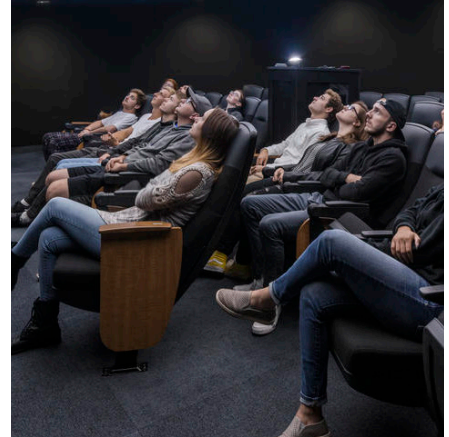


2021 - 2025

Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy

for Northern Illinois



Boone | McHenry | Winnebago

November 2020

2021-2025 Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy for Northern Illinois

Adopted November 18th, 2020

This document has been prepared by the Region 1 Planning Council in collaboration with its member agencies, partnership organizations, and local stakeholders.

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The statements, findings, recommendations are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the U.S. Economic Development Administration or the U.S. Department of Commerce.



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I. Introduction

Background

This document is the 2021-2025 update of the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) for the Region 1 Planning Council Economic Development District in Northern Illinois, representing a continued focus on regional collaboration in support of economic development planning. This will be the third CEDS for Boone and Winnebago Counties, and the second for McHenry County. Our region consists of two major metropolitan statistical areas (MSAs) in Illinois – Rockford MSA (defined as Boone and Winnebago Counties), and the Chicago MSA (of which McHenry is the northwestern-most county within). This is also the second CEDS for this 3-county geography, making this document an update of the plan developed for 2016-2020. The region's

economic indicators, shared strengths, assets, and partnerships have grown and progressed since the completion of the 2016-2020 CEDS. Our region continues to share industry strengths, transportation and infrastructure assets, regional economic development partnerships, and a shared economic development strategy which forms the basis for collaboration. Together, Boone, Winnebago, and McHenry Counties (collectively referred to as the Northern Illinois Region, or formally as Region 1 Planning Council Economic Development District) remain a competitive region in the global economy and can better leverage limited local, state, and federal funds to drive job creation, an improved quality of life, and development strategies described within this document.

Regional Definitions:

This document references many different “regions”. Below is a summary of those geographies.

Northern Illinois Region / Economic Development District

Boone, Winnebago, and McHenry counties

Rockford MSA / Rockford Region

Boone and Winnebago counties

Chicago MSA / Chicagoland*

Cook, DeKalb, DuPage, Grundy, Jasper (IN), Kane, Kendall, Kenosha (WI), Lake (IN), Lake (IL), McHenry, Newton (IN), Porter (IN), and Will counties

Northeastern Illinois / CMAP Region

Cook, DuPage, Kane, Kendall, Lake, McHenry, and Will counties

Collar counties

DuPage, Kane, Lake, McHenry, and Will Counties

Great Lakes Megaregion**

All major population centers located between the following transportation corridors: Chicago-Minneapolis, Chicago-St. Louis, Chicago-Indianapolis-Cincinnati, Chicago-Buffalo-Rochester, Chicago-Detroit

*Chicagoland has varying geographical definitions. For the purposes of this document, it will be synonymous with the Chicago MSA

**The Great Lakes Megaregion often includes the Windsor-Quebec City corridor in Canada. Any data within this document will only include the portion of this region within the United States

Northern Illinois Region / Economic Development District



History

The Region 1 Planning Council (RPC) was officially established in 2018. The organization combined longstanding planning and special purpose governmental entities which represented regional planning efforts. These include: The Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) for the Rockford Metropolitan Planning Area, formerly known as RMAP, which formed in the 1960s for the purpose of transportation planning; Rockford Regional Economic Development District, which oversaw the creation of the region's first CEDS plan in 2010 and enhanced regional economic development planning in the region; WinGIS, which has provided regional geographic information services since 2000; and the Northern Illinois Land Bank Authority, which combats blight and bolsters property values in the region by finding new life for distressed properties. All of these organizations are under the umbrella of Region 1 Planning Council, formed in December 2018.

The RPC regularly engages regional stakeholders for various planning efforts on all subject matter. This engagement includes various municipalities, counties, economic development organizations, educational and workforce development organizations, and non-profit partners. These stakeholders are heavily involved when discussing regional economic development efforts, and aligning them with existing regional goals. This alignment and engagement has led to cohesive regional goals and an excitement throughout the community to increase our engagement with the EDA on significant projects.

2010-2015 CEDS

The Rockford MSA adopted its first CEDS in 2010. The regional economic development plan was developed with public input and by aligning public and private sector, nonprofit, and community partner goals. The 2010 CEDS was completed amidst the Great Recession when regional unemployment was on the rise. The plan brought to attention what many knew already – the regional economy was overly reliant on several manufacturing sectors, and facing concerning trends in business development, workforce, infrastructure, and quality of life, that if left unchecked would worsen these problems.

Economic need drove the creation of the first CEDS, but the larger goal was to increase collaboration in the region and plan projects, initiatives, and strategies to make the Rockford MSA “a world-class, sustainable community with a diverse economic base.” This vision, slightly updated, remains. Likewise, despite the change in geography, many of the goals and strategies from the 2010 remained the same or similar in the 2016 iteration. Because of this, the current CEDS again builds on and updates the strategies from its predecessor, a progression of the decade-old strategies from the first CEDS can be seen even in this version.

2016-2020 CEDS

The 2016 CEDS built upon the first CEDS and represented a clear evolution of regional economic development planning within the region. The planning process was robust, involving multiple stakeholders, exercises, and robust public input. The resulting document was direct and clear in the direction for the region, and further laid the groundwork for the formation of a regional planning council. This was one priority goal that was achieved in the intervening years.

Notably, while economic development planning efforts were previously focused on the Rockford MSA (Winnebago and Boone Counties), the 2016 iteration of the CEDS document expanded to include McHenry County. The collar county and the Rockford MSA collaborated as part of a nine-county application for the EDA's Make it in America Challenge, and continued to apply for the EDA's Investing in Manufacturing Communities Partnership (IMCP) in 2014 and 2015. This coordination was the prelude to McHenry's involvement in the 2016 CEDS. In 2020, McHenry County formally joined the RPC board. Because McHenry is generally less distressed than the Rockford MSA counties, the need to increase collaboration for larger regionally cohesive strategies became even more of a priority. This remains true in this update.

This current CEDS is an update of the 2016-2020 CEDS. Much has changed in the intervening years, but similarities in the steering committee makeup, format and language of the report, and most importantly – the action plan – are clear in this document. This 2021-2025 CEDS update seeks to evolve economic development planning even further.

EDA Impact

Chicago Rockford International Airport (RFD) is an economic engine in the Northern Illinois Region and is a good example of how the three-county region has put the goals and strategies of its Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy into action. Since 2015, the Northern Illinois Region has leveraged roughly \$7 million dollars in EDA funding for airport-related infrastructure and promotion of aerospace jobs into more than \$50 million of additional public and private investment into the region's aerospace, aviation, and logistics industries. Chicago Rockford International Airport's growth created nearly 2,000 jobs in 2019 alone, including construction-related jobs and both permanent and seasonal positions at new and existing airport tenants.

The EDA's investment is helping RFD become what its leaders envisioned years ago: A Midwest hub for e-commerce. Air freight business is booming so much that breaking cargo volume records has become an annual tradition at RFD. More than 2.3 billion pounds of cargo traveled through the airport in 2019, triple the volume of landed cargo weight recorded at the airport in 2015. Amazon's Prime Air, which has made Rockford a significant spoke in its rapidly expanding “hub and spoke” air freight network, is a chief reason for this growth. Additionally, United Parcel Service (UPS), which operates its second-largest U.S. air freight hub at RFD,

has added jobs and retooled its Rockford facility to accommodate the increased volume of cargo it is routing through the airport.

Construction of a 90,000-square-foot international cargo terminal at RFD began in October 2020 as this document was being drafted, further evidence that the airport is viewed by air freight operators as an attractive place to do business. The airport is developing the \$11 million terminal, which will be leased to a longtime airport tenant, Emery Air, and other cargo companies.

The EDA's investments have netted jobs and capital investment at the airport. The Federal Aviation Administration presently ranks RFD as the nation's 19th largest cargo airport in terms of cargo volume. Additionally, the airport was recognized as the world's fastest-growing cargo airport in 2018 for facilities that handled more than 250 metric tons of air cargo, according to a September 2019 report from Airports Council International. In short, EDA investments resulting from the Northern Illinois Region's CEDS planning process has helped RFD become a world-recognized leader in the air freight industry.



EDA investments at Chicago Rockford International Airport are helping the airport become a Midwest hub for e-commerce air freight.
[SCOTT P. YATES/ROCKFORD REGISTER STAR]

2020 CEDS Planning Process

The COVID-19 pandemic formed the backdrop for the planning process for this CEDS update. Following COVID-19 mitigation efforts, as recommended by the state of Illinois, the RPC and many of its partner agencies moved to remote working operations, which required the RPC to alter the planning process for the 2020 CEDS update.

Unchanged from the previous CEDS process, a three-county CEDS Strategy Committee consisting of public- and private-sector representatives spearheaded the process. In accordance with EDA guidelines, the members of the committee represented the main economic interests of the region, including leaders from manufacturing, healthcare, key public officials, community leaders, economic development professionals, workforce development representatives, labor and trade groups, higher education, and utilities. Committee members were selected in a formulaic manner so that each county was represented by the same number of representatives. The previous CEDS Steering Committee was used as a baseline for determining the membership of the committee. Additionally, in the 2016 CEDS, McHenry County created its own steering committee which met separately and communicated strategies and priorities to the main committee. All partners were integrated into a single committee for this update cycle.

Region 1 Planning Council, facilitated the CEDS planning process. Not only is the RPC the Economic Development District, but works with many of the Steering Committee stakeholders on individual projects or through general support. The RPC is able to play a role in the alignment of other regional planning efforts, particularly those related to transportation, infrastructure,

sustainability, and land use planning. Much like the previous CEDS iteration, RPC staff worked closely with the region's economic development professionals at Growth Dimensions in Boone County, McHenry County Economic Development Corporation (MCEDC), and the Rockford Area Economic Development Council (RAEDC) in Winnebago County. Additionally, as an adaptation to COVID-19 and the lack of in-person engagement, numerous one-on-one discussions were conducted with stakeholders outside of Steering Committee meetings.

Steering Committee meetings were virtual and occurred monthly from July 2020 to November 2020. In order to simulate small group discussions and exercises that typically occur during in-person meetings during a normal CEDS process, these monthly Steering Committee meetings alternated between large group discussions and small group exercises. For example, organizational-specific feedback for the SWOT analysis and action items were more efficiently discussed in a small group setting, whereas general feedback and responses to drafts were better done as a large group. Additionally, surveys were distributed prior to select meetings to form a baseline for discussion and updates for the vision, goals, and strategies.

Due to COVID-19, public workshops were not held as part of the planning process. However, goals and strategies were made available online from mid-September to October for public comment. Public comments were incorporated into the drafted tactical plan. The CEDS document draft was made available for 30 days from mid-October to mid-November. Comments were incorporated into the final document. A record of public comments is included in Appendix II.

While the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted much of the planning process, the planning team also approached the pandemic as a way to increase the attention given to resiliency planning in this document—a regional goal for the update prior to 2020. The virtual CEDS Steering Committee meetings provided an additional forum for discussions about the impacts COVID-19 has had on business and government operations and helped develop a dialogue on what regional strategies should be pursued for post-COVID response, recovery, and resiliency in the face of a changing world.

Alignment with Existing Plans

Stakeholders and RPC staff made a concerted effort to align the CEDS with other regional plans that preceded or were concurrent with the process. Great strides have been made toward regionalism in the intervening years, though “planning fatigue” is still felt throughout the region. This CEDS aims to build off of existing plans that were created with a wealth of public input. Examples of these plans and how they were incorporated include:

Rockford Region Strategic Diversification Plan (2012)

This plan was funded partly through an EDA adjustment grant for the purpose of analyzing the Rockford MSA’s competitiveness in aerospace, aviation and logistics, medical equipment manufacturing, and alternative energy parts manufacturing. This plan is nearly 10 years old and may require some updates, though its action steps remain largely relevant. The Diversification Plan informs action steps in this current plan, particularly in strategies related to business development, regional collaboration, and targeted industries.

ON TO 2050

The Chicago Metropolitan Area for Planning (CMAP) oversees the updates and implementation of its comprehensive plan for the Chicago Metropolitan region, which includes McHenry County. The plan not only guides transportation investments, but also frames regional priorities on development, the environment, the economy, and quality of life. The Rockford Region is inexorably tied to the larger Chicago metropolitan region. As such, attention has been given so that strategies within this CEDS update generally overlap with those of CMAP’s comprehensive plan particularly those which relate to the larger region.

2050 Metropolitan Transportation Plan for the Rockford Region

RPC is responsible for developing the regional Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP), sometimes referred to as the long-range transportation plan (LRTP). The plan covers Winnebago, Boone, and northern Ogle Counties and aims to identify the region’s transportation vision, strategies, and priorities for future transportation. The most recent

iteration was adopted in July, 2020. When updating this CEDS, RPC staff looked to align the two plans, particularly on goals related to transportation infrastructure investment.

McHenry County Strategic Plan 2017-2020

The most recent Strategic Plan for McHenry County was adopted by their board in 2017 and guides the county’s work to provide the highest quality services to the county. The five goals and their strategies outlined in McHenry County’s Strategic Plan bear similarities to those within the CEDS and thus, many of the strategies and action items within this document are also overtly or abstractly referenced within the county’s plan.

Comprehensive Plans:

McHenry County 2030 Comprehensive Plan; Boone County Comprehensive Plan 2029; Winnebago County 2030 Land Resource Management Plan

Existing comprehensive/land use plans not only offer baseline policy recommendations to reference, but also provide background information, a vision, and strategic direction for the respective county. Each comprehensive plan was referenced during the update of the CEDS strategies, with the idea that the CEDS bolsters the economic development and other related portions of these plans.

Rockford 20/20 Strategic Plan (2016-2020)

The Rockford Area Economic Development Council (RAEDC) outlines its mission, vision, and strategies within this plan for economic development. As one of the three economic development organizations within our EDD, the strategies within were used to inform business development strategies within the CEDS.

Chicago Metro Metal Consortium

In 2014, the Chicago Region received the Investing in Manufacturing Communities Partnership designation from the U.S. Department of Commerce for the Chicago Metro Metal Consortium. MCEDC has been particularly active in assisting the consortium, helping to organize match-making events throughout the region and training others on its successful methods. Metal fabrication remains a key cluster in the Northern Illinois Region.

Chicago Regional Growth Corporation (CRGC)

The CRGC is the regional economic development organization comprised of the City of Chicago and the collar counties, including McHenry County. While not an EDD, the CRGC plays an active role in coordinating economic development partners and enhancing the regional ecosystem around Chicago. Firms in McHenry County have accessed its programs, and priorities of this organization inform various CEDS strategies with respect to the larger region.

Rockford Regional Plan for Sustainable Development (2014)

This plan for the Rockford MSA was created by the Rockford Region Vital Signs project and RMAP (prior to RPC formation) through funding from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, U.S. Department of Transportation, and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. The intensive plan and corresponding process still informs regional planning priorities. This plan provided the first recommendation for the creation of a Regional Planning Commission in the Rockford Region – an action item that also manifested as a top priority in the 2016-2020 CEDS and has since been completed. Strategies within this plan were also revisited in the context of improving resiliency-related strategies for this CEDS update.

Boone County Government Strategic Plan (2016)

This plan was updated concurrently with the previous iteration of the CEDS with shared stakeholder participation and three of its broad goals connect directly with CEDS goals:

1) Intergovernmental Collaboration, 2) Promotion of Economic Development to support New and Existing Business, and 3) Investment in Infrastructure to enhance Quality of Life. These goals remain largely unchanged in this update and are still to be pursued.

City of Rockford 2020 Comprehensive Plan

The 2015 amendment to this plan has been used in the 2010 CEDS, the Rockford Region Diversification Plan, and other plans, and had an extensive public input process in order to develop action steps for the region's largest city. Items from its economic development, quality of life, and infrastructure sections are in the CEDS as city priorities that fit regional goals.

IL Northern Stateline Regional and Local Workforce Plans 2017-2019, 2020-2024

Regional workforce development plans informed this iteration of CEDS. Specifically, many of the action items in these plans were verbatim from the action items in the 2016 CEDS. Specific workforce strategies do not appear in this iteration of the CEDS partly for this reason. However, the goals and strategies of our workforce partners play a key role in economic development and are to be consistently referenced and used as justification for recommendations within this plan.

Vision and Goals

The CEDS Steering Committee approved the following updated vision for the Northern Illinois Region:

In 2025, the Northern Illinois Region will be a world-class, diverse, inclusive, and prosperous region with a resilient economic base and a superior quality of life that outperforms peer regions in job growth, capital investment, and innovation.

To reach that vision, the Steering Committee, building off of the previous CEDS, approved the following goals:

1. *A full range of infrastructure, with emphasis on transportation, utilities, and communication in order to successfully meet the needs of the region's businesses.*
2. *Sustainable economic development which improves quality of life while protecting the environment and natural resources that lend resiliency to the region*
3. *Collaborative regional economic development efforts, emphasizing communication, coordination, shared assets and promotion of the region for business investment*
4. *Efficient business development, expansion, diversification, job growth, and innovation throughout the region.*
5. *A high quality of life enhanced by the region's sense of place, livability, community health, and creative environments.*
6. *Promotion of the natural environment, cultural and recreational amenities, and our industrial and agricultural legacy to support a visitor-based economy.*

II. Background

As discussed in the introduction, the Region 1 Planning Council, as an Economic Development District containing Boone, McHenry, and Winnebago Counties, is committed to regional economic development planning. This collaboration is largely due to key linkages between the three counties. While the three counties have their own unique identifiers and characteristics which set them apart, they are also linked through shared industries, workforce, infrastructure, and contributions to the larger region. These larger regions include the 21-county Greater Chicago Region (population 9.53million), and the larger Great Lakes Megaregion (population ~85million). In particular, the Great Lakes Megaregion which the Northern Illinois region contributes to outputs an estimated Gross Regional Product (GRP) of \$4 trillion, or about 20% of the total US GDP. The megaregion's

traditional manufacturing base remains an important contributor to this GRP despite declining employment. The larger megaregion is also becoming a leading center for business and professional services, biotechnology, education, and research and development activities. While the three-county region exemplifies the trends of the greater regions, there also characteristics of our region which deserve additional analyses of its own. This section will give a brief overview of regional connections, shared issues between the counties, and top line indicators which provide context for economic development within our region.

Figure 1: EDD Geography

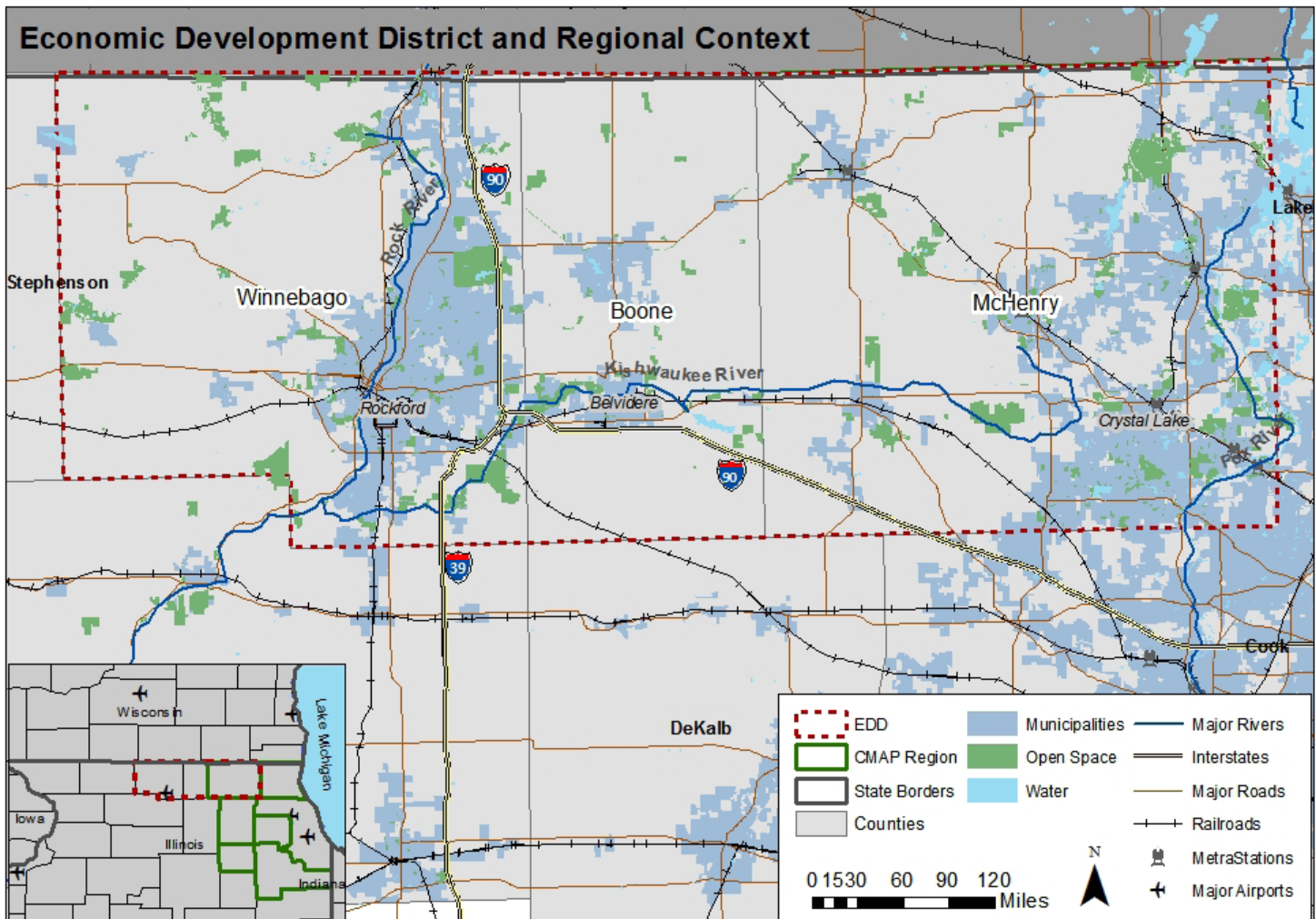
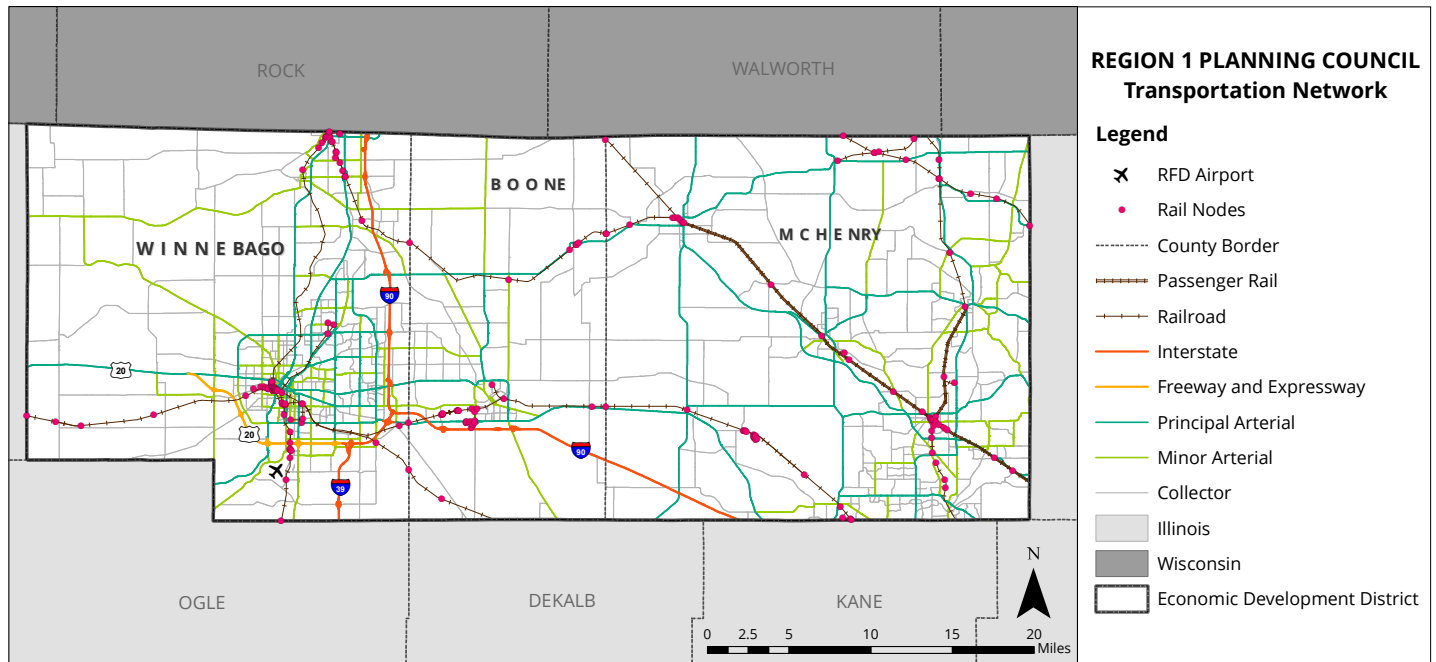


Figure 2: EDD Transportation



Regional Links

One of the clearest ways our region is integrated to the Chicago metropolitan area is through infrastructure. This includes federal and state highways, freight rail, and the Chicago-Rockford International Airport (RFD). The segment of Interstate 90 known as the Jane Addams Memorial Tollway is a significant transportation and economic artery for the three-county region, with an annual vehicle mile total of 2,401,837,605 – the second highest among Illinois tollways behind the Tri-State Tollway which rings around Chicago. The \$2.5 billion Jane Addams Memorial Tollway Rebuilding and Widening Project was completed in 2016 and improved 90 miles of I-90 from Chicago O’Hare International Airport to Rockford. The improved highway has been a boon for our region in moving freight, commuters, and visitors. Sixteen percent of the Rockford MSA’s employed residents commute to the Chicago area – an increase from 12% in 2013.

