

2016

NORTHERN ILLINOIS

COMPREHENSIVE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY



Winnebago | Boone | McHenry

2020



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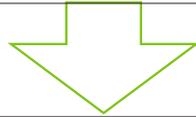
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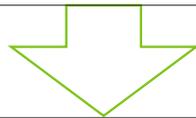


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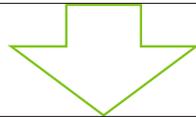


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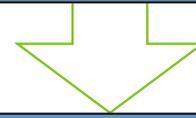
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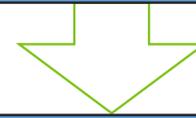
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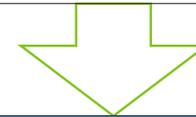


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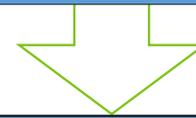
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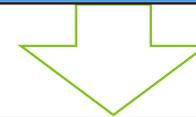
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I. INTRODUCTION

The update and expansion of the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) for the Northern Illinois Region represents a natural evolution of a continued focus on regional collaboration in support of economic vitality. This is the second CEDS for Boone and Winnebago counties, and the first for McHenry County. It overlaps two metropolitan statistical areas (MSA) – the Rockford MSA (Boone and Winnebago counties) and the Chicago MSA (of which McHenry County is a part). Shared industry strengths, transportation assets, and recent regional economic development partnerships form the basis for collaboration. Together Boone, Winnebago, and McHenry counties (collectively called the Northern Illinois Region) are more competitive in the global economy and can better leverage limited local, state, and federal funds to drive job creation and improved quality of life for residents.

2010-15 CEDS

The Rockford MSA adopted its first CEDS in 2010. The process aligned public sector, private sector, nonprofit, and community partners, as well as public input, into a plan for regional development. The Rockford MSA met the federal criteria for “economic distress” because of severe impacts from the Great Recession and subsequent company shutdowns and layoffs. Unemployment peaked at 17.3 percent in 2010 and did not consistently fall below 10 percent until late 2013. The regional economy was overly reliant on several manufacturing sectors, facing concerning trends in business development, workforce, infrastructure, and quality of life that if left unchecked would make problems worse.

The Rockford MSA has seen some economic recovery since adoption of the last CEDS (more information is outlined in the Background section), but work remains. Fortunately the MSA made significant progress in terms of regional collaboration, laying the groundwork for future economic success. This collaboration has been done in tandem with the federal government, particularly the U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA).



Prior to completion of the CEDS, the Rockford MSA did not qualify for EDA funding, but has since been awarded the following grants:

REGION

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

Northern Illinois Region

Boone, Winnebago, and McHenry counties

Rockford MSA/Region

Boone and Winnebago counties

Chicago MSA

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

Northeastern Illinois

Cook, DuPage, Kane, Kendall, Lake, McHenry, and Will counties. Synonymous with the CMAP region

Greater Chicago Region

Chicago MSA, plus Kankakee and LaPorte (IN) counties and Milwaukee, Ozaukee, Racine, Washington, and Waukesha counties in Wisconsin



- \$2.7 million public works grant to upgrade roads around Chicago Rockford International Airport
- \$2.5 million public works grant to upgrade road infrastructure and develop the Midfield Aviation Industrial Park at Chicago Rockford International Airport
- \$1.8 million Jobs and Innovation Accelerator Challenge grant (through EDA and other federal agencies) to promote the region’s aerospace cluster
- \$150,000 economic adjustment grant to develop the Rockford Region Strategic Diversification Plan, which outlined strategies to develop the Rockford MSA’s competitiveness in aerospace, aviation and logistics, medical equipment manufacturing, and alternative energy parts manufacturing
- \$65,000 planning grant to assist with the updating of this CEDS

Three of these grants directly supported the growth of the aerospace and aviation clusters, which have been among the brightest spots of economic recovery. Highlights include:

- The expansion of aircraft component manufacturer Woodward, whose \$300 million second campus in Loves Park will add approximately 1,000 jobs in the coming years
- AAR Corp.’s maintenance, repair, and overhaul hangar

for wide-body jets at Chicago Rockford International Airport and a related Aviation Maintenance Technology education facility for Rock Valley College

- Increased networking, business development programming, and trade assistance to companies in the Rockford Area Aerospace Cluster, which has an estimated 250 companies in the aerospace and aviation supply chains northern Illinois and southern Wisconsin

While economic need drove creation of the last CEDS, the bigger goal was to increase collaboration in the two-county region and plan projects, initiatives, and strategies to make the Rockford MSA “a world-class, sustainable community” with a “diverse economic base” as outlined in the first CEDS’ vision. A summary of the results of the first CEDS, by Goal area, is included as Appendix 1.

ADDITION OF MCHENRY COUNTY

Collaboration between the Rockford MSA and McHenry County began in earnest in 2013 with development of a nine-county application for the EDA’s Make it in America Challenge. The application focused on expanding the advanced manufacturing cluster, attracting foreign direct investment, and training and educating domestic workers to fill engineering positions. Initiatives identified in the Make it in America process continue as part of this CEDS update.

In 2014, the collaboration continued. Boone, Winnebago, and McHenry counties partnered in applying for the EDA’s Investing in Manufacturing Communities Partnership (IMCP). Through the IMCP application development process, the counties connected and expanded existing and proposed plans along six “pillars” of the regional economy: workforce and training, supplier networks, research and innovation, infrastructure and site development, trade and international investment, and operational improvement and capital access. The application did not win a designation, but regional economic development, workforce, and education partners continued to meet to implement some of the plans, and submitted another application in 2015. In many ways, the IMCP plans were the prelude to this CEDS. The positive experiences of collaboration lead to the three counties agreeing to jointly develop a new CEDS.

THE CEDS PLANNING PROCESS

A three-county CEDS Strategy Committee that included a mix of public- and private-sector representatives spearheaded the CEDS process. The Strategy Committee included some members from the previous CEDS Strategy Committee for Boone and Winnebago counties, as well as new members from those counties and from McHenry County. It represented the main economic interests of the region, including leaders from manufacturing, healthcare

and other companies, key public officials, community leaders, economic development professionals, workforce development stakeholders, minority and labor groups, and higher education representatives from across the three counties.

As noted before, this is McHenry County’s first CEDS. In order to quickly delve into important local issues and prepare for participation in the Strategy Committee, McHenry County also created its own steering committee that included representatives from the governmental, non-profit, and private spheres. This committee met ahead of the Strategy Committee meetings and sent its findings and priorities to the larger committee as part of the planning process.

The CEDS planning process was supported by a Technical Committee that included representatives of the Economic Development District of Northern Illinois (EDDNI), Northern Illinois University’s Center for Governmental Studies (NIU), and the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP). The Technical Committee worked closely with Boone, McHenry, and Winnebago county officials and the region’s economic development professionals at Growth Dimensions for Belvidere-Boone County, the McHenry County Economic Development Corporation (MCEDC) and the Rockford Area Economic Development Council (RAEDC). The Technical Committee provided background data on the region, analysis of the previous CEDS and existing regional plans, and facilitation of CEDS Technical Committee meetings and other public outreach.

Several surveys were conducted in order to gain stakeholder input. McHenry County surveyed local governments on their approach to economic development and young workers on the county’s strengths and weaknesses as a place to live and work. NIU surveyed businesses across the three counties, identifying key needs and issues.

The public reviewed the draft goals and strategies in July 2015. Each county hosted one public meeting. More than 100 people attended in-person sessions. Strategies were



also circulated through an online survey, with 31 people responding. Additionally, members of the Strategy Committee and Technical Committee conducted numerous small conversations throughout the process that provided invaluable insights. The draft CEDS was made available for public review in December 2015 and early January 2016. Four public open houses were held in that period across the three counties, with more than 50 attendees, and online public input was also sought. The draft CEDS was also presented at seven public government meetings, including each county board. Comments from the public review period are included as Appendix 2.

ALIGNMENT WITH EXISTING PLANS

Regional stakeholders prioritized alignment of this CEDS with other regional plans that preceded or were concurrent with this process. Particularly within the Rockford MSA, there is a sense of “planning fatigue.” As such, this CEDS builds off those existing plans, which also had a wealth of stakeholder input. Examples of these plans include the following:

- **Rockford Region Strategic Diversification Plan (2012):**

Funded in part through an EDA adjustment grant, this plan analyzed the Rockford MSA’s competitiveness in aerospace, aviation and logistics, medical equipment manufacturing, and alternative energy parts manufacturing. It provided action steps in four areas - quality of the built environment, regional collaboration, targeted industries, and workforce.

- **Chicago Metro West Manufacturing Alliance for the Investing in Manufacturing Communities Partnership:**

This plan was developed in 2014 and 2015 with Boone, McHenry, and Winnebago counties, as well as other partner counties, to strengthen the region’s shared advanced manufacturing sectors – particularly metalworking, aerospace, production technology, and vehicle manufacturing. Several of its key action items remain in this CEDS as regional priorities.

- **GO TO 2040:**

CMAP developed and now guides the implementation of GO TO 2040, metropolitan Chicago’s comprehensive regional plan. Several of GO TO 2040’s recommendations overlap with the strategies prioritized in this CEDS. For example, as part of its Human Capital theme, the plan recommends supporting economic innovation and improving education and workforce development.

- **Transportation for Tomorrow 2040: A Long Range Transportation Plan for the Rockford Region:**

Updated in 2015 alongside the CEDS update, this plan prioritizes infrastructure upgrades in Boone and Winnebago counties that are needed to improve freight and people mobility and pays special attention to

economic development and land use. Key airport, rail, and road improvements in this plan are represented in the CEDS.

- **McHenry County Strategic Plan 2013-15:**

In 2013, the McHenry County Board adopted a strategic plan to guide the county’s work. All of that work was framed within a mission: dedicated to providing the highest quality services for McHenry County. A number of recommendations in this plan move the strategy forward, including highlighting the importance of infrastructure to support economic growth and focusing the many economic development actors around a common business outreach approach.

- **McHenry County 2030 Comprehensive Plan:**

This comprehensive plan provides long-range policy recommendations for the development and redevelopment of the County’s built form and physical assets as well as for the maintenance and enhancement of the County’s valued natural resources.

- **Rockford Area Economic Development Council Rockforward 20/20 Strategic Plan (2015):**

This plan for Winnebago County’s economic development agency – which is a key partner in the CEDS – was developed at the same time as this CEDS, and thus shares goals and strategies.

- **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 (CMMC). MCEDC has been particularly active assisting the consortium, helping to organize match-making events throughout the region and training others on its successful methods. Metals are a key cluster in the Northern Illinois Region.

- **Metro Chicago Exports:**

Metro Chicago Exports represents an unprecedented collaboration between the seven counties in northeastern Illinois, the City of Chicago, and World Business Chicago with the goal of increasing exports from small and mid-sized firms and supporting regional job growth. Firms in McHenry County have accessed this program.

- **Rockford Regional Plan for Sustainable Development (2014):**

This plan for the Rockford MSA was created by the Rockford Region Vital Signs project and the Rockford Metropolitan Agency for Planning through funding from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. Among other recommendations, this plan outlined some of the concepts used to develop the Regional Planning Commission that became a top CEDS priority.

• **Boone County Economic Development Strategic Plan Action Report (2011):**

This plan was completed as part of the Regional Plan for Sustainable Development process, and in conjunction with the previous CEDS to specifically outline actions for Boone County. Several of its findings remain in the CEDS and guide related discussions with Growth Dimensions for Belvidere-Boone County’s business development committee to enact this plan.

• **Boone County Government Strategic Plan (2016):**

This plan was updated concurrently with 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.

• **City of Rockford 2020 Comprehensive Plan:**

The 2015 update of this plan used the previous CEDS, the Rockford Region Diversification Plan, other plans, and extensive community input 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.

• **Transform Rockford:**

This ongoing grassroots community initiative, focused in Winnebago County but including Boone County is creating a strategic plan to make Rockford a “top 25 community by 2025.” Its Jobs and Economy team reviewed the previous Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy and assisted with identifying key initiatives for this CEDS.

• **McHenry County Green Infrastructure Plan (2012)**

The plan created a detailed inventory of natural resources in the county and worked with local governments and agencies to identify additional green infrastructure opportunities, and develop policies and implementation recommendations. The ultimate goal of this plan to be the foundation for green infrastructure planning and implementation in McHenry County at every level—from the county, municipalities, and park districts—to individual property owners and businesses.

VISION AND GOALS

The CEDS Strategy Committee approved the following vision for the Northern Illinois Region.

In 2020, the Northern Illinois Region will be a world-class, 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 Strategy Committee approved the following goals:

- 1 A collaborative economic development strategy within the three-county region emphasizing communication, cooperation, alignment of initiatives, shared assets, and promotion of the region for business investment.**
- 2 Efficient business development, expansion, diversification, job growth, and innovation throughout the region.**
- 3 Availability of a skilled and flexible workforce that successfully meets the needs of existing and emerging industries and technologies.**
- 4 A full range of infrastructure, with emphasis on transportation, utilities, and communication in order to successfully meet the needs of the region’s businesses.**
- 5 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.**
- 6 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.**



II. BACKGROUND

As discussed in the introduction, Boone, McHenry, and Winnebago counties decided to collaborate on economic development planning because of the numerous key linkages between the three counties. A report published by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) identified the Greater Chicago Region as the third largest metropolitan region in the U.S., encompassing 21 counties in Illinois, Indiana, and Wisconsin with a population of more than 11.5 million people and \$650.6 billion in gross regional product (GRP).¹ The Northern Illinois Region overlaps the megaregion defined by the OECD. The megaregion's traditional manufacturing base, despite declining employment over the past several decades, remains an important contributor to GRP compared to other areas and the nation. It is also a leading center for a wide variety of business and professional services, biotechnology, education, and research and development activities.

The hub for this megaregion is Chicago. Boone, McHenry, and Winnebago counties are increasingly connected to this core, though to varying degrees. The Northern Illinois

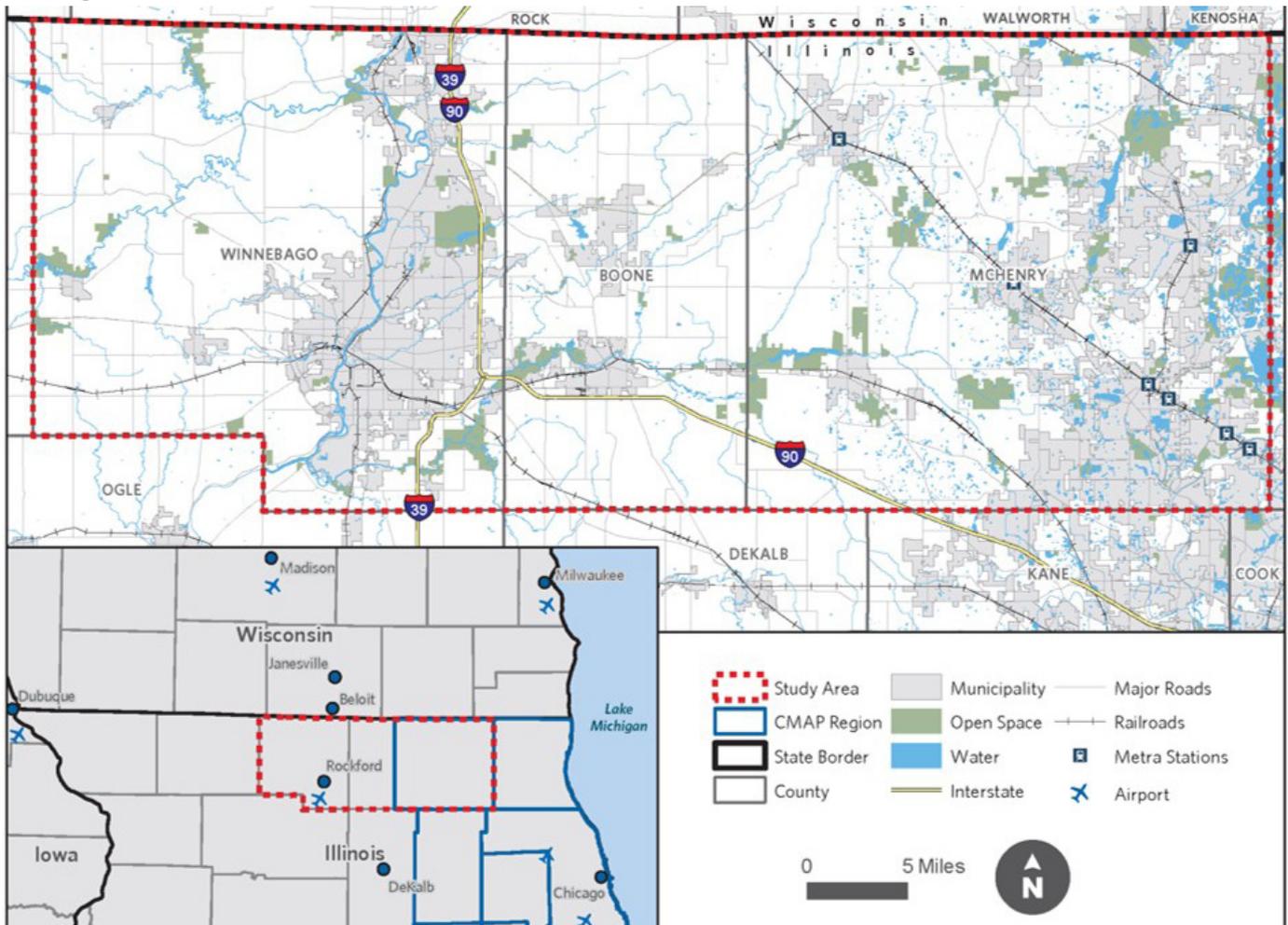
Region is linked to Greater Chicago by several federal and state highways (especially I-90, U.S. 20, and U.S. 14), as well as Class I rail lines and regional airports. McHenry is most closely linked with Chicago. The county participates in numerous regional bodies that include Chicago and McHenry is served by Metra passenger rail lines that provide access to downtown Chicago. Almost 9 percent of employed McHenry County residents commute to Chicago for work while only 1.9 percent commute to Boone or Winnebago counties.

