activities and initiatives within the Northeast Georgia Region.
- Familiarize local governments with Water Planning Council plans, initiatives, and local staff.

### Performance Measures:

- Track webpage “hits” for water resource webpage(s)
- Increased investment in water conservation efforts

Responsible water resource management is important to all aspects of life in Northeast Georgia. Tourism to local lakes and rivers depends on water quantity and quality. New residential, commercial, and industrial development requires access to a reliable water supply. Agricultural production also depends on available local water. Continued monitoring of the directives of all three Water Planning Councils is essential to coordinate the efforts of the region as a whole.



In September, 2016, the Georgia Environmental Protection Division (EPD) declared a drought for all 12 Northeast Georgia counties. The region continues to be under a Level 1 Drought Response.

Responsible water management is key to maintaining water access and quality during periods of drought and to reducing drought conditions as quickly as possible. Consistent efforts across the region work to minimize lasting impacts on tourism, farming, commercial businesses, and residents.

## Strategy 5.c | Support local disaster plan updates and emergency communication networks

### Tasks:

- Ensure local Pre-Disaster Mitigation (PDM) Plans are up-to-date.
- Assist communities in creating community facilities that provide support during natural disasters or in emergency response efforts (ex. pursue GEMA/FEMA PDM grants).

### Performance Measures:

- Up-to-date PDMs for all counties
- Inventory of new facilities that offer emergency support services
- Awarded PDM grants and/or other project funding



Natural disasters can have lasting effects on local economies.

Effective communication systems and response procedures help to mitigate the effects of flash floods, severe thunderstorms, extended drought, and other environmental threats that face the Northeast Region.



## Tracking Progress

The NEGRC is governed by a Council of county, municipal, private sector, and state representatives. The Planning & Government Services (PGS) Committee of the NEGRC Council is one of four standing committees, established to consider potential PGS Division projects for inclusion in the NEGRC annual work program, make determinations about Developments of Regional Impact (DRIs), and perform a variety of other functions. On a (typically) monthly basis, the PGS Committee meets to discuss business activity, infrastructure projects, and other planning and government service-related matters within the region. Monthly meetings also provide an opportunity to report matters of importance or interest to the full Council.



**The PGS Committee** will serve as the monitoring entity for the Northeast Georgia CEDS. In this capacity, PGS Committee members will review the CEDS at least annually to identify progress made in implementing the five Action Items described in the Action Plan. Findings will then be presented to the full Council. Key Facilitators for each Action Item will provide the NEGRC PGS Division performance measure results to be compiled and provided to the PGS Committee prior to each CEDS progress review.

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# Appendix A

## Complete SWOT Analysis

The CEDS Committee drafted an initial SWOT analysis during Meeting #1.

Online questionnaire responses and CEDS Committee Meeting #2 discussions identified additional items.

The following results served as a guide for developing the CEDS Action Items and Implementation Plan:



**Strengths:**

- Access to transportation hubs and thoroughfares (rail, ports, air, interstates)
- Local colleges, universities, and K-12 schools
- Recognized local educational programs
- Quality of life (“culturally dense” area)
- Location (proximity to Atlanta, mountains, and lakes)
- Natural, cultural, historical, and recreational resources
- Well-managed regional water supply
- Tourism
- Supply of available land
- Cooperation between local communities
- Improved relationship between the region and State entities
- Professional economic development staff (on-the-ground to attract and promote businesses or areas)
- Camera-ready communities
- The people
- Charities, non-profits, and church groups
- Low poverty (in certain areas)
- Growth
- Higher income housing
- Creativity
- Independence
- Diversity
- Skilled and educated citizenry
- Lack of traffic congestion
- Affordable cost of living
- Destinations and events
- Local government and leadership
- “Small town feel”
- Safety

**Weaknesses:**

- Lack of comprehensive high-speed internet access and cellular service
- Lack of road, bridge, and public utility improvements
- Lack of industry-ready sites (lack of utilities, sufficient road access, and other site preparation)
- Shortage of hands-on industrial and mechanical skills
- Disconnect between employers and qualified applicants
- Outflow of talent (“brain drain”)
- Poor “soft skills” in younger generations
- Education systems’ failure to acknowledge skilled trade jobs as lucrative or reputable (particularly K-12)
- Limited supply of workforce housing
- Lack of vacant building space (majority of available land is undeveloped)
- Lack of available professional jobs
- Mixed messages from the State regarding economic development priorities (particularly for rural areas)
- High poverty rates
- Lack of diversity of a minority middle-class
- Over-regulation
- Outdated regulations
- Limited public capital
- Low school quality (in parts of the region)
- Lack of confidence in local leadership
- Insufficient health and safety services

**Opportunities:**

- Grant and tax incentive programs (Opportunity Zones, U.S. Economic Development Authority, Georgia Department of Community Affairs, Appalachian Regional Commission, and Georgia Department of Transportation, among others)
- Multi-county and municipal collaboration (ex. joint industrial parks, expanded broadband and cellular service, public utility improvements, management of natural resources)
- Transportation and infrastructure improvements (new facilities coming on-line, nearby intermodal connections, and indication of potential increase in Federal funding)
- Local colleges, universities, and high school Career Academies and other specialist programs for K-12 students (opportunity to expand programs and extend skill development and training opportunities to all ages)
- Local entrepreneurs, artists, and small businesses (expand existing business incubators, makerspaces, and other programs that offer shared materials, tools, spaces, and services)
- Agricultural and boutique businesses (farm-to-table, farm-to-school, farmers markets, event venues, teaching farms, and other tourism)
- Restricted development in the nearby Atlanta Metro area
- Potential to build off of growing nearby businesses and development (ex. Baxter, Caterpillar, transportation infrastructure and logistics, cybersecurity industry)
- Metro Atlanta’s increasing cost of living (region has more affordable housing options)
- Commercial air and rail transit
- County-scale economic development plans
- After-school programs and spaces for children and young-adults

**Threats:**

- Potential for increase in electricity costs due to future increase in fuel costs
- Burden on existing roads (trucking, commuting, growth in areas surrounding Metro Atlanta)
- Lack of high-speed internet access and inconsistent cellular coverage
- Gaps in workforce development
- Societal perception that “blue-collar” jobs are low-paying and undesirable
- Falling unemployment rates (if too low, could lead to lack of qualified candidates to fill local jobs and relocation of skilled workers to Metro Atlanta to find work)
- Water supply (continued access, quality, and quantity)
- Environmental threats to agricultural and timber industries (disease, pests, drought, changing weather patterns, reduced pollinator populations)
- Lack of promotion and marketing of local tourism opportunities (by the State, region, and locally)
- Zoning updates needed (to encourage lasting growth and development that retains regional character)
- Aging populations (particularly in rural communities)
- Expansion of “bedroom communities” (adding to tax burden and placing excessive burden on schools)
- Rising housing costs and living expenses
- School quality
- Low-income/rental homes
- Lack of diversity
- Insufficient local code enforcement
- Loss of greenspace, natural resources, and agricultural land
- Crime and drugs
- Low wages, unemployment, and poverty
- Resistance to change and clashing mindsets
- Overcrowding and population shifts
- Pressure from developers to construct high-intensity, low-quality developments
- Traffic congestion and increasing trucking traffic





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