McHenry County is most closely linked with Chicago. As a “collar-county”, many residents choose to live in Chicagoland’s most northwestern county, and commute to the city. McHenry County is served by the Metra passenger rail line. Around 3.2% of McHenry

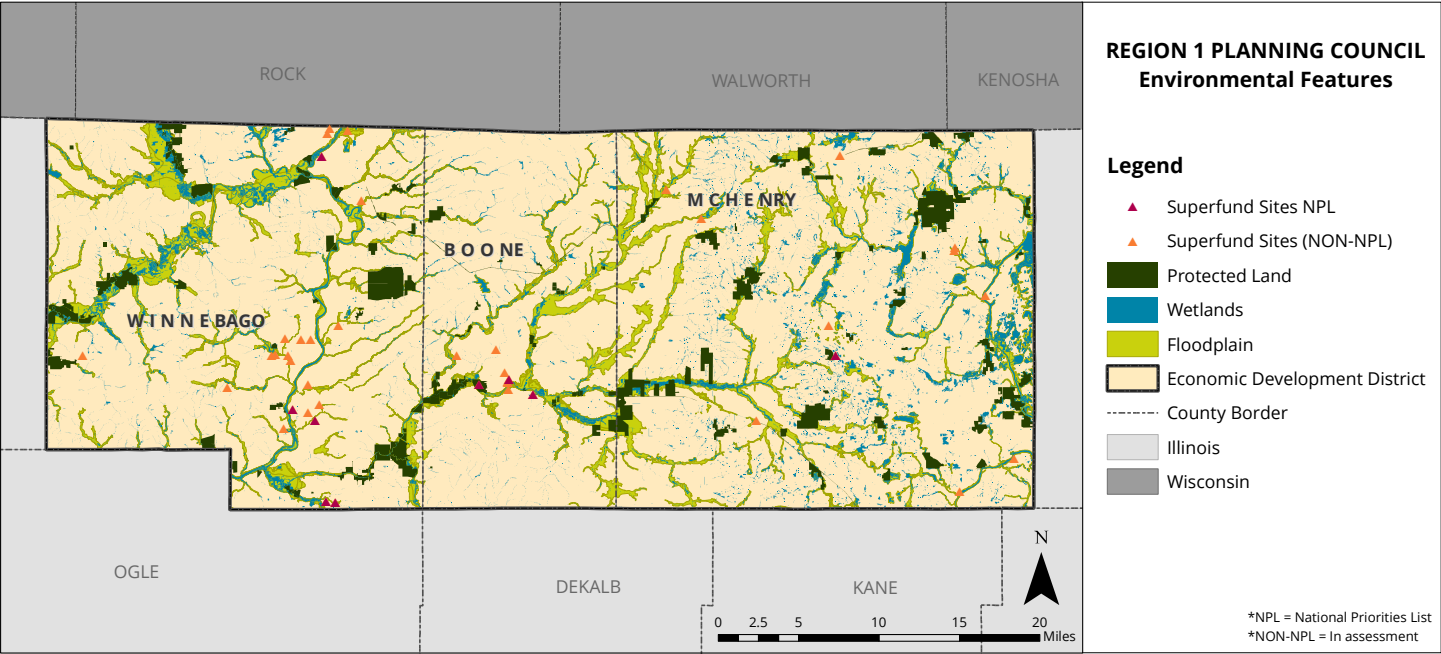
County employed residents commute to the City of Chicago. In July of 2020, the \$33.4 million Illinois Route 23 Interchange project on I-90, the first interstate interchange within the county was completed in partnership with the City of Marengo, McHenry County, and the Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT). This interchange has great potential for the region, both in moving residents and pursuing large-scale development projects surrounding the interchange. Additionally, the interchange increases access to both the Chicago-Rockford International Airport and O’Hare, an important factor for the region’s growing logistics industry. Increased infrastructure connections will also assist in the supply of skilled workers – a critical factor in business location decisions and growth. While the statewide population has been trending downward, growth and business expansion in the region are linked to that of Greater Chicago, as it is expected that potential outward growth of the Chicago area will occur on the I-90 corridor, further linking our region to the city.

Shared Land and Environmental Issues

Beyond infrastructure connections, the region shares many land use and environmental concerns. Common in Midwest regions, large portions of the three counties retain a rural identity, with agriculture and agriculture-related business as a significant land use and economic output. Western parts of McHenry County, southwestern parts of Winnebago County, and central parts of Boone County all balance development pressures with a desire to retain their rural heritage. Additionally, all types of communities, from large cities like Rockford to smaller rural communities like Harvard, struggle with revitalizing distressed development sites and are interested in identifying strategies to jumpstart reinvestment.

Much like the last CEDS process, water supply and pricing was cited as a major strength by local businesses. However, because much of the region is groundwater dependent, water must be managed sustainably to preserve that strength. In the past, representatives from all three counties participated in the Northern Ground Water Protection Planning Committee. Now the three counties are active in groundwater task forces such as Healthy Land and Water (Winnebago and Boone) and the McHenry County Water Resources Action Plan. Major watersheds in the region – which correspond to the major rivers - include the Rock, Kishwaukee, and Fox.

Figure 3: Environmental Features



Source: IL DNR, EPA, FEMA

Interstate Competition

Being a region that exists on a state border, Northern Illinois also has important connections to its northern neighbors. The large Wisconsin cities of Beloit, Janesville, and Madison are linked to the region via I-90. Beloit, Milwaukee, and Janesville, in particular, have a similar industrial makeup to the Rockford MSA, thanks in part to the location of all three on the Rock River. Differences between Illinois and Wisconsin often drive competition among the two. This is especially true in resident attraction efforts. Despite this, the proximity, transportation connections, and a shared labor force can form the basis for collaboration.

Differences Between Counties

While the three counties share geographic, infrastructure, and environmental attributes, there are clear differences that set them apart. McHenry and Winnebago Counties are nearly equal in population with strong employment concentrations in manufacturing and business services. However, the settlement patterns within McHenry are unique in that relatively recent outward growth from the Chicago area turned what was previously a largely rural county into a network of suburban communities with a workforce tied to the Chicago area. Winnebago County, with most of its population and employment in the City of Rockford, is a long-standing metropolitan area in its own right. Winnebago County does share some of the benefits from Chicago's northeastern expansion, though its population and job growth have moved at a much slower pace due to waves of economic and social troubles.

Like McHenry County, Boone County's growth has also been relatively recent, having benefitted from suburbanization of both the Rockford and Chicago areas. Despite the County being the smallest of the three in terms of population and area, this is an advantage as operations and development decisions are able to employ a more localized touch. Additionally, the business and employment base of Boone County is closer to that of the Rockford area with an emphasis on automobile and machinery manufacturing, due to the presence of one of Fiat Chrysler Automobiles' (FCA) major plants.

Top Line Indicators

Population

To describe the economic development environment within our region, some relevant core indicators should be examined. This section provides key statistics which frame the economic development strategies. In tandem, both the Targeted Industry analysis and the SWOT section will help to further discuss economic development and build upon some of this initial analysis. Taken as a single region, the three counties are home to almost 650,000 people. Northern Illinois has recently experienced population loss and has had a slower growth rate in the number of new jobs compared to Chicago, the state, and the country (Table 1). However, the Chicago Region itself has grown more slowly than its large metropolitan counterparts, partially due to the slow growth of the larger region.

In Northern Illinois, nearly a fifth of its workers are employed in the manufacturing sector (Table 1). Winnebago and McHenry County both have large manufacturing bases, however Boone County makes up a large portion of manufacturing within the region, where 45.5% of its employees worked in manufacturing in 2018. The region's manufacturing legacy is a point of pride for the region, with much of its historical development being led by factories and plants. It is also important to note that manufacturing, being a significant basic (exported) industry, is particularly sensitive to global industry trends and trade policy. While future-proofing the sector is possible, and is a priority for the region, it is still the case that when manufacturing struggles, the Northern Illinois economy struggles. In response, both Winnebago and Boone County have expressed that new development should be approached openly knowing the importance of diversification.

Table 2: Top 10 Industries and Share (2018)

Sector	Northern Illinois Region	Greater Chicago Region	State of Illinois
Manufacturing	19.6%	8.8%	10.0%
Health Care and Social Assistance	13.7%	12.8%	13.5%
Retail Trade	11.2%	10.1%	10.4%
Educational Services	8.8%	8.6%	9.0%
Accommodation and Food Services	8.5%	8.7%	8.8%
Administrative and Support and Waste Management and Remediation Services	7.6%	8.4%	7.4%
Construction	5.2%	3.8%	3.9%
Wholesale Trade	4.5%	5.4%	5.0%
Transportation and Warehousing	3.6%	5.0%	4.8%
Other Services (except Public Administration)	3.4%	3.7%	3.5%
Total	86.0%	75.2%	76.3%

Source: U.S Census Bureau; LEHD Quarterly Workforce Indicators

Table 1: Top Line Indicators

Indicator	Time Period	Boone County	McHenry County	Winnebago County	Northern Illinois Region	Greater Chicago Region	State of Illinois	United States
Population	2018	53,606	307,789	286,174	647,569	9,536,428	12,821,497	322,903,030
	2014-2018 % Change	-0.7%	0.0%	-2.0%	-1.0%	0.2%	-0.4%	2.8%
Employment	2018	25,748	163,471	132,751	321,970	4,712,444	6,225,964	152,739,884
	2014-2018 % Change	5.7%	5.2%	1.6%	3.7%	4.7%	3.2%	6.5%
Unemployment Rate	2018	5.6%	3.6%	5.6%	4.6%	4.1%	4.3%	3.9%
	2014-2018 Point Change	-0.02	-0.03	-0.03	-0.03	-0.03	-0.03	-0.02
Per Capita Income	2018	\$47,437	\$55,720	\$43,742	\$48,966	\$52,658	\$56,919	\$54,526
	2014-2018 % Change	16.8%	16.0%	14.3%	15.8%	0.0%	15.1%	15.8%
GRP per Capita (2012 \$)	2018	\$31,843	\$32,432	\$44,792	\$37,555	\$60,400	\$57,328	\$52,375

Sources: U.S. Bureau of Census, Economic Analysis; American Community Survey, Local Area Unemployment Statistics

Business Vitality

Regional well-being can also be based on business vitality and hiring trends. While COVID-19 has thrown traditional business churn tracking into flux, the steering committee reported that prior to 2020, business openings and closings have been steady. Business assistance and ensuring that the economic conditions of the region are suitable for entrepreneurs and small business creation will be a major undertaking for our region and the partners within. Young businesses have traditionally been an important source of job creation. Fewer new businesses could mean fewer new jobs.

Workforce

The Northern Illinois Region can produce and sustain a well-educated and skilled workforce. However, there are significant challenges in attracting and retaining them. This is evident when examining the shares of college graduates in the region (Table 3). Compared to the Chicago region and the state of Illinois, the Northern Illinois region has a lower proportion of its working age population attaining degrees. McHenry County has a larger number of residents with college degrees, possibly due to its ties with the Chicago labor-market. While the region does not have any public universities, Northern Illinois University (NIU) in neighboring DeKalb County does provide 4-year higher education to those who pursue it. NIU also has satellite locations within the region and partnerships with Rock Valley College. The University of Illinois College of Medicine also has a campus in Rockford, offering MD degrees, a family medicine residency program, and the Center for Rural Health Professions. Rock Valley College and McHenry County College are the two community colleges in the region, and both play important roles in tailoring educational and workforce training programs to the local industries. Two advanced training centers in the

region help to accomplish this, as do the workforce services provided by the Workforce Connection and McHenry County Workforce Network. Adding on to the educational pathway, the region recognizes steps to achieve a better-educated, better-trained workforce, especially in the science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) disciplines will be necessary to compete in an evolving, globally competitive economy.

Another workforce factor that affects the region is the “graying” of the population and slow growth or decline in younger age groups. Both of these will also need to be addressed if the region is to be competitive. While the recession showed major losses in key working-age groups such as those between ages 25-44, as well increases in retirements from older workers, this pattern has waned slightly more recently. A retiring workforce not only means that businesses may face greater competition for new employees, but may also impact internal operations as new workers must be trained and industry knowledge can be lost when legacy workers leave. This is especially true for the manufacturing industry, and tends to impact smaller businesses more than corporations, who are more likely to have succession planning, training, and employee search operations in place

Attention must also be given to other factors which could attribute to the increasing levels of unemployment and *underemployment* in the region which prevent people from participating in the workforce. This list includes - though not exhaustively - a lack of transportation, location of affordable housing, criminal records, lack of affordable childcare, etc. While different organizations have missions to address these issues, it must be understood that workforce issues go beyond just education and age trends.



The new LEED Gold Certified Liebman Science Center at McHenry County College in Crystal Lake prepares students for careers and includes lab, lecture, and preparation spaces, as well as a planetarium (pictured on cover).
[MCHENRY COUNTY ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION]



Instructor Robin Schroer (left) talks with Rock Valley College students Kelsey Smith (center) and Ciarra Horton on Jan. 20, 2020 during an electrical systems class that is part of the college's new mechatronics certificate program in Rockford.
[SCOTT P. YATES/ROCKFORD REGISTER STAR]

Table 3: Education Attainment Indicators and Trends

Indicator	Time Period	Winnebago County	Boone County	McHenry County	Illinois	United States
High School graduate or higher (percent of persons age 25+ years)	2015-2019	87.7%	86.2%	93.1%	89.2%	88.0%
Bachelor's degree or higher, percent of persons are 25+ years	2015-2019	22.9%	23.5%	34.4%	34.7%	32.1%

Sources: U.S Census Bureau; American Community Survey

Table 4: Working-Age Population Indicators and Trends

Indicator	Time Period	Northern Illinois Region	Greater Chicago Region	State of Illinois	United States
20 to 24 years	2018	6.1%	6.70%	6.80%	6.90%
	2010-2018 % Change	11.3%	2.2%	0.1%	5.1%
25 to 44 Years	2018	24.02%	27.70%	26.76%	26.43%
	2010-2018 % Change	-11.9%	-2.5%	-3.0%	3.6%
45 to 65 Years	2018	28.40%	26.08%	26.18%	25.98%
	2010-2018 % Change	5.5%	5.8%	3.5%	6.7%
Median Age	2018	39.4	37.2	37.9	37.9
	2010-2018 Change	2.47	1.80	1.70	0.03

Source: U.S Census Bureau

Distress

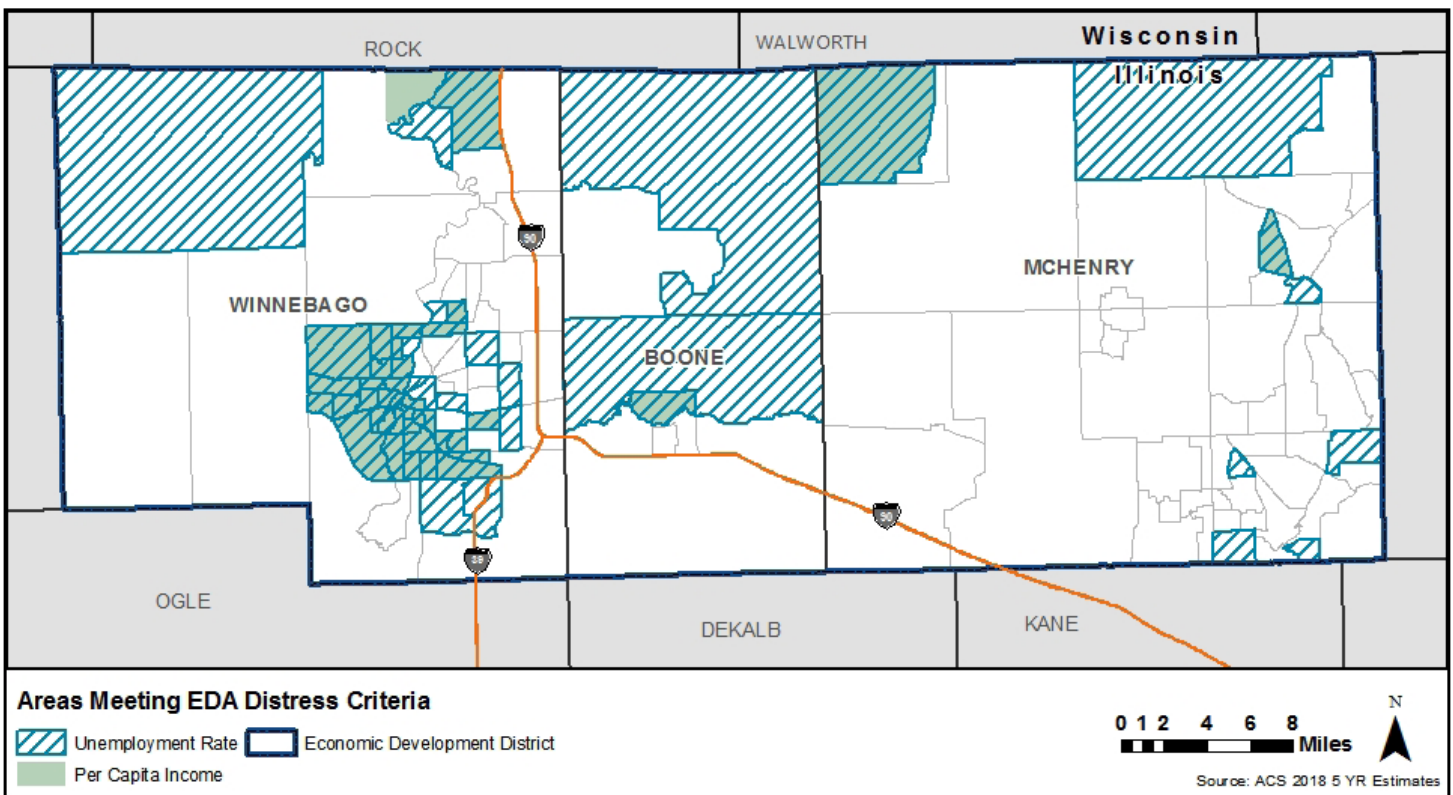
While the CEDS is largely focused on regional economic development challenges, assets, and initiatives, stakeholders noted that special effort must be made to ensure that economic growth is spread across all parts of the region. Economically distressed communities and neighborhoods of the region benefit greatly from both locally specific tactics and regionally important tactics outlined in this plan. Discussions, particularly those around workforce, quality of life, and redevelopment, are centered around place-based economic development initiatives. Focus on these areas also aligns with EDA's commitment to distressed areas through targeted investments.

EDA considers an area to be distressed if: 1) the most recently available per capita income is 80% or less of the national average; 2) the average unemployment rate over the most recent 24-month period is at least one percentage point greater than the national average; or 3) the area has a "special need" as determined by EDA. The census tracts within our region which fall under the first two distressed categories are shown in Figure 1. Distress measures often play a key role in eligibility and match proportions for funding under EDA programs. Many tracts

within Winnebago and Boone counties qualify as distressed under the unemployment threshold, while specific census tracts in McHenry County qualify. Portions of populations that qualify as distressed under the per capita income metric are scattered throughout the region, often overlapping with the unemployment criteria. Additionally, when looking at the counties as a whole, Winnebago and Boone Counties have had unemployment rates at least one percentage point above the national average.

The 2016 CEDS was conducted at a time when impacts from the 2008 Recession had taken place and the region had stabilized. For the purpose of internal consistency and providing a "pre-COVID baseline", most of the measurables shown here are done prior to 2020. However, the impacts from the COVID-19 Pandemic and its subsequent recession on all of these indicators must be monitored closely and frequently. Keeping up-to-date indicators not only serve as a means to measure the economic development progressions within the region, but also assist with fund procurement and ensuring investments are targeted and create the most value for our region.