Boone and Winnebago are increasingly integrated into Greater Chicago by transportation access, commuting, and business supply-chain linkages. The \$2.5 billion Jane Addams Memorial Tollway Rebuilding and Widening Project is improving 90 miles of I-90 from near Chicago O'Hare International Airport to Rockford. The improved roadway will enable future transit expansion, including expanded Pace bus service. As of 2013, more than 12 percent of employed residents of Boone and Winnebago counties commute to the seven counties of northeastern Illinois for work, an increase from just 9.5 percent in 2003.

Stakeholders in McHenry frequently cite how in some areas of the county it is far more convenient to access

1 <http://www.oecd.org/unitedstates/oecdterritorialreviewsthechicagotri-statemetropolitanarea.htm>

Regional Context (Figure 1)





Chicago Rockford International Airport than O'Hare Airport. The supply and mobility of skilled workers continues to be a critical factor in business location and growth. Population growth and business expansion in the region are linked to that of Greater Chicago.

Beyond economic connections, the region shares land use and environmental issues. Significant portions of all three counties retain a rural identity, with agriculture a significant land use and economic sector. Western parts of McHenry County, southwestern parts of Winnebago County, and central parts of Boone County all struggle with balancing development pressures with a desire to retain their rural heritage. All types of communities, from large cities like Rockford to smaller rural communities like Harvard, struggle with revitalizing distressed development sites and want strategies to jumpstart reinvestment.

While water was cited as a major strength by local businesses, much of the region is groundwater dependent and water must be managed sustainably to preserve that strength. Representatives from all three counties participate in the Northern Ground Water Protection Planning Committee. Important habitats are linked throughout the region. Major watersheds, such as the Rock and Kishwaukee, cover all of Boone and Winnebago and parts of McHenry.

Northern Illinois also has important connections to the north. Beloit, Janesville, and Madison are linked to the region via I-90. Beloit and Janesville in particular share the region's manufacturing focus. While differences between Illinois and Wisconsin often drive competition among the parties, their proximity, transportation connections, and a shared labor force form the basis for future collaboration.

Although the counties in the Northern Illinois Region share similar attributes, unique aspects also set them apart. McHenry and Winnebago counties are nearly equal in population with strong employment concentrations in manufacturing and business services. However, much of McHenry County's growth has been relatively recent,

transforming a previously rural county into a network of suburban communities based on links to the greater 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. Although Winnebago County has benefited from Chicago's outward expansion, its population and job growth have moved at a much slower pace as the area struggled with retrenchment in several key industries and major employers.

Like McHenry County, Boone County's growth has been relatively recent, having benefitted from outward suburbanization of both the Rockford and Chicago areas. However, its business and employment base is closer to that of the Rockford area with an emphasis on automobile and machinery manufacturing due to the presence of Fiat Chrysler Automobiles (FCA).

CORE TRENDS (Table 1)

INDICATOR	TIME PERIOD	NORTHERN ILLINOIS REGION	GREATER CHICAGO REGION	STATE OF ILLINOIS
Population	2014	649,694	11,544,825	12,880,580
	2010-2014 Trend	-1.30%	0.90%	0.40%
Employment	2014	311,607	6,923,233	7,557,969
	2010-2014 Trend	3.40%	5.90%	4.80%
Unemployment Rate	2010	12.7%	10.2%	10.5%
	2014	7.8%	6.9%	7.2%
	2010-2014 Trend	-4.9	-3.3	-3.3
Per Capita Income (2009 \$)	2014	\$40,914	\$45,772	\$41,479
	2010-2014 Trend	7.4%	9.2%	7.7%
GRP per capita (2009 \$)	2014	\$37,239	\$60,591	\$56,810
	2010-2014 Trend	5.1%	5.6%	5.8%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau population estimates 2010-2014; Woods and Poole Economics, Inc., 2015; Illinois Department of Employment Security, Labor Market Information unit, 2015; U.S. Census Bureau, Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates (SAIPE) program, 2010-2013.

TOP 10 INDUSTRIES BY SHARE OF EMPLOYMENT, 2013 (Table 2)

SECTOR	NORTHERN ILLINOIS REGION	GREATER CHICAGO REGION	STATE OF ILLINOIS
Manufacturing	21.9%	11.3%	10.9%
Health Care and Social Assistance	14.1%	13.1%	13.2%
Retail Trade	11.1%	10.4%	10.5%
Educational Services	8.0%	9.2%	9.8%
Administration and Support, Waste Management and Remediation	7.4%	7.1%	6.6%
Accommodation and Food Services	6.9%	7.4%	7.5%
Wholesale Trade	5.3%	5.8%	5.6%
Construction	4.1%	3.3%	3.3%
Public Administration	3.6%	3.4%	4.3%
Other Services (excluding Public Administration)	3.5%	3.5%	3.4%
Total	85.9%	74.5%	75.1%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamics.

TOP LINE FIGURES

The SWOT section of this plan delves deeply into the region's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats by marrying relevant data with stakeholder input. As a

prelude, this section provides a few key statistics that frame this CEDS. The three counties are home to almost 650,000 people. Northern Illinois has performed more poorly coming out of the recession than the Greater Chicago megaregion, losing population and adding jobs at a slower rate. The slow population growth of Greater Chicago is owed, in part, to slow growth in the core of the region. Growth in the Chicago metropolitan area substantially trails other large metropolitan areas.²

In Northern Illinois, over a fifth of workers are employed in the manufacturing sector. This distribution is even more skewed in Boone, where 48 percent of employees work in manufacturing. When manufacturing struggles, as was the case during the recession, the Northern Illinois economy struggles.

Business vitality also indicates regional well-being. Following a sharp drop in the number of establishments and new business startups during the recession, both indicators rallied from 2007 to 2010. Since 2010, both have declined but remain above pre-recession levels (Table 2). Taken together with the rate of business closures, which increased through the recession and beyond, the region faces a challenge in creating the economic conditions that encourage entrepreneurs and small businesses to invest and grow. Young businesses have traditionally been an important source of job creation. Fewer new businesses could mean fewer new jobs. Patent activity is a strength, however, for the Northern Illinois Region and outpaces that of both the Greater Chicago Region and the state. Patent activity also is increasing, creating opportunities for business development and job growth provided programs are in place to take advantage of them.

While the Northern Illinois Region can produce and sustain a well-educated and skilled workforce, it faces significant challenges in retaining them, demonstrated by the relatively smaller share of college graduates in the region, as well as the recent decline in the number of working-age people with 2-year and 4-year degrees (Table 3). This is in contrast to the Greater Chicago Region,

BUSINESS VITALITY INDICATORS (TABLE 3)

INDICATOR	TIME PERIOD	NORTHERN ILLINOIS REGION	GREATER CHICAGO REGION	STATE OF ILLINOIS
Business Establishments	2013	38,143	658,209	756,404
	2010	45,568	792,777	920,906
Startups per 10,000 Population	2013	36.3	39.6	38.9
	2010	159.7	158.9	158.8
Closures per 10,000 Population	2013	98.1	101.1	102.0
	2010	39.8	41.9	40.4
Patents per 10,000 Population	2013	5.1	3.9	3.6
	2010	3.3	3.1	2.8

Source: Nation Employment Time Series (NETS) database, 2015; Patent information taken from the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office (http://www.uspto.gov/web/offices/ac/ido/oeip/taf/countyll/usa_county_gd.htm), 2013.

EDUCATION ATTAINMENT INDICATORS (Table 4)

INDICATOR	TIME PERIOD	NORTHERN ILLINOIS REGION	GREATER CHICAGO REGION	STATE OF ILLINOIS
Some College (no Degree) per 10,000 Population*	2013	2,529.8	2,191.7	2,191.3
	2010-2013 Trend	6.5%	3.6%	0.8%
Associate Degree per 10,000 Population*	2013	756.8	793.9	726.3
	2010-2013 Trend	-1.8%	1.8%	0.8%
College Graduates per 10,000 Population*	2013	2,551.7	2,844.1	3,177.8
	2010-2013 Trend	-1.9%	2.2%	0.8%

*Based on population 25 years of age and older, Source: EASI Analytics, Inc., 2013.

WORKING-AGE POPULATION TRENDS (Table 5)

INDICATOR	TIME PERIOD	NORTHERN ILLINOIS REGION	GREATER CHICAGO REGION	STATE OF ILLINOIS
18 to 24 Years of Age	2014	57,147	1,087,447	1,256,307
	2010-2014 Trend	7.6%	1.4%	0.8%
25 to 44 Years of Age	2014	157,550	3,170,247	3,464,460
	2010-2014 Trend	-7.7%	-0.6%	-1.0%
45 to 64 Years of Age	2014	185,253	3,019,391	3,377,759
	2010-2014 Trend	1.3%	1.9%	0.8%

Source: Adjusted U.S. Census Bureau population estimates 2010-2014

which experienced small increases in both categories. Within the Northern Illinois Region, educational attainment differs significantly. Per 10,000 people aged 25 and older, McHenry County contains almost 3,900 college educated workers, compared to only 2,500 in Boone and 2,800 in Winnebago.

In addition, the Northern Illinois Region has a higher share of people with some college-level education, but no degree. Although little information is available on the characteristics of this group, it suggests that the region may be able to increase the pool of college graduates by identifying and assisting those with the greatest potential to finish their education. It also demonstrates an ongoing need for educational pathways to help residents prepare for high-wage jobs that typically require high educational attainment. If the region aspires to be a knowledge-based, globally competitive economy, it must develop a better-educated, better-trained workforce, especially in the science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) disciplines.

Concerns about an aging workforce inherently relate to educational attainment and the attractiveness of the region for young workers. The “graying” of the population and the

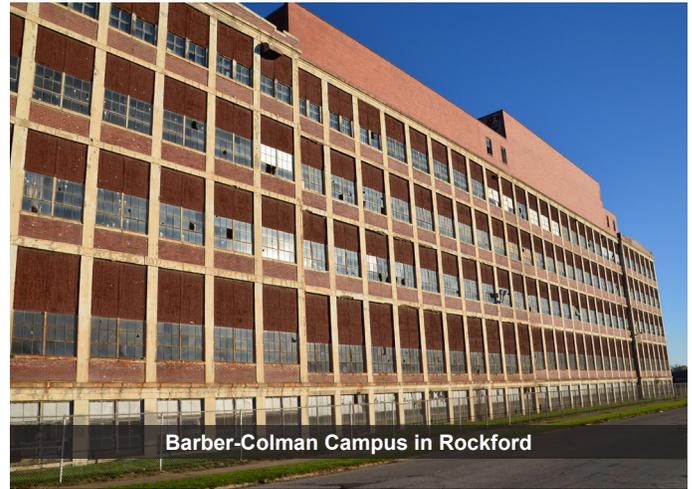
2 http://www.cmap.illinois.gov/about/updates/-/asset_publisher/UIMf-SLnFfMB6/content/population-change-and-geographic-mobility-in-the-cmap-region.

slow growth or decline in younger age groups will impact the competitiveness of the Northern Illinois Region (Table 5). The recent recession appears to have precipitated losses in key working-age groups, such as those between 25 and 44. As older workers retire in increasing numbers during the next decade, businesses in the Northern Illinois Region will face greater competition for new employees. Northern Illinois businesses will not only compete among themselves for young workers but also with other regions, including Greater Chicago.

Finally, while the CEDS process is largely focused on regional economic development challenges, assets and initiatives, stakeholders noted that special effort must be made to ensure economic growth is spread across all parts of the region. In particular, economically distressed communities and neighborhoods of the region and their residents will benefit from both locally specific tactics and regionally important tactics outlined in this plan. This complements regional commitments toward place-based economic development, as well as the EDA's commitment to benefiting distressed areas.

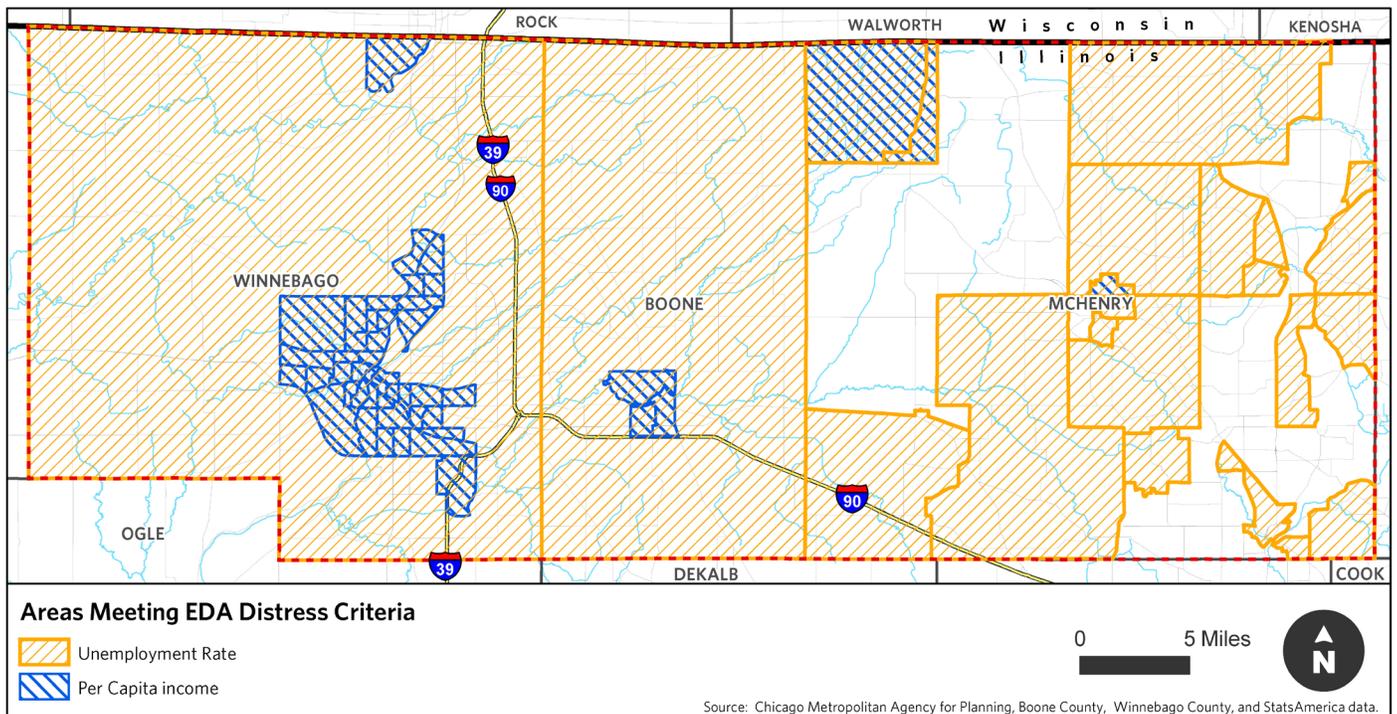
MEASURING DISTRESS

EDA considers an area to be distressed if the most recently available per capita income is 80 percent or less of the national average; the average unemployment rate over the



most recent 24-month period for which data is available is at least one percentage point greater than the national average; or the area has a "special need" as determined by EDA. This measure often plays a key role in eligibility for funding under EDA programs. Substantial portions of Northern Illinois are distressed under at least one of the two measures. All of both Boone and Winnebago counties qualify as distressed under the unemployment threshold. Specific U.S. Census tracts in McHenry County also qualify due to higher unemployment rates. Portions of Rockford, Belvidere, Harvard, and other communities qualify as distressed under the per capita income metric.

EDA DISTRESSED AREAS (Figure 2)



In developing this CEDS, the project team prepared a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) analysis for the Northern Illinois Region. The SWOT represents a marriage between findings from data analysis and stakeholder feedback gathered both the CEDS Strategy Committee, members of the public, and other stakeholders. It builds upon the SWOT analysis of the 2010-15 CEDS for Boone and Winnebago Counties and similar work done for McHenry County, as well as the plans cited previously.

The 2010-15 CEDS was based around six goals. Early in this CEDS update process, stakeholders agreed to keep those goals substantially the same for this CEDS. As such, the SWOT analysis is organized around those six areas:

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

1 REGIONAL COLLABORATION

Regional collaboration was the first goal of the 2010-15 CEDS for Boone and Winnebago counties, and much work has been done on that front over the past five years. It remains the first goal of this CEDS:

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.

Collaboration is the framework for successful implementation of many actions in the tactical plan – stakeholders agreed that a lack of alignment and shared commitment to implementation of economic development and related initiatives holds the region back.



STRENGTHS

Existing regional partnerships form the foundation for further collaboration. The 2010-15 CEDS Strategy Committee brought representatives of Boone and Winnebago counties together in an unprecedented way. EDDNI was formed as part of the 2010-15 CEDS process and continues to serve as a regional forum for economic development planning and a resource for research and grantwriting. Another regional entity, RMAP, is also an asset, bringing Boone and Winnebago counties together as their metropolitan planning organization. During the 2016-20 CEDS process, EDDNI and RMAP further strengthened their combined assets by co-locating in order to provide more efficient services to partners in

the two-county area, with an eye toward increased service to McHenry County as well.

The Northern Illinois Region has three economic development organizations, each funded as a public/private partnership, with significant investment by the region’s major employers and government agencies. These organizations – McHenry County Economic Development Corporation (MCEDC), Growth Dimensions for Belvidere-Boone County, and the Rockford Area Economic Development Council (RAEDC) – are the region’s business attraction and retention agents. As discussed earlier, these entities have collaborated on projects such as previous IMCP applications and the Make it in America Challenge.



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. The different geographic orientations of Boone and Winnebago (historically part of the Rockford region) and McHenry (historically part of the Chicago region), along with long-standing role divisions, must be surmounted.

The Rockford MSA, which makes up about half of the Northern Illinois Region, is the only urbanized area of Illinois without a Regional Planning Commission (RPC) or Council of Governments. While Boone and McHenry counties have countywide planning bodies, and McHenry County is part of CMAP (which offers more extensive planning services beyond transportation planning), the lack of a larger regional planning body limits collaboration and causes duplication of government services.

In 2014 the Rockford Regional Plan for Sustainable Development,¹ in response to an identified need by community stakeholders, developed a regional governance model for the two-county Rockford metropolitan area, but also indicated such a model could be extended to surrounding counties. Goal 4 of that plan was “The regional planning framework shall integrate the disparate activities of transportation, land use, education, housing, economic development, human capital development, and human services to amplify the incremental value associated with coordinated planning.”

A weakness identified in the 2012 Rockford Region Strategic Diversification Plan² was “lack of collaboration among regional economic development partners.” The plan noted, “In order to grow, strengthen, and diversify its economy, the Rockford region must work together toward common goals, while also collaborating strategically

¹ Funded by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development’s Partnership for Sustainable Communities.

² Funded by the U.S. Economic Development Administration.

with nearby regions such as Chicago, Milwaukee, and Madison. The Rockford region ... has shown its potential to work together for economic development. ... However, this potential for regional collaboration remains largely untapped and acts as a major barrier to economic development as the region's communities often compete against each other for economic development projects, retail developments, and tax revenue."

Stakeholders have also discussed the need for 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. Large numbers of governmental units have a number of impacts, including the potential for additional regulation and uncoordinated investment. Many of these entities rely on property taxes, making addressing concerns about the relationship between property tax rates and the business environment more challenging to address. Data from EMSI indicates that slightly less than 13 percent of the region's employees in 2013 work in government with typical wages and benefits worth \$58,000 a year.

The 2012 Strategic Diversification Plan also noted "limited/weak branding of the region. ... News stories in the national media (many of which are one-sided and highly biased) often portray Rockford as a hopeless, decaying city. At the same time, many Illinois-based businesses ... are being aggressively courted by economic development organizations in neighboring states. The Rockford region must work proactively to enhance its marketing program and improve the image it projects to the outside world." This perception reached its nadir in 2013 when Forbes magazine named Rockford the third most miserable city in the U.S. because of high crime, unemployment, and poverty (notably, neighboring Chicago was fourth on that list.) While Boone County and McHenry County do not suffer as much from those problems, they can be negatively colored by the perception of their neighbors.



OPPORTUNITIES

By being "late" to developing a regional planning concept, the region has the opportunity to take best practices from other successful models and put a local spin on them. For example, RMAP and EDDNI have developed expertise in traffic modeling, transportation planning and economic research that an RPC could offer its members as either a package or "a la carte" to best suit local needs. McHenry would benefit from service by the RPC and its continued affiliation with CMAP.

Improved collaboration among economic development agencies is an opportunity to make more efficient use of limited funding to get a bigger "bang" on their marketing and business attraction work. Additionally, regional branding is a good opportunity to change the narrative about the region into one that promotes its business strengths and shared proximity to Chicago, particularly when communicating

with international businesses. Forming such collaborative organizations and/or 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. Past projects show that surrounding counties are good partners, and many initiatives outlined in this plan will have the opportunity to cross outside of the Northern Illinois Region.



THREATS

The primary threat to attempts at regional collaboration is further reduction in government and private sector funding. All collaborative efforts must demonstrate efficient and effective use of funds. A key part of demonstrating these characteristics is building the necessary relationships to prevent "turf battles" and communication breakdowns. Care must be taken to make sure all parties' interests are represented, and that any plan for joint action has sufficient buy-in.

2 EFFICIENT BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

The business development activities of the Northern Illinois Region's economic development organizations and governments can assist the private sector in growing the regional economy. As demonstrated by the successes of the 2010-15 CEDS, partnerships with business can reduce the barriers for growth and encourage investment in the region. This is the second goal of the 2016-20 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 approximately 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 already have a strong presence here. Long a leader in Automotive, Production Technology, and Metalworking, the region's manufacturing base has been gradually diversifying. Key manufacturers in the Aerospace, Metal Production, and Medical Device clusters are expanding.

- The largest employer in the region, FCA in Belvidere – which cut its workforce to just hundreds during the Great Recession -- now boasts a plant record 4,500 employees and supports local suppliers that employ another 1,500.
- Aerospace component manufacturer Woodward



Fiat Chrysler Automobiles in Belvidere

recently completed construction on a second campus in Loves Park that is expected to add approximately 1,000 jobs in upcoming years.

- Sage Products, the largest medical device manufacturer in the region, has added 200 jobs at its Cary facility.

Recognizing the need to strengthen the region’s resilience when domestic markets have slow demand, it has committed to encouraging export growth in recent years. The new regional partnership of this CEDS brings together the efforts of the Illinois Small Business Development Center International Trade Center of the Rockford Area with McHenry County firms’ participation in the Metro Chicago Export Initiative. The region has seen marked growth in exports by its manufacturers. Key export industries are Transportation Equipment Manufacturing (particularly Automotive and Aerospace), Metalworking, and Production Technology. Beyond the region’s manufacturing strength, business climate aspects also make the region attractive.

- Electricity prices in Illinois are the lowest in the Midwest as of July 2015. Illinois prices have averaged ten percent below the national average since the Illinois electric industry was deregulated in 1999.
- ComEd, which provides electricity for the entire Northern Illinois Region, had its two best years for reliability in 2013 and 2014.
- Nicor Gas is the lowest cost gas utility 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 State of 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.



WEAKNESSES

As alluded to previously, perhaps the most significant business development weakness in

the Northern Illinois Region is the poor business climate reputation of Illinois. For example, Illinois was ranked 40th in Forbes’ 2014 “Best States for Business.” Illinois’s corporate income tax, worker’s compensation rates, and local property taxes are frequently cited as weaknesses.

The primary sources of local revenue in Illinois are sales taxes and property taxes. Across the three counties, sales tax rates range from 7 percent to 9 percent in 2015. These rates are relatively comparable to northeastern Illinois where sales tax rates are typically between 7 and 10 percent. In communities across the border in Wisconsin, however, sales tax rates are typically 5.5 percent. 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. A recent study by Anderson Economic Group found that Illinois ranks 33 out of the 50 states in terms of total business tax burden, not the best, yet far from the worst. This analysis looked at multiple aspects to taxation, not just property taxes. Previous work by CMAP has shown that McHenry County’s effective property tax rates are on par with those of its neighbors in northeastern Illinois. The Tax Foundation’s 2015 State Business Tax Climate Index ranked Illinois 31 out of 50 states.

Views on business climate and taxation are often a matter of perception. Stakeholders do not agree on whether taxes are an issue or what specific taxes are problematic. Respondents to the municipal survey in McHenry County noted concerns about “taxes” in many ways: current rates as a weakness, interest in lowering taxes over the next five years, and that high taxes could be a threat to the achieving economic development goals. In the three-county business survey, tax rates for businesses were the poorest rated element of business climate. Although few businesses specified which local taxes and regulations limited their business, a Realtor in Winnebago County commented that high unemployment rates and property taxes have limited property sales. Some stakeholders expressed appreciation for the services provided through taxation, such as school, parks, and public infrastructure. These same individuals identified a need for better ways to communicate the tax-value proposition resulting from government-led investments that often benefit businesses and residents alike.

Determining whether the region’s property taxes are competitive must consider trends in the tax base, not just nominal rates. Trends in the tax base 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 growth in the cost of public services outpaces growth in the base. Between 2000 and 2012, the property tax base as measured by equalized assessed value (EAV) grew 41.8 percent across the three counties. However, this varied significantly by county, with Boone growing 53.5

percent, McHenry growing 47.2 percent, and Winnebago growing 30.3 percent. This growth is slower than that of the seven counties of northeastern Illinois region, which totaled 59.8 percent. In Boone County, much of the growth was attributable to strong industrial EAV growth. On the other hand, industrial EAV growth was just 14.8 percent in McHenry County and dropped 5.2 percent in Winnebago County.

As noted previously, stakeholders agree on the value of maintaining a competitive taxation policy. But who can set that policy? One of the main challenges in effecting tax policy change is the diffuse nature of control. 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 governments. Data from the Illinois Department of Revenue indicates that in 2014 Northern Illinois had 197 different taxing bodies. Each of these governments also exercise some level of control over tax policy through budgeting, spending, and rate setting decisions.

Some stakeholders believe that improving economic growth is a key part of maintaining a competitive tax policy. The vast majority of the region's property tax base is residential: 73 percent in Boone, 74 percent in Winnebago, and 80 percent in McHenry County. This structure is problematic and feeds into the perception that property taxes are quite high since residents shoulder much of the property tax burden. Between 2000 and 2012 the burden worsened in some parts of Northern Illinois as residential property became a larger share of the tax base in McHenry County and Winnebago County. Pursuing policies to encourage economic growth and increase the number of businesses in Northern Illinois would help address this burden.

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 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.



OPPORTUNITIES

The region's over-reliance on key manufacturing sectors can be improved by diversifying into related industries. For instance, companies with experience in Metalworking and Plastics have found success in Aerospace; while Aerospace suppliers can also serve Medical and Metalworking industries. The region's manufacturing base includes many small- and mid-size companies that need assistance identifying industry targets, connecting with business partners, and receiving the certifications required to compete. Metals are a key cluster in the Northern Illinois Region and McHenry's role

in CMMC offers an avenue for manufactures throughout all three counties the opportunity to build off of the metals strength in northeastern Illinois.

As part of this effort, an increased relationship with the federally funded Digital Manufacturing and Design Innovation Institute (DMDII) in Chicago (via a newly announced Rockford chapter) and the National Additive Manufacturing Innovation Institute in Ohio, as well as partnerships with area colleges and universities, are good opportunities. The region can also spur growth by improving support for entrepreneurs and growing small companies, and connecting companies to those resources.



THREATS

Threats to the region's business development efforts are diffuse. The regional economy is greatly affected by things outside the control of the three counties– particularly consumer demand for automobiles and air travel, and business demand for heavy machinery and metal products. This was particularly demonstrated by job losses at FCA during the recession, which had more to do with the company's overall business model than the quality of the work and facility in Belvidere. As such, it is key for the region to diversify into multiple industries and geographic markets and encourage growth outside of manufacturing to weather these storms.

In many critical industries, small local employers are privately owned. With an aging workforce, both on the floor and in the board room, succession planning is vital. Businesses must be given resources to plan for new leadership in order to keep firms in the region.

Finally, the region's location on the Wisconsin border, as well as ongoing recruiting efforts by Indiana, serve as a constant reminder of the importance of creating an attractive regional and state business climate in order to be competitive.

3 WORKFORCE

Employers routinely cite the region's workforce as both one of its biggest strengths and one of its biggest areas of need. The region's workforce development agencies and educational institutions have been working hard in this area, and shared workforce goals across county lines have brought the region together. This is third goal of the 2016-20 CEDS.

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



STRENGTHS

The size and quality of Northern Illinois' labor force are primary strengths, particularly within

the manufacturing sector. The 335,000-person labor force – including nearly 50,000 employed in manufacturing, have been cited by site selectors as a good size for the types of companies the region has successfully attracted in the past.

Employers, including those surveyed as part of the CEDS, generally find the workforce well-trained and effective. While there may be skill-specific shortages, McHenry County stakeholders praised the local workforce combined with the ability to pull from the larger Chicago regional labor pool when necessary. In a 2011 Labor Shed Analysis of the Rockford MSA by Foote Consulting Group, existing employers noted “the great work ethic and labor pool here.” Some other comments from employers about labor availability and quality include:

- “Highly experienced management and supervisors.”
- “Rockford has a great skill base and a great work ethic and even has diversity!”
- “It is a great place to do business, airport is great, and it is a central location with great employees and definitely many educational opportunities.”
- “People in the Rockford area know how to work!”

That workforce quality ties closely with strong educational systems, particularly within higher education. The two community colleges – McHenry County College (MCC) and Rock Valley College (RVC) – run training programs geared toward manufacturing, healthcare, and other key sectors within the region. The region is also served by NIU, which has its main campus in an adjacent county and a satellite campus in Rockford. Other higher educational institutions include expanded healthcare schools University of Illinois College of Medicine at Rockford and Saint Anthony College of Nursing; growing liberal arts school Rockford University; an Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University Worldwide campus providing training for the region’s aerospace and aviation clusters; Aurora University and Loyola University’s operations in McHenry County; and several local campuses for colleges based outside the region. Student degree and certificate from these educational institutions have benefited the region’s targeted industry clusters.

The region’s K-12 school systems feed more advanced programs. Several schools have been named to U.S. News and World Report’s Best High Schools List. Alignment Rockford, a public-private partnership to improve the performance and perception of Rockford Public Schools – a key goal of the 2010-15 CEDS – has led to College and Career Academies. Belvidere School District 100 has developed the STEM-based Washington Academy, and Huntley School District 158 has a Medical Academy. These programs can serve as models for the region to develop its workforce.



WEAKNESSES

The primary workforce weaknesses of the region are its age and education levels. In 2013, 21 percent of employed residents and 22 percent of the employees who work in the region were younger than 30. The share of young workers who live and work in the region has declined since 2003 as the number of workers over 55 increased. While the region has a large share of residents who have completed high school or some college, it falls short at higher levels of attainment. Over 36 percent of residents age 25 and older in the Chicago region have at least a bachelor’s degree, but the share is 32 percent in McHenry County and 21 percent in Boone and Winnebago counties.

During the CEDS process, stakeholders in all three counties identified the difficulty employers have in attracting young, educated workers. The region competes with denser urban areas for young talent, including neighboring Chicago. McHenry County businesses find it particularly difficult to attract technology workers. This has been a longstanding concern – the Rockford Region Strategic Diversification Plan listed “Workforce Development & Attraction” as its first Urgent Priority, noting that if the region does not do a better job competing for young, educated talent, it will have difficulty growing its economy.

Reasons for the difficulty attracting young and educated workers are multifaceted. The region lacks a large four-year college or university. Graduates of the region’s high schools pursuing bachelor’s degrees typically leave, and research indicates they are less likely to return. In particular, the lack of an engineering program within the region has been a significant weakness identified by aerospace and other advanced manufacturing employers.

Beyond educational opportunities, housing, transportation, and urban form may play a role. A small survey of young workers in McHenry County identified that the following factors needed to be in place for young workers to also live in McHenry County:

- Improved transportation access (distance to highways and train stations and duration of train trips)
- Improved affordability of the housing stock

PROGRAM COMPLETIONS (Table 6)

PROGRAM	2010	2013	CHANGE
Health Professions	1,330	1,736	30.5%
Business, Management and Related Services	380	562	47.9%
Computer and Information Services	58	155	167.2%
Mechanic and Repair Technologies	56	136	142.9%
Precision Production	40	50	25.0%
Engineering and Engineering Technologies	34	37	8.8%
Agriculture	14	33	135.7%
All Programs	3,982	5,022	26.1%

Source: Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System database.



- Increased density and/or more multi-family housing

Identifying strategies that allow the region to create diverse housing and transportation options, particularly in locations near major employment centers, will be an important part of attracting more young workers to work and live in Northern Illinois.

Workforce development and economic development professionals report that there is also a disconnect between the skills that employers say they are seeking and their hiring practices. Several manufacturing-related programs have been developed within the region to meet perceived employer demand in machining, welding, and assembly skills, but even with these resources, program participants continued to have difficulty finding jobs.

Finally, while the region's K-12 school systems (in particular Rockford) have seen a marked improvement in performance in recent years, there is still a perception that the urban districts underperform, making it difficult to attract families to those areas. Graduation rates at some urban schools still lag state rates.

OPPORTUNITIES



After years of research and discussion, the region is starting its first four-year engineering program – a collaboration of RVC and NIU in Rockford. This is critical for the region's Aerospace and other advanced manufacturing sectors; indeed, company officials played a key role in the development of this new program. Expansions of the University of Illinois College of Medicine at Rockford and Saint Anthony College of Nursing (which is moving to RVC to increase its student pipeline) and a new internship program by Rosalind Franklin University at Centegra Health Systems' Huntley hospital will provide a stronger workforce for the region's health systems. Creating more such initiatives both attracts and retains young workers with needed skills, making the workforce more responsive and resilient.

The population growth the region saw in the years leading up to the Great Recession shows it has the potential to

reverse recent losses. The region was one of the fastest-growing in Illinois from 2000 to 2010, with population increasing 12.4 percent as development out of Chicago spread. Past growth was fueled by the Chicago region's development up the I-90 corridor, and as business activity picks up around Chicago, that growth could resume.