Figure 4: Distress Indicators by Census Tract



III. Targeted Industry Analysis

To provide further background on our regional economy, the 2021-2025 CEDS identifies 11 industry clusters across the three-county region. These clusters were identified using the following methodology:

- Review of the 2016-2020 CEDS;
- Conversations with the CEDS Steering Committee and other relevant partners; and
- Previous targeted industry analysis studies including those conducted by regional Economic Development Organizations.

While identifying these industries provides initial guidance for business development, a more in-depth analysis is needed to understand the overlap areas between industries and how shared strategies can benefit multiple sectors, and ultimately the region as a whole. The identified clusters fall into four (4) areas:

- Advanced Manufacturing;
- Transportation, Logistics, and Distribution;
- Agriculture and Food Processing; and
- Healthcare and Medical Sciences.

The large overlaps in the targeted industry clusters also provide an opportunity for regional entities to focus their efforts while maximizing development opportunities and benefits. It was also expressed that a more in-depth regional analysis may be pursued in the future.

Figure 5: Industry Cluster Summary



Advanced Manufacturing Clusters

Automotive

Regional Employment: 8,248

Major Companies: Fiat Chrysler Automobiles (FCA) and its suppliers; Accuride Wheel End Solutions, Bergstrom, Charter Dura-Bar

Regional Overview: The automotive sector has been and continues to be a cornerstone of the regions' manufacturing sector. The largest employer in the region continues to be the Fiat Chrysler Automobiles (FCA) factory in Belvidere, though recent layoffs, a potential merger with an international PSA Group, and talks of moving to Detroit may lessen its' significance. Accuride – Wheel End Solutions has grown significantly in recent years, having invested over \$70 million into capital upgrades and implementing data-driven operations and decision-making. This turnaround provides the region with another strong and growing automotive firm that can be relied upon for consistent employment and growing GRP. Other major automotive players in the region include Bergstrom and Charter Dura-Bar, both continuing to play important roles in the region's economy. Overall the sector is continuing to steadily grow within the region. It will be important to work with these firms as they prepare to adjust to current and future needs in the automotive industry, such as the increasing demand for electric and automated vehicles.

Aerospace and Defense Production

Regional Employment: 2,092

Major Companies: Collins Aerospace Systems (Formerly UTC), Woodward, GE Aviation

Regional Overview: The Aerospace and Defense Production sector continues to grow within the region which remains the national center of aerospace and aviation technology, despite the loss of B/E Aerospace. Most recently, Collins Aerospace Systems (formerly UTC Aerospace Systems) has combined with Raytheon Technologies Corporation, opening new avenues and opportunities within the industry that can be nurtured and exploited for the development of the region. Woodward continues to be a stable employer with two high production factories located in Loves Park. GE Aviation has held steady over recent years, but has felt the effects of the global pandemic contracting the global market demand for their aviation products. It will be key to the continued growth of this sector and region to work with the aviation companies to ensure continued production and employment, and ideally greater growth in the future.

Production Technology and Heavy Machinery

Regional Employment: 7,315

Major Companies: Unicarriers Americas Corp., Taylor Company, Mechanical Tool and Engineering Co., Parker Hannifin

Regional Overview: The region's Production Technology and Heavy Machinery manufacturers serve a variety of industries in this cluster- including agricultural equipment, construction equipment, and industrial machinery and process equipment and their components. It also includes a particular expertise in hydraulics. Considering the importance and connectivity of this sector, it is reassuring to see major companies continue to produce in the region and even work on expanding their operations and deliverables. Just recently the UniCarriers Americas Corp. announced an expansion of their partnership with Vecna Robotics, increasing their efficiency and their drive to expand their footprint in the region. Equally important has been the Taylor Company's resilience and dedication to continue their production, and therefore employment, through this economic downturn. Mechanical Tool and Engineering Co. and Parker Hannifin have also found ways to continue employing the region and contributing to the GRP.

Metal and Metal Products

Regional Employment: 9,889

Major Companies: Scot Forge, Knaack Manufacturing, Rockford Toolcraft, Southern Imperial, Franklin Display Group

Regional Overview: Considering the size and number of the region's manufacturing sectors, the Metal and Metal Products sector is key to the success of the cluster as a whole. This sector overlaps with many of the other manufacturing clusters as it represents the region's strength in making equipment and machinery. So far, the sector has been relatively static in terms of growth, but the continued demand in the region adds to the importance of this sector for consistent employment and GDP. The Tactical Plan focuses on development strategies in regional cooperation, resiliency, and business development, as well as workforce retention, all of which will help this sector continue to maintain strong ties to the region and will help bolster the region's economy.

Metalworking Technology

Regional Employment: 6,383

Major Companies: Ingersoll Cutting Tool, Ingersoll Machine Tools, Regal Cutting Tool

Regional Overview: The Metalworking Technology sector overlaps with the other sectors in the Advanced Manufacturing cluster, representing the region's strength in making equipment and machinery that work with metals. This affects the Automotive, Aerospace and Defense Production, Production Technology, and Heavy Machinery sectors, and is heavily connected to the Metal and Metal Products sector. This sector has seen many successes over the past years as well as some difficulties. Ingersoll Cutting Tool and Ingersoll Machine Tool have both grown and are continuing to introduce new products to the market. In the later part of 2020, Ingersoll Machine Tools went on to expand their partnership with Siemens, looking to become "a leading digital enterprise in the machine tool market". Unfortunately, other companies have struggled. Greenlee Textron closed their facility in the Rockford area in late 2020 and moved the majority of their existing volume to Ohio. Regal Cutting Tool has held steady in terms of growth within the region. Their largest hurdle over the years has been finding a qualified workforce, pushing the company to partner with local high schools in the region, which has shown signs of success. Economic development entities will need to continue to foster the workforce programs surrounding metalworking in order to maintain and grow this sector. It will also be imperative to implement business development and workforce retention strategies found in the Tactical Plan.

Plastic Products

Regional Employment: 2,933

Major Companies: AptarGroup, JL Clark, Fabrik Molded Plastics, Filtartek

Regional Overview: The Plastic Products sector is primarily located within McHenry County, but continues to have growth potential throughout the three-county region. The major companies making up the sector have continued to grow and develop roots in the area. AptarGroup as a whole has grown their revenue 61% over the last 10 years, and their market capitalization has increased 204% in that same time period. In 2018, JL Clark increased their capacity by 30%, meaning job creation and increased revenue. In 2017, Fabrik Molded Plastics increased their job offerings by opening a second, 44,000 square foot facility in McHenry, IL. The continued growth of this sector is something economic and workforce development entities will need to emphasize and nurture. The Tactical Plan provides various strategies in terms of workforce development and retention and business development that will further expand this sector within the region.

Chemical Products

Regional Employment: 1,514

Major Companies: Chemtool, Rust-Oleum, Rock Valley Oil and Chemical

Regional Overview: The Chemical Products sector has remained relatively static in terms of growth in the region. There have been no major changes in terms of closing facilities or expanding on or building new facilities. Rust-Oleum has, in recent years, closed facilities in other states in preparation for more streamlined production and future growth opportunities. Economic development entities will need to better understand the connection between this sector and others within the Advanced Manufacturing Cluster and utilize strategies within the Tactical Plan that push for connectivity between regional entities, business development and retention, and workforce retention to help this sector grow and remain a key sector in the region.

Transportation, Logistics, and Distribution Cluster

Regional Employment: 34,875

Major Companies: Amazon, UPS, Lowe's, FedEx, Packaging Coordinators

Regional Overview: Transportation, logistics, and distribution refers to the combination of the Distribution/Electronic Commerce and Transportation/Logistics sectors, as both rely heavily on similar assets and development strategies. This has grown to become the largest targeted industry cluster in the region with the recent addition of Amazon. Amazon completed building a 120,000 square foot expansion at the Chicago Rockford International Airport in 2019 and already has plans to continue expanding their footprint within the region. Through its building phases and subsequent regular usage, Amazon has increased the employment rate as well as the GRP, something which can be used as a development tool when soliciting other industries to the region. This, partnered with the steady growth of UPS, Lowe's, FedEx, and other packaging coordinators, highlights the need for development entities, the airport, and private businesses to work closely to develop strategies that build on the regions strategic advantages.

Agriculture and Food Processing Clusters

Production Agriculture

Regional Employment: ~2,689

Major Companies: N/A

Regional Overview: Production Agriculture is a sector endemic to the region and a key segment of the region's economy. This is true for surrounding counties outside of the EDD as well. In 2019, production agriculture grew the regions GRP by \$249.9 million and increased the number of jobs by 6%, when compared to 2014 numbers. However, there are issues that economic development partners and the region as a whole need to mitigate in order to have continued success in this sector. As of the 2017 Census of Agriculture, there are only 2,074 farms within the region. This is a drop from previous census years indicating either a consolidation trend or a loss of farm land due to urban sprawl. A consolidation trend is evidenced by the increase in the average farm size in Winnebago County, however, in both Boone and McHenry Counties the average farm size continues to drop, supporting the argument for loss of farm land to urban development. Many small and mid-sized farms have seen success in selling their goods to restaurants, grocery stores, at farmer's markets, and through Community Supported Agriculture programs. Other strategies, as mentioned in the Tactical Plan, include increasing agritourism, food tourism, and focusing on renovating and rebuilding structures and areas already in urban areas to balance urban development with agricultural operations.

Food Processing and Manufacturing

Regional Employment: 2,820

Major Companies: General Mills, Mondelez International

Regional Overview: This sector leverages the region's agricultural strengths with its transportation networks that connect to large consumer markets. So far this has worked well as the firms, though somewhat static in growth, continue to remain in the region, offering consistent employment and GRP. The willingness of these firms to stay within the region makes it all the more important for economic development entities to work to keep them in the region, as well as help them grow and expand their operations. Many of the Tactical Plan strategies involve strengthening regional infrastructure. This will increase road capacities and therefore increase the capacities and efficiencies of Food Processing and Manufacturing firms as well.



Susie's Garden Patch in Garden Prairie is a family owned farm in operation since 1985, which also attracts visitors for picking and canning. Agriculture is a key industry in the region. [SCOTT P. YATES/ROCKFORD REGISTER STAR]



Food processing is a key industry cluster in the region, as evidenced by the presence of larger plants such as General Mills [SCOTT P. YATES/ROCKFORD REGISTER STAR]

Healthcare and Medical Sciences Clusters

Healthcare

Regional Employment: 32,807

Major Companies: Centegra Health System, Mercy Rockford Health System, OSF HealthCare, Swedish American Health System

Regional Overview: Healthcare is the second largest industry cluster in the region, and continues to see the most growth. Between 2014 and 2019 this sector saw a 9% growth in the number of jobs and a GRP of approximately \$2.6 billion. Part of this GRP is attributed to the traditional services for local residents in the region, while another part of the GRP can be attributed to medical tourism. This sector has continued to expand their specializations, attracting individuals from neighboring counties and other areas. These specializations and job growth have also attracted and are expected to continue to attract an educated and specialized workforce, including in areas such as behavioral health, mental health, and emotional health. The tactical plan identifies various strategies that economic development entities can use to increase the attraction and also the retention of this type of workforce.

Medical Device and Supplies Manufacturing

Regional Employment: 1,170

Major Companies: Sage Products (Stryker Corporation), Medela, Catalent, Medtronic

Regional Overview: Primarily located in McHenry County, the Medical Device and Supplied Manufacturing sector has grown consistently and continues to expand, adding jobs and increasing the GRP of the region. In 2016, Sage Products was acquired by Stryker Corporation and started expanding their footprint in the region. By 2021 they expect to add an additional 610,000 square feet of warehouse space, manufacturing space, office space, and parking space as well as about 300 more jobs. Though not growing as quickly, Medela, Catalent, and Medtronic all still have a consistent presence in the region, leveraging McHenry's proximity to major cities and counties in the area.



An operating room within the comprehensive stroke center at OSF HealthCare Saint Anthony Medical Center is part of a four-story, \$85 million patient tower added to the Rockford hospital in 2018.
[ARTURO FERNANDEZ/ROCKFORD REGISTER STAR]

IV. SWOT

A Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) analysis for the Northern Illinois Region was conducted as part of the CEDS development process in order to understand the present economic conditions facing Winnebago, Boone, and McHenry counties. The following narrative provides an overview of the SWOT analysis and is a marriage of key data findings and feedback gathered from the CEDS Steering Committee and other stakeholders. It builds upon the SWOT analysis of the 2016-2020 CEDS and incorporates elements of master plans and strategic plans adopted by local governments and economic development and workforce agencies within the three-county region.

This CEDS is organized around six goals, each featuring a number of underlying strategies and actions. This structure is identical to the 2016-2020 CEDS, though the nature of the current goals, strategies, and action steps contain key revisions and updates based on feedback from Steering Committee members and the public.

Most notably, the availability of a skilled and flexible workforce – one of the six goals of the previous CEDS – is no longer a stand-alone goal in this revision. Steering Committee members felt that workforce availability is so tightly interwoven into the fabric of the Northern Illinois Region's economic

development environment that workforce-related strategies and actions should be woven throughout all CEDS goals rather than organized under a stand-alone workforce goal.

Steering Committee members also felt strongly that the Northern Illinois Region's visitor-based economy is so integral to the region's economic welfare that tourism, while related to quality of life, deserves to be treated as a stand-alone goal in this revised and updated CEDS. Thus, the 2021-2025 CEDS is organized around these six goals:

- Infrastructure
- Land Use and Sustainable Development
- Efficient Business Development
- Regional Collaboration
- Quality of Life
- Tourism

Infrastructure

Partners from across the region believe that working together to plan and advocate for key road, rail, and airport upgrades is critical to the region because of the vital role transportation plays in economic development. The first goal of the 2021-25 CEDS is:

A full range of infrastructure, with emphasis on transportation, utilities, and communication in order to successfully meet the needs of the region's businesses.

Strengths

As discussed previously, the region is united by a strong transportation network. The top asset noted in the previous CEDS was the region's "location in the central US at the junction of major highways, rail, and air with proximity to Chicago, Madison, and Milwaukee." When the process of revising this CEDS began, those shared assets again rose to the top.

Interstate 90 (the Jane Addams Memorial Tollway) runs through the entire region, connecting it to Chicago and the rest of the Midwest. I-90 carries between 27,000 and 60,000 vehicles per day within the region, including significant truck traffic. McHenry County's access to I-90 was greatly enhanced with the July 2020 completion of a \$33.4 million interchange improvement at Illinois 23 in Marengo.

Part of the region is also served by Interstate 39, which is a significant truck route through the middle of Illinois and a catalyst of recent distribution and warehouse growth. U.S. 20 is a four-lane divided highway through part of the region, providing another Interstate-quality route. U.S. 14 and U.S. 12 in McHenry also carry significant traffic.

The region is also home to Chicago Rockford International Airport (RFD), the 19th largest cargo airport in the country, according to the Federal Aviation Administration. RFD is home to UPS's second-largest air hub in North America and its 10,000-foot runway can accommodate any aircraft flying today. The AAR Corp. maintenance, repair, and overhaul facility that opened at RFD in 2016 has helped the airport attract more cargo airlines and other airside development. Additionally, while not in the

region, proximity to Chicago O'Hare International Airport, one of the world's largest passenger and freight air facilities, also benefits numerous companies and the region's residents.

The region also boasts significant rail assets, including several Class 1 railroads, a short-line railroad, and a regional railroad, all of which augment regional freight movement capacity. This freight system and interconnectedness is of vital importance for large scale industrial and other employers in the region.

The region has improved broadband infrastructure in recent years through investments in the iFiber initiative. A looped fiber backbone along I-90 and I-39 supports the high speeds that advanced manufacturers, hospitals, and information technology firms need. McHenry County has also pursued expansion of fiber, creating a spine that links McHenry County College with the county government center in Woodstock. Additional expansions are planned to improve connectivity and speed in the northern and western parts of McHenry County. More partnerships and fund identification will be necessary to ensure access to broadband, particularly in Boone County and rural Winnebago County.

Rockford Area Economic Development Council launched the Northern Illinois Qualified Sites Program in 2017 to help close a notable gap identified in the previous CEDS: the absence of high-quality business parks that are truly shovel-ready. Today, six shovel-ready industrial parks in Winnebago and Boone counties are benefitting from online marketing as part of the Northern Illinois QSP.

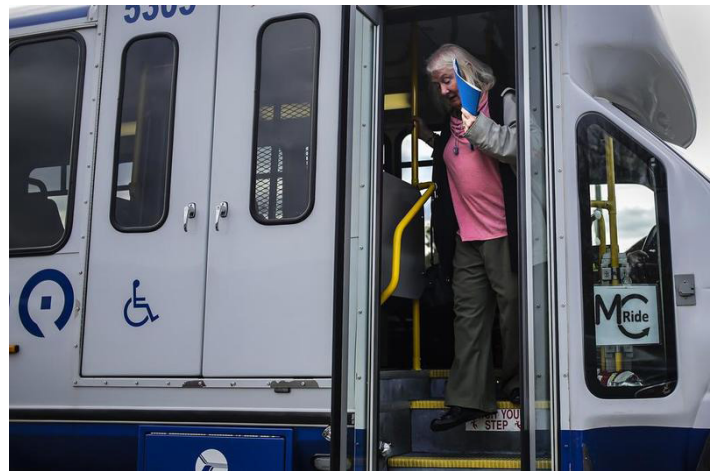
Weaknesses

Specific locations within the region suffer from inadequate infrastructure. Several of the region's freight rail lines need upgrades to handle faster and larger freight loads, particularly the Illinois Railway that passes Chicago Rockford International Airport, and the Union Pacific line that serves the FCA plant in Belvidere and also passes through McHenry and Winnebago counties. Additionally, the region lacks a direct connection to the Union Pacific Global III Intermodal Facility in Rochelle, which would prove beneficial should the intermodal hub be put back into use.

Finally, the region broadly needs better public transportation services. While McHenry County is served by Metra commuter rail, the other counties of the region lack passenger rail service. Rockford is the largest city in Illinois not served by passenger rail. In addition to passenger rail, stakeholders frequently discussed the need to expand last mile public transportation connections – bike, pedestrian, and transit connections to homes and businesses. The lack of connection limits the number of non-auto transportation options for residents and employees. Moreover, these gaps are a barrier for those who seek job-training opportunities and may dissuade young, skilled workers from locating in the region. Another barrier that has been expressed is the timing and convenience

of existing public transit options. While transit planning is undoubtedly complex, partners must be keen in understanding convenience and timing when it comes to their service planning.

McHenry County has made great strides toward improving its last mile connections. In 2012, the County spearheaded an effort to consolidate several municipal dial-a-ride services into a single coordinated service known as MCRide, which expands on bus routes and paratransit service provided by Pace. Some stakeholders have expressed interest in further expansion of these bus programs to rural areas of Boone County to improve regional connectivity of demand-response transit service.



Expansions of the MCRide service area can improve regional connectivity, particularly in the rural areas where the service has shown success.
[NORTHWEST HERALD (SHAW MEDIA)]

Opportunities

A number of efforts offer the possibility of addressing these weaknesses. Industrial real estate location decisions are often influenced by clusters of similar companies or strategic locations within the broader supply chain. To that end, Winnebago, Boone, and McHenry counties are using proceeds of a state transportation grant to establish a joint marketing plan to attract industry to three greenfield sites along I-90 and U.S. 20 that have benefitted from significant infrastructure upgrades: 485 acres surrounding U.S. 20 and Illinois 2 in Winnebago County; 1,334 acres at I-90 and Irene Road in Boone County; and 590 acres surrounding I-90 and Illinois 23 in McHenry County.

Additionally, Region 1 Planning Council, in partnership with Rockford Area Economic Development Council, has received a state grant to develop a strategic plan to enhance broadband access in Winnebago County that will cultivate primary job growth. While many local governments and community institutions have ramped up their broadband efforts and provide students, workers, and residents with internet connection during the COVID-19 crisis, coordinated efforts for broadband planning,

focusing on access, adoption, and use within our region will be a valuable undertaking for our region. Partners from across the region recognize the importance of broadband as an infrastructure issue, but also as a workforce issue as reliable internet connection is vital for job seekers and teleworkers alike.

Though the Northern Illinois Qualified Sites Program has made six shovel-ready industrial parks in Winnebago and Boone counties more visible to site selectors around the globe, stakeholders expressed a desire to add more QSP sites to the three-county region, especially industrial parks that feature mega-parcels of 500 acres or larger.

McHenry County's 2040 Long Range Transportation plan, adopted in 2014, features a slate of transportation projects that CMAP estimated can boost GRP by \$117 million by 2040. Implementing such long-range planning will improve and expand the current system in critical ways.

Upgrading freight rail lines throughout the region can attract larger manufacturing facilities, especially in industries cited for their growth potential, such as Food Processing and Heavy Machinery and Production Technology. Freight rail is also a key to developing air cargo transloading near RFD.

Stakeholders involved in this CEDS revision have specifically cited extension of passenger rail for Rockford, Belvidere, Marengo, and Huntley, as outlined in the Rebuild Illinois capital plan, as a means to increase mobility and link residents to wider job markets. Additionally, stakeholders cited opportunities to establish micro-transit and rideshare (vanpools) as a means to better connect residents with major job centers and downtowns within the three-county region.

"Lacking state and federal resources for broadband expansion and programming is also cited as a top concern, especially in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic may well accelerate demand for telehealth, distance learning and other services that are dependent on reliable broadband infrastructure."

Threats

The primary infrastructure threat is the need for long-term, sustainable transportation funding at the federal, state, and local levels. Local governments often have limited funding for major projects, and capital funding typically comes from federal or state sources that are dependent on local match funding.

Stakeholders cited crumbling infrastructure as a burden to health systems serving large areas within the three-county region. Lacking state and federal resources for broadband expansion and programming is also cited as a top concern, especially in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic that may well accelerate demand for telehealth, distance learning, and other services that are dependent on reliable broadband infrastructure.

This funding threat can only be overcome by carefully targeting infrastructure investments, integrating those investments with land use planning, increasing travel alternatives (such as public transit), and exploring innovative funding techniques.

While the convergence of road, rail, and air at RFD is a strength and opportunity for the region, other airports around the nation offer similar characteristics. The region's transportation assets could be threatened by competing facilities elsewhere, and must take advantage of these opportunities before they go to other locations. Stakeholders cited Illinois' continued political and financial support for a new suburban Chicago airport in Peotone as a direct threat to the continued growth trajectory of RFD.

Sustainable Economic Development

While stakeholders recognized the need for economic growth, they also cited the need for balanced growth. The urban/rural mix of the three-county region presents opportunities to collaborate on best practice regarding land use and sustainable development. The second goal of this CEDS update is:

Sustainable economic development which aims to increase the quality of life of residents while protecting the land and natural resources that support a resilient region.

Strengths

The Northern Illinois Region has ample land suited and zoned for industrial and commercial development, near major transportation corridors, and is generally accessible to its larger workforce.

Throughout the three-county region, local governments have used state and federal brownfield grants to strip pollutants from old industrial sites and prime the properties for new uses. For example, long-vacant industrial facilities in Rockford, including two former Amerock factories, have been repurposed: one as a downtown Embassy Suites hotel and conference center and the other as a large warehouse and manufacturing center.

An additional strength of the region are local farms that support jobs and crop and livestock production and are vital to the regional economy. Additionally, these farms help maintain the region's agricultural heritage and sense of place.