THREATS

The largest threat to the region's workforce is continued population loss. A March 2015 report by NIU³ cited U.S. Census data showing Illinois had the largest numerical decline of population of any state in 2014, and its first population decline since the mid 1980s. NIU noted that population loss in recent years has been primarily to surrounding states, particularly by people finding new jobs elsewhere. As a border region, Northern Illinois is particularly susceptible to this threat. Rockford led the state in population loss from 2010 to 2014.⁴ Moreover, the slow growth of Northern Illinois is directly tied to that of the Chicago area. CMAP research shows that the Chicago area's population growth substantially lags other major metropolitan areas and is following similar trends for economic indicators. If this population loss is not reversed, it will be increasingly more difficult for the Northern Illinois Region to maintain, much less grow and diversify its economy. The region also stands to lose workers through retirements, and must counteract this by attracting and retaining young workers.

4 INFRASTRUCTURE

Because of the vital role transportation plays in economic development, partners from across the region believe that working together to plan and advocate for key road and rail upgrades is critical. The fourth goal of the 2016-20 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 this CEDS process began, those shared assets again rose to the top.

I-90 (the Jane Addams Memorial Tollway) runs through the entire region, connecting it to Chicago and the rest of the Midwest. The previously referenced multimillion-dollar expansion project made the interstate six lanes through the entire region. Wider dedicated shoulders will allow

³ <http://newsroom.niu.edu/2015/03/30/illinois-leads-nation-in-population-decline/>

⁴ <http://newsroom.niu.edu/2015/05/26/illinois-population-shifts/>



Irene Rd Interchange Groundbreaking in Belvidere

Pace to provide dedicated and reliable transit service, including two new routes originating from a new park and ride facility at the Randall Road interchange. I-90 carries between 30,000 and 55,000 vehicles per day within the region, including significant truck traffic. Part of the region is also served by I-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 also carry significant traffic.

The region is also home to Chicago Rockford International Airport (RFD), the 28th largest cargo airport in the country. RFD is home to UPS's second-largest air hub in North America and its 10,000 foot runway can land any aircraft flying today. The new AAR Corp. maintenance, repair, and overhaul facility at RFD will be an asset in attracting 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.

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. Although not in the region, the Union Pacific Global III Intermodal Facility in Rochelle is just to the south and is a key asset.

The region has invested in broadband technology in recent years through the iFiber initiative and related efforts. 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 backbone that links the MCC with the county government center in Woodstock and is planning further expansions to improve connectivity and speed in northern and western parts of the county.

WEAKNESSES



The Rockford Region Strategic Diversification Plan listed "Quality of Built Environment" as the second Urgent Priority. It stated, "The Rockford region has numerous properties that are well-positioned to become business/industrial parks; however, the region currently lacks a high quality business park that is truly shovel-ready. Efforts to address this barrier are making headway

but must be fast-tracked so that the Rockford region can improve its overall competitiveness." This problem extends into McHenry County as well.

Regional economic development officials receive regular leads from companies that will only consider "shovel-ready" sites with utilities in place and interstate access. In the past five years, Winnebago County alone has received nearly 40 leads looking for rail-served sites, something the region lacks. Additionally, existing manufacturers looking to expand report they cannot find suitable buildings in the region to meet their needs, and would prefer to build new in a shovel-ready site. Because of this deficiency, the region is often disqualified from attracting manufacturers, and risks losing existing firms to regions with more attractive sites. This particularly hurts the region's advanced manufacturing sectors, which needs modern facilities to meet the demands of more technologically complicated processes. Barriers to developing shovel-ready industrial parks include "last mile" utility connections at existing parks, lack of suitable and available land along rail lines, and the lack of a uniform Qualified Sites Program to help developers and government officials move properties toward being shovel-ready. Illinois is the only state in the Upper Midwest without a statewide Qualified Sites Program, which puts the region at a disadvantage against certified sites programs in other states.

Specific locations suffer from inadequate infrastructure. Several of the region's freight rail lines need upgrading in order 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. Additionally, the region lacks a direct connection to the Union Pacific Global III Intermodal Facility in Rochelle. McHenry County is the only county in the region or in northeastern Illinois without an interstate interchange, which raises commuting and freight delivery times and costs.

Finally, the region broadly needs better public transport service. 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. Stakeholders frequently discussed the need to expand the number of last mile connections. Last mile connections were defined as bike, pedestrian, and transit connections between both homes and transit facilities and transit facilities and businesses. The lack of connections limit the number of non-auto transportation options for residents and employees and may dissuade young workers from locating in the region.

McHenry County is already trying to improve last mile connections. In 2012 the County spearheaded an effort to consolidate several municipal dial-a-ride services in to a single coordinated service known as MCRide. This effort was expanded in March 2015. Data from McHenry County Division of Transportation indicates that over 40

percent of current trips are people traveling for work. MCRide expands on the five existing bus routes and paratransit service provided by Pace. Some stakeholders have expressed interest in further expansion of these bus programs to better connect McHenry County.



OPPORTUNITIES

A number of efforts offer the possibility of addressing these weaknesses. McHenry County recently adopted its 2040 Long Range Transportation plan, laying out a slate of transportation projects that CMAP estimates 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 here such as Food Processing and Heavy Machinery and Production Technology. Freight rail is also a key to developing air cargo transloading near RFD. Additionally, the proposed Great Lakes Basin Railroad could cut through the region, providing more rail-served land and a rail “bypass” around Chicago.

Extending commuter rail through the region will provide opportunities for residents to commute across counties, or to and from the Chicago suburbs. This flexibility will make the region more attractive to talented workers, which in turn will attract companies. Moreover, MCRide offers a model for expanded and coordinated transit service in less densely populated areas. Finally, the expansion of I-90 through the region, and the recent addition of new interchanges, provides an opportunity to develop new manufacturing, distribution, and commercial parks to spur economic growth and diversification.



THREATS

The primary infrastructure threat is the need for a long-term sustainable approach to funding transportation 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. Without significant state and federal support, projects would languish. This 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.

Prioritizing the maintenance of the existing system is a key part of such an approach. One example is the region’s bridge inventory – more than 15 percent of its bridges are structurally deficient and/or functionally obsolete.

While the convergence of road, rail, and air in the region generally and around RFD particularly, is a strength and opportunity, other locations around the nation offer similar

characteristics. The region’s transportation assets could be threatened by competing facilities elsewhere, and must take advantage of opportunities before they go to other locations.

5 LAND USE AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

While stakeholders recognized the need for economic growth, they also cited the need for balanced growth. With the urban/rural mix of the region, this becomes an exciting chance for collaboration on best practices in this CEDS’ fifth goal.

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.



STRENGTHS

The Northern Illinois Region has ample land suited for and zoned for industrial and commercial development, placed near major transportation corridors, and accessible to its workforce. Following the Great Recession and the crash of the housing market, interstate-adjacent land in several parts of the region that had previously been zoned residential was rezoned industrial and commercial to meet changing market conditions. This actually turned out to be positive, as the region at the time had a perceived shortage of industrial land next to its interstates.

At the same time, the region has made efforts toward infill development and redevelopment of brownfields and greyfields. Key former industrial sites, such as the Motorola campus in Harvard and the Barber-Colman campus in Rockford, are being marketed for new uses. Long-vacant industrial facilities in Rockford, including two former Amerock facilities, are being repurposed: one as a downtown hotel and one as a large warehouse and manufacturing center. Local governments have successfully implemented brownfield grants from state and federal environmental protection agencies.

The region’s agricultural areas are a key land use both from a production (Agriculture is a targeted industry) and perception (people talk frequently about the urban/rural balance as an asset) standpoint. More than 60 percent – 552,000 acres⁵ – of the region’s land is devoted to farmland, including a large swath of rural area from northern and western McHenry County into most of Boone County. Acreage decreased from 2002 to 2012, though rebounded in McHenry County by 2012.

The region has active Farm Bureaus, conservation organizations and relationships with the U.S. Department of Agriculture that help preserve farmland and maximize its

⁵ USDA 2012 Agricultural Census



Wheat Harvest in McHenry County

economic impact and value to communities. 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.

ACRES OF FARMLAND (Table 7)

	2002	2007	2012
Boone County	146,940	137,162	134,759
McHenry County	233,458	215,584	234,211
Winnebago County	191,455	183,615	182,905
Northern Illinois Region	571,853	536,361	551,875

Source: USDA Agricultural Census 2002-12

WEAKNESSES



While the region has successfully geared industrial growth toward key transportation arteries, stakeholders remain concerned about residential and retail sprawl. Rockford, the largest city in the region, has seen steady development pull businesses away from the urban core, leading to increased residential and commercial vacancy in the city. As a result municipal services – such as police and fire and utilities – are spread over a larger area with a declining tax base. Meanwhile McHenry County stakeholders report that growth threatens to displace valuable farmland and taxes its road system. Boone County suffers from a mix of these problems as it is the smallest of the three counties but was, at one point in the previous decade, the fastest growing.

While vacant facilities have been repurposed, including brownfields and greyfields, the process is arduous. Numerous such sites remain, as shown in recent vacancy statistics. One-fifth of the office space in McHenry County was vacant in Q1 2015. The vacant Motorola campus in Harvard significantly impacts the office and industrial figures. That site comprises 10 percent of McHenry’s office space and 3 percent of its industrial space. With that location removed from the analysis, industrial and office vacancy rates in McHenry drop substantially, to 8.2 percent and 12.6 percent respectively. In Winnebago, the industrial vacancy rate doubled, the office vacancy rate tripled, and the retail vacancy rate quadrupled. All the while, total industrial, office, and retail rentable building area (RBA) grew. Similarly, the retail vacancy rate in McHenry County increased from 6.4 percent in Q1 2007 to 10.5 percent in Q1 2015 even as retail RBA grew by almost 10 percent. These growth trends highlight why stakeholders in both

McHenry and Winnebago have discussed strategies to reuse or redevelop existing facilities. The rebirth of FCA in Boone County can be seen in the changing industrial and office vacancy numbers. Between Q1 2007 and Q1 2015, the office vacancy rate in Boone County dropped from 22 percent to 4.5 percent even while adding space. Similarly the industrial vacancy rate declined from 9.9 percent to 5.2 percent. Over the same period, the vacancy rates in the other two counties increased.

Stakeholders also identified barriers to reusing existing buildings in development codes, as well as construction cost and tax disparities. Such differences make it hard for infill sites to compete with greenfield sites. Anecdotally, private-sector developers have made most of their recent investments in greenfield sites, and limited tax resources prevent local governments from incentivizing redevelopment to be competitive. New development also can be perceived as more lucrative to local government tax rolls, thus providing a disincentive to promoting infill development and redevelopment.

OPPORTUNITIES



The need to attract more young workers combined with feedback that the region’s housing stock may be a barrier to achieving that goal presents an opportunity for local governments to encourage greater residential densities and a more diverse housing stock. This may include zoning land for new multifamily development, increasing densities in areas proximate to transit and traditional downtowns, and exploring the reuse of historic buildings in urban areas (particularly in Rockford).

A concerted effort to prioritize development and redevelopment in existing commercial and industrial corridors would not only mitigate sprawl but could also lead to more equitable investment as existing economically distressed areas would benefit from more development opportunities.

The region can complement its Production Agriculture industry by promoting urban agriculture in vacant lots and older buildings not suitable for modern manufacturing use. Parts of the region – especially in Winnebago County – have excess municipal water capacity and industrial-grade electricity for larger-scale urban agriculture, and there are also opportunities to build on existing community gardens in urban areas. The success of the outdoor Rockford City Market, plans for a year-round indoor City Market, and spread of farmers markets around the region show the consumer demand for such products.

THREATS



Quality of life was a major point of discussion throughout the planning process. For many, the region’s balance of developed areas, agricultural areas, and natural lands embodied that concept. Municipalities

too cited the balance between development, agriculture, and natural areas as a key question going forward. Some stakeholders cited “room for development” as a major asset for future economic growth. Others cited natural and agricultural areas as a strength to draw visitors and new residents. Rural resistance to development was cited by a few as a weakness. While many planning entities in the region have attempted to strike a balance between these viewpoints, it is important to recognize that loss of critical natural areas can be a threat to the region in multiple ways. In considering the right balance, special attention should be paid to understanding the value of existing productive landscapes. For example, McHenry County is rich with natural assets that offer an array of physical and economic benefits, for example air scrubbing, flood protection, agriculture, and recreation. Based on a study to estimate the value of the CMAP region’s green infrastructure, McHenry County’s ecosystems contribute \$1.34 billion per year from flood control, groundwater recharge, water purification, and carbon storage.⁶

Flooding is a particular concern – there have been four federal disaster declarations within the region since 2007, resulting in millions of dollars of damage. Thankfully for the regional economy, major employers are not in floodplains and while these disasters have resulted in significant property damage, they have not upended the economy. Still to be a resilient region, leaders must continue to pursue multiple ways of reducing flood hazard, including purchasing and demolishing buildings in flood-prone areas, ensuring that development codes limit runoff, and preserving natural areas. The region, particularly Boone and McHenry counties, must also manage its groundwater supply. “As the population grows, the demand for water is rising, the potential for contaminating aquifers increases, and wastewater disposal becomes more difficult,” McHenry County reported in the creation of its 2006 Groundwater Management Plan. Stakeholders also called out the McHenry County Green Infrastructure Plan and Boone County’s water management plan as important resources.

Finally, a loss of government funding toward brownfield cleanup, from local, state or federal sources, represents a significant threat. Additionally, the discovery of significant remediation requirements in former industrial facilities could stall progress in redevelopment projects.

6 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. The sixth goal of the 2016-20 CEDS is:

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.

⁶ <https://datahub.cmap.illinois.gov/dataset/green-infrastructure-vision-2-3-eco-system-valuation>.



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. Those assets grow with the inclusion of 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. McHenry County also has its own wealth of cultural and recreational attractions, including ample parkland, conservation areas, and natural areas.

In many ways, the Northern Illinois Region enjoys an affordable cost of living. For instance, the Rockford MSA had a cost of living 91.8 percent of the U.S. average in 2014.⁷ 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.

MEDIAN HOME PRICE 2015 YTD THROUGH SEPTEMBER (Table 8)

BOONE COUNTY	MCHENRY COUNTY	WINNEBAGO COUNTY	CHICAGO METRO
\$120,000	\$176,000	\$88,000	\$213,500

Source: Illinois Association of Realtors

A key component of this lower cost of living is housing prices, which also track below the nation and Chicago. The region features many different types of neighborhoods, a vital 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. These health systems are expanding and adding specialties that give residents a high level care and reduce the need to leave the region for services.



Centegra Health System in Huntley

The region’s cultural and recreational attractions are a major strength. The Rockford Park District received 2012 National Gold Medal Award for Excellence in Park and Recreation from the National Recreation and Park

⁷ Council for Community and Economic Research Cost of Living Index

Association (NRPA) and the McHenry County Conservation District received the 2013 Barb King Environmental Stewardship Award. The region is also home to four state parks and natural areas and more than 30,000 acres of conservation areas. The Rock and Fox rivers provide water recreation opportunities.

More than 3 million people attended sporting events at Rockford-area indoor and outdoor sports complexes in 2014,⁸ including many tournaments for out-of-area teams. 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 200,000 in attendance in 2014. The region has numerous theaters, music venues, and festivals that also attract visitors and benefit residents.

WEAKNESSES



While the region's cost of living is affordable by some metrics, there are concerns raised by the Location Affordability Index, a HUD tool that measures the combined cost of housing and transportation.⁹ The Center for Neighborhood Technology, which developed the index for HUD, suggests that 45 percent is the maximum percentage of income a household should spend for housing and transportation. A median-income Chicago MSA family (4 people with 2 commuters with a median household income) would be expected to spend more than 55 percentage of their income on housing and transportation costs in McHenry County. This is a higher percentage spent on housing and transportation than in the Chicago MSA and Winnebago County (50 percent and 52 percent respectively), but slightly lower than Boone County (57 percent). Less costly housing is balanced against higher transportation costs that may undermine the region's affordability.

Stakeholders, particularly health systems in the region, identified the challenge of supporting healthy lifestyles for residents. While the region has strong health systems, Winnebago County – the region's most urban – has particularly low health scores. In County Health Rankings¹⁰ it ranked 72nd in Illinois in Health Outcomes and 96th in Health Factors out of 102 counties, both of which correlate with the county's unemployment and poverty indicators that must be addressed.

OPPORTUNITIES



Pursuing strategies to leverage the region's numerous cultural and recreational amenities would strengthen the economy by attracting new residents

⁸ Rockford Area Convention and Visitors Bureau annual site attendance report

⁹ <http://www.locationaffordability.info/lai.aspx>.

¹⁰ <http://www.countyhealthrankings.org/> (developed by the University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation)



Burpee Museum of Natural History in Rockford

and visitors, pumping more money into the regional economy. The development of hotels and a sports complex in downtown Rockford will build activity, drawing residents looking for an urban living experience. This also promotes increased tourism and commercial activity to diversify the economy.

Similarly, the region's urban/rural balance is attractive to many current residents. Stakeholders noted that the region's smaller cities and towns also offer opportunities for increased cultural and recreational amenities and commercial and residential activity. Promoting these smaller communities to attract residents who value their features also represents an important opportunity.

THREATS



Threats related to quality of life are largely wrapped up in topics previously discussed, including continued negative publicity about the region, development that alters the fundamental regional character so many find attractive, and uncertainty regarding state finances due to its implications for local tax policy. Continued negative perceptions of public safety in the region threaten to undo efforts to develop a positive brand to attract businesses and residents. Also, reduction in state and local funding sources could also threaten the major projects in downtown Rockford.

IV. TARGETED INDUSTRY CLUSTERS

The 2016-20 CEDS identifies twelve industry clusters to assist economic development partners in focusing their business development efforts. These clusters were identified using the following methodology.

- Analysis of EDA-funded U.S. Cluster Mapping data.¹
- The targeted industry analysis for Boone and Winnebago counties conducted in 2006 by Carter & Burgess (and cited in the 2010-15 CEDS), as well as updated findings developed by the RAEDC and Growth Dimensions.
- Analysis conducted by McHenry County Workforce Network (MCWN) and MCEDC on their county's industry clusters.
- The regional industry cluster section of the 2014 Illinois Economic Development Plan.
- Discussion with CEDS Strategy Committee members and other stakeholders.

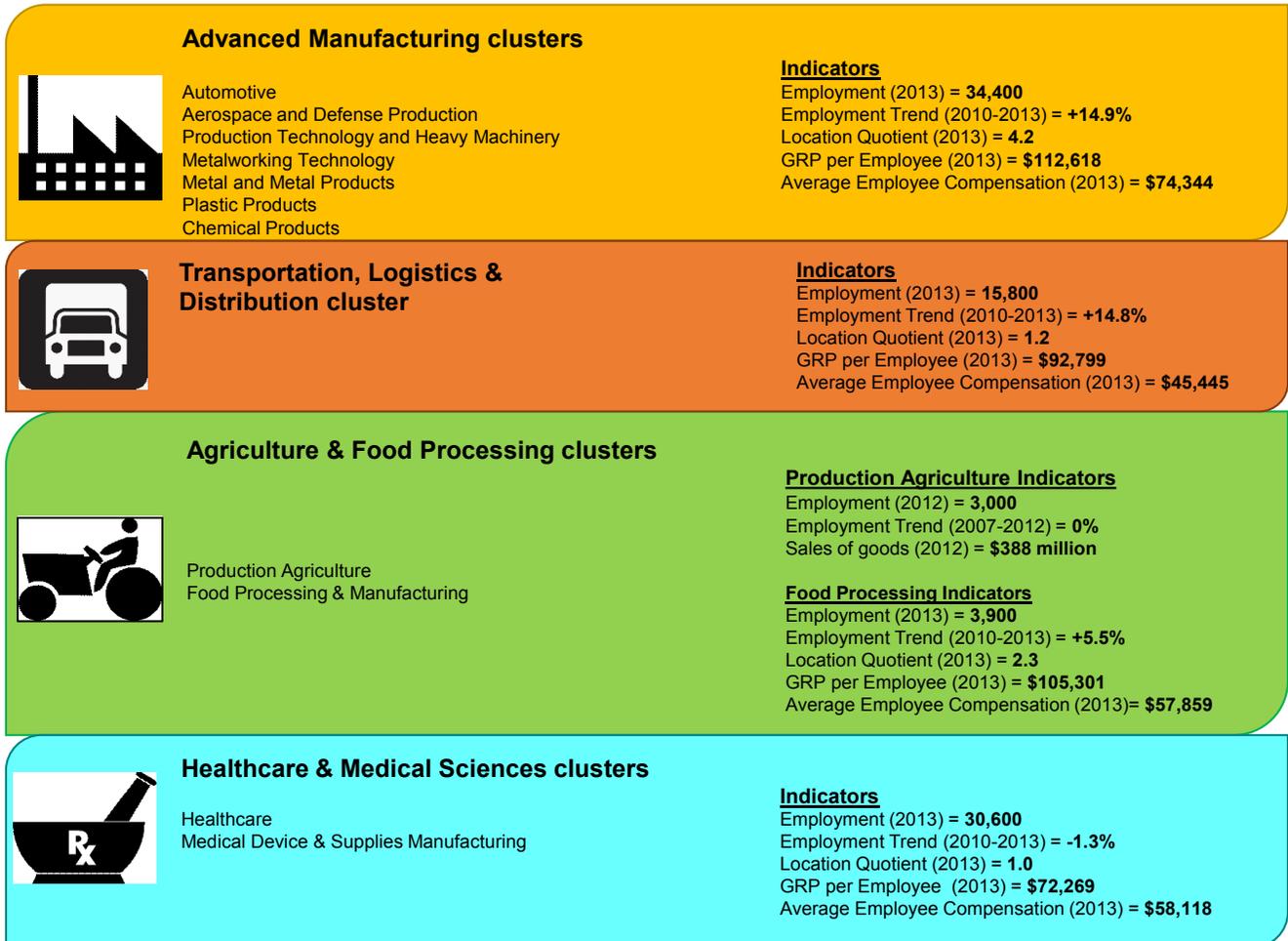
¹ Reference link: www.clustermapping.us.

While these twelve industries provide initial guidance, a deeper dive is needed on each sector to understand internal and external dynamics, particularly how these twelve overlap and how shared strategies and benefit multiple sectors. The tactical plan includes such a study for 2017. The identified industry clusters fall into four areas (Figure 3):

- Advanced Manufacturing
- Transportation
- Logistics and Distribution
- Agriculture and Food Processing
- Healthcare and Medical Services

As the 12 targeted industry clusters have significant overlaps in needs and strategies, it provides the region a means to focus its efforts while maximizing its opportunities. It also recognizes that, as a three-county region overlapping two metropolitan areas, Northern Illinois has multiple industry strengths in different counties.

Northern Illinois Targeted Industry Clusters in Context (Figure 3)



Sources: U.S. Cluster Mapping Project, <http://clustermapping.us>; IMPLAN, 2013; USDA Census of Agriculture.
Average Employee Compensation = wages and benefits

ADVANCED MANUFACTURING CLUSTERS

AUTOMOTIVE

Regional employment: 7,400 employees

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

Regional overview: The most mature and comprehensive manufacturing cluster in the region, it is anchored by FCA, which is the largest employer in the region. As such, development strategies are focused on maintaining FCA's successful operation of its Belvidere facility – including providing incentives and responsive government permitting for expansions and upgrades, and providing a robust workforce pipeline – and identifying additional supplier opportunities. Additionally, the region's other automotive suppliers not related to FCA show potential for supplying other Original Equipment Manufacturers in the Midwest.

AEROSPACE AND DEFENSE PRODUCTION

Regional employment: 3,700 employees for companies classified in the Aerospace and Defense Production cluster; however there are second- and third-tier Aerospace and Defense suppliers that are classified in other clusters, making the number larger.

Key companies: UTC Aerospace Systems, Woodward, GE Aviation, B/E Aerospace

Regional overview: A fast-growing cluster that has been a significant bright spot for the regional economy coming out of the Great Recession. This was a key growth cluster identified in the 2010-15 CEDS and the Rockford Region Strategic Diversification Plan. Growth has been in both the region's tier-one suppliers, which have generated new contracts with aircraft manufacturers, as well as with tier-two and tier-three suppliers entering the supply chain or expanding their participation. Development strategies are focused on bolstering the cluster's workforce – particularly within engineering and related fields – and assisting small- and mid-sized manufacturers in joining or expanding their participation in the supply chain.



PRODUCTION TECHNOLOGY AND HEAVY MACHINERY

Regional employment: 7,800 employees

Key companies: Unicarriers Americas, Taylor Company, Mechanical Tool and Engineering, Parker Hannifin.

Regional overview: The region's largest manufacturing cluster, it's also perhaps the most diffuse. The region's manufacturers serve a variety of industries in this cluster – including agricultural and construction equipment, industrial machinery and process equipment and components. It also includes a particular expertise in hydraulics. While the region is recognized as a leader in supplying these industries, it also makes the region dependent on industries particularly prone to economic downturns. Development strategies are focused on expanding the hydraulics sector, promoting export growth to avoid domestic downturns, and bolstering the region's workforce.

METALWORKING TECHNOLOGY

Regional employment: 6,900 employees

Key companies: Ingersoll Cutting Tool, Ingersoll Machine Tools, Greenlee Textron, Regal Cutting Tool.

Regional overview: This cluster overlaps with some of the other manufacturing clusters – it represents the region's strength in making equipment and machinery that work with metals. As such, it supports the Automotive, Aerospace and Defense Production and Production Technology and Heavy Machinery clusters, and is directly connected to Metal and Metal Products. Development strategies are focused on connecting companies in Boone and Winnebago counties with the Metal cluster in McHenry County and northeastern Illinois, promoting export growth to avoid domestic downturns, and bolstering the region's workforce.

METAL AND METAL PRODUCTS

Regional employment: 3,200 employees

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

Regional overview: This is an exciting combination of existing strengths in two parts of the region – the growing Metals cluster in McHenry County (evidenced by its participation in the Chicago Metro Metals Consortium) and the Metal Products cluster in Boone and Winnebago counties. As much of the region's economy relies on manufacturing items with metal, and using metal components, this cluster's health is key to the above clusters' success. While it has some key larger companies listed above, this cluster also represents many small machine shops that can make metal products for various industries. Development strategies are focused on implementing the CMMC plan, better connecting the rest of the Northern Illinois Region with those metal manufacturers, and assisting smaller metal products manufacturers with diversifying into new industries.

PLASTIC PRODUCTS

Regional employment: 3,100 employees

Key companies: AptarGroup, JL Clark, Filtertek, Fabrik Molded Plastics

Regional overview: This industry is mostly concentrated in McHenry County, but has growth potential throughout the region. It is an exciting growth opportunity, as its companies supply Aerospace and Defense Production and Medical Device and Supplies Manufacturing. Development strategies are focused on connecting existing plastics companies with supply chains in the region, and attracting additional plastics manufacturers to grow the cluster.

CHEMICAL PRODUCTS

Regional employment: 2,300 employees

Key Companies: Chemtool, Rust-oleum, Rock Valley Oil and Chemical.

Regional overview: This is a cluster targeted for more study to understand how it fits into the regional economy and what opportunities exist. It is particularly strong in McHenry County.

TRANSPORTATION, LOGISTICS AND DISTRIBUTION CLUSTER

Regional employment: 15,800 employees

Key companies: Packaging Coordinators, UPS, Lowe's, FedEx

Regional overview: This is a combination of the Distribution/Electronic Commerce and Transportation/Logistics clusters identified by Clustermapping.us, as both rely on similar assets and development strategies in the region. It is the second-largest targeted industry cluster in the region, employment-wise, and further growth potential exists in all counties, particularly along I-90 and I-39 and near Chicago Rockford International Airport. Development strategies include the identified I-90 interchange projects, developing logistics parks and investing in the airport and the region's rail lines.



AGRICULTURE AND FOOD PROCESSING CLUSTERS

PRODUCTION AGRICULTURE

Regional employment: 3,000 employees¹

Regional overview: The region's farms sold \$388 million in goods in 2012, a 19 percent increase since 2007, bolstered by corn and soybean price increases. It

¹ Source: USDA 2012 Census of Agriculture



has been a significant time of flux for the region's farms, though – average farm size dropped and the number of small (under 50 acres) farms rose dramatically from 2002 to 2007, but both numbers have since reversed, suggesting consolidation. Still, about half of the region's farms are under 50 acres. Many of the smaller farms are selling their goods to restaurants and grocery stores, at farmers markets, and through Community Supported Agriculture programs. Small and mid-sized farms are best suited in locations that are proximate to population centers, making the region's farms well situated to draw on the large Chicago-area market. Specialty crops sold directly to consumers can generate higher retail market prices, and an opportunity for this industry regionally is to coordinate distribution into Chicago to maximize profits. According to a U.S. Department of Agriculture report, fruit and vegetable farms that sell into local markets employ 13 full-time employees per every \$1 million in sales, versus three employees for farms that sell into global commodity markets. In addition, the multiplier most typically applied to agricultural retail unprocessed food sales is 1.6-1.7 in direct and indirect economic activity.

Development strategies include farmland preservation efforts, use of zoning and land-use planning to protect agricultural areas, seeking opportunities for FFA programs, coordinating distribution of products to customers in surrounding urban areas, and supporting business development of vital farm services to ensure that the infrastructure for farm success remains in place in the region.

FOOD PROCESSING AND MANUFACTURING

Regional employment: 3,900 employees

Key Companies: General Mills, Mondelez International, Dean Foods

Regional overview: The cluster leverages the region's agricultural strength with its transportation network connecting to large consumer markets. While growth in recent years has been someone static in the region, there have been significant expansions in surrounding counties, indicating potential for more growth here. Development strategies include identifying buildings that could be converted to food-grade (or assisting developers with build-to-suit projects), assisting existing companies with expansion needs, and improving rail and highway access for current and potential employers.



Additionally, for both of these clusters, the 2015 Food and Agriculture RoadMap for Illinois (FARM Illinois), is a resource for complementary and additional development strategies. Going forward, stakeholders will work to identify ways to align CEDS tactics with FARM Illinois initiatives.

HEALTHCARE AND MEDICAL SCIENCES CLUSTERS

MEDICAL DEVICE AND SUPPLIES MANUFACTURING

Regional employment: 1,100

Key companies: Sage Products, Medela, Catalant, Medtronic

Regional overview: This is a smaller, but growing cluster, mostly in McHenry County, that has been identified as an aspirational industry for the region. It leverages McHenry's proximity to the larger cluster in neighboring Lake County, and potentially connects to the Plastics Products cluster. It also includes some biopharmaceutical activity. Additionally, medical manufacturing was one of the industries considered as part of the Rockford Region Strategic Diversification Plan. Development strategies include creating a cluster database to understand which companies in the region serve this supply chain and which can join the supply chain.



HEALTHCARE

Regional employment: 29,500

Key companies: Centegra Health System, MercyRockford Health System, OSF HealthCare, SwedishAmerican Health System

Regional overview: This is the largest of the region's targeted industry clusters, and the one that's seen the most growth in recent years, mirroring national trends. Traditionally seen as a "local" cluster that serves residents of the region, this is growing into a "traded" cluster like the others in this study that brings money from outside the region. With the expansion of the region's health systems and growing specializations, they are serving as attractions for outside residents, thus growing our economy. Additionally, the region's healthcare systems are attracting educated workers that counteract some of the workforce weaknesses and threats identified in the SWOT analysis. The region's strong healthcare educational programs bolster this. Finally, healthcare is seen as a quality of life asset that must be robust for the Region to see a return to population growth. Development strategies include strengthening educational programming, assisting health systems with attention and retention of key employees, and identifying needs and opportunities of the growing mental health services sector.

V. ECONOMIC RESILIENCE

The 2016-20 CEDS incorporated economic resilience throughout the planning process and in the final document. This began by an acknowledgement that improving the resilience of the regional economy was vital in the wake of the Great Recession and other economic downturns before it. In fact, early in the process, the CEDS Strategy Committee changed the Vision for the region to include “resilient economic base” as one of the components.

In meeting EDA requirements that resilience be addressed in the document, it was explicitly mentioned in key places. However, this brief summary notes some of the most significant pieces of the Tactical Plan that address resiliency:

- A planned RPC can serve as a central economic data center in the event of a downturn, mass layoff, or environmental disaster. An RPC can support regional governments, economic development agencies, and workforce boards with data and analysis to assist with the response to an economic disruption, much as the 2010-15 CEDS and the HUD-funded Rockford Region Vital Signs (a project that included RMAP) collected data in response to the Great Recession.
- As evidenced by the EDA-funded Rockford Region Strategic Diversification Plan, the region must diversify its industry mix in order to be more resilient. This CEDS includes plans to use existing industry strengths to diversify into related industries, including those identified

in the Diversification Plan.

- Building upon the region’s successful promotion of exports by its manufacturers has been an important effort to increase economic resilience, and that continues in this CEDS.
- Succession planning was identified as a key weakness for the region’s small- and mid-sized businesses, and a plan to develop programming to address that was added.
- Strategies to improve workforce development and education around the region’s targeted industries will also address resilience, as they will provide programming that can retrain workers affected by economic downturns to get them back into the workforce.
- Strategies to attract and retain young workers will also improve resilience by providing the workers necessary to counteract the effects of retirements and outmigration that threaten the regional economy’s prospects at economic rebound.
- The land use strategies of this CEDS include elements to address environmental disaster resilience by preventing flooding, groundwater depletion, and associated risks that have been identified in the SWOT analysis. A byproduct of the CEDS process is efforts to connect emergency response professionals in each county to share best practices and planning efforts.



VI. TACTICAL PLAN

GOAL 1

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.

Strategy 1.1: Develop a framework for regional government officials and economic development professionals to collaborate on regionally significant initiatives, coordinate planning and increase communication across county lines.

Action		Responsible	
1.1A	Create a Regional Planning Commission (RPC) that would serve Northern Illinois Region counties, as well as potentially surrounding counties, with a variety of planning, research and back-office services. The RPC would offer different levels of services for different counties as needed. The RPC could serve as a research and planning partner of an economic development cooperative, outlined below.	Boone, McHenry, Winnebago, and adjacent county governments, in partnership with RMAP and EDDNI	2016
1.1B	Create an economic development cooperative or consortium partnering the three economic development organizations within the Northern Illinois Region, as well as those in adjacent counties, on regional business attraction marketing and other regional initiatives while retaining local control. The cooperative would be separate from but complementary and collaborative with the RPC outlined above. Work on this tactic began in 2015 by examining successful partnerships elsewhere in the country. Discussions will continue over the next year on what such a concept could look like in Northern Illinois.	Growth Dimensions, MCEDC, RAEDC, other regional economic development organizations, in collaboration with a new RPC	2017
1.1C	Create a regional code of ethics among economic development partners for promoting the region, collaborating on business attraction efforts and minimizing competition among communities, similar to Metro Denver's code of ethics.	Growth Dimensions, MCEDC, RAEDC, other regional economic development organizations, in collaboration with EDDNI/RMAP	2017
1.1D	Meet regularly (at least twice annually) with adjacent regional bodies, to coordinate projects serving multiple regions.	EDDNI/RMAP	Through 2020

Strategy 1.2: Obtain EDA-approved Economic Development District (EDD) status for the Economic Development District of Northern Illinois as the regional economic development planning body and oversee the ongoing CEDS scope of work.