Additionally, the region's cities provide a strong, accessible market for locally grown goods; and larger markets such as Chicago, Madison, and Milwaukee are easily reachable by highway. Support for locally grown foods, as well as interest in urban agriculture and farmers' markets, are also strengths. More information about the economic impact of Production Agriculture is included in the Targeted Industry section.

Weaknesses

Stakeholders noted that the region needs a more concerted focus needed on infill development, such as the former Motorola site in McHenry. Many of these old factory buildings sit empty because they don't meet today's production standards. Large developments like these present a continued challenge for the region, and solutions that lead to reuse are complex undertakings that require long-term, coordinated efforts and community commitment.

That same commitment will be needed to address the lack of shovel-ready sites in the region. While the region has a few large-scale industrial parks, it lacks sites with fully connected utilities that could meet the demands of any potential big user. Not having such a site was reported as a glaring business attraction weakness of the region.

Across the three-county region, local government revenue to support municipal services is strained, partly due to several

decades of urban sprawl that has lasting consequences. Police, fire, and utility services, for example, are spread over larger areas with a declining tax base, underscoring the need for smart-growth principles and sustainable economic development. The previously mentioned need to extend utilities and infrastructure to create more shovel-ready industrial sites would ensure that future factories and warehouses are appropriately sited and not influenced solely by real estate prices or the availability of tax incentives.

The steady disappearance of farmland is a continuing concern for the region. Farmland covers 500,472 acres, nearly 56% of all land in Winnebago, Boone, and McHenry counties. However, it is slowly disappearing. Winnebago County lost 2% of its farmland and McHenry County lost 11% between 2012 and 2017, according to the most recent USDA Census of Agriculture. Preservation of agricultural land is an especially important priority for Boone County, where the number of farms declined 4.6% from 479 to 457 and total farmland shrank 16% to 113,500 acres during the same five-year period, according to the USDA report.

Like other rust-belt areas of the country, residential and business vacancy are a major weakness and general concern for the region. While vacant facilities do get repurposed, the process is arduous. Additionally, there are major large vacant buildings in the region such as the Barber Colman campus in Winnebago (Rockford) and the Motorola campus in McHenry (Harvard). Large sites like this have their own factors complicating reuse but are major priorities regardless.

Numerous sites remain, as shown by USPS vacancy rates. In Q1 2019, around 4.1% of business addresses in Boone County were listed as vacant, 9% in McHenry County, and 15.3% in Winnebago. As a whole the EDD had a business vacancy rate of 11.8%. While these rates have largely remained the same since the time of the previous CEDS update, stakeholders have prioritized finding strategies to reuse or redevelop existing facilities. One major step would be a simple regional inventory of these vacant commercial sites, which could then be used to prioritize properties for redevelopment, similar to what is being done in the region for housing. Another challenge is finding developers who have an interest in infill development. Stakeholders at the City of Rockford described this as a major barrier to redevelopment and reuse of commercial buildings. Lastly, because of the COVID-19 pandemic and a movement

towards teleworking in traditionally white-collar jobs, many unknowns still remain about the commercial development market, particularly for office-space. Past difficulties with redevelopment, as well as the quickly changing real-estate landscape, will need to inform any future redevelopment strategies within the region.

Opportunities

Stakeholders noted that local governments have an opportunity to attract younger residents and workers to the three-county region by encouraging denser residential development and a more diverse housing stock overall.

Additionally, stakeholders cited the need to link smart growth practices and economic development, when cost effective, and incorporate more sustainability principles into relevant plans, policies, and codes at the municipal and county levels.

Another opportunity presents itself through the identification of new uses for idled industrial sites in the region, particularly Colman Village in southwest Rockford and the former Motorola plant in Harvard. These properties have great historical value and are worth preserving. This will allow the region to attract business, make use of existing infrastructure and utilities, and lessen the property tax burden on others by returning large orphan properties to the tax rolls. Likewise, stakeholders cited the need for a targeted inventory of properties that prioritizes redevelopment potential and community and economic impact to maintain vibrant neighborhoods and commercial and industrial corridors.

Promoting the use of Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) standards was also cited as a means to enhance sustainable development and reduce energy costs for the public and private sectors. Rockford's Prairie Street Brewhouse, the FCA plant in Belvidere, and the Science Center at McHenry County College are among roughly three dozen buildings in the three-county region that have earned the U.S. Green Building Council's LEED certification.

Realizing that the auto industry is pivoting toward electric vehicles and that consumer demand for this new technology is rising, Region 1 Planning Council has begun crafting a regional framework for an electric vehicle charging network for future growth and innovation. The Electric Vehicle Readiness Plan was identified as a regional need through the update of the 2050 Metropolitan Transportation Plan for the Rockford Region (2050 MTP). The plan will help the region identify appropriate future public and private infrastructure investments and potential policy changes to accommodate a robust charging network in Boone, Winnebago, and northeastern Ogle counties.

Finally, stakeholders agree that consumer demand for farmers markets, urban agriculture, and restaurant menus featuring locally-sourced foods is a sign that farm bureaus should work more closely with municipal governments and economic development organizations to establish new local markets for farmers, thus sustaining farming jobs while improving access to healthy foods.

Threats

Exelon Corporation's announcement that the Byron nuclear power plant will close in 2021 is a reminder that the Northern Illinois Region, which has long enjoyed inexpensive electricity, must develop sustainable, alternative energy sources to mitigate the likelihood of higher electricity costs in the future.

During this CEDS process, municipal stakeholders cited the need for balanced development, agriculture and natural areas as key to retaining and attracting young, educated, and skilled workers. Parks, forest preserves, and other natural lands provide a respite from the "hustle and bustle" of an urban work environment. Stakeholders noted that the Northern Illinois Region would be well served to market its natural lands as a workforce strategy, as the COVID-19 pandemic has made more workers realize that telecommuting technology allows them the freedom to live anywhere.



Exelon's planned closure of its Byron nuclear power plant in September 2021 threatens the cheap, clean source of electricity that has made doing business in northern Illinois attractive for more than three decades. The plant generates enough electricity to power more than 2.3 million homes. [RANDY STUKENBURG/ROCKFORD REGISTER STAR]



Pedigree Ovens completed a 1.7MW array in Harvard, IL in 2020. It is expected that the solar power generation will offset 1,456 tons of greenhouse gasses annually. [MCHENNY COUNTY ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION]

Regional Collaboration

Collaboration is the framework for successful implementation of many actions in the tactical plan. Regional collaboration was identified as the first goal of the 2016-2020 CEDS for Winnebago, Boone, and McHenry Counties, and much work has been done to address it over the past five years. Stakeholders said that regional collaboration is still a critical element of the Northern Illinois Region's economic vitality. Thus, the third goal of the 2021-2025 CEDS is:

Collaborative regional economic development efforts, emphasizing communication, coordination, shared assets, and promotion of the region for business investment.

Strengths

Regional partnerships provide the foundation for collaboration. The addition of McHenry County to the Northern Illinois Region was a hallmark of the 2015-2020 CEDS process. Another milestone: the marriage of Economic Development District of Northern Illinois (today known more simply as the Northern Illinois Region EDD) with Rockford Metropolitan Agency for Planning under an umbrella Regional Planning Commission known as Region 1 Planning Council (RPC). RPC serves as a research and planning partner of the economic development cooperative while providing member counties with a more efficient delivery of research, planning, and back-office services.

Additionally, collaboration continues to flourish among the three economic development organizations serving the region – Rockford Area Economic Development Council in Winnebago County, Growth Dimensions in Boone County, and McHenry County Economic Development Corporation in McHenry County.

The three EDOs are using proceeds of an Illinois Department of Transportation grant to craft a marketing strategy to drive industrial development at three key interchanges along Interstate 90, a significant transportation corridor that links the three-county region to the Midwest and the nation as a whole.

Additionally, informal talks began in 2020 among EDOs in a larger seven-county region (Stephenson, Winnebago, Boone, McHenry, Lee, Ogle, DeKalb counties) to discuss post-COVID efforts/challenges, regional branding, and data sharing.

The formation of Northern Illinois Land Bank in Winnebago and Boone counties 2019 is further evidence of regional collaboration. The land bank was established to combat blight and elevate property values by eliminating tax liens and transferring clean titles to new owners who put distressed properties back to productive use. This year, the land bank sold its first property: a boarded-up duplex in Rockford, which had been condemned and vacant for several years. Efforts are underway to add additional geographies to the land bank, including Boone and McHenry Counties.

Weaknesses

While progress has been made on regional collaboration, much remains to be done. Many of the region's strongest collaborations are at the county level. More work is needed to overcome long-standing differences among roles and geographic orientations. Boone and Winnebago counties, for example, have historically identified as part of the Rockford Region while McHenry County has traditionally identified itself as part of the Chicago Region. While McHenry County joined the Northern Illinois Region EDD five years ago, they are served by the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning for federal transportation planning efforts. Boone and Winnebago, on the other hand, are largely served by Region 1 Planning Council for federal transportation planning. However, the city of South Beloit and village of Rockton are served by the State Line Area Transportation Study, the MPO for the Beloit, Wisconsin urbanized area in regards to federal transportation planning.

Stakeholders desire more collaboration among units of local government. Data from the Illinois Department of Revenue indicates that in 2014 the region had 197 different taxing bodies. The vast number of taxing bodies in the region create the potential for greater business regulation and uncoordinated investment. Many of the taxing bodies in the Northern Illinois Region rely on property taxes to sustain their budgets, complicating efforts to address the relationship between property tax rates and the business environment.

The region's "limited/weak branding" was a weakness noted as early as 2012 in the Rockford Region Strategic Diversification Plan (the first incarnation of the region's rolling, five-year CEDS). That plan concluded that the Rockford region "must work proactively to enhance its marketing program and improve the image it projects to the outside world." Boone and McHenry counties do not suffer as much from an image problem, though the consensus among stakeholders who participated in the recent SWOT exercise was that three-county region would be well served by a stronger marketing/branding effort.

Opportunities

One opportunity that can contribute to improved collaboration among economic development agencies is the more efficient use of limited funding to get a bigger “bang” on their marketing and business attraction efforts. Additionally, regional branding can help promote the region’s business strengths and shared proximity to Chicago, particularly when communicating with international businesses. Strengthening partnerships among governments and economic development organizations would provide an opportunity to reduce redundancies and provide more efficient use of government funds as requested by stakeholders and public input.

Finally, communities outside the three counties participating in this plan have expressed interest in collaboration efforts. The region’s public and private sectors are able to quickly collaborate when facing a pressing workforce need, as evidenced by Rock Valley College and Northern Illinois University (based in DeKalb County) four-year engineering program in Rockford aimed at serving the region’s aviation and aerospace industry. Similar to the Rock Valley College/NIU engineering partnership, many initiatives contained in this CEDS will have the opportunity to cross outside the Northern Illinois Region.

“Regional branding can help promote the region’s business strengths and shared proximity to Chicago, particularly when communicating with international businesses.”

Threats

Reduction in government and private sector funding is a primary threat to enhanced regional collaboration. This threat can come from shifting priorities in the ever-changing political and economic landscape. All collaborative efforts must demonstrate efficient and effective use of funds and be served by basic shared values to guide decision making.

While local governments within the three-county region have ample access to revolving loan funds, tax rebate programs, state and federal tax credit resources, and other incentives to attract business, a nagging “culture of competition” among local jurisdictions and a failure to agree on how to apply such incentives threatens to undermine business attraction efforts at a regional level.

Routine communication and deliberate attempts to collaborate with an eye toward even “small wins”, such as consolidation of services between organizations or alignment during strategic planning efforts, is critical to strengthening relationships within the three-county region and preventing further competition amongst regional partners. Care must be taken to ensure all parties’ interests are represented, and that any plan for joint action has sufficient buy-in.

Efficient Business Development

The business development activities of the Northern Illinois Region's economic development organizations and governments can help the private sector grow the regional economy. As demonstrated by the successes of the 2016-2020 CEDS, partnerships with businesses can reduce the barriers for growth and encourage investment in the region. This is the fourth goal of the 2021-2025 CEDS:

Efficient business development, expansion, diversification, job growth, and innovation throughout the region.

Strengths

The Northern Illinois Region is a center of manufacturing excellence with more than double the U.S. concentration of manufacturing employment. This strength can be a competitive advantage in attracting domestic and international manufacturers, particularly those in the supply chain of industries that maintain a strong presence here.

Long a leader in automotive, production technology, and metalworking, the region's manufacturing sector has gradually pivoted toward advanced manufacturing disciplines. The region's longstanding culture of innovation has helped fuel this pivot, evidenced by Collins Aerospace's \$50 million investment in "The Grid," a high-tech research and development lab at its Rockford plant where aerospace leaders will develop next generation hybrid and electric jet propulsion systems.

Meanwhile, capital investments from the region's health systems since 2016 are nearing \$1 billion, and a surge in air freight business has created hundreds of aviation and logistics jobs at Chicago Rockford International Airport. Highlights of the region's business attraction and retention wins during the last five years include:

- The largest employer in the region, Fiat Chrysler Automobiles, restarted its Belvidere Assembly Plant in June, bringing back the 3,800 workers it laid off in March to produce the 2021 Jeep Cherokee model. In 2019, the plant eliminated a third shift and about 1,400 jobs amid dwindling demand for the Cherokee.
- United Parcel Service and Amazon Air have expanded operations at Chicago Rockford International Airport, adding more than 1,000 jobs in the last two years.
- Camfil invested \$13 million in 2019 to expand its Crystal Lake manufacturing plant and purchase new equipment. The McHenry County manufacturer plans to hire 90 employees over the next five years as it expands its air filtration and pollution control product lines.
- A surge of capital investment in hospitals and clinics has significantly enhanced the Northern Illinois Region as a regional health care destination.
- The 2019 debut of the six-story, 194-bed Javon Bea Hospital and Physician Clinic-Riverside in Rockford represented a \$500 million investment from Mercyhealth and was the largest construction project in the history

of Winnebago County. Mercyhealth will have invested \$70 million by the end of 2020 to modernize Javon Bea Hospital-Rockton Avenue on Rockford's westside, and is primed to build a \$100 million, 13-bed "microhospital" in the City of Crystal Lake in McHenry County.

- OSF Healthcare added 78 larger, private patient rooms and space for a pharmacy and women's services as part of an \$85 million expansion at OSF St. Anthony Medical Center in Rockford. This expansion was completed in 2018.
- UW Health is adding a 110,000-square-foot women and children's patient tower to SwedishAmerican Hospital in Rockford, along with significant modernization of other areas of the hospital. This phased, \$130 million investment is in addition to three clinics that UW Health has built since 2017 representing another \$30 million worth of capital investment.

Marked growth in manufacturing exports has helped the region become more resilient to economic downturns. Key export industries are transportation equipment manufacturing (particularly automotive and aerospace), metalworking, and production technology. The following business climate aspects also make the region attractive:

- In 2019, electricity prices in Illinois were the lowest in the Midwest for the seventh consecutive year, according to the U.S. Energy Information Administration.
- Nicor Gas is among the lowest cost gas utilities in the state of Illinois and is among the lowest cost gas utilities in the United States, according to the company.

Moreover, while the region suffers from negative publicity about the Illinois' business climate (see below), it does have some tax advantages. Specifically, the lack of an inventory tax and personal property tax benefits the warehousing/distribution and manufacturing sectors. Also, while parts of the region have high property tax rates, relative lower land values reduce business costs.

“The region’s reliance on certain key manufacturing sectors – particularly Automotive, Metalworking, and Production Technology – makes it more susceptible to economic downturns. For example, during the Great Recession, the region lost almost 11,000 manufacturing jobs versus 17,000 jobs combined in other sectors”

Weaknesses

The region’s reliance on certain key manufacturing sectors – particularly Automotive, Metalworking, and Production Technology – makes it more susceptible to economic downturns. For example, during the Great Recession, the region lost almost 11,000 manufacturing jobs versus 17,000 jobs combined in other sectors. Some parts of the region are particularly vulnerable to the loss of a single employer, particularly Belvidere. Other areas, such as McHenry County, benefit from a diverse employment base.

Perhaps the most significant business development weakness in the Northern Illinois Region is the state’s poor business climate reputation. For example, Illinois was ranked 37th in Forbes’ 2019 “Best States for Business,” up from the 40th spot it held in 2014. The state ranked even lower – 45th place – when the business magazine examined prospects for business growth in all 50 states. Illinois’s corporate income tax, worker’s compensation rates, and local property taxes are frequently cited as weaknesses.

Since 2017, Moody’s has rated the Illinois’ credit lowest in the country at Baa3 – a function of the state’s looming pension crisis and ramshackle finances and a phenomenon that forces Illinois to spend more revenue on debt-related interest. The vast number of Illinois government taxing bodies – 6,918 (only Texas has more) – exacerbates the negative perception of the state’s tax and regulatory environment.

Stakeholders agree on the value of maintaining a competitive taxation policy, though power to set that policy is not entirely in the control of local governments. The state is responsible for income and corporate tax rates along with the overall tax structure that emphasizes revenue generation from sales and property taxes to support local government services.

Across the three counties, sales tax rates range from 7.75% to 9.75% with the city of Rockford at the top of that range. However, in communities north of the Wisconsin border, including Beloit, Walworth, and Janesville, the sales tax rate is 5.5%. Stakeholders agree on the value of maintaining a competitive taxation policy at the local, county, and state level that allows the region to compete nationally and internationally. The region is competing against not just other communities in Illinois, but those throughout the nation and world.

The competitive nature of the region’s property tax rates must take into consideration trends in the tax base, not just nominal rates. Tax base fluctuations inherently impact tax rates. Areas of low growth in the property tax base are at risk for higher property tax rates in the future if the cost of public services outpaces growth in the base. On a positive note, the 2019 property tax base across the three-county region, as measured by Equalized Assessed Value, reached or surpassed levels not seen since 2011.

- Winnebago County EAV grew 6% to \$4.84 billion in 2019 compared to 2018.
- Boone County’s total EAV increased 5.3% to nearly \$1.1 billion in 2019 compared to 2018.
- McHenry County EAV grew 5.5% to nearly \$8.9 billion in 2019 compared to 2018.

However, a closer look at the numbers shows that residential EAV growth is driving this trend throughout the three-county region. Tax base growth due to industry reveals smaller gains, a sign that economic development efforts in the region must focus on attracting more industry to reduce the property tax burden on homeowners. It’s important to note that vast majority of the region’s property tax base is residential: 71 percent in Boone, 75 percent in Winnebago, and 83 percent in McHenry County. This structure is problematic and feeds into the perception that property taxes are quite high because residential property owners shoulder much of the property tax burden. Pursuing policies to encourage industrial economic growth and increase the number of businesses in Northern Illinois would help address this burden.



The Embassy Suites by Hilton Rockford Riverfront and adjoining conference center opened in downtown Rockford in 2020. The \$87.5 million project involved redevelopment of a blighted 13-story factory tower overlooking the Rock River. [SCOTT P. YATES/ROCKFORD REGISTER STAR]

Opportunities

Stakeholders noted that our region has a good relationship with Northern Europe when it comes to foreign direct investment. There are opportunities to continue to leverage that relationship, however, local governments and economic development professionals need to be cognizant of the geopolitical world. This understanding would guide everything from branding, to general communications, to tailoring incentives.

On the subject of incentives, there may be an opportunity to explore and diversify the suite of incentives offered to businesses interested in relocating here. CMAP's "Improving Local Development Incentives" report (released in September 2020) provides examples of best practices for incentives and could be a valuable resource for exploring and/or retooling incentive structures.

Threats

At the time of the SWOT exercise, local government stakeholders reported that COVID-19 had delayed many projects, derailing internal timelines for development. While operations may be able to get back on track sooner than initially thought, there was an immediate effect on business development. Another major threat related to the pandemic was the limited federal financial resources, particularly the perceived lack of accounting and transparency of CARES Act funding at the federal level. With the waiting times associated with state and federal support, the fear that the new market conditions could erase the gains made post-2008 recession, negative effects on small business and their role in the local economy, thin resources at the local level, will have a lasting impact on the region. This has led to a great deal of unease surrounding the long-term effects of COVID-19.

One threat that existed prior to COVID-19 is the perception of the state and business attraction competition with neighboring regions. It is largely understood that lower development costs are offered in Wisconsin, and that economic development professionals must find workarounds to offset those costs in order to equalize any relocation proposition. Tangential to this is the financial state of Illinois as a whole. The state is experiencing a "wealth-flight" where money, whether it be residents or businesses, are moving out of the region. Interstate politics and competition is a complex issue with many issues being out of the control of local governments and professionals, but stakeholders noted that some of the effects can be mitigated to an extent with incentives and marketing, while still avoiding race-to-the-bottom situations.



Mercyhealth's \$505 million Javon Bea Hospital-Riverside, the largest construction project in the history of Winnebago County, opened in northeast Rockford in 2019.
[IMAGE PROVIDED BY MERCYHEALTH]



Camfil, a Swedish air filtration manufacturer, added 50,000 square feet to its 110,000-square-foot Crystal Lake plant as part of a \$13 million investment in 2018.
[MCHENRY TIMES]

Quality of Life

Stakeholders noted that while quality of life is a somewhat difficult term to define, it directly affects economic development efforts and it is both a strength and a challenge. Economic Development and Quality of Life are closely linked. The fifth goal of the 2021-25 CEDS is:

A higher quality of life enhanced by the region's sense of place, livability, diversity, community health, and creative environments.

Strengths

The 2010-15 CEDS identified “proximity to Chicago, Madison, and Milwaukee; and quality of life assets such as affordable housing and real estate, the low cost of living, parks, rivers, and green space” as key strengths of the Northern Illinois Region. A decade later, stakeholders involved in this CEDS revision say this statement still rings true. This sentiment especially resonates in McHenry County, as many of its residents live there in order to enjoy Chicago’s job opportunities and cultural and recreational attractions while maintaining a smaller-city or rural quality of life. Each of the three counties has a rich diversity of cultural attractions and sports and recreational amenities. The region is home to four state parks and more than 30,000 acres of forest preserves and conservation areas. The Rock, Kishwaukee, and Fox River corridor provide water recreation opportunities.

In many ways, the Northern Illinois Region enjoys an affordable cost of living. For instance, the Rockford MSA had a cost of living 89.6% of the U.S. average in 2019. This is owed in part to lower housing and utility expenses. While McHenry County’s cost of living is higher, it was cited by stakeholders as lower than neighboring Chicago, providing a competitive advantage in attracting residents.

A key component of this lower cost of living is housing prices, which also track below Chicago and the nation. The region features a mixture of urban, suburban, and rural areas. That diversity can be attractive to residents, businesses, and visitors.

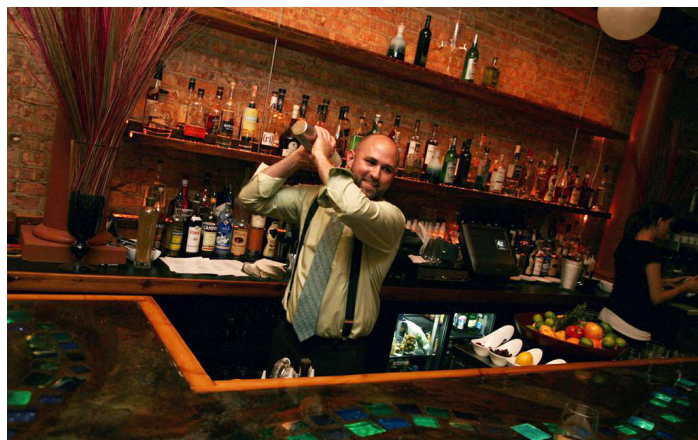
The region has several award-winning health systems that provide a wide range of care, as well as employment opportunities. As previously noted, all health systems serving the three-county region have heavily invested in capital expansions in recent years to provide better access to high-level healthcare, providing residents from outside the region with even greater incentive to come here for healthcare.

The region’s cultural and recreational attractions are a major strength. More than 4.2 million people attended sporting events at Rockford-area indoor and outdoor sports complexes in 2018, including many tournaments for out-of-area teams. Of those, 2.9 million were at the Mercyhealth Sportscore Complexes & Indoor Sports Center, which expanded in 2017. These facilities provide both a high-caliber amenity for regional residents and a boost to the regional economy with tourism dollars. The region is also home to the Rockford IceHogs, the minor league affiliate to the NHL’s Chicago Blackhawks, which attracted nearly 160,000

in attendance in 2018. The region has numerous theaters, music venues, and festivals that also attract visitors and benefit residents. Notably, the Boone County Fair is the largest within the state, which attracted nearly 208,000 visitors in 2018.



Tour de North End is an annual neighborhood celebration in Rockford which attracts bicyclists from around the region to tour local businesses.
[ROCKFORD AREA CONVENTION AND VISITORS BUREAU]



Residents report that downtown nightlife has been on the upswing. Pictured: Social Urban Bar in downtown Rockford.
[ROCKFORD AREA CONVENTION AND VISITORS BUREAU]

Weaknesses

Net migration out of Illinois remains high and further population declines are projected. This phenomenon is a particular weakness in terms of the perception of the quality of life in the Northern Illinois Region. During the past 10 years, Rockford — once the second-largest city in Illinois outside Chicago — has fallen from Illinois' third-largest community to fifth.

The Rockford MSA of Boone and Winnebago Counties lost 20,375 people — a 5.8% population decline — from 2010 to 2018 — the third largest population decline in the Midwest, according to an October 2019 Business Insider report. Conversely, McHenry County added nearly 47,000 residents — an 18% population increase — during the same period, according to Census estimates. Nevertheless, Illinois has about 160,000 fewer residents today compared to 2010, a 1.2% decline. Illinois could have a smaller voice in Washington and access to fewer federal funds to improve the region's quality of life if this trend holds true after the completion of the 2020 Census.

Cost of living is a strength of the region. However, there are some concerns when looking at the cost of living components and comparative Q3 2019 data from the Council for Community and Economic Research (C2ER). The Rockford MSA, comprised of Winnebago and Boone Counties has a cost of living index of 89.6, where 100 is the national average. Housing costs are largely the reason for this affordability, though this component of the index presumably includes both renters and owners. There is a growing concern for rental affordability and the potential increase of rent burdened householders in the region — those who commit over a third of their income on rent. Additionally, both the transportation and healthcare components of the index are slightly above the national baseline, indicating that while the services may be quality, residents generally pay more for them. Lastly, the Chicago MSA had a cost of living index of 121.9 during the same period and while McHenry is included in this index, it does point to the relative affordability to our region, despite its proximity to Chicago.

Stakeholders continue to identify the challenge of supporting healthy lifestyles for residents. While the region has strong health care systems, Winnebago County — the region's most urban county — has particularly low health scores. In County Health Rankings, which is a standardized aggregate of health related measurables within life expectancy, quality of life, clinical care, health behaviors, socioeconomic factors, and physical environment metrics, it ranked 92nd in Illinois in Health Outcomes and 97th in Health Factors out of 102 counties, both of which are understood to correlate with the county's unemployment and poverty indicators that must be addressed. This is in stark contrast to Boone and McHenry counties, which ranked 18th and 5th respectively on Health Outcomes in the state. Addressing the social determinants of health has been a major focus for regional health organizations and departments.

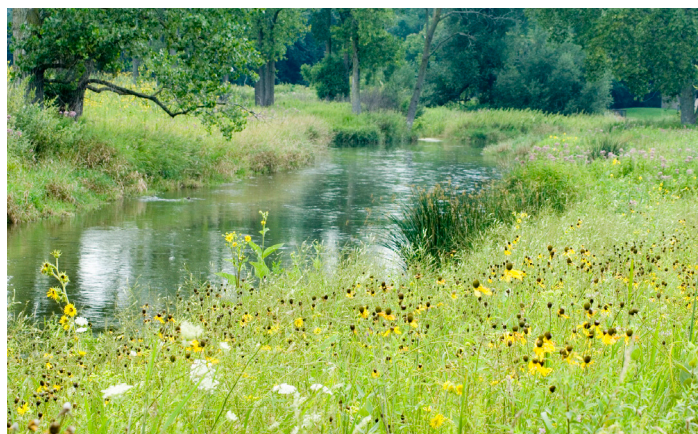
Opportunities

Pursuing strategies to leverage the region's numerous cultural and recreational amenities would strengthen the economy by attracting residents and visitors and adding more money into the regional economy.

The addition of loft apartments, a hotel, and an indoor sports complex in downtown Rockford is drawing residents and visitors looking for an urban living experience and recreation opportunities. While there are still many vacant, eyesore properties and underused office buildings in need of repurposing, the redevelopment of these sites could continue to attract even more residents looking for an urban setting with a lower cost of living than other large cities.

The region's balance of urban, rural, and natural areas is attractive to many residents, and stakeholders noted that the region's forest preserves, river corridors, and bike trails that span all three counties can benefit from joint marketing and promotional campaigns. A roughly 2-mile extension of the Long Prairie Trail from its eastern terminus at Boone McHenry County Line Road through Chemung and Harvard in McHenry County is an infrastructure investment that would enhance residents' quality of life while providing visitors another incentive to come to this region.

Additionally, joint marketing of "small town" events and attractions throughout the Northern Illinois Region could enhance visitor spending to the more rural parts of the region that are often overlooked by Rockford, Belvidere, and larger municipalities that possess an array of cultural attractions.



The region is home to more than 3,000 acres of forest preserves and conservation areas such as Glacial Park in McHenry County. [ENJOY ILLINOIS]

Threats

Threats related to quality of life are largely wrapped up in topics previously discussed, including continued negative publicity about the region surrounding issues of crime, poverty, and safety, development that alters the fundamental landscape of the region character, and uncertainty regarding state finances due to its implications for local tax policy.

Despite the mix of urban, suburban, and rural settlement patterns in our region, stakeholders did express the concern that there needs to be a greater diversity of housing stock within the region. Like many of regions, the lack of affordable multi-family housing can have negative cascading effects on

supporting a workforce and building a healthy middle-class.

An ongoing threat is the far-reaching impacts of COVID-19 on the region's ability to attract private investment, grow jobs, and fund infrastructure that will drive both of those efforts. The resulting fundamental paradigm shift will affect quality of life and any efforts to adapt economic development to the impacts of COVID-19 will need to keep impacts on the quality of life of the region in mind.

Tourism

For this iteration of the CEDS, there was enough discussion around a “visitor-based economy” to warrant a new goal focused on tourism. Prior to confirming this as a new goal, the subject came up in discussion of the other goals. Many strategies previously within the quality of life goal are now specified in this final goal of the 2021-2025 CEDS:

Promotion of the natural environment, cultural and recreational amenities, and our industrial and agricultural legacy to develop and support a visitor-based economy.

Strengths

The economic impact of tourism, and the work of the tourism boards in our region, the Rockford Area Visitors and Convention Bureau (RACVB) and Visit McHenry County, were identified by stakeholders as regional strengths. Boone County tourism efforts are undertaken by various partners, including Northern Illinois Tourism Development, Boone County Conservation District, local park districts, Granges of Boone County, and Belvidere Chamber of Commerce. In 2019, RACVB reported that the tourism sector in Winnebago County grew by 4.3%, with visitors spending more than \$409 million while visiting the County. In 2018, Visit McHenry reported that visitor spending in McHenry County had increased 3.6%, attracting \$256 million in local spending.

As mentioned in the quality of life section, stakeholders see one of the region's greatest strengths is the presence of outdoor amenities. These include neighborhood parks, forest preserves, state parks, arboretums, and trails. All counties have extensive lists of these attractions, which make up one of the defining features of the region's visitor-based economy. Stakeholders reported that our greenways, particularly around our rivers, are attractions for Chicago-based visitors, who don't have to travel far or out-of-state for outdoor recreation. The retail environment was also determined to be a strength, offering both large retail stores and smaller local businesses – including boutique stores within main street districts.

Also mentioned in the quality of life section were the cultural

amenities provided by our region. These includes sports, major events, and arts. It's also important to note that visitors include both those from within the region and those from outside.



Annual events such as the Boone County Fair, one of the largest county fairs in Illinois, are significant attractors for both local residents and outside visitors. [ENJOY ILLINOIS]

Weaknesses

One of the big weaknesses of our region when it comes to fostering a visitor-based economy is the lack of knowledge of our region by outsiders. Promotion of our region is an ongoing effort, that needs to be completed not only by the tourism boards, but also by other community organizations and residents. Another weakness related to tourism is the greater association of this area with Chicagoland and not as its own distinct region. Stakeholders also mentioned that it can sometimes be difficult to compete with Wisconsin's outdoor recreation attractions, despite our region having similar lakes, trails, and forest preserves.

One other potential weakness that was brought up was the feel that there are too many tourism and regional marketing organizations. Consolidation, separation, or communication of the specific roles that individual organizations could be beneficial for both efficiency and cost-effectiveness.

Opportunities

When talking with the Rockford Area Visitors and Convention Bureau, an important facet of our region's visitor-based economy was brought up in regards to economic resiliency – that is, while many indoor attractions, events, and restaurants have suffered greatly under COVID-19 due to social-distancing and public safety guidelines, outdoor recreation opportunities were far less affected. Many of the same guidelines which affected indoor gatherings were not as present or jarring to outdoor operations. Outdoor activities were largely seen as safer and easier to adapt to new guidelines. This is not to say that our tourism industry was left unscathed, far from it. However, our commitment to outdoor amenities presents an opportunity to continue attracting visitors to our region, relative to other regions that have a reliance on indoor amenities.

While the region has great parks and recreational opportunities, stakeholders noted that there is room for improvement. It was suggested that many opportunities exist specifically in the Belvidere Park District, by building upon the small-town pride within Boone County. Additionally, many main street and downtown areas have seen success in arts-based initiatives such as public murals, which add to community character while supporting local artists. This is something that stakeholders noted could be further developed.

The region is fortunate enough to have three large rivers running through it – the Rock, Kishwaukee, and Fox. Riverfront development is a clear choice for fostering a visitor-based economy. Various riverfront amenities exist already, however, stakeholders mentioned that the region often takes these attractions for granted and that these assets should be leveraged further. Further development of Davis Park in Rockford and river front parks in various McHenry County communities present opportunities for further attraction.

While development of new tourism attractions is an opportunity,

so too is an expanded approach towards branding. The Steering Committee suggested a shift in branding strategy to capitalize on recreational and quality of life amenities. For example, shifting from a “nice to have” to a “need to have” approach can have long term benefits for both determining what tourism to develop and how to attract visitors. Tourism boards remain the best organizations to guide regional branding efforts, however, this approach to branding would be beneficial for all organizations.

In Rockford, there has been a trend, both implicitly and overtly, to guide a “back to downtown” movement. This is seen in many ways – from the success of Rockford City Market, downtown business and restaurant support, community institutional presence, major downtown developments, and an increase in housing options. These movements, while supported in some ways by local government, are community-led movements. There is a wide perception that the region, and specifically the largest city within the region, was a far different place as recently as 10 years ago. There is an opportunity to build upon these successes and to keep responding to the demands of residents and visitors in value-added and equitable ways.

Threats

Lack of funding was listed as a prominent threat that has been magnified by the COVID-19 pandemic. It can be hard to justify funding for tourism and marketing efforts in the region when the sector as a whole may be seen as less profitable due to a decrease in people being able to seek entertainment. Despite this, our region's tourism industry can be more resilient to these patterns, and efforts to sustain the industry should be supported however possible.

Mentioned previously throughout this document, one of the most persistent threats to anything related to attraction of businesses, residents, or visitors is the negative view of Illinois and our region. This has been a pressing challenge for pursuing any improvements to a visitor-based economy and overcoming perception is a complex task, especially when there are grains of truth among inaccuracies. Various organizations in the region take on outreach efforts helping to paint the region in a positive light. It could be that successes within our region will speak for themselves, so long as our region continues to improve itself.

Funding is also a concern for tourism, as declining tax revenues threaten to diminish investments, commitments, and returns. The issue of funding has manifested itself in recent plans by park districts and will continue to be an ongoing threat that the region should be mindful of.

V. Resiliency

The 2021-2025 CEDS has incorporated economic resilience throughout the planning process and within this document. Various topics were discussed as ways for responding to regional “shocks” or adapting to a changing world. Resiliency discussions are not new to the region, as past CEDS processes acknowledged the resilience of the regional economy as vital during the Great Recession, and the vision of the 2016-2020 CEDS added “resilient economic base” to its language. This CEDS keeps that vision.

Below are brief summaries of how economic resilience has been addressed in this document. First, as updates to previous resilience discussions, and second, as new discussions which took place. All of which is reflected within the action plan.

Updates to 2016 Resiliency Discussions

- Region 1 Planning Council supports local governments, economic development agencies, and community institutions with technical assistance and data analysis related to economic disruption. While RPC has been providing assistance to these groups, it is the intent that the RPC will assist with the collection of more economic disruption data going forward. This assistance includes working with individual agencies, as well as a convening body to discuss regional economic disruption and strategies.
- It was expressed during the CEDS development process that the Rockford Region Strategic Diversification Plan may need an update. Partly due to the age of the document and its current recommendations, but also due to the changed economic realities of the post-COVID landscape. This may also manifest as an updated in-depth targeted industry analysis, reflected as an action item in the tactical plan.
- Building upon the region’s successful promotion of exports by its manufacturers, there has been an important effort to increase economic resilience, which continues in this CEDS. This is evidenced in moving forward a regional group consisting of economic development organizations, both within our EDD and in neighboring counties, with an expressed emphasis on promotion of our region.
- Strategies to improve workforce development and education around the region’s targeted industries are continued in this CEDS. Succession planning is still a challenge, though programming from various organizations are making concerted efforts. Credentials and better connecting our workforce to opportunities has been another large effort. In 2019, RPC, in partnership with Rockford Areas Economic Development Council, Rock Valley College, and the Workforce Connection undertook a Coordinated Workforce Study, surveying businesses and analyzing the needs for middle-skills credentialing within the region. The study is being used to inform

talent pipeline programming through the Workforce Connection, RVC, and K-12.

- The steering committee for this process recognized the interaction between quality of life and attracting and retaining young families. Having young families and young workers will counteract the effects of retirements and outmigration that still persists as a threat to the regional economy and ability to rebound. In addition to quality of life strategies, tourism was separated out as an element for attraction and retention of residents. Lastly, diversity and equity, while a difficult topic to address in an economic development plan, was noted as an important regional commitment which affects public perception of the region, community trust in institutions, and ensuring that all residents are able to participate in our economy and society to achieve their goals.
- Like the previous CEDS, the land use strategies of this CEDS include elements to address the environmental resilience by preventing flooding, groundwater depletion, and associated risks. There is a recognition that economic recovery and environmental recovery should be tied in the aftermath of disaster events, and emergency-response professionals from each county can share best practice and planning efforts while aligning with economic recovery programs.

In addition to discussing existing resiliency topics from previous CEDS processes, new discussions surrounding resiliency took place for this update. Examples are detailed below.

COVID-19

This CEDS update took place in 2020, at the height of the pandemic caused by the COVID-19 disease. It became clear early in the year that this global health crisis would quickly contribute to a global economic crisis, trickling down to our own local economy, businesses, and workers. Pandemics such as this would certainly qualify as a major disruption to the economic base, and thus, was an impossible-to-ignore backdrop of our CEDS Steering Committee discussions and planning process. Partners were quick to discuss ways to curb the effects of the pandemic, recover our economy, and build up our regional environment not only to withstand future shocks, but to adapt to a changed post-COVID world.

One example includes connecting business to recovery programs. While ensuring that businesses are connected to local, state, and federal business assistance programs has always been vital to the community, the steering committee expressed that this now has to be an “all-in” effort. Economic development organizations, chambers, local governments, and the RPC itself have made efforts to facilitate these connections to the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act, and other programs/initiatives through direct grants, recapitalization of RLFs, diversifying

supplier networks, etc. All of these are initiatives that the region would need federal assistance with, and would be expected to be pursued as the region recovers from the pandemic.

As a result of the pandemic, residents were advised to stay home as much as possible. Many workers, particularly those in office oriented jobs, began to work remotely from home. The education system was also thrown into flux as the majority of districts transitioned to remote or online learning. Some workforce training programs are becoming remote, in addition to health services (telehealth). The region may look for efforts attract remote workers to live in the region while they telecommute. All of this is to say that businesses, institutions, and residents are in need of increased broadband services. Enhancing broadband networks was a strategy in the 2016 CEDS, and that strategy has been greatly expanded upon to meet these needs.

Even before the pandemic, the region's communities have been moving towards providing mental and behavioral health services, in addition to quality physical treatment. EDOs and business representatives in particular expressed the need to supply workers, especially those deemed as "essential workers", with adequate behavioral and mental health services as a response to labor-related stresses caused in part, but not exclusively, by the pandemic.

While these examples are not exclusive of the strategies discussed during the CEDS process, they are reflected within our action plan. Economic recovery assistance is expected to aggressively continue throughout the 5-years of this plan.

Automation

Automation will be a key technological trend to watch for in our region. Industries such as manufacturing, healthcare, and logistics – all prominent and growing in our region – have the potential for a complete upheaval of its workforce and technological needs due to advances in automation and other technology such as artificial intelligence.

Discussions took place between community colleges about the future of automation and preparing our workforce for shifts in human roles within increasingly automated industries. For example, Rock Valley College and McHenry County College's commitment to Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) and related programs, as well as inclusion of adaptive curriculums within new Advanced Technology Center campuses for both colleges can make our region proactive to any potential disruptions to our core industries caused by automation and technology.

Sustainable Infrastructure

The committee discussed energy incentives provided by utility companies, and how use of these are expected to expand in the coming years. These incentives not only play a role in physical infrastructure, but also in marketing the region for business attraction. On the land use and environmental planning scale, green infrastructure was suggested as a general goal for pursuing new development, with an aim towards striking balances between feasibility, cost, and impact.

An emerging priority for the region is looking at renewable energy infrastructure in light of recent events indicating a reduction clean energy generation in Northern Illinois. Inexpensive energy prices are a competitive advantage for business attraction efforts to support local industry development. As renewable energy consumption becomes a mandatory component of operations of industry, the area would benefit from its own renewable energy generation infrastructure both in supporting its industry and in its communities cost of living. Likewise, as a major source of economic development funding from tipping fees, Winnebago County's landfill continues to potentially be at concerning level of available capacity. An investment into an industrial campus with proximity to Chicago Rockford International Airport, the Winnebago County landfill, and the Rock River Water Reclamation District, with a focus on renewable energy generation. Supportive waste-to-energy private industry developments, could anchor a new rail-served industrial park that would allow for infrastructure which could support future industry.

The impact of climate change was one of the backdrops surrounding discussions of green infrastructure and sustainable development. Our region in particular has, and will likely continue to see, an increased frequency of flooding and weather extremities such as droughts, tornadoes, and derechos. Climate migration may also impact our region as a non-coastal area. While there is no silver bullet for global and dynamic systems issues, economic development policies can be one of the cogs in proactive preparation for climate change.

VI. Tactical Plan

Below is the tactical plan for the 2021-2025 Update to the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy. Over the course of two months, the steering committee developed these strategies and actions which our region will pursue over the course of the next five years. The action, responsible parties, and general timeline are detailed.

The timelines for the actions are grouped into short-term (1-year), mid-term (5-year), and ongoing goals. Priority projects, listed in section VII., includes more detailed timelines.

This table represents the strategic economic development roadmap for our region. It is intended to be a dynamic reference, and such is subject to change during annual updates to the CEDS as our region progresses.

Goal 1			
A full range of infrastructure, with emphasis on transportation, utilities, and communication in order to successfully meet the needs of the region's businesses.			
Strategy 1.1: Continue working with Chicago – Rockford International Airport (RFD) to expand air cargo, passenger service, and airport logistics-related development in the region.			
Action		Responsible	Timeline
1.1A	Promote business use of airport passenger service and use of UPS next-day cargo capabilities, using a “Consider Rockford First” type model.	Chicago-Rockford International Airport (RFD), Cargo companies	Ongoing
1.1B	Recruit students and workers, including minority youth, for RVC aircraft maintenance school and Maintenance Repair and Overhaul companies at the airport.	RFD, RVC, aviation and aerospace employers	5-year
1.1C	Support Rockford airport officials on cargo, MRO, and other development opportunities through economic development efforts, incentives, and capital procurement for infrastructure upgrades.	City and County governments and RVC	Ongoing
1.1D	Improve amenities and infrastructure at Rockford Global Trade Park and the Kishwaukee and 11th Street gateways, and make available parcels shovel-ready and marketable for industries that would benefit from proximity to Chicago Rockford International Airport.	City of Rockford, Winnebago County, RAEDC	5-year
Strategy 1.2: Upgrade and extend freight rail service in key corridors to boost rail-reliant industrial development.			
Action		Responsible	Timeline
1.2A	Upgrade Illinois Railway line from Davis Junction to Rockford, and identify possible link to Rochelle to connect to an intermodal hub facility.	RPC, Illinois Tollway, Winnebago County, Ogle County	5-year
1.2B	Create large, rail-served industrial development at Rockford Global Trade Park – South.	RPC, City of Rockford, Illinois Railway, Winnebago County	5-year
1.2C	Upgrade Union Pacific rail line through McHenry, Boone, and Winnebago Counties.	RPC, Union Pacific, IDOT, CMAP	5-year
1.2D	Conduct freight study to identify infrastructure needs of major regional freight corridors.	RPC	5-year
Strategy 1.3: Increase mobility options for each county's suite of transit services, including innovative mobility services to link residents and workforce to wider labor, employment, and recreational markets and a passenger rail intercity connection.			
Action		Responsible	Timeline
1.3A	Examine models for developing, expanding, and/or coordinating various public transit services provided by PACE, RMTD, and others, including bus rapid transit, demand response/micro-transit options, and rideshare programs to major employment centers, passenger rail stations, and downtowns in order to increase convenience and efficiency of services.	RPC, CMAP, RMTD, RTA/PACE, SMTD, Employers	5-Year

1.3B	Establish rideshare program in Rockford MSA with goal of developing demand for van or bus service to jobs elsewhere in the region and to Chicago area.	RPC, RMTD	5-Year
1.3C	Pursue steps to develop passenger rail service for Rockford, Belvidere, Marengo, and Huntley as outlined in Rebuild Illinois capital plan.	State, IDOT, RPC, Local Governments	5-Year
1.3D	Support MCRide service in McHenry County and Boone County Public Transportation in Boone County, and explore coordination of demand-response transit services with rural/non-urbanized portions of the three counties to build regional connectivity.	Boone County, McHenry County, Winnebago County, IDOT, CMAP, RPC	Ongoing
1.3E	Examine other services to provide regional connectivity in concert with regional mobility plans with emphases on service to employment centers and workforce training.	RPC, County governments	5-Year
1.3F	Expand existing transit district boundaries and examine models for sustainable local funding to comprehensively serve regional service needs	IDOT, RPC, RMTD, Rockford, Loves Park, Machesney Park, Belvidere, Winnebago County, Boone County	Ongoing
1.3G	Seek to alleviate perceptions of public transit in the region, particularly Boone County Council on Aging's bus service through re-branding or other efforts	Boone County, Boone County Council on Aging, Local Governments	5-year

Strategy 1.4: Leverage the region's interstates and arterials as an economic catalyst, while improving overall highway access for businesses and residents.