Action		Responsible	
1.2A	Complete application for formal designation as an Economic Development District.	EDDNI	2016
1.2B	Conduct quarterly CEDS Strategy Committee meetings to monitor progress and adjust tactics.	EDDNI	Through 2020, with quarterly milestones

1.2C	EDDNI will serve as a coordinating forum for finding regional connections on initiatives while also allowing for county-specific and local projects.	EDDNI/RMAP	Through 2020, with quarterly milestones
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Strategy 1.3: Establish a regional identity and leverage our location and shared assets to create a marketing strategy for the region.

Action		Responsible	
1.3A	Develop a regional business attraction branding theme in collaboration with adjacent counties, with a particular focus on promoting our proximity to Chicago to attract international investment. Early discussions have considered Chicago Gateway West as a potential theme.	Government and economic development professionals in partner counties	2017
1.3B	Attend key trade shows as region, such as SelectUSA.	Growth Dimensions, MCEDC, RAEDC	Through 2020, with annual schedules set by partners
1.3C	Develop collaborative regional site selection responses.	Growth Dimensions, MCEDC, RAEDC, EDDNI	Meet in 2016 to develop initial template

Strategy 1.4: Coordinate with federal and state priorities and “speak with one voice” on seeking funding and legislative priorities.

Action		Responsible	
1.4A	Work with the Illinois Department of Commerce as it updates its economic development plan, which is expected to have a regional focus and also promote key targeted industries for regions and the state.	Regional government officials and economic development professionals	2016
1.4B	Use EDDNI and CEDS Strategy Committee to prioritize requests for EDA funding, while also promoting projects that fit with EDA priorities.	EDDNI	Quarterly meetings through 2020
1.4C	Provide region's federal and state elected officials with prioritized projects of regional significance for funding consideration. Use the success of CMAP, RMAP and EDDNI and the template of Northwest Illinois Blackhawk Express for regional advocacy efforts around key projects.	Regional government officials and economic development professionals	Annually through 2020
1.4D	Develop a multi-county legislative agenda that outlines the desired changes in state-level policies and regulations that impact the competitiveness of their region, including taxation and worker compensation.	Local government officials in conjunction with the RPC	2016

GOAL 2

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

Strategy 2.1: Strengthen existing industry clusters within the region, while developing selected emerging clusters identified in the SWOT analysis.

Action		Responsible	
2.1A	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 and strategies to augment current plans.	EDDNI, in collaboration with Growth Dimensions, MCEDC and RAEDC	2017
2.1B	Develop industry-specific cluster groups, like the Rockford Area Aerospace Network, and build on MCEDC's matchmaking programming to strengthen targeted clusters, such as medical device manufacturing, metalworking, hydraulics, and agribusiness.	Growth Dimensions, MCEDC and RAEDC	2017
2.1C	Partner with the Chicago Metro Metal Consortium, of which member McHenry County is directly involved. Opportunities include developing supplier opportunities Chicago Metro metal suppliers (including those in McHenry County) and Northern Illinois Region metalworking by participating "manufacturer matchmaking events."	MCEDC, in collaboration with other organizations in region	Through 2020

Strategy 2.2: Build upon existing business retention programs by developing a regional program that shares best practices.

Action		Responsible	
2.2A	Build on RAEDC's Synchronist-based Voice of the Customer business survey program in Winnebago County to develop surveys in Boone and McHenry counties in partnership with ComEd and create regional reporting. Integrate as possible with workforce agency business visitation programs.	ComEd, Growth Dimensions, MCEDC, and RAEDC, in partnership with McHenry County Workforce Network (MCWN) and Northern Illinois Workforce Alliance (NIWA)	Develop programs in 2016, with annual goals set by partners

Strategy 2.3: Recruit new business to the region through targeted business attraction efforts aimed at key industries and geographic markets.

Action		Responsible	
2.3A	Build regional website to provide key property information and economic data to site selectors and businesses looking to locate in the region. Enhance project that started in Winnebago County prior to CEDS, potentially expanding to other counties.	Winnebago County and RPC, with other counties as there is interest	2016 for first phase
2.3B	Build on MCEDC's Certified Sites Illinois program and RAEDC's Qualified Sites Program throughout the region to identify and promote development-ready industrial and commercial parks in the region.	MCEDC, RAEDC	Determine scope in 2016

2.3C	Attend trade shows for targeted industries, such as aerospace and metalworking.	Growth Dimensions, MCEDC, and RAEDC	Through 2020
2.3D	Identify and target small- and mid-size companies looking to relocate to lower cost locations such as the Northern Illinois Region, building upon previous successful business attraction efforts with such companies.	Growth Dimensions, MCEDC, and RAEDC	Through 2020
Strategy 2.4: Nurture entrepreneurial activity within the region, particularly within potential high-growth industries.			
Action		Responsible	
2.4A	Develop a manufacturing-based workforce training/business incubator on the west side of Rockford to increase employment in underrepresented populations.	RockFast initiative, with Winnebago County	2016
2.4B	Support NIU EIGERlab Innovation Network to develop start-ups and early-stage companies, particularly those in information technology or product-based businesses.	NIU EIGERlab	Through 2020
2.4C	Study the region's small business assistance system, including its Small Business Development Centers, to identify gaps and potential linkages to improve service to growing companies.	Growth Dimensions, MCEDC, RAEDC, in partnership with EDDNI/RMAP and chambers of commerce.	2017
2.4D	Develop a linked network of makerspace facilities, including craft manufacturing, local food, and other projects.	City of Rockford, City of Belvidere, and other partners	First facility developed by 2017
Strategy 2.5: Identify, create, and promote programs, activities and policies fostering innovation in emerging and existing businesses, aiding them in the creation of viable business operation and economic development practices.			
Action		Responsible	
2.5A	Start the Rockford chapter of the Digital Manufacturing Design and Innovation Institute (DMDII) and connect small- and mid-sized manufacturers with DMDII's technologies and processes.	NIU EIGERlab, Growth Dimensions, MCEDC, RAEDC	Programming begins in 2016, will revisit needs on an ongoing basis
Strategy 2.6: Promote agribusiness and local food industries as a growth area for applicable parts of the region.			
Action		Responsible	
2.6A	Develop food hubs for aggregation of regionally grown produce for delivery to the Chicago region, Northern Illinois, and southern Wisconsin. This proposal from the McHenry County Local Food Assessment could be developed there and potentially expanded to the rest of the region.	County planning departments	By 2018

2.6B	Identify locations suitable for urban agriculture and assist companies and individuals with such projects.	County and municipal planning departments	Begin 2017
2.6C	Collaborate with the creators of the FARM Illinois plan and identify ways to enact its initiatives within the region.	Local government and economic development partners	Determine Next Steps in 2016
Strategy 2.7: Continue communication from economic development organizations on efforts for recruitment and retention activities to area stakeholders and encourage community collaboration.			
Action		Responsible	
2.7A	Convene an annual economic development summit for the region, bringing together economic development organizations, government officials and key business leaders.	EDDNI, regional economic development professionals and governments	Annual through 2020
2.7B	Improve outreach to and encourage public input from residents and community groups to explain the work of economic development and its impact. A model for this could be the City of Rockford's 2020 Comprehensive Plan update process.	EDDNI, regional economic development professionals and governments, with assistance from City of Rockford	Ongoing
Strategy 2.8: 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	
2.8A	Implement the development plans of the region's five Enterprise Zones to use those using incentives to catalyze growth in targeted areas and assist businesses with expansion and renovation	Municipalities and counties with Enterprise Zones	Ongoing
2.8B	Promote energy incentives by ComEd and Nicor Gas, such as their New Construction Service and ComEd's Smart Ideas Program, as part of other business outreach programming.	Growth Dimensions, MCEDC, RAEDC, and government agencies, in partnership with ComEd and Nicor	Ongoing
2.8C	Increase foreign direct investment and exports within the region by leveraging the region's Foreign-Trade Zone, International Trade Center, and Metro Chicago Exports	Metro Chicago Exports and RAEDC, in collaboration with other economic development agencies	Ongoing

2.8D	Partner with the Illinois Manufacturing Excellence Center to help manufacturers reduce operational costs and improve performance.	IMEC, in collaboration with economic development agencies	Ongoing
2.9E	Develop succession planning programming for regional small- and mid-sized businesses.	Growth Dimensions, MCEDC, RAEDC, with other partners	By 2018

GOAL 3

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

Strategy 3.1: Develop the workforce pipeline by strengthening connections between employers and the region's P-20 educational systems, with emphasis on providing education and training to individuals of all ages and socioeconomic groups.

	Action	Responsible	
3.1A	Create and implement a coordinated awareness program of regional career opportunities, particularly in manufacturing, healthcare, and other key industries.	NIWA, MCWN, regional educational systems	2016
3.1B	Encourage and assist with the implementation of the Illinois State Board of Education's Career Cluster Framework (which includes career clusters, career pathways, and programs of study) in the K-12 school districts and the local workforce areas in the region.	NIWA, MCWN, regional educational systems	Ongoing
3.1C	Assist with the recruitment of students for the new NIU/RVC engineering program, and identify employers within the region to provide internships, co-op placements, and other opportunities for students and graduates.	NIU and RVC, in partnership with workforce, educational and economic development partners	Ongoing
3.1D	Encourage the development of educational and technical training academies, such as the Career Academy program at Rockford Public Schools, Belvidere Public Schools' science-based Washington Academy, and Huntley School District Medical Academy.	Rockford Public Schools, Belvidere Public Schools, Huntley Community School District	Ongoing
3.1E	Develop an educational center and technical training facility in Belvidere at currently abandoned or underused commercial space.	City of Belvidere, in partnership with educational and workforce partners	2017
3.1F	Create a centralized location for enhanced Career and Technical Education in Rockford for high school and college students to consolidate disparate facilities. This facility can also be used by private industry in partnership with public school districts to facilitate job training.	RVC, City of Rockford, Rockford Public Schools	2017
3.1G	Support the Rosalind Franklin University internship program at Centegra Health Systems' Huntley hospital to develop the future biomedical workforce.	Rosalind Franklin University, Centegra health Systems, MCWN	Ongoing, with program starting in 2017

Strategy 3.2: Align workforce and economic development strategies and implementation plans by strengthening partnerships between industry associations, workforce boards, economic development agencies, educational partners, and employers.

Action		Responsible	
3.2A	Develop regional workforce plans as part of state-led process of meeting the requirements of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act. While the Northern Illinois Region falls into two workforce regions, this CEDS can be used to help align workforce and economic development activities.	MCWN, NIWA	2016
3.2B	Hold regular meetings between economic development and workforce development agencies to align and coordinate strategies and improve regional communication on current and future workforce needs. This includes adding workforce development entities to the team on business attraction and retention efforts as confidentiality allows.	MCWN, NIWA, Growth Dimensions, MCEDC, RAEDC	Ongoing
3.2C	Share data and analysis among the partners to guide development of region-wide strategies to strengthen competitiveness among existing and emerging clusters identified in the CEDS process. Use data generated from regional Synchronist surveys and workforce agency business visits. Consult with Chicago-Cook Workforce Partnership on its workforce assessment tool in development.	EDDNI, MCWN, NIWA, Growth Dimensions, MCEDC, RAEDC	Ongoing
3.2D	Proactively engage employers facing workforce shortages, either current or expected, in finding viable solutions to their needs through workforce development agency Business Services outreach.	MCWN, NIWA	Ongoing

Strategy 3.3: Increase efforts to retain workers in high-demand occupations who are commuting out of the region or moving to other regions, while attracting workers to move to the region.

Action		Responsible	
3.3A	Increase the use of job fairs and online postings to attract individuals and promote careers available in key industries across the region.	MCWN, NIWA	Ongoing
3.3B	Develop a “live here/work here” campaign promoting job opportunities in the region and the benefits of reducing commutes outside of the region. This initiative is particularly important to McHenry County, and would be started there to possibly expand to the rest of the region.	MCWN, NIWA	2017
3.3C	Create a plan to attract and retain college graduates and young professionals for the key industries identified in the region.	MCWN, NIWA, Growth Dimensions, MCEDC, RAEDC, potentially others.	Begin work on plan in 2017
3.3D	Work with businesses to offer internships, co-ops, apprenticeships job shadowing, and scholarships for local students, such as the Joint Institute for Engineering and Technology – Aerospace program.	MCWN, NIWA, Growth Dimensions, MCEDC, RAEDC	Ongoing

GOAL 4

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 4.1: Work with Chicago Rockford International Airport to continue to expand air cargo, passenger service, and airport-related development in the region.

Action		Responsible	
4.1A	Promote business use of airport passenger service and of UPS next-day cargo capabilities, using a "Consider Rockford First" type model.	Chicago Rockford International Airport, partnering with economic development organizations	Ongoing
4.1B	Recruit students and workers for RVC aircraft maintenance school and Maintenance Repair and Overhaul companies at the airport.	RVC, NIWA	Ongoing
4.1C	Support Rockford airport officials on cargo, MRO, and other development opportunities through economic development efforts, incentives, and infrastructure upgrades.	Chicago Rockford International Airport, City of Rockford, Winnebago County, RAEDC, EDDNI	Ongoing
4.1D	Improve amenities and infrastructure at existing Rockford Global Trade Park and develop available parcels for industries that would benefit from proximity to Chicago Rockford International Airport.	City of Rockford, EDDNI/RMAP, RAEDC	TBD

Strategy 4.2: Upgrade and extend freight rail service in key corridors to boost rail-reliant industrial development.

Action		Responsible	
4.2A	Upgrade Illinois Railway line from Davis Junction to Rockford, and identify possible link to Rochelle to connect to Union Pacific intermodal hub.	RMAP, Illinois Railway, Winnebago County, Ogle County	Identify and apply for funding opportunity in 2016
4.2B	Create large, rail-served industrial development at Rockford Global Trade Park – South.	City of Rockford, Winnebago County, Illinois Railway, RMAP	By 2018
4.2C	Upgrade of Union Pacific rail line through McHenry, Boone, and Winnebago counties.	RMAP, Union Pacific, Illinois Department of Transportation, CMAP	By 2019

Strategy 4.3: Extend passenger rail service through the three-county region, linking the region to wider labor, employment, and recreational markets.

Action		Responsible	
4.3A	Develop commuter rail service for Rockford, Belvidere, Marengo, and Huntley via Metra or new transit district.	RMAP, local governments, and potentially Regional Transportation Authority or Rockford Mass Transit District	Ongoing
4.3B	Advocate for the return of Amtrak from Chicago through Rockford to Iowa.	Regional elected officials, RMAP	Ongoing

Strategy 4.4: Leverage the region's interstates as an economic catalyst, while improving overall highway access for businesses and residents.

Action		Responsible	
4.4A	Upgrade and extend infrastructure needed to develop area around Irene Road interchange in Boone County for advanced manufacturing and logistics.	City of Belvidere, Boone County, RMAP	By 2017
4.4B	Advocate and identify funds for I-90 interchange at Illinois 23 in McHenry County.	Illinois Tollway, McHenry County, IDOT	By 2017
4.4C	Continue supporting the completion of CMAP's major capital projects, including the Route 53/120 extension.	McHenry County, CMAP, Lake County, Illinois Tollway	Ongoing
4.4D	Advocate and identify funds for I-90 interchange at Perry Creek Parkway in Rockford.	Illinois Tollway, City of Rockford, Winnebago County, RMAP	By 2020
4.4E	Upgrade and extend infrastructure needed to develop US 20/IL 2 (South Main Street) Interchange Area to provide better access and services to Rockford Global Trade Park.	City of Rockford, Rock River Water Reclamation District, Winnebago County, RMAP	By 2017

Strategy 4.5: Create a regional slate of infrastructure priorities based on the strategies outlined in this plan by coordinating across responsible entities that develop and maintain the capacity of the region's transportation system, and seek the funding necessary to achieve those priorities.

Action		Responsible	
4.5A	Complete the 5-year Transportation Improvement Programs for McHenry County Department of Transportation, Rockford Metropolitan Agency for Planning, and Stateline Area Transportation Study (SLATS); the Long-Range Transportation Plans for CMAP, RMAP and SLATS; and GO TO 2040.	Regional planning agencies and government transportation departments	Ongoing
4.5B	As the region advances identified priority infrastructure projects, consider the need for additional local revenues to support their completion. This should be considered within the broad goal of maintaining a good tax-value proposition for residents and businesses.	Local government transportation departments, regional planning agencies	Ongoing

Strategy 4.6: Build off of each county's transit service strengths when seeking opportunities to expand service.

Action		Responsible	
4.6A	Expand MCRide, McHenry County's consolidated dial-a-ride service, and work with Boone County to improve coordination and regional connectivity of its demand-response service.	McHenry County, Boone County	2017
4.6B	Work with businesses in McHenry County looking to establish new or access existing van pool services.	MCEDC, Pace	2018
4.6C	Expand Commuter Connection rideshare program in Rockford MSA and explore using RMTD's East-Side Transfer Center as staging point first for existing commuter and rideshare traffic, with the goal of developing demand for van service and later bus service to jobs elsewhere in region and in Chicago area.	RMTD, RMAP	Expand rideshare use in 2016; upgrade van service by 2017

Strategy 4.7: Consolidate multiple infrastructure improvements, including utility, communications, and roadway improvements, into single projects.