Action		Responsible	Timeline
1.4A	Upgrade and extend the necessary infrastructure to develop land around the Irene Road/Interstate 90 interchange in Boone County for advanced manufacturing and logistics.	RPC, City of Belvidere, Boone County, Growth Dimensions, Illinois Tollway	1-year
1.4B	Continue supporting the completion of CMAP's regionally significant projects, particularly those within McHenry or in proximity, as catalysts for economic development and increased regional mobility.	McHenry County, Illinois Tollway, CMAP	Ongoing
1.4C	Improve infrastructure around the US 20/Illinois 2 interchange area to provide better access and services to Rockford Global Trade Park developments.	City of Rockford, Winnebago County, IDOT, RPC	1-year
1.4D	Advocate for and identify funds for Interstate 39 improvements and reconstruction, particularly to support the growing logistics services within the I-39 corridor.	RPC, IDOT, Win. County, Ogle County	1-year
1.4E	Identify and obtain funding to extend infrastructure, particularly sewer and water, at the new I-90/Illinois 23 Interchange in McHenry County to support the attraction of future development around the interchange.	McHenry County, City of Marengo, Illinois Tollway	1-year

Strategy 1.5: Create a regional slate of infrastructure priorities based on the strategies in this CEDS and obtain the necessary funding for these projects.

Action		Responsible	Timeline
1.5A	Complete the 5-year Transportation Improvement Programs and corresponding Metropolitan Transportation Plans for McHenry County Department of Transportation, and the Region 1 Planning Council to further detail regional infrastructure priorities for both urban and rural areas	McHenry County, RPC	5-year
1.5B	Identify and pursue opportunities for shared infrastructure services, such as a shared city/county maintenance yard, so as to free up funding for new infrastructure and maintenance of existing infrastructure.	RPC, county and municipal governments	1-year

Strategy 1.6: Pursue project bundling for utility, communications, and roadway improvements when possible, to expedite project delivery and reduce costs.			
Action		Responsible	Timeline
1.6A	Coordinate multiple infrastructure improvements into single projects to increase efficiency and decrease costs to local government and other funders, implementing a “one-dig policy” or bundling contracts.	Local governments, RPC	Ongoing
Strategy 1.7: Enhance broadband networks by extending backbones and adding last-mile connections to better facilitate e-commerce, telework, telehealth, and telelearning capability in the three-county region.			
Action		Responsible	Timeline
1.7A	Continue the expansion of fiber service in McHenry County, ensuring that downtown businesses and residential areas are connected.	McHenry County, municipal governments, other broadband partners	1-year
1.7B	Extend fiber to key job creation sites and community institutions within the region, while also ensuring fiber redundancies for stable connections.	Municipalities, other broadband partners	1-year
1.7C	Partner with TriRivers Health Partners and iFiber to connect companies and broadband service providers with available dark fiber.	RPC, TriRivers Health Partners, iFiber	Ongoing
1.7D	Seek additional funding for broadband access, adoption, and use, through programs such as Illinois DCEO Connected Communities.	RPC, EDOs, Workforce, School systems, Realtors, Broadband Partners	1-year
1.7E	Work with community institutions such as hospitals, community colleges and non-profits to identify priority populations in need of broadband, as well as assist with funding procurement for deployment programs.	Hospital systems, public libraries, RVC, MCC, housing authorities, other broadband partners	1-year
1.7F	Adapt to the changing requirements of business and residential location decisions by identifying the needs of teleworkers and including connection attributes in Multiple Listing Services.	EDOs, Realtors Associations, municipal governments	Ongoing
Strategy 1.8: Improve and seek infrastructure projects which accommodate new technology and increase efficiencies of existing systems.			
Action		Responsible	Timeline
1.8A	Implement Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS) regionally and invest in proven ITS strategies using models such as Smart Communities (i.e. Columbus, OH).	RPC, IDOT, RMTD, ComED, county and municipal governments	Ongoing
1.8B	Establish standards and create a regional plan for public and private incorporation of renewable energies and related energy supply infrastructure (e.g. solar, wind, electric vehicle charging stations, etc.).	RPC, RMTD, ComEd, county and municipal governments	5-year
1.8C	Coordinate with local and statewide partners in the development of connected/autonomous vehicle (CAV) initiatives for freight service and passenger transportation.	RPC, IDOT	Ongoing
1.8D	Prepare the region for advanced communications technologies, including fifth-generation wireless communications (5G).	County and municipal governments, other partners	Ongoing
1.8E	Site and develop an industrial campus with proximity to Chicago-Rockford International Airport, Winnebago County landfill, and the Rock River Water Reclamation District, with a focus on renewable energy generation, coupled with waste-to-energy developments to anchor supportive rail-served industrial parks	County and municipal governments, RPC	5-year

Goal 2			
Support sustainable and equitable economic development which improves quality of life while protecting the environment and natural resources that lend resiliency to the region.			
Strategy 2.1: Ensure that building and development codes and all other economic development and infrastructure plans promote, incentivize, and facilitate the redevelopment of existing structures and encourage infill development.			
Action		Responsible	Timeline
2.1A	Align and coordinate transportation, land use, housing, and economic development planning and policies with sustainability plans and smart growth practices.	RPC, county and municipal governments	Ongoing
2.1B	Identify and promote a slate of incentives, programs, and policies to encourage LEED building and rehabilitation standards.	RPC, county and municipal governments	1-year
2.1C	Explore and seek funding for the reuse of existing developed facilities in the region, such as Barber Colman in Winnebago County and the Motorola site in McHenry County	EDOs, county and municipal governments	5-year
Strategy 2.2: Continue to assess, remediate, and redevelop brownfield sites throughout the region for the purposes of public safety, environmental protection, historic preservation, and/or reuse.			
Action		Responsible	Timeline
2.2A	Create a targeted brownfield inventory for the region which prioritizes properties based on redevelopment potential, while incorporating expected reuse access, community impacts, and other characteristics.	RPC, county and municipal governments	1-year
2.2B	Streamline permit and review processes in ways that still address concerns/needs but communicates options for private-sector development.	Local governments	Ongoing
2.2C	Build upon and potentially deploy similar models to The City of Rockford's Business First "one-stop shop" initiative throughout the region as an easier way for businesses to redevelop targeted commercial and industrial sites.	Local governments	5-year
2.2D	Engage private sector to promote potential for redeveloping sites and other opportunities within the region, with an aim to find developers who have significant interest in redevelopment.	Local governments, EDO's	Ongoing
2.2E	Ensure that new buildings and additions facilitate ongoing improvement and/or maintenance of healthy air, soil, and water quality	Conservation districts, public health departments, private sector	Ongoing
Strategy 2.3: Protect prime farmland from urban sprawl and promote the key role of agriculture in the economy.			
Action		Responsible	Timeline
2.3A	Use boundary agreements to protect prime farmland, while maximizing business development along commercial nodes and near existing development.	County and Municipal gov'ts	Ongoing
2.3B	Continually reference local and regional comprehensive land plans to maintain a balance between development and preservation.	Local governments	Ongoing

Strategy 2.4: Develop regional best practices for repurposing vacant residential land that contributes to the fiscal and economic goals of the area.

Action		Responsible	Timeline
2.4A	Maintain clear and consistent communication with the Northern Illinois Land Bank on properties that can be acquired and then sold by the RPC to buyers who can repurpose property consistent with regional and local priorities.	RPC (as land bank host), Local governments	Ongoing
2.4B	Maintain and monitor tax databases, flagging tax delinquent properties as well as properties where water has been shut off.	Local governments, RPC	Ongoing
2.4C	Identify and connect committed end-users with vacant residential and commercial properties which lay outside the scope of the land bank and county trustee programs.	EDOs, county and municipal governments, private developers	5-year
2.4D	Create an infill development strategy which identifies, prioritizes and provides a comprehensive redevelopment plan for residential neighborhood blocks, commercial corridors, and buildings in need of repurposing.	EDOs, county and municipal governments, private developers	5-year

Goal 3			
Collaborative regional economic development efforts emphasizing communication, coordination, shared assets, and promotion of the region for business investment.			
Strategy 3.1: Use Region 1 Planning Council (RPC) as a forum for local government and economic development officials to coordinate planning, foster collaboration, and enhance communication about initiatives of significance to Winnebago, Boone, and McHenry Counties.			
Action		Responsible	Timeline
3.1A	Maintain the RPC as a regional research and planning partner and Economic Development District.	RPC	Ongoing
3.1B	Use RPC to foster collaboration among economic development organizations with a focus on regional business attraction, marketing, and other regionally significant initiatives.	RPC, RPC Board	Ongoing
3.1C	Support and provide guidance for unification efforts of business and economic development organizations in the region.	RPC	Ongoing
3.1D	Follow best practices as outlined in the International Economic Development Council (IEDC) code of ethics, and leverage the RPC as a forum for mediation.	EDOs	Ongoing
Strategy 3.2: Maintain the Economic Development District and oversee the scope of work laid out within the CEDS.			
Action		Responsible	Timeline
3.2A	Complete application for formal designation as an Economic Development District.	RPC	2020
3.2B	Convene quarterly CEDS Steering Committee meetings to monitor progress, adjust tactics and discuss annual progress reporting to EDA.	RPC, Steering Committee	Ongoing
3.2C	Identify economic development initiatives that are ideal for regional partnerships while also assisting with county-specific and local projects.	RPC, RPC Board	Ongoing
Strategy 3.3: Establish a regional identity and leverage our location and shared assets to create a marketing strategy for the region.			
Action		Responsible	Timeline
3.3A	Develop a regional business attraction branding theme in collaboration with other northern Illinois counties, with a particular focus on promoting our proximity to Chicago in order to attract international investment and promote our industrial resilience	RPC, EDOs	1-year
3.3B	Attend key trade shows as a region, such as SelectUSA.	EDOs	Ongoing
Strategy 3.4: In coordination with local working groups, a council of governments, and other partners, identify and “speak with one voice” on top funding and legislative priorities at the federal and state levels.			
Action		Responsible	Timeline
3.4A	Work with Illinois DCEO to tie regional economic development incentives to Illinois’ five-year economic development plan.	RPC, EDOs, & Local gov’ts, CMAP, COG	Ongoing
3.4B	Engage CEDS Steering Committee during quarterly meetings to prioritize requests for EDA funding, while also promoting projects that fit with EDA priorities.	RPC, Steering Committee	Ongoing
3.4C	Provide local government administrations and the regions’ elected officials with prioritized projects of regional significance for funding consideration.	RPC	1-year

3.4D	Develop a multi-county legislative agenda that outlines desired changes in state and federal policies and regulations that impact the competitiveness of the region, including taxation, worker compensation, workforce diversity and inclusivity, and economic recovery programs.	RPC, Region Chambers, RFD, gov't entities, COG	1-year
3.4E	Engage and stay informed with Chicago-region partners as they identify and cultivate a Chicago based entity with the mandate and resources to implement their own regional economic development strategy.	McHenry County, McHenry County EDC, CMAP, RPC	5-year
3.4F	Align or create an advocacy group with a priority of advancing a regional social determinants of health agenda and narrative to aid the region in addressing issues of persistent poverty and negative market perceptions.	County Health Departments, Chambers, public housing authorities, gov't entities, RPC	

Goal 4			
Efficient business development, expansion, diversification, job growth, and innovation throughout the region.			
Strategy 4.1: Strengthen existing industry clusters and develop selected emerging clusters within the region.			
Action		Responsible	Timeline
4.1A	Conduct in-depth targeted industry analysis, including detailed mapping of individual clusters and the linkages between targeted clusters to update existing studies among the three counties and identify industry-specific targets.	EDOs, Workforce	5-years
4.1B	Build upon industry-specific cluster groups, such as the Rockford Area Aerospace Network, and MCEDC's matchmaking programming to strengthen targeted clusters, such as medical device manufacturing, metalworking, hydraulics, and agribusiness.	EDOs	5-years
4.1C	Partner with trade associations, such as IMA, Center for Automotive Research, and the Chicago Metro Metal Consortium, to develop supplier opportunities via "manufacturer matchmaking events."	EDOs, Chambers	Ongoing
Strategy 4.2: Promote and expand business retention efforts among economic development, workforce development, and local government programs.			
Action		Responsible	Timeline
4.2A	Develop business survey programs in Boone and McHenry Counties using RAEDC's CORE Conversations and CORE Illinois programs as models. Align when possible with Chambers of Commerce and Workforce Board efforts.	EDOs, Workforce, Chambers	Ongoing
4.2B	Promote succession planning programs and best practices to small- and mid-sized businesses in the 3-county region.	EDOs, Chambers, IMEC, SBDC	Ongoing
4.2C	Promote financial support for small businesses, such as loan and investment programs; specifically, in response to major economic downturns.	EDOs, Chambers, City & County gov'ts, Rockford Local Dev. Corp.	Ongoing
4.2D	Better understand and develop programs which holistically address underemployment and unemployment barriers such as lack of transportation, affordable housing, criminal records, etc.	Workforce, Local Gov'ts, social services, RMTD, Housing Authorities	Ongoing
Strategy 4.3: Recruit businesses and emerging industries to the region through targeted business attraction.			
Action		Responsible	Timeline
4.3A	Identify and promote shovel-ready industrial and commercial parks in the region by using national frameworks, MCEDC's Certified Sites Illinois program, and RAEDC's/Growth Dimensions Qualified Sites Program (QSP) as models.	RPC, EDOs	Ongoing
4.3B	Work with counties to develop sites within the region, outside the QSP listings, where development is desired.	RPC, EDOs, County gov'ts	Ongoing
4.3C	Identify commercial development opportunities in Rockford to serve the growing number of businesses and workers centered around the Chicago-Rockford International Airport.	EDOs, RFD, City of Rockford	Ongoing
Strategy 4.4: Identify, create, and promote programs, activities, and policies which foster innovation, inclusivity, and nurture entrepreneurial activity, particularly in emerging and existing businesses.			
Action		Responsible	Timeline

4.4A	Monitor enrollment, student demand, and employers' workforce needs to inform and enhance STEM education, middle-skills credentialing, and Career and Technical Education (CTE) at Rock Valley College and McHenry County College.	Workforce, RVC, MCC, employers	Ongoing
4.4B	Develop additional workforce training/business incubators as needed to increase employment in underrepresented populations.	Workforce, Higher Ed, employers, Trade Unions	Ongoing
4.4C	Create and support "innovation exchange hubs" to develop start-ups and early-stage companies, particularly those in information technology or product-based businesses, building off of models from NIU EIGERlab Innovation Network, Small Business Development Centers and other best practices..	EDOs	Ongoing
4.4D	Connect local businesses interested in selling goods to government agencies with Illinois Procurement Technical Assistance Centers (PTAC) to provide counseling, technical information, marketing assistance and training.	EDOs	Ongoing
4.4E	Develop solutions in the small business assistance programs, including Small Business Development Centers, to fill gaps and identify linkages that will improve service to growing companies, building upon existing programs such as the Entrepreneur Venture Program at Growth Dimensions.	EDOs, SBDCs	1-year
4.4F	Develop and promote a linked network of makerspace facilities to emphasize craft manufacturing, local food, and minority and women-owned businesses.	Local gov't, Higher Ed	5-year
4.4G	Connect minority and women-owned businesses to funding opportunities and programs, reducing barriers to capital and bridging funding gaps.	SBA, Municipal gov'ts	Ongoing

Strategy 4.5: Promote agribusiness and local food industries as a growth area for applicable parts of the region and to adapt to changes to the agricultural product supply chains.

Action		Responsible	Timeline
4.5A	Develop food hubs for aggregation of regionally grown produce for delivery to the Chicago region, northern Illinois and southern Wisconsin.	City & County gov'ts, Farm Bureaus	5-year
4.5B	Identify locations suitable for urban agriculture and assist companies and individuals with such projects.	City & County gov'ts, Farm Bureaus	1-year
4.5C	Encourage direct sales and build local networks of suppliers to lessen impacts of future shocks to the agricultural system.	EDOs, Farm Bureaus	Ongoing

Strategy 4.6: Promote and make efficient use of business incentives and programs from government, utilities, not-for-profits, and other partners to advance key industries.

Action		Responsible	Timeline
4.6A	Implement the development plans of the region's existing and new Enterprise Zones as a catalyst for growth in targeted areas and assist businesses with expansion and renovation.	EDOs	5-year
4.6B	Promote ComEd and Nicor energy incentives as part of the region's business outreach programming and emphasize the competitive advantages of low cost energy.	EDOs	5-year
4.6C	Increase foreign direct investment and exports within the region by leveraging the region's Foreign Trade Zone, International Trade Center, and Metro Chicago Exports.	EDOs	Ongoing
4.6D	Partner with the Illinois Manufacturing Excellence Center to help manufacturers reduce operational costs and improve performance.	EDOs, IMEC	Ongoing

Goal 5

A high quality of life enhanced by the region's sense of inclusion, place, livability, community health, and creative environments.

Strategy 5.1: Strengthen downtowns and surrounding neighborhoods, both urban and rural, as anchors for work, live, and play, while creating active and diverse neighborhoods that help the region attract and retain young workers.

<i>Action</i>		<i>Responsible</i>	<i>Timeline</i>
5.1A	Support the redevelopment of key riverfront properties in the three-county region to foster housing, businesses, and entertainment centers.	Municipality gov'ts	Ongoing
5.1B	Continue pursuing downtown Rockford development projects, such as improvements to Davis Park, BMO Harris Bank Center, and Coronado Performing Arts Center, which act as catalysts for increased residential and commercial growth in the urban core.	City of Rockford	Ongoing
5.1C	Build upon and diversify educational programming within the region's downtowns as a way to attract economic activity, engage communities, engage the creative class, and serve students within those areas.	Rock Valley College, McHenry County College	5-year
5.1D	Encourage alternative transportation, such as biking, within downtowns, business districts and historic neighborhoods using "Complete Streets" best practices as a model.	RPC, City governments, IDOT	Ongoing
5.1E	Identify and promote relevant planning and funding opportunities to increase the diversity of housing, i.e., low-income housing, multi-unit housing, single occupancy housing, etc.	Non-profits, public housing authorities, RPC, city and county governments	Ongoing
5.1F	Undertake housing needs assessments and host summits to understand the current housing stock and future needs of the three-county region and identify opportunities to fill gaps.	Non-profits, public housing authorities, developers, city and county governments	1-year

Strategy 5.2: Promote healthy lifestyles by building upon the region's health care systems, engaging with employers, and increasing awareness of health-related resources.

<i>Action</i>		<i>Responsible</i>	<i>Timeline</i>
5.2A	Use local food systems, such as farmers markets, community-supported agriculture, community gardens, and urban agriculture to increase access to healthy food and connect farmers with additional markets for their commodities.	EDOs, City gov'ts, Farm Bureaus, Employers	Ongoing
5.2B	Expand employer-based wellness programs, including mental and emotional health services, by leveraging the expertise and services of local health systems.	Employers, local health providers, chambers of commerce	Ongoing
5.2C	Identify and pursue strategies to improve access to primary healthcare and reduce volume of Emergency Room visits.	RPC, city and county governments, health systems and public health departments	Ongoing

Strategy 5.3: Advocate for and improve access to behavioral health services by engaging providers, employers, workforce development, and health departments to overcome existing and new labor-related stresses.

<i>Action</i>		<i>Responsible</i>	<i>Timeline</i>
5.3A	Work with employers to become trauma-informed work places.	Workforce organizations, public health departments, local health providers, employers	Ongoing
5.3B	Build low-cost educational and training opportunities for behavioral health workers, through both distance learning and local collaborations.	Higher education providers, local health providers, public health departments	5-year

Strategy 5.4: Improve public safety through infrastructure investments and research-based programmatic reform of public services.			
Action		Responsible	Timeline
5.4A	Identify and seek funding to fill gaps in public safety system and develop working plans with relevant agencies to fill those gaps, support data sharing, and identifying entities for civic engagement training.	Municipal and county governments, RPC	1-year
Strategy 5.5: Work with communities to foster creative environments for entrepreneurs.			
Action		Responsible	Timeline
5.5A	Connect entrepreneurs to small business resources and networks, including mentorship, grants and other financial support.	EDOs, city and county governments	Ongoing
5.5B	Develop business incubators across the region to support economic diversification and small business growth.	EDOs, city and county governments	Ongoing
Strategy 5.6: Improve the competitive and responsive local and state tax environment for businesses and residents.			
Action		Responsible	Timeline
5.6A	Monitor trends in local government service costs relative to changes in the property tax base, allowing taxing districts to better understand information that helps influence long-term trends in tax rates.	City and county governments	Ongoing
5.6B	Ensure that regional marketing materials highlight the competitive nature of the region's tax environment and low cost-of-living.	EDOs, Tourism Bureaus, Chambers, Workforce	Ongoing
Strategy 5.7: Explore and support alternative revenue sources for local and regional taxing bodies.			
Action		Responsible	Timeline
5.7A	Identify growing and emerging industries that can be designated as alternative revenue sources.	City and county governments, chambers of commerce	Ongoing
5.7B	Seek funding and create programs to support unique and niche markets, i.e., downtown boutiques and specialty retailers.	Chambers of commerce, EDOs, SBDC	Ongoing
5.7C	Create a blueprint to help emerging industries navigate local, regional, state, and national codes and regulations, as they apply.	Chambers of commerce, EDOs, SBDC	5-year
Strategy 5.8: Incentivize and facilitate sustainable residential and mixed-use development.			
Action		Responsible	Timeline
5.8A	Incentivize the use of green infrastructure, such as permeable surfaces, rain gardens, and other stormwater management best practices.	City and county governments	Ongoing
5.8B	Examine conservation subdivisions and cluster neighborhoods as possibilities for new residential development.	City and county governments	1-year

Goal 6			
Promotion of the natural environment, cultural and recreational amenities, and our industrial and agricultural legacy to support a visitor-based economy.			
Strategy 6.1: Develop and promote tourism and recreational use of the region's natural assets, including waterways, parks, preserves, and agricultural areas.			
Action		Responsible	Timeline
6.1A	Create a regional inventory of tourism assets that includes sports tourism, intellectual tourism, arts tourism, gardens/arboretums, agritourism, ecotourism, heritage tourism, etc.	Tourism Bureaus, county governments, park districts and forest preserves	1-year
6.1B	Promote the region as a green getaway from Chicago with destinations such as our forest preserves, conservation areas, state parks, wildlife refuges, outdoor recreation, and regional trails.	Tourism Bureaus, land owners	Ongoing
6.1C	Tie outdoor recreation to economic resiliency, as an element of the visitor-based economy which has been less affected by COVID-19 restrictions.	Tourism Bureaus, local governments	Ongoing
Strategy 6.2: Expand regional trail connections and accompanying development, capitalizing on increased amenity value, particularly in rural areas.			
Action		Responsible	Timeline
6.2A	Implement regional greenways plans to connect parks, downtowns, and other desirable areas via recreational paths.	RPC, city and county governments	5-year
6.2B	Seek funding to fill gaps in regional trail connectivity between all three counties.	RPC, county governments	5-year
Strategy 6.3: Develop a regional marketing vision for the region, encompassing all potential opportunities for visitor-based economies.			
Action		Responsible	Timeline
6.3A	Examine best-practice holistic regional marketing strategies and find ways to replicate them in this region.	Tourism Bureaus, chambers of commerce	5-year
6.3B	Align tourism messaging with economic development/business attraction messaging.	EDOs, Tourism Bureaus, local governments	Ongoing

VII. Implementation and Tracking

2021-2025 Key Implementation Activities

The region defines economic development very broadly. Much like the previous iterations of the CEDS, this is evidenced by the plan's goals, strategies, and actions. Coordination is the norm and not the exception within our region, but organizations still have their own goals and strategic efforts to undertake. While not inclusive of every single economic development activity that could occur within the next five-years, the tactical plan in the previous section details some of the actions the region and partners plan to take. Many items in the tactical plan are policies or initiatives in the pipeline which may evolve over time. Lastly, resources are scarce, especially in the wake of a pandemic-induced recession. Recognizing these factors, this section will outline the identified key activities the region will seek to undertake within the next five years, with an emphasis on near term milestones.