Action		Responsible	
4.7A	As a policy, the three counties will focus on consolidating multiple infrastructure improvements into single projects in order to increase efficiency and decrease costs to units of local government and other infrastructure funders.	County and municipal governments, RMAP, CMAP	Ongoing

Strategy 4.8: Enhance high-speed fiber optic networks by further extending fiber backbones and adding "last mile" connections for businesses.

Action		Responsible	
4.8A	Complete the expansion of fiber service in McHenry County via the improvements to US 14.	McHenry County, IDOT, other partners	2018
4.8B	Extend fiber to key job creation sites, such as Barber-Colman facility in downtown Rockford.	City of Rockford and other municipalities, potentially TriRivers Health Partners and/or iFiber	2018
4.8C	Partner with TriRivers Health Partners and iFiber to connect companies and broadband service providers with available dark fiber.	TriRivers Health Partners, iFiber	Ongoing

GOAL 5

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.

Strategy 5.1: Ensure that building and development codes, as well as plans within the region, promote and facilitate the redevelopment of existing structures and infill development, leveling the playing field with requirements for new greenfield construction.

Action		Responsible	
5.1A	Increase collaboration and communication at the regional level regarding land use and transportation planning regarding economic development.	RPC, local governments, and economic development professionals	Ongoing
5.1B	Recognize the link between smart growth practices and economic development by incorporating sustainability principles into relevant plans, policies, and codes at the municipal and county levels. Resources include the Rockford Region Plan for Sustainable Development and CMAP's Sustainability Planning White Paper.	Local governments, in partnership with RPC and CMAP	Ongoing
5.1C	Develop programs and outreach efforts that create incentives, programs and policies to encourage use of LEED building and rehabilitation standards.	Local governments, in partnership with RPC	Ongoing
5.1D	Consistent with a policy of helping businesses grow in areas adjacent to or within areas that are already developed, McHenry County will continue to explore the reuse of existing facilities, including the Motorola site.	MCEDC, McHenry County, Harvard	Ongoing

Strategy 5.2: Streamline local permit and review processes for projects in suitable development areas to the extent possible, especially those that rebuild on cleared brownfield sites.

Action		Responsible	
5.2A	Create a system for the region that ranks properties based on redevelopment potential using a place-based strategy incorporating transportation access, greenspace, walkability, and other characteristics.	Local governments, in partnership with RPC	Ongoing
5.2B	Integrate these tactics into a wider effort by local government to make permit and review process for all projects as streamlined as possible, implementing a "culture of yes" that addresses public concerns/needs but clearly communicates options for private sector development.	Local governments, in partnership with RPC	Ongoing
5.2C	Develop Rockford/Winnebago County's new BUSINESSFirst initiative and then deploy across the region with other local governments to make it easier for businesses to redevelop targeted brownfields and other properties.	Rockford, Winnebago County and other partners	Ongoing
5.2D	Engage private sector to promote potential for redeveloping sites and other opportunities within region; whenever possible, identify and contact developers who specialize in, or have significant interest in, redevelopment.	Regional economic development professionals	Ongoing
5.2E	Take necessary steps to ensure ongoing improvement and/or maintenance of healthy air, soil, and water quality.	Local governments, conservation districts	Ongoing

Strategy 5.3: Continue to assess, remediate, and redevelop brownfield sites throughout the region, taking full advantage of federal and state funding opportunities, both for environmental purposes and for historic preservation of significant properties. Where redevelopment of existing structures on brownfield sites is not feasible, clear any unusable structures for either permanent open space or future development.

Action		Responsible	
5.3A	Redevelop key sites such as the Barber-Colman campus in downtown Rockford and Leath building in downtown Belvidere.	City of Rockford, City of Belvidere	2017-2020
5.3B	Develop a regional inventory of brownfield and infill sites with the potential to accommodate industrial and commercial growth.	Regional municipalities	Ongoing
5.3C	Aggressively pursue state and federal funding for key brownfield sites, using EPA Brownfield grants, New Market Tax Credits, Enterprise Zone/River Edge Redevelopment Zone, etc.	Regional municipalities	Ongoing

Strategy 5.4: Protect prime farmland from encroachment of incompatible development and promote in order to maintain agriculture's key role as a part of the regional economy and promote ecological and agricultural tourism in rural areas of the region.

Action		Responsible	
5.4A	Use growth boundary agreements to protect prime farmland, while maximizing business development along commercial nodes and near existing development.	County and municipal governments, in partnership with RPC	Ongoing
5.4B	As McHenry County updates its 2030 Comprehensive Plan over the next few years, officials will continue to maintain a balance between development and preservation.	McHenry County	2017

GOAL 6

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.

Strategy 6.1: Continue strengthening the Region's downtowns, both urban and rural, as anchors for jobs, residences, and amenities, creating the types of active neighborhoods that will allow the region to be more competitive in retaining young workers.

Action		Responsible	
6.1A	Complete new UW Health Sports Factory, hotel development and Davis Park upgrades in downtown Rockford as catalysts for increased residential and commercial growth in the urban core.	City of Rockford, Rockford Area Convention Visitors Bureau (RACVB), and Rockford Park District	2016 – UW Health Sports Factory and hotel; Davis Park TBD
6.1B	Enhance higher education opportunities in the region's cities as a way to attract economic activity and serve students in urban areas, including new RVC design arts programming in downtown Rockford.	RVC, other educational institutions, in partnership with local governments	RVC facility 2016

6.1C	As a policy, support efforts of local communities to add employers and diversify the housing stock in downtowns, including considering these efforts when working with businesses on site selection.	Boone County, McHenry County, Winnebago County, local municipalities	Ongoing
Strategy 6.2: Promote tourism and recreational use of the region's natural areas, including waterways, parks, preserves, and agricultural areas.			
Action		Responsible	
6.2A	Implement the Rockford Whitewater Rafting Plan and Riverfront walkway plan on the Rock River	City of Rockford	By 2020
6.2B	Promote Fox River opportunities in McHenry County	McHenry County Conservation District, Visit McHenry County	Ongoing
6.2C	Develop list of agritourism opportunities in region and market them for visitors.	RACVB, Northern Illinois Tourism, Visit McHenry County, County Conservation Districts	2017
6.2D	Promote the region as a green getaway from Chicago with destinations such as Glacial Park, Rock Cut State Park, Nature at the Confluence, and eventually Hackmatack National Wildlife Refuge.	RACVB, Northern Illinois Tourism, Visit McHenry County, County Conservation Districts	Ongoing
6.2E	Develop a regional website of events, activities and quality of life amenities geared toward both existing residents and potential visitors. This could be coordinated with existing websites such as gorockford.com	RACVB, Northern Illinois Tourism, Visit McHenry County	2018
Strategy 6.3: Promote healthy lifestyles by building upon the region's health care systems, engaging with employers, and increasing awareness of health-related resources.			
Action		Responsible	
6.3A	Use local food systems, such as farmers markets, community supported agriculture, community gardens, and urban agriculture, to increase access to healthy food. In particular, support Farm to School programs in the region.	County planning and health departments	Ongoing
6.3B	Work with employers to utilize health systems' expertise in planning benefits and improving wellness.	Regional health systems in partnership with local governments, economic development professionals, and/or chambers	Ongoing
6.3C	Implement the Greenways plans in the region to connect parks with recreational paths, and promote those paths to residents.	Planning departments and conservation districts	Through 2020

Strategy 6.4: Maintain a competitive local and state tax environment for businesses and residents.

Action		Responsible	
6.4A	Monitor trends in public service costs relative the changes in the property tax base, allowing taxing districts to better understand information that helps influence long-term trends in tax rates.	Boone County, McHenry County, and Winnebago County	Ongoing
6.4B	Ensure that regional marketing materials discuss the competitiveness of the region's total tax burden (as opposed to just property taxes) and tax-value proposition.	Government officials and economic development professionals in partnership counties	2016
6.4C	Increase the sense of ownership among businesses and residents on issues of budgeting and taxation by increasing civic engagement. Investigate using tools like participatory budgeting and others recommended by The Frameworks Institute .	Boone County, McHenry County, and Winnebago County, local taxing jurisdictions	Ongoing
6.4D	Advocate as one group at the state level on issues of taxation.	Government and economic development officials within the Northern Illinois Region	Ongoing
6.4E	Continue investigation and discussions in Winnebago County regarding concerns about property valuation issues that contribute to decreased Equalized Assessed Valuation and increased tax rates.	Winnebago County Supervisor of Assessments, Rockford Township Assessor, RAEDC, Gary W. Anderson Architects	Ongoing

VII. IMPLEMENTATION AND TRACKING

As evidenced by the span of this plan’s goals, strategies, and actions, the region defines economic development broadly. Many partners impact how the region grows and whether it will achieve its vision. The tactical plan details the actions those partners plan to undertake and the policies they will follow to do so. Unfortunately, resources remain scarce and not everything in this plan can be implemented in the short-term. Many items in the tactical plan are policies. Implementation priorities may change over the life of this plan. Recognizing these points, this section outlines the key activities the region will undertake in 2016 and 2017, how implementation of these specific key activities will be measured, and how economic performance of the region will be measured.

2016-17 KEY IMPLEMENTATION ACTIVITIES

Stakeholder input from the July public meetings and subsequent CEDS Strategy Committee meetings revealed

the highest priority tactics. The overarching theme of those actions that rose to the top is deepening regional collaboration. Stakeholders want to move first on actions that allow partners from throughout Boone, Winnebago, and McHenry counties to better collaborate, not only on economic development and workforce matters, but also on land use planning and transportation.

Over the next two years the region commits to undertaking the key activities detailed in the table below. The table highlights the parties that must be involved, interim milestones, and a final measure to determine whether the action has been implemented. Actions are listed in the order in which they are found in the tactical plan. Annual updates to track progress are a key part of any CEDS. Because this document lays out actions for only the first two years, the 2017 annual review should revise this table with those actions that will be undertaken in 2018 and 2019 along with implementation measures.

KEY IMPLEMENTATION ACTIVITIES (Table 9)

ACTION	PARTIES RESPONSIBLE	KEY MILESTONES	IMPLEMENTATION MEASUREMENT/ DELIVERABLE
Goal 1.1a – Create a Regional Planning Commission (RPC)	Boone, McHenry, and Winnebago counties, other adjacent counties who express interest, in partnership with RMAP and EDDNI	Q2 2016 – Circulate draft framework agreement. Q4 2016 – Meetings of the RPC underway	A regional planning commission in which Boone, McHenry, and Winnebago counties have formally signed an agreement of participation by end of Q4 2016.
Goal 1.1b – Create an economic development cooperative or consortium	Growth Dimensions, MCEDC, RAEDC, other regional economic development organizations, EDDNI, and RPC	Q2 2016 – Begin meetings among regional economic development organizations to outline process. Q3 2016 – Develop the scope of activities for the cooperative based on Q2 2016 determination.	An economic development cooperative among Growth Dimensions, MCEDC, RAEDC, and potentially other partners, formed by Q1 2017.
Goal 1.1c – Create a regional code of ethics	Growth Dimensions, MCEDC, RAEDC, other regional economic development organizations, EDDNI, and RPC	Q2 2017 – Begin holding project meetings to draft code of ethics.	A code of ethics adopted by the responsible parties by Q4 2017.
Goal 1.2a – Obtain EDD status for EDDNI	EDDNI	Q1 2016 – File all necessary documentation with the EDA.	EDD status achieved by Q4 2016.
Goal 1.3a – Develop a regional business attraction branding theme	Economic Development Cooperative, Growth Dimensions, MCEDC, and RAEDC, supported by RPC	Q1 2017 – Begin discussions among economic development partners and identify resources needed. Q2 2017– Complete key stakeholder outreach and identify factors to include in branding effort.	Branding materials rolled out to partners for use by end of Q4 2017.

ACTION	PARTIES RESPONSIBLE	KEY MILESTONES	IMPLEMENTATION MEASUREMENT/ DELIVERABLE
Goal 1.4d – Joint legislative agenda on business climate issues	Boone, McHenry, and Winnebago county officials in conjunction with RPC	Q2 2016 – Staff at RPC, MCEDC, Growth Dimensions, and RAEDC begin developing preferred approaches. Q4 2016 – Present preferred approach to three county boards for approval.	Joint legislative agenda by Q1 2017.
Goal 2.1a – In-depth targeted industry analysis	EDDNI, in collaboration with Growth Dimensions, MCEDC, and RAEDC	Q3 2016 – Begin project scoping with partners. Q4 2016 – Secure funding for support. Q1 2017 – Project kickoff Q3 2017– Draft of study	Completed study by Q4 2017.
Goal 2.2a – Develop a united Synchronist business survey program	ComEd, Growth Dimensions, MCEDC, and RAEDC, in partnership with McHenry Workforce Network and NIWA	Q1 2016 – Develop a project steering committee and initiate meetings. Q2 2016 – Complete input of common assessment into Synchronist. Q3 2016 – Begin usage by all partners.	Share business visits conducted using Synchronist by each partner, to be measured quarterly, benchmarked to Q1 2016 figures.
Goal 2.3a – Develop a regional site selection website	Winnebago County, Boone County, and RPC	Q1 2016– RPC and counties to solicit needed website features from project partners. Q2 2016 – Website development begins. Q3 2016 – Website launch.	Tracking the following quarterly from website launch through 2020: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of website visits. • Number of inquiries generated by the websites. • Project leads or site selector relationships to be generated through the website.
Goal 3.3b – Develop a “live here/work here” campaign, particularly focusing on young workers	RPC, McHenry County Workforce Network, NIWA, Growth Dimensions, MCEDC, and RAEDC	Q1 2017 – Joint selection of a marketing firm as part of the regional branding effort. Q3 2017 – Complete all stakeholder outreach regarding young worker attraction and retention.	Branding materials rolled out to partners for use by end of Q1 2018.
Goal 4.1.d. Improve infrastructure surrounding Chicago Rockford International Airport	City of Rockford, RPC, RAEDC	Q2 2016 – Final inspections on MRO project work by start of quarter.	MRO open and hiring before end of Q3 2016.
Goal 4.2.a. Upgrade Illinois Railway line from Davis Junction, identify possible link to Rochelle to connect to UP intermodal hub	RMAP, Illinois Railway, Winnebago County, Boone County	Q3 2016- Identify and apply for at least 1 opportunity for IL Railway upgrade between Rochelle and Rockford.	Q4 2016- Decision on first application received. Successful application awarded funding by end of 2020.

ACTION	PARTIES RESPONSIBLE	KEY MILESTONES	IMPLEMENTATION MEASUREMENT/ DELIVERABLE
Goal 6.1.a. Complete new UW Health Sports Factory, hotel development and Davis Park upgrades in downtown Rockford as catalysts for increased residential and commercial growth in the urban core	City of Rockford, RAEDC, Rockford Park District, RACVB	Q2 2016 – completion of UW Health Sports Factory. Q4 2016 – completion of downtown hotel.	Completion of UW Health Sports Factory and hotel by Q4 2016.
Goal 6.1.b. Enhance higher education opportunities in the region's cities as a way to attract economic activity and serve students in urban areas, including new RVC design arts programming in downtown Rockford	RVC, City of Rockford	Q4 2016 – Classes start at downtown facility.	New RVC facility open in downtown Rockford.
Goal 6.2.c. Develop list of agritourism opportunities in region and market them for visitors	Growth Dimensions, MCEDC, RAEDC, RPC, Economic Development Cooperative	Q1 2017- Convene stakeholders to develop partner list and strategy. Q3 2017- Draft materials available for public review.	Marketing materials completed and published by end of 2017.

MEASURING IMPLEMENTATION

Beyond the key actions identified previously, the CEDS contains a number of ongoing activities, many of which relate to a key plan theme: collaboration. Focusing

a causal relationship between regions based solely on the execution of economic development policies or plans, benchmarking overall performance can offer some valuable insights on their effectiveness.

KEY MEASUREMENTS (TABLE 10)

FACTOR	INTERIM WORK	MEASUREMENTS THROUGH END OF Q4 2020
Trade show attendance as a region	Agree on trade show events in which to participate by Q1 2016.	Number of trade shows attended as regional group. 2015 figure is 1. Number of business leads or prospects generated per event. 2015 figure is 100.
Regional site selection proposals	Develop format for responses with regional group	Number of regional site selection proposals submitted. 2015 figure is 1.
Prioritized EDA funding requests submitted as a region	Work through the CEDS strategy committee to determine what to submit for funding annually.	Total amount of funding received from EDA for regional projects. Share of projects submitted to EDA that receive funding.
Annual economic development summit	EDDNI will coordinate planning for the annual summit.	Number of summits held. 2015 figure is zero.
Improved public outreach regarding economic development	Use of the RPC to identify local planning projects where EDDNI conduct outreach.	Number of members of the general public attending events where EDDNI presents on economic development. 2015 figure is 0.

on this theme will allow the region to speak as one on many different topics and will utilize the following broad measures to assess the implementation of this concept.

MEASURING REGION PERFORMANCE

Beyond completing the near term key tasks and measuring implementation of important ongoing efforts, the region wants to broadly track economic performance. Yet, it is equally important to monitor the region's performance in relation to similar regions. Although it is difficult to draw

As such, this plan will establish a handful of important basic indicators that will be tracked in conjunction with the CEDS. These measures will be tracked for both Northern Illinois and five peer regions. Peer regions were selected for because of their similar demographic, economic, and locational characteristics. The following tables give an overview of the basic indicators for the region and peer communities. Additional metrics may be added as necessary to address areas of particular concern (such as changes in wages, productivity, or employment in targeted industries).