In order to make this a more actionable document, heightened attention was given to action items which are tangible and/or would not need outside funding sources. While a "laundry list" of priority infrastructure items is no longer required within the CEDS, partners found this to be useful if the CEDS were to truly be a continually referenced roadmap for economic development. In the previous iteration of this document,

stakeholders prioritized action items that sought to develop regional collaboration. Strengthening those collaborations is still a prescient goal of the region, however stakeholders feel that including priority infrastructure and tangible implementation not only makes sense at this point as a region, but partnering on projects will further strengthen collaboration.

Similar to the larger tactical plan, determining the priority actions combined various methods. These included: 1) stakeholder input gathered during the September and subsequent CEDS Steering Committee meetings, 2) individual discussions and meetings with key responsible parties, 3) internal discussions within the RPC, and 4) a prioritization survey administered to the steering committee. Over the next two years the region commits to undertaking the key activities detailed in the table below. Actions are listed in the order that they appear within the tactical plan, and thus are not in any hierarchy of prioritized activities. The steering committee plans to meet quarterly to track progress and discuss updates or changes to the key implementation activities. Annual updates will be released starting in 2021.

Action Number	Action Description	Responsible Parties	Key Milestones	Implementation Measurement/Deliverable
1.1C	Support Rockford airport officials on cargo, MRO, and other development opportunities through economic development efforts, incentives, and capital procurement for infrastructure upgrades.	City of Rockford, RAEDC, RPC, Rock Valley College	Q3 2021 – Development opportunities identified and prioritized Q4 2021 – Partnerships identified Q1 2022 – Identify and apply for Funds	At least one new EDA investment into Rockford Airport by 2023.
1.1D	Improve amenities and infrastructure at Rockford Global Trade Park and the Kishwaukee and 11th St. gateways, and make available parcels shovel-ready and marketable for industries that would benefit from proximity to Chicago Rockford International Airport.	City of Rockford, RAEDC	Ongoing; Q4 2021 - Development strategy determined	At least one major development in areas surrounding airport underway or completed in 2025.
1.3D	Support MCRide service in McHenry County and Boone County Public Transportation in Boone County, and explore coordination of demand-response transit services with rural/non-urbanized portions of the three counties to build regional connectivity.	Boone County, McHenry County, Winnebago County, IDOT, CMAP, RPC	Q3 2021 – Needs, partnerships, and capacity determined for regional connectivity Q3 2023 – Coordination plan for services completed	Have complete regional connectivity by 2025
1.4E	Identify and obtain funding to extend infrastructure, particularly sewer and water, at the new I-90/Illinois 23 Interchange in McHenry County to support the attraction of future development around the interchange.	McHenry County, City of Marengo, Illinois Tollway	Q3 2021 - Funding procured Q3 2022 – Build phases for fully served sites	Completion of infrastructure required for development around interchange by 2024.

Action Number	Action Description	Responsible Parties	Key Milestones	Implementation Measurement/Deliverable
1.6A	Coordinate multiple infrastructure improvements into single projects to increase efficiency and decrease costs to local government and other funders, implementing a “one-dig policy” or bundling contracts.	Local governments, RPC	Ongoing; Q1 2022 – Recommendations and policies agreed upon by all parties	Coordination policy in place by 2023.
1.7A	Continue the expansion of fiber service in McHenry County, ensuring that downtown businesses and residential areas are connected.	McHenry County, municipal governments, other broadband partners	Q2 2021 – Expansions determined and funding procured	Measurable improved fiber access and adoption in McHenry County by 2022.
1.7B	Extend fiber to key job creation sites and community institutions within the region, while also ensuring fiber redundancies for stable connections.	Municipalities, Counties, RAEDC, Growth Dimensions, MCEDC, other broadband partners	Ongoing; Q2 2021 – Additional funding from DCEO, USDA, EDA, etc. procured	Measurable improved fiber access and adoption by businesses in the region by 2022.
1.8A	Implement Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS) regionally and invest in proven ITS strategies using models such as Smart Communities (i.e. Columbus, OH).	RPC, IDOT, RMTD, ComEd, county and municipal governments	Q1 2021 – ITS opportunities programs identified	Implementation of identified ITS Programs within the region by 2025.
1.8B	Establish standards and create a regional plan for public and private incorporation of renewable energies and related energy supply infrastructure (e.g. solar, wind, electric vehicle charging stations, etc.).	RPC, RMTD, ComEd, county and municipal governments	Q2 2021 – Renewable energy and supply infrastructure opportunities and partnerships identified Q3 2022 – Completion of a regional renewable energy plan, including recommendations for incorporation and ordinances	Local codes and ordinances to address renewable energies and energy supply infrastructure in place by 2023.
1.8C	Coordinate with local and statewide partners in the development of connected/autonomous vehicle (CAV) initiatives for freight service and passenger transport.	RPC, IDOT	Q1 2022 – Partnerships and next steps for CAV development in place	Develop CAV Study for region by 2025.
1.8E	Site and develop an industrial campus with proximity to Chicago-Rockford International Airport, Winnebago County landfill, and the Rock River Water Reclamation District, with a focus on renewable energy generation, coupled with waste-to-energy developments to anchor supportive rail-served industrial parks	County and municipal governments, RPC	Q3 2021 - Funding identified and applied for, partnerships in place Q3 2022 - Begin development phases	Renewable energy industrial campus established by 2025
2.1A	Align and coordinate transportation, land use, and economic development planning and policies with sustainability plans and smart growth practices.	RPC, county and municipal governments	Ongoing; Inclusion of smart growth and sustainability in planning documents to be tracked during creation of plans	Implemented, nameable smart growth policies within the region by 2025
2.1C	Explore and seek funding for the reuse of existing developed facilities in the region, such as Barber Colman in Winnebago County and the Motorola site in McHenry County.	RAEDC, Growth Dimensions, MCEDC, RPC, county and municipal governments	Q1 2022 – Convene stakeholders in a “redevelopment forum” setting to discuss significant sites and next steps	Actionable reuse strategy in place by Q3 2022 with concrete next steps to pursue reuse of at least one major site.

Action Number	Action Description	Responsible Parties	Key Milestones	Implementation Measurement/Deliverable
2.2A	Create a targeted brownfields inventory for the region which prioritizes properties based on redevelopment potential, while incorporating expected reuse, access, community impacts, and other characteristics.	RPC, county and municipal governments	Q1 2021 – Begin project scoping with partners with a preliminary analysis, and assessment of current inventories by Q4 2021. Q4 2021 – Apply for funding	Working inventory and a list of top redevelopment priorities completed by Q1 2022.
2.4D	Create an infill development strategy which identifies, prioritizes, and provides a comprehensive redevelopment plan for residential neighborhood blocks, commercial corridors, and buildings in need of repurposing.	Economic Development Organizations, county and municipal governments, private developers	Q2 2022 – Materials drafted for partner use Q4 2021 – Funding procured for strategy development Q4 2021 – Convene partners and begin project scoping	Strategy in place by end of 2022, with future redevelopment being guided by the strategy ongoing.
3.3A	Develop a regional business attraction branding theme in collaboration with other northern Illinois counties, with a particular focus on promoting our proximity to Chicago to attract international investment.	RPC, Economic Development Organization Group	Discussions about approach currently taking place. Q2 2021 – Scope out steps Q3 – 2021 – Project kickoff	Regional branding initiative in place and materials rolled out to partners by Q2 2022.
4.1B	Build upon industry-specific cluster groups, such as the Rockford Area Aerospace Network and MCEDC's matchmaking programming to strengthen targeted clusters, such as medical device manufacturing, metalworking, hydraulics, and agribusiness.	RAEDC, Growth Dimensions, MCEDC	Q3 2021 - Needs identified	New cluster groups established by end of 2025.
4.2C	Promote financial support for small businesses such as loan and investment programs; specifically, in response to major economic downturns.	EDOs, Chambers, City & County gov'ts, Rockford Local Dev. Corp.	Q1 2021 -Programs identified Recapitalization of identified local RLFs by Q3 2021	Report small business success metrics quarterly Opportunities to be pursued throughout the region
4.4B	Develop additional workforce training/business incubators as needed to increase employment in underrepresented populations.	Workforce, Higher Ed, employers, Trade Unions	Q2 2021 – Programs and partnerships identified to pursue over 5 years Q2 2022 – At least 1 opportunity identified; funding procured	At least one new business incubator in each of the counties by Q4 2025
6.2B	Seek funding to fill gaps in regional trail connectivity between all three counties.	RPC, county governments	Q4 2021 – System gaps identified and funding procured Q3 2022 – Work on trails to begin	Inter-county trail connectivity completed and reflected in marketing and wayfinding materials by 2025.

Measuring Implementation

The tactical plan contains many ongoing activities. These ongoing activities represent agreed upon best practices or policies which partners wish to adhere, work towards, or be mindful of. The region is committed to working collaboratively together, both on a specific project bases and as a united Economic Development District. Implementation will be qualitatively measured through successes and updates discussed at quarterly steering committees or at other convened groups. Examples of broad quantitative measurements of success are shown in Table 5.

Table 5: Measurements of Success

Factor	Interim Work	Measurements through end of Q4 2025
Improved small business recovery and assistance	Partners will work to connect businesses with assistance programs from respective agencies, including CARES Act funds, RLFs, grants etc	Number of businesses reported receiving local, state, federal assistance.
Private-sector redevelopment of properties	Local governments and EDOs will seek out developers interested in redevelopment, as well as supplemental funding tools such as gap financing programs.	Number of developers engaged for redevelopment projects.
Prioritized EDA funding requests submitted as an EDD	Reference the key activities list while determining projects to apply for federal funding. Update table as needed during quarterly CEDs Steering Committee meetings.	Total amount of funding received from EDA for regional projects Share of projects submitted to EDA that receive funding.
Site selection proposals	Partners to be responsive in any technical assistance during RFI site selection process.	Number of site selection proposals submitted to economic development organizations or economic development professionals.
Alignment of economic development planning with comprehensive, land use, environmental etc. plans	Economic development professionals and planners to be consulted in order to tie economic development goals to other planning goals.	Inclusion of economic development sections, indicators, or consul within new plans.
Regional economic recovery	Partners will apply for state and federal economic recovery programs, particularly in the months during and immediately after the COVID-19 pandemic.	Number of programs applied; funding received. Number of programs initiated and jobs/businesses retained.

These measurements will be informative for the progression of our regional economic development activities. In addition to completing the prioritized tasks and tracking measurements, it is useful to track general economic performance. To do this, the region can analyze performance against Northern Illinois' past, as well as with our peers (these regions are known as peer regions). Although it is often impossible to draw a causal relationship between regions based solely on the execution of economic development policies or plans, benchmarking overall performance can offer valuable insights to their effectiveness. It also offers an opportunity to contextualize local conditions to broader extra-regional factors.

As such, this plan will establish a handful of basic indicators that will be tracked in conjunction with the CEDS. As of this update, RPC has implemented staffing to monitor indicators over time. Over the next five years RPC will be responsible for tracking the decided metrics for our regional performance as well as that of peer regions. Peer regions were selected based on similar demographic, economic, and locational characteristics. The following tables give an overview of the basic indicators for the region and peer communities. Reviewers may note that the five peer regions in this update are not identical to those

which were published as part of the 2016 CEDS; this reflects the fact that as Northern Illinois changes, as do others, it is worthwhile to monitor standard metrics, but also to reassess periodically ensuring that benchmark communities reflect the advantages and conditions seen in the Northern Illinois market. Additional metrics may be added as necessary to address areas of particular concern as/if they arise (such as changes in wages, productivity, or employment in targeted industries).

Table 5 shows the demographic and economic factors that illustrate the size differences between the comparison areas. As highlighted earlier, the growth or decline in younger working-age population groups is particularly important as an indicator for the health of the labor force and given the national ongoing trend of the aging workforce. GRP and personal incomes estimates are commonly used to compare the economic performance and relative wealth of regions. Although the Northern Illinois Region ranks behind several of its peers in terms of the size of its economy (as measured by GRP per capita) it ranks near the top in personal income (income per capita), which is consistent with the original benchmark assessment in 2015.

Table 6: Performance Metrics of Economic Development Regions

<i>Region or District Area</i>	<i>Population</i>	<i>GRP per Capita</i>	<i>Median Household Income</i>	<i>24-month Average Unemployment Rate (BLS) Distress Threshold*</i>	<i>2018 Per Capita Personal Income**</i>
Northern Illinois	647,569	\$ 43,676.41	\$ 53,005	1.32	91.41%
Greater Peoria	400,117	\$ 64,978.40	\$ 66,607	1.02	89.95%
Northwest Pennsylvania RPDC	424,765	\$ 38,388.42	\$ 45,875	1.33	77.53%
Michiana Area COG	598,245	\$ 57,084.12	\$ 47,450	-0.2	86.16%
Miami Township-Dayton Joint EDD	532,034	\$ 54,338.16	\$ 40,814	0.68	86.12%
Northeastern Ohio Four County RPDC	820,662	\$ 72,618.56	\$ 41,368	0.46	87.36%

*(< 0 better than than national unemp; > 0 worse) (per. Ending Aug 2020)

** (< 100% indicates % lower than nation at large)

Sources: U.S. Bureaus of Census, Labor Statistics, and Economic Analysis, generated by StatsAmerica

Appendix A: List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

Abbreviation	Meaning
CEDS	Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy
Baa3	The lowest rating of investment grade Moody's Long-term Corporate Obligation Rating. Obligations rated Baa3 are subject to moderate credit risk.
C2ER	Council for Community and Economic Research
CARES Act	Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act
CAV	Connected/ Autonomous Vehicle
CMAQ	Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning
COG	Council of Governments
CORE	Creating Opportunities for Retention and Expansion
CRGC	Chicago Regional Growth Corporation
CTE	Career and Technical Education
DCEO	Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity
EAV	Equalized Assessed Value
EDA	U.S. Economic Development Administration
EDD	Economic Development District
EDO	Economic Development Organization
FCA	Fiat Chrysler Automobiles
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GRP	Gross Regional Product
IDOT	Illinois Department of Transportation
IEDC	International Economic Development Council
IMA	Illinois Manufacturing Association
IMEC	Illinois Manufacturing Excellence Center
ITS	Intelligent Transportation Systems
LEED	Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design
LEHD	Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamics
L RTP	Long Range Transportation Plan
MCC	McHenry County College
MCEDC	McHenry County Economic Development Corporation
MD	Doctor of Medicine
MPO	Metropolitan Planning Organization
MRO	Maintenance, Repair, and Operations
MSA	Metropolitan Statistical Area
MTP	Metropolitan Transportation Plan
NHL	National Hockey League
NIU	Northern Illinois University
NPL	National Priorities List
PTAC	Procurement Technical Assistance Center
QSP	Qualified Sites Program
RACVB	Rockford Area Visitors and Convention Bureau
RAEDC	Rockford Area Economic Development Council

RFD	Chicago Rockford International Airport
RLF	Revolving Loan Fund
RMAP	Rockford Metropolitan Agency for Planning
RMTD	Rockford Mass Transit District
RPC	Region 1 Planning Council
RPDC	Regional Planning and Development Commission
RPDO	Regional Planning and Development Organization
RTA	Regional Transportation Authority
RVC	Rock Valley College
SBA	Small Business Association
SBDC	Small Business Development Center
SMTD	Stateline Mass Transit District
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math
SWOT	Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats
UPS	United Parcel Service
USDA	U. S. Department of Agriculture
USPS	U.S. Postal Service
WinGIS	Winnebago County Geographic Information System
UPS	United Parcel Service
USDA	U. S. Department of Agriculture
USPS	U.S. Postal Service
WinGIS	Winnebago County Geographic Information System

Appendix B: Results of 2016-2020 CEDS

GOAL I: A collaborative economic development strategy within the Northern Illinois Region emphasizing communication, cooperation, alignment of initiatives, shared assets, and promotion of the region for business investment.

Progress:

- Region 1 Planning Council (RPC) established in 2017 to serve the Northern Illinois Region counties and surrounding counties with a variety of planning, research, and back-office services.
- RPC convened a working group of representatives from economic development organizations across seven counties (Winnebago, Boone, McHenry, Lee, Ogle, DeKalb, and Stephenson) in 2019 to discuss shared regional business attracting marketing and other opportunities and challenges. This informal group – tentatively dubbed “Chicago Metro West” – is presently sharing information about efforts and challenges related to COVID-19.

Challenges:

- Definition of region differs depending on audience, making it difficult to identify a regional marketing program.
- “Chicago Metro West” members began to establish a rapport after meeting a handful of times in 2019, but momentum stalled as the group hit pause due to the pandemic and did not reconvene until August 2020.
- Regional economic efforts have often been reactive rather than proactive, with formal partnerships coalescing around economic development and grant opportunities, rather than around pre-meditated goals and strategies.
- COVID-19 has put local governments in a “survival mode” mindset, exacerbating RPC’s efforts to engage its partners and clients in forward-looking resiliency and sustainable economic development efforts.

GOAL II: Efficient business development, expansion, diversification, job growth, and innovation throughout the region.

Progress:

- The region’s aerospace cluster remains a beehive of innovation, as evidenced by Collins Aerospace System’s \$50 million investment in a high-tech lab in Rockford that will help build a hybrid-electric jet in 2021 with leading-edge technology.
- AAR Corp., a global leader in the aviation maintenance, repair, and overhaul industry, began operating at a new \$40 million twin-hangar jet maintenance hub at Chicago Rockford International Airport in 2016, which has made the airport more attract to domestic and international cargo operators.
- Since 2015, health systems in Winnebago, Boone, and McHenry County have spent or announced \$1 billion worth of hospital and clinic construction, renovation, and expansion projects in Winnebago, Boone, and Ogle counties.
- Small and mid-sized farms throughout the region have seen success in selling their products to restaurants, grocery stores, and at farmer’s markets.

Challenges:

- Nearly a fifth of workers within Northern Illinois are employed in the manufacturing sector, which makes the three-county region vulnerable to economic downturns and shocks such as COVID-19.
- The three-county region is overdue for a targeted industry cluster analysis to better understand overlaps within its manufacturing, agricultural, healthcare, and transportation/logistics industries and how shared strategies can benefit multiple sectors.
- The Rockford region has long enjoyed some of the cheapest electricity rates in the Midwest. However, Exelon’s announcement in 2020 that it intends to shutter its Byron nuclear power station in 2021 would strip the region of this often-overlooked business attraction tool. It is imperative that the region develop an energy resiliency plan and begin building its own sustainable energy infrastructure.

GOAL III: Availability of a skilled and flexible workforce that successfully meets the needs of existing and emerging industries and technologies.

Progress:

- Rock Valley College is helping 150 low-income, minority persons who are underserved and underemployed pay short-term educational and training opportunities that lead to jobs in truck driver training, computer numerical control (CNC) operation, cold forming, and industrial welding thanks to a \$1.5 million grant in 2019 from the Illinois Community College.
- McHenry County College obtained \$15.8 million in state capital funding in 2019 to establish a career and technical building in Crystal Lake to prepare the region’s workforce for the jobs requiring “old” and “new” skills in the realm of welding, electronics, mechatronics, advanced manufacturing, and engineering technology.
- Rock Valley College forged a partnership with the city of Belvidere, Belvidere School District, and private companies in Boone County to establish an Advanced Technology Center in Belvidere that will enhance the traditional manufacturing skills the region is known for.

- Rockford Public Schools has established a “Rockford Promise” partnership that will provide academically-eligible students with four years of free tuition to obtain a bachelor’s degree from Northern Illinois University.

Challenges:

- There remain approximately 40,000 adults in Winnebago and Boone counties who lack a high school diploma; poverty and unemployment rates in the Rockford area are typically higher than national averages.
- Difficulty for residents in underserved areas to get to job centers.
- The three-county region lacks a shared, cohesive solution for building and maintaining an entrepreneurial ecosystem that promotes small business growth and innovation and builds upon its rich manufacturing and agricultural heritage.

GOAL IV: A full range of infrastructure, with emphasis on transportation, utilities, and communication in order to successfully meet the needs of the region’s businesses.

Progress:

- RPC obtained a \$15,000 state grant in 2020 to help public and private sector partners in Winnebago County identify broadband infrastructure gaps and establish more equitable and affordable broadband service.
- Federal investments in roads and cargo ramps at Chicago Rockford International Airport, including an EDA investment to improve Falcon Road, have helped Chicago Rockford International Airport attract more cargo business and grow more than 1,000 jobs since 2019.
- A Qualified Sites Program launched in 2017 is marketing “shovel ready” industrial parks in Winnebago and Boone counties to real estate brokers and site selectors around the world.
- Construction on Interstate 90 interchanges in Boone and McHenry counties and a new interchange at U.S. 20 and Illinois 2 in Winnebago County are creating attractive greenfields for manufacturing and logistics industries and possibly some retail opportunities.
- A Rockford Region Passenger Rail Station Conceptual Siting Analysis is underway, which will investigate two passenger rail stations in the Rockford Region that will help establish Chicago to Rockford Intercity Rail.

Challenges:

- Broadband infrastructure and access lags in northwest Winnebago County and in small villages, rural areas, and in certain business districts within the larger three-county region.
- There remains much room for transportation improvements within the three-county region, and the absence of commuter rail makes it challenging to move people to and from the Chicago area.
- More “shovel ready” industrial parks are needed within the three-county region, particularly those that can accommodate businesses looking for “mega sites” of 500 acres or more.

GOAL V: Sustainable economic development with redevelopment of underused commercial and industrial properties, including brownfields, and promotion of land use patterns that allow for growth while protecting natural resources.

Progress:

- Renewal of Illinois’ River Edge historic tax credit program in 2018, an economic development tool that has spurred more than \$100 million worth of redevelopment projects along Rockford’s riverfront, including the 2020 debut of a downtown Hilton Embassy Suites Hotel and conference center.
- Northern Illinois Land Bank Authority was established in 2019 as an affiliate of the RPC to return distressed, tax-delinquent properties in Boone and Winnebago counties to productive use. The Land Bank sold its first property in September 2020 – a boarded-up duplex in Rockford with a fair market value of \$58,480 – for \$20,000.
- RPC is overseeing completion of a Regional Freight Plan that will be a blueprint for the Rockford Region regarding freight-related infrastructure improvements, freight-related land use planning, and freight linkages to economic development.
- RPC is conducting a Keith Creek Corridor Study in the city of Rockford that will look at alternative transportation options; equitable access to natural resources; infrastructure improvements; resiliency of the corridor; and economic redevelopment along the Creek.

Challenges

- Several large and dormant industrial properties within the three-county region, particularly Colman Village in southwest Rockford (Winnebago County) and the former Motorola manufacturing plant in Harvard (McHenry County) remain barriers to redevelopment efforts and will require specific strategies for infill and revitalization.
- Lack of funds often forces local governments to prioritize infrastructure maintenance as opposed to construction that would

support new industrial parks to aid business attraction efforts.

- The stigma of high taxes and population loss at the municipal, county, and state level are barriers to business attraction and retention.

GOAL VI: A higher quality of life through support and enhancement of the region's sense of community identity, community health, natural features, cultural and recreational amenities, and creative industries.

Progress:

- In 2019, Rockford Area Convention & Tourism Bureau reported that the tourism sector in Winnebago County grew by 4.3% with visitors spending more than \$409 million. In 2018, Visit McHenry reported that visitor spending increased 3.6% to \$256 million.
- Rockford City Market has added an Indoor City Market and in 2019 surpassed previous annual attendance records, drawing more than 111,000 people to downtown Rockford during the 2019 season.

Challenges:

- Lack of funding threatens arts and cultural amenities and often handicaps efforts to encourage visitor spending within the three-county region.
- The region has no shortage of bike path and recreation trails, but connectivity remains a problem.
- Many residents still struggle with access to health care services. Poor health outcomes, particularly in Winnebago County, are a barrier to business attraction and overall worker productivity.
- The region lacks joint marketing and branding strategies to promote its rivers, parks, and other outdoor recreation assets.

Appendix C: Public Comments and Changes

Individual or Organization	Public Comment	Staff Response and Changes
<p>Todd Wells, on behalf of Bourn & Koch Inc.</p>	<p>The cluster “Metalworking Technology” is now missing from this plan and may be an oversight, where production of metalworking technology still occurs in the Winnebago region. In the 2010-2015 plan, Industrial Machine Manufacturing was a targeted industry. The cluster exists in the 2016-2020 plan as “Metalworking Technology”. Bourn & Koch is among the businesses targeting growth in this cluster for the Rockford area.</p> <p>To verify that this section wasn’t combined within the “Production Technology and Heavy Machinery” cluster, I compared the employment counts between the current plan and this proposed plan and decided that the differences between the current plan and this draft don’t make up for the gap.</p> <p>It may be the case that the “Metalworking Technology” cluster disappeared into the “Metal and Metal Products” cluster, where the total of this cluster appears that it may be a combined employment count of two of the current clusters. However, the “Production Technology and Heavy Machinery” cluster in this new version is described as being inclusive of industrial machinery and process equipment and may therefore be a better category to include “Metalworking Technology”, if it needed to be combined away.</p>	<p>Thank you for your comments. All suggestions have been made. Excluding Metalworking Technology looks to be an oversight and it is understood that this is a legacy and growing industry in the Rockford region. It is distinct enough from Production Technology - both in data and description – to be included as its own industry.</p>
<p>Kevin A. Catlin, on behalf of Boone County</p>	<p>On page 10 under heading “differences between counties,” Boone County seems to be illustrated as a third-strong compared to Winnebago and McHenry. I believe Boone should be elevated because it is a great place to live, school districts are wonderful, and we have a more personal touch to our operations and development.</p> <p>Page 12: Although Boone County has a strong manufacturing base, I believe we should convey early on that Boone County is willing to approach new development with an open mind.</p> <p>Page 20: was there any discussion on potentially merging or collaborating between Winnebago and Boone pertaining to transportation? I feel like Boone residents could benefit from such a partnership that might save the Council on Aging some funds, while providing Winnebago with more apparatus and a broader commuter base.</p> <p>Page 21: will R1 apply for funding to increase broadband access in Boone County? I want to ensure the resources and funding is being spread effectively enough to capture a wider spectrum of individuals.</p> <p>Page 25: possibly talk about possibility of land bank wanting to expand to include more partners.</p> <p>Page 26: typo under weaknesses – the first paragraph has a sentence that reads “Boone and Winnebago and Boone Counties...” see below</p> <p>Page 31: I’d be curious to know if Boone lost more than Winnebago and vice versa. And obviously we should be able to figure out why they left and tailor our economic development strategy to recruiting them back or adding new residents to the population.</p> <p>Page 33: it is obvious that there are too many organizations playing around with tourism. That should be controlled by one entity. Possibly some cost savings there too.</p> <p>Page 39: speaking of mobility, something strategically needs to be done to address the stigma of the Council on Aging bus service for Boone County. We were thinking of some sort of rebranding, but most people believe the buses are only for the elderly which is not true.</p> <p>GREAT STRATEGY OVERALL!</p>	<p>Thank you for the comments and specific suggestions. These have all been reviewed by our team and incorporated in ways that we feel honors the suggestions. We have also taken note of analyses that we may examine in the future, and could potentially include in progress updates. We have also added a new strategy ,1.3G to the document.</p>

Individual or Organization	Public Comment	Staff Response and Changes
Rockford Chamber of Commerce	<p>On behalf of the Rockford Chamber of Commerce I am providing public comments/recommendations as it pertains to Goal 3 in the draft 2021-2025 CEDS Plan: “Collaborative regional economic development efforts emphasizing communication, coordination, shared assets, and promotion of the region for business investment.” And specific to Strategy 3.4: “In coordination with local working groups and other partners, identify and “speak with one voice” on top funding and legislative priorities at the federal and state levels.”</p> <p>It is our belief that language and a strategy component in the CEDS needs to be specific to the formation of Council(s) of Governments to be the “one voice” for regional priorities, including funding, but also to address critical needs that will grow our economy and improve the lives of the residents in our region. A COG should be included as one of the “responsible parties” as part of this plan.</p> <p>Councils of Governments (COGs) are voluntary associations that represent member local governments, mainly cities and counties, that seek to provide cooperative planning, coordination, and technical assistance on issues of mutual concern that cross jurisdictional lines. In this sense, COGs serve to develop consensus on many issues that need to be addressed in a subregional or regional context. If properly structured, COG duties complement and do not duplicate jurisdictional activities, and serve to unify jurisdictions and agencies on matters of mutual concern, but independent of the responsibilities traditionally exercised by the individual members within their own communities.</p> <p>We believe that a COG’s core mission to lead in determining and prioritizing regional outlook that will enhance economic growth, workforce development, natural resource conservation, and quality of life for local communities through leadership, program and project development, planning, and leveraging of resources.</p>	<p>Thank you for the comments and information. The team was unsure of the timeliness/status of this initiative and thus did not include it. COG language has been added to the strategy and as a responsible partner. It is expected that a formed COG will play a crucial role in future economic development discussions and progress reports.</p>
Ron Clewer, Area Resident	<p>ATTN Committee members:</p> <p>My comments are submitted in accordance with the request for public comment on the CEDS plan. I was a participant in the initial CEDS plan, and I appreciate the opportunity to provide comments in this third iteration. I hope the committee and R1 find my input relevant and will consider amending the CEDS plan to address at a minimum the following equity related comments.</p> <p>To best serve the region’s interest, planners must ensure that proposed plans, policies, and regulations serve and benefit all residents of our region in ways that reduce or eliminate inequities. Unfortunately, I don’t believe this CEDs document does enough to cast an equity lens on its SWOT assessment of current conditions or within the tactical plan strategies. Because the basis of the plan is to leverage our assets to advance our economy and grow our region, equity, inclusion, and an acceptance of diversity should be vital and highly recognized components of the plan.</p> <p>The American Planning Association released Planning for Equity Policy Guide in the spring of 2019. According to the document, it reaffirms the commitment of the American Planning Association and its members to “promote equity and explicitly remove barriers in policies and regulations that perpetuate inequity in the United States.” It further defines equity as, “just and fair inclusion into a society in which all can participate, prosper, and reach their full potential.” Perhaps the CEDs plan implies a success for all intention; however, with where we are in the world at this point and time, I believe explicitly centering equity in the document is not only appropriate but essential and wise. Other planning organizations are doing just that – playing an active role in equalizing communities and the infrastructure and programs contained in their boundaries so that prosperity for all becomes a reality. Some, are even more bold... The Metropolitan Planning Council studied and produced a document on the Cost of Segregation across Chicago in 2017, and in 2018 released Our Equitable Future as a means to address the inequities driven by segregation.</p> <p>These documents provide valuable content that help frame our regional economic development planning to ultimately drive greater job creation and a higher quality of life. I am hopeful that the strategy and steering committees will consider the intentional inclusion of an equity centered frame to the plan.</p>	<p>The full public comments from this submission are not included in this document for the sake of concision, but are available upon request.</p> <p>Thank you for your comments. Equity, inclusion and the incorporation of housing as a community issue directly related to workforce and economic development has been taken into consideration. As a committee, we will seek to bear this in mind and elevate voices who advocate for these issues.</p> <p>Nearly all comments have been incorporated.</p> <p>Changes of note include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Added Action item 3.4F - Updated narrative portions surrounding the effects of persistent poverty as it relates to cost of living, transportation, workforce, equity, etc. - Added public housing authorities to select action items - Added “inclusivity” to language of 4.4

Individual or Organization	Public Comment	Staff Response and Changes
<p>Bob Babcock, Area Resident</p>	<p>This can't be about making wealthy folks more money. We're being cheated as families live in poverty, unsupported because education is underfunded and there's not emphasis on providing jobs to low income people. If they're not qualified, DON'T IGNORE THEM! HELP THEM GET QUALIFIED.</p> <p>THAT is "Economic Development"!</p> <p>In an 8 county area with the largest populations, Winnebago has the highest percentage in foster care. And we don't have enough foster parents!</p>	<p>Thank you for your comments. The CEDS Team and Committee agree with this assessment. Committee members representing workforce training, community institutions, and labor groups offered their insight throughout this plan creation and recommendations to emphasize the need for providing jobs to lower income populations through training and equitable investment. Inclusion and equity will be a focus going forward.</p>
<p>Mark West, on behalf of Rockton Strong</p>	<p>We have reviewed the 2021-2025 CED with great interest. We were particularly interested in the statement of Vision and Goals on page 8. Of particular interest were the following:</p> <p>...</p> <p>RECOMMENDATIONS</p> <p>In our view, relatively insignificant improvements to economic development CANNOT have a higher priority than environmental impact. We are currently fighting a situation where elected officials are willing to risk the air and water of an entire community for modest economic gains. It is our view that the Economic Development Council should do everything within its power to emphasize the importance of environmental protections and ensure local governments follow best practices to protect communities from air and water pollution.</p> <p>Our organization would welcome the opportunity to meet with, or provide further documentation to anyone within your organization. We look forward to providing any cooperation you may seek.</p>	<p>The full public comments from this submission are not included in this document for the sake of concision, but are available upon request</p> <p>Thank you for your comments and advocacy. Throughout our discussions and update of the plan, emphasized sustainable development, prioritizing those strategies higher than in previous iterations.</p> <p>While the plan does not bind our county and municipal partners to pursue what is recommended, we hope that officials do reference both the CEDS and their own land use/comprehensive plans when making development decisions, and always bear in mind their duties to promote the health, safety, and welfare of their communities.</p> <p>However, this plan does prioritize what EDA funding will be invested into the region. EDA itself emphasizes resiliency and sustainability. We will make clear that any projects that we or partners might seek federal dollars for, do not result in overt and dangerous environmental impacts.</p>

Individual or Organization	Public Comment	Staff Response and Changes
Spitty Tata, on behalf of Transform Rockford	<p>Transform Rockford (TR) applauds the thoroughness of the CEDS Plan. We believe most of the strategies and actions listed will be transformational to the region. Most strategies and tactics are completely aligned with TR transformation Map and projects. In many cases, we believe that R1 has gone above and beyond our T-Map and we would enthusiastically support those strategies as R1 proceeds down the implementation path with the partners in our region.</p> <p>Page 9. Vision statement: Recommendations: Include the concepts of Equity and Inclusion in addition to diversity into the statement. In addition, we suggest replacing “world class” with the community derived phrase “top-25 community”</p> <p>Page 9: Goals: TR is completely aligned with the Goal statements Section II No Comments</p> <p>Section III Targeted Industry Clusters.</p> <p>TR’s plan does not include Medical Sciences as a regional cluster, however, if R1’s research shows that we have enough strength in this cluster in our region, we support forming this cluster.</p> <p>Agriculture and Food Processing Cluster: Boone, Winnebago and McHenry are mentioned, but will CEDS ensure alignment/ collaboration with Stephenson County and surrounding counties with significant presence of agribusiness? We believe this needs mention.</p> <p>Section IV SWOT Analyses.</p> <p>Regional Collaboration: Transform Rockford supports R1’s role in proactively enhancing regional economic collaboration. We assume this is not limited to Economic collaboration and extends to all forms of collaboration in our region.</p> <p>Section V Resiliency.</p> <p>Covid 19 Section: Recommendation: In this section include more verbiage with regard to attracting remote workers into our region.</p> <p>Comment: Although the Covid 19 downturn has affected our manufacturing industry negatively, the positive side is that we can use this as an opportunity to diversify our industry base and reduce our reliance on any one economic sector or cluster in the region.</p> <p>Section VI Tactical Plan</p> <p>1.1B Recommendation: Intentional recruitment of minority youth for this effort and so state in the action</p> <p>1.3A Recommendation: Include language that ensures we reduce travel times with public transit (e.g., Point to Point Transportation)</p> <p>1.7 Recommendation: Include an action to specifically expand broad-band networks to underserved populations.</p> <p>3.1D Recommendation: Use community created shared values (example Transform Rockford)</p> <p>4.3 We see this as a very good strategy that stands on its own with its own set of actions. The actions listed here align better with a different strategy focused on site development in the region. TR supports both strategies.</p> <p>4.4B Recommendation: Remove the term “manufacturing-based” so the target underserved populations have broader access to other industries as well.</p> <p>4.4E Recommendation: Include Launch815 as a virtual platform for small business assistance</p> <p>4.6D We support this tactic, but it seems out of place in this strategy</p> <p>5.4 Recommendation: Given the current civic unrest, strengthen this strategy to include more specific actions.</p> <p>5.5 Recommendations: Add specific tactics to shore up mentorship and SCORE. Add specific call-out/focus to support and growing the number of Stage 1 and Stage 2 companies in our region. Startups and Accelerator Programing</p> <p>Section VII Implementation and Tracking</p> <p>1.7A Comment: We are not aware of why McHenry is specifically called out. It seems like Boone and Winnebago can benefit from fiber service also?</p> <p>Table 7: Is there a fuller list of peer communities to compare to?</p> <p>Table 7: Instead of using median as the measure of income comparison can there be a measure of equity like percent of households over “living wage”</p>	<p>Thank you for your comments and support.</p> <p>Agriculture is important not just for the EDD geography, but also in our surrounding counties. Slight language changes were made to reference this. Additions have been made to the resiliency section.</p> <p>Various changes have been made to the tactical plan. Many of the listed recommendations have already been made based on previous public comments, aiding in the legitimacy of the changes.</p> <p>Some action items were not changed due to detailed discussions that have taken place with partners. Regardless, all comments are noted and could aid in progress reports and updates of the tactical plan.</p> <p>RPC intends to expand upon the peer communities and improve our progress tracking methodology going forward.</p> <p>Section VII comments are useful to us as we seek to do this. We believe there should be process alignment here with Transform Rockford.</p>

Individual or Organization	Public Comment	Staff Response and Changes
Kerry Knodle, Area Resident	<p>To Whom It May Concern:</p> <p>Thank you for the opportunity to submit public comment on the Draft CEDS Plan for Winnebago, Boone, and McHenry County. As a member of the initial CEDS Steering Committee, and an interested private citizen, I have followed the evolution of the CEDS Plan as well as the various committees/bodies/agencies that have worked to implement the CEDS over time. I hope you find my comments and suggestions useful.</p> <p>First, some general comments which reflect my overall reaction to the document. The concepts referenced may affect more than one area of the CEDS:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Steering Committee Representation: Over time, it appears that representation by the nonprofit sector of our communities has decreased. Especially in the era of COVID, as the demands for services from the nonprofit sector skyrockets, I would urge RPC to reach out to area nonprofit leaders for inclusion in the implementation phase, and certainly in future CEDS efforts. • The plan, I believe, needs to be more intentional in its approach to the development of human capital as equally essential to the success of the region. In your review of each goal and tactical plan, I urge you to consider the effect on all segments of our population, especially those who are underrepresented, and un/under employed. • While hampered by COVID, I would urge you to be much more aggressive in publicizing this plan and intentionally seek input from those least likely to be heard on these topics. • While not entirely incongruous, it seems as if having a goal of achieving a high quality of life, when the vision measures it by "outperforming peer regions" injects a competitive element that I consider distasteful. • Targeted Industry Clusters – a question: The 11 clusters you cite employ only 16% of the region's population. What is the rationale for a focus on such a small portion of the overall workforce? • Alignment with Existing Plans: It has been said often that our region is awash in plans and planning, but behind the curve in results. While we have achieved progress on several fronts, is there any kind of "crosswalk" of the various plans with an eye toward identifying overlapping elements and strategies? Some years back, I worked on such a review of dozens of studies done on the Winnebago County Criminal Justice System, and found repeated recommendations that, in many cases, had been ignored or shelved. I think it would be helpful to public acceptance of this plan if the successes of those existing plans could be highlighted. <p>...</p> <p>I hope that the committee will take my comments and suggestions in the spirit that they are given – to turn planning into effective and sustainable action. I applaud the efforts of all concerned and understand the herculean task of regional planning. If I may be of help in any way, please do not hesitate to reach out.</p> <p>Warm regards,</p>	<p>Extensive public comments from this submission are not included in this document for the sake of concision, but are available upon request</p> <p>Thank you for your comments. We appreciate the detailed feedback and attachments you have provided as we look towards implementation. Various changes have been made to the document based on your suggestions. A few responses are below:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - There was an error in employment numbers in the targeted industry infographic. This has been fixed. - Going forward, the CEDS Committee will focus on human capital and investments, especially in the context of COVID-19 recovery. Non-profit and human services representation will be added to the steering committee. - The decision to leave out the workforce goal came at the desire of the workforce board representatives on the steering committee. The intent was not to de-emphasize the importance of workforce in our region. R1 will be working closely with workforce partners on any federal funded initiatives in our region. - Tourism was added as a separate goal as a result of committee discussions. It has not replaced any other goals, despite the number of goals remaining the same. <p>Again, we appreciate the detailed feedback and will bear in mind all suggestions moving forward.</p>

Individual or Organization	Public Comment	Staff Response and Changes
	<p>Thank you for the opportunity to submit comments on the CEDS 2021-2025 Draft Document. Please see below our suggestions, comments and questions regarding the draft. Overall, we believe this was a very good overview of challenges and potential strategies to enhance our regional economy and commend the R1 Planning staff for their work.</p> <p>Sustainable Development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To be competitive nationally and reverse the decline in population in the greater Rockford area, we must continue to work to achieve world class sustainable development. The approach should include a diverse offering of urban living and business opportunities. Our region must enhance the quality of life with urban lifestyle options that is especially appealing to those 25-44, representing the young professionals, families and individuals who make-up the needed workforce that will help grow the local economy. • Should consider taking a phased approach to infill development prioritizing the city center of Rockford. In addition to Barber Colman, Motorola facilities, we call out the former Rockford Register Star building at 99 E. State St. in Rockford. This building consist of approximately 180,000 square feet of development space. • For better urban mobility, continue to pursue funding such as the federal BUILD grant program under the US DOT for the Rockford "Downtown Complete Streets Project" that would develop traffic calming measures and innovative public transit options such as the electric bus circulator route. <p>Regional Collaboration</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong regional collaboration is needed and should include Rock County, Wisconsin which shares transportation/logistics infrastructure and also the regional labor and visitor/destination market, and two large cities, Rockford and Beloit. • Collaboration should include planning and branding strategy for the region as a whole. • Develop strategies to attract remote workers nationally. <p>Supporting a Visitor Based-Economy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For regional visitor attraction, also include local residents who attend and use local recreational and entertainment amenities. A visitor-based economy includes our own residents. • The Kishwaukee River Valley Greenway should be highlighted for its biking/hiking trails as an attraction for visitors from the Chicago region. <p>Other Comments and Questions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Home Rule is an important tool for the City of Rockford to have the ability to compete on an even playing field with other jurisdictions throughout the region that currently have this authority to develop effective revenue strategies to provide services and balance budgets. • Government reduction planning and strategy, consolidation. What is the strategy? • What are some of the small wins referred to in the document? Please provide examples for context. • Identify effective measurement tools to assess the impact of federal funding initiatives from the EDA that support innovation and drive new business start-ups. 	<p>Thank you for your comments. There is a lot here that we will need to keep in mind going forward, and as we update our strategies.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A phased approach will likely be a part of any infill development strategy, but reference has been made within the plan. - The BUILD grant program, and other transportation programs are accounted for through the work of RPC (as the MPO, and CMAP. Some of the strategies within this plan could be pursued with BUILD, SPR, etc. programs. We and our partners understand the importance of transportation infrastructure investments as it relates to economic development and quality of life. - Shared collaboration with Rock County, WI (through SLATS) is on our radar, especially when it comes to transportation and logistics infrastructure. For the purpose of the plan, representing the EDD, cross-state collaboration may seem forgotten but we recognize the importance of aligning with our neighbors, and this will be pursued. - Language regarding recreation among local/regional residents has been added, as well as language on our greenways as attractions. - Language has been added in the regional collaboration section regarding small wins and consolidation.



COLLABORATIVE PLANNING FOR NORTHERN ILLINOIS

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