Table 11 shows the demographic and economic factors that will be used for comparison. The total population primarily illustrates the size differences between the comparison areas. As highlighted earlier, the growth or decline in younger working-age population groups is particularly important to the cluster given its 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).

PEER REGIONS

Choosing peer regions that allow for meaningful comparisons is critical. The peer regions selected for the Northern Illinois Region are comparable in terms of...



DEMOGRAPHIC AND ECONOMIC PERFORMANCE METRICS FOR THE NORTHERN ILLINOIS REGION AND PEERS (Table 11)

REGION/METROPOLITAN AREA	POPULATION (2014)	POPULATION AGE 25-39 YEARS (2014) ¹	GRP PER CAPITA ² (2014)	MEAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME ² (2014)
Northern Illinois	649,694	17.6%	\$37,239	\$90,820
Canton, OH	403,923	16.9%	\$35,202	\$80,041
Dayton, OH	800,836	18.5%	\$43,092	\$82,233
Fort Wayne, IN	427,183	19.2%	\$44,217	\$81,767
Peoria, IL	380,040	19.3%	\$50,449	\$97,180
Janesville-Beloit, WI	161,188	18.5%	\$33,685	\$80,246

¹ Percent of total population.

² Figures are in constant (2013) dollars.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2014 (population data); Woods and Poole Economics, Inc., 2015 (GDP and personal income data).

LABOR MARKET PERFORMANCE METRICS FOR THE NORTHERN ILLINOIS REGION AND PEERS (Table 12)

REGION/METROPOLITAN AREA	TOTAL EMPLOYMENT (2014)	EARNINGS PER WORKER ¹ (2014)	NEW HIRES AND RECALLS PER 10,000 JOBS (2014)	MANUFACTURING L.Q. ² (2014)
Northern Illinois	311,447	\$42,282	15.5%	2.2
Canton, OH	224,352	\$39,054	12.8%	1.9
Dayton, OH	460,904	\$45,894	8.5%	1.2
Fort Wayne, IN	257,382	\$41,790	13.5%	2.0
Peoria, IL	223,241	\$50,837	12.5%	1.8
Janesville-Beloit, WI	79,666	\$43,526	11.7%	1.7

¹ Figures are in constant (2013) dollars.

² The Location Quotient (L.Q.) is a measurement of manufacturing employment concentration in the region in relation to the national average.

Source: Woods and Poole Economics, Inc., 2015 (employment and earnings data); Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamics (LEHD) database, U.S. Census Bureau, 2014, accessed at <http://lehd.ces.census.gov/> (New Hires and Recalls data).

BUSINESS VITALITY METRICS FOR THE NORTHERN ILLINOIS REGION AND PEERS (Table 13)

REGION/METROPOLITAN AREA	NEW BUSINESS STARTS ¹ PER 10,000 POPULATION (2013)	EXPANSION STARTS ² PER 10,000 POPULATION (2013)
Northern Illinois	37.6	3.2
Canton, OH	43.8	3.6
Dayton, OH	29.5	3.5
Fort Wayne, IN	42.3	3.7
Peoria, IL	33.6	4.3
Janesville-Beloit, WI	31.0	3.3

¹ New Business Starts are defined as establishments with a new DUNS number that have no prior affiliation with any existing business.

² Expansion Starts are defined as new business establishments created or "spun-off" from existing firms.

Source: National Employment Time Series (NETS) database, accessed at www.youreconomy.org, 2013 (New Business Starts and Expansion Starts).

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The following people and organizations assisted in the CEDS planning process:



County Board Chairmen

Chairman Bob Walberg
Boone County

Chairman Joeseph Gottmoller
McHenry County

Chairman Scott Christiansen
Winnebago County

Mark Williams
City of Rockford

Jarid Funderburg
Growth Dimensions for Belvidere-
Boone County

Pam Cumpata
McHenry County Economic
Development Corp.

Jeff Polsean
Greater Rockford Airport Authority

Rocco Zucchero
Illinois Tollway

Michele Aavang
McHenry County Farm Bureau

CEDS Strategy Committee

John Chadwick
WREX-TV (Committee Chairman)

Ken Terrinoni
Boone County Government

Scott Hartman
McHenry County Government

Dennis Sandquist
McHenry County Planning and
Development

Mayor Mike Chamberlain
City of Belvidere

Dan Jacobson
City of Loves Park

Mike Nicholas
Rockford Area Economic Development
Council

Michael Dunn Jr.
Rockford Metropolitan Agency for
Planning

Darcy Bucholz
Northern Illinois Workforce Alliance

Julie Courtney
McHenry County Workforce Network

Jeff Poynter
McHenry County Workforce Network
Board

Sam Overton
Rock Valley College

Teresa Beach-Shelov
Superior Joining Technologies

Stacy Bernardi
First Midwest Group

Conor Brown
Illinois Association of Realtors

Colleen Carroll
UTC Aerospace Systems

Ken Carlton
Corrugated Metals

Tom Carlton
Corrugated Metals

Shawn Condon
Dean Foods



Michael Eesley
Centegra Health System

Dr. Bill Gorski
SwedishAmerican Health System

Brad Long
Northwestern Illinois Building &
Construction Trades

Misti Rice
Fiat Chrysler Automobiles

Joel Sjostrom
Sjostrom and Sons

Jim Thorpe
Crystal Lake Bank & Trust

Richard Van Evera
Barrick, Switzer, Long, Balsley & Van
Evera

Shane Van Sickle
LandMark Development Group

Michael Williams
Rock River Training Corp.

McHenry County Steering Committee

Michele Aavang
McHenry County Farm Bureau

Thomas Burney
Zanck, Coen, Wright and Saladin, PC

Lenore Beyer-Clow
Friends of Hackmatack/Openlands

Conor Brown
Illinois Association of Realtors

Scott Brown
Sage Products

Shawn Condon
Dean Foods

Chalen Daigle
McHenry County Council of
Governments

Robin Doeden
McHenry County Community
Foundation

Michael Eesley
Centegra Health System

Tom Muschoot
General Kinematics

Jhonna Ryan
Construction Industry Service
Corporation

Carolyn Schofield
Chicago Metropolitan Agency for
Planning representative

Dr. Justin Smith
Woodstock High School

Dr. Vicky Smith
McHenry County College

Jennifer Soule
OWC

Jim Thorpe
Crystal Lake Bank & Trust

Dan Volkers
McHenry County Farm Bureau

Technical Committee

Dana Northcott
Economic Development District of
Northern Illinois (EDDNI)

Thomas Bona
EDDNI

Jonathan Burch
Chicago Metropolitan Agency for
Planning

Norman Walzer
Northern Illinois University Center for
Governmental Studies (NIU-CGS)

Brian Harger
NIU-CGS

Sandra Belman
EDDNI

Sydney Turner
EDDNI

Terrance Hall
Rockford Metropolitan Agency for
Planning

Melissa Henriksen
NIU-CGS

Andy Blanke
NIU-GCS

Other Support

Justyn Miller
Boone County Government

Darrell Moore
McHenry County Planning &
Development

Peter Austin
McHenry County Government

Scott Hennings
McHenry County Division of
Transportation

Jon Paul Dipla
Rockford Metropolitan Agency for
Planning



Chicago Metropolitan
Agency for Planning



NORTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY

Center for
Governmental Studies

Outreach, Engagement, and Regional Development

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Rockford Metropolitan Agency For Planning

APPENDIX I: RESULTS OF 2010-15 CEDS FOR BOONE AND WINNEBAGO COUNTIES

GOAL I: CREATE A REGIONAL COMPREHENSIVE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PLAN, INCLUDING A MARKETING STRATEGY EMPHASIZING COLLABORATION WITHIN THE ROCKFORD MSA.

Progress:

- Successfully formed Rockford Region Economic Development District (now the Economic Development District of Northern Illinois), which oversees the CEDS, coordinates regional grantwriting activities, and serves as a key forum for Boone/Winnebago collaboration.
- State of Ingenuity grant was collaboration between Rockford MSA and Wisconsin counties to promote entrepreneurship and innovation programs.
- Two Investing in Manufacturing Communities Partnership federal grant applications connected a 4- and 6-county region and directly caused McHenry County to be added to the CEDS.
- AAR Corp. project funded by regional coalition.
- Rockford Area Economic Development Council Emerging Opportunities Fund used for regionally significant projects like Alignment Rockford, regional lobbying efforts, and Embry-Riddle attraction project.
- Boone County extending its Enterprise Zone in 2014 application, bringing Poplar Grove and Capron into partnership. Additionally, Loves Park and Machesney Park jointly form new Enterprise Zone.
- Beginning discussions between multi-county area on marketing wider region collaboratively.

Challenges:

- Regional efforts often reactive rather than proactive. Formal partnerships developed in response to economic development or grant opportunities, rather than in advance.
- Collaboration and communication across county lines can be improved.
- Limited public resources make local governments protective of their project priorities and may limit spending on projects in “other areas”.
- No formal process for regional spending on key projects.
- Definition of region differs depending on audience, which makes it difficult to identify a regional marketing program.

GOAL II: FOSTER EFFICIENT BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT, EXPANSION, DIVERSIFICATION, JOB GROWTH, AND ENTREPRENEURIAL CREATIVITY THROUGHOUT THE REGION.

Progress:

- More than 16,000 jobs created or retained in Rockford MSA, as reported by government and economic development partners.
- More than \$1.6 billion in private sector investment in Rockford MSA.
- Chrysler’s \$700 million expansion saved 3,000 jobs and created 1,500 more at region’s largest employer, supported another 1,100 supplier jobs.
- Woodward’s new \$300 million campus will add 1,000 or more jobs.
- Gap between Rockford MSA unemployment rate and national rate dropped from 5.8 percentage points to 2.1

percentage points.

- Gap between Rockford MSA unemployment rate and Illinois rate dropped from 4.7 percentage points to 1.2 percentage points.

Challenges:

- Rockford MSA unemployment rate still farther from U.S. and Illinois rates than it was before recession.
- Total employment in MSA is 93% of pre-recession peak, representing 11,000 lost jobs, including 2,500 manufacturing jobs.
- Number of annual startups in Rockford MSA down approximately 7%.
- While there have been some high-tech startups in region, it has yet to be a significant trend.

GOAL III: ENSURE THE FUTURE AVAILABILITY OF A SKILLED AND FLEXIBLE WORKFORCE PREPARED TO MEET THE NEEDS OF BOTH EXISTING AND EMERGING INDUSTRIES AND TECHNOLOGIES.

Progress:

- Alignment Rockford, academy program, and other improvements have boosted public confidence in Rockford Public Schools.
- Graduation rates at Rockford Public Schools rose from 62% in 2012 to 68% in 2014.
- Belvidere North, Hononegah, and South Beloit High Schools named in U.S. News and World Report's best high schools rankings.
- Percentage of high school graduates living in region has increased faster than state and national percentages; now slightly ahead of national percentage.

Challenges:

- Percentage of college graduates in region has remained flat; gap with state and national percentages widening.
- Graduation rates at Rockford schools still below national average.
- Population decline, and aging of population, causes concern about future worker availability, particularly among those with proper education and training.
- Perception among employers that it is difficult to find skilled workers.

GOAL IV: MEET THE FULL RANGE OF BUSINESS' INFRASTRUCTURE NEEDS WITH EMPHASIS ON TRANSPORTATION, UTILITIES AND COMMUNICATIONS.

Progress:

- More than \$550 million invested in road improvements in Rockford MSA.
- Millions invested in Chicago Rockford International Airport for runway rehabilitation, cargo capacity, parking lot expansion, and surrounding roads.
- Increased federal and state investment in region's infrastructure.

- New I-90 interchanges and widened highway promote access to Chicago and Midwest for residents and businesses.
- Utility upgrades and public-private partnerships led to significant development at three new industrial parks.
- Investment in infrastructure has given ComEd its two best years of reliability on record.
- iFiber and other efforts have expanded availability of broadband in region.

Challenges:

- Reduced local and state tax revenue limit future transportation projects and ability to maintain existing infrastructure.
- Amtrak project continuously delayed; may not be progress on commuter rail until Amtrak returns.
- Underutilized mass transit; lack of ridership and revenue threaten new routes.
- Difficulty for residents in underserved areas to get to job centers.
- Relative lack of shovel-ready land and high-quality business parks, as identified in Rockford Region Strategic Diversification Plan.

GOAL V: REDEPLOY EXISTING UNDERUSED COMMERCIAL AND INDUSTRIAL PROPERTIES AND SITES (GREYFIELDS AND BROWNFIELDS), PROTECT NATURAL AMENITIES AND RESOURCES, AND RESTRUCTURE LAND USE PATTERNS FOR MORE SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT.

Progress:

- Significant redevelopment of downtown Rockford buildings underway, including planned hotel, sports complex, and housing units.
- Several other environmental assessments completed in region.
- Increased construction to meet LEED standards – showcase projects in region, and local contractors and architects with experience in green building.
- Increased use of region’s waterways for recreational use.

Challenges:

- Availability of funds for remediation projects.
- Expiration of state historic tax credits threaten redevelopment projects.
- Concerns over property value assessment of older/infill properties a barrier for redevelopment.
- Older industrial facilities lack appropriate ceiling heights and amenities needed for modern manufacturing, so they site empty.

GOAL VI: OBTAIN A HIGHER QUALITY OF LIFE BY SUPPORTING AND ENHANCING THE REGION’S SENSE OF COMMUNITY IDENTITY, COMMUNITY HEALTH, NATURAL FEATURES, CULTURAL AND RECREATIONAL AMENITIES, AND CREATIVE INDUSTRIES.

Progress:

- Attendance at Rockford Region Sites, Attractions, and Events increased by 10% to 6.6 million. Leading attractions were Rockford Park District sports facilities, which attract regional competitions as well as local visitors.

- Rockford IceHogs set all-time attendance record; Management changes strengthen financial stability of BMO Harris Bank Center and other downtown venues.
- Success of downtown events throughout region, including Rockford City Market, Belvidere Heritage Days, Rockton Old Settlers Days.
- Transform Rockford led by private sector and residents in grassroots effort to improve community.
- Increased investment by health care systems in region.

Challenges:

- Funding limitations threaten arts programs and cultural amenities.
- Efforts underway, but not complete, to deconcentrate public housing and improve quality of options.
- While health care institutions are strong, region scores poorly in health ratings.
- Progress has been slow on developing local foods systems, beyond success of Rockford City Market and farmers markets.

APPENDIX II: PUBLIC COMMENTS AND RESULTING CHANGES TO DOCUMENT

Name or Organization	Comment	Response
<p>McHenry County Board</p>	<p>Project staff note that at the December 1, 2015 McHenry County Board meeting, Board members asked:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • That the plan talk more expansively about the negative impacts of taxation on the business environment, particularly property taxes. • That the plan talk more about the cost of regulation and the cost of government on the business environment. • For more detail about how the region could formally tell the state what changes are desired to improve competitiveness. • For more detail about prioritization and implementation, including the details of who will be implementing specific tactics. • That concerns about the impact of current state worker compensation requirements on business attractiveness be referenced in the document. 	<p>The plan has been revised in a number of ways to address these comments. Previously disparate tax discussions have been combined in the efficient business development section and supplemented with greater detail about the property tax dynamics at play in McHenry County. The plan has been revised to include more information about the need for more collaboration among units of local government and the size and scope of the government sector across the three counties. Worker compensation rates are cited in the business development section as a major weakness. The plan now includes a new action item (1.4D) that recommends the development of a joint legislative agenda for the three counties that includes topics such as taxation and worker compensation.</p> <p>The document includes Chapter VII that specifically goes into implementation of selected tactics. The small number of tactics referenced in Chapter VII reflects the implementation priorities that were highlighted by the public in the July meetings and subsequent three-county steering committee meetings. Specific individuals were not highlighted in the draft plan so as to make the document functional over the full five year implementation time horizon as the staff or roles responsible for specific items may change. As tactics are integrated into annual McHenry County work plans, staff understands that the Board will want those items to have specific owners.</p>
<p>McHenry County Board Planning & Development Committee</p>	<p>At the November 24 committee meeting, members made the following comments:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The healthcare sector should include mental health services, which is a growing strength of the region. 2. The screw and fastener industry in Winnebago County was identified as a strength. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. A reference to mental health services was added to the Healthcare section. 2. Project staff explained that the screw/fastener industry is a subset of the Metal and Metal Products cluster.

<p>Boone County Board</p>	<p>At the December 9 Boone County Board-Belvidere City Council joint City/County Coordinating Committee and the December 16 Boone County Board meeting, the following comments were made:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Will ongoing meetings between the three counties be open to the public? 2. Board members asked what the status of the county's AgTech Initiative was and what role it played in the CEDS. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Staff confirmed that Strategy Committee meetings were open to the public, and also noted the CEDS process included annual reports on project progress. EDDNI staff offered to present to the Board quarterly on CEDS progress if there was interest. 2. County staff discussed the history of the Initiative. It was noted that the Production Agriculture and Food Processing and Manufacturing elements of the CEDS could incorporate the work AgTech did. If the initiative resurfaces or a similar one is started, it could be added to a later update of the CEDS.
<p>Winnebago County Board</p>	<p>At the December 10 Winnebago County Board meeting and December 8 and January 5 Winnebago County Board Economic Development Committee meetings, the following comments were made:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Will this plan's focus on collaboration help reduce redundancies among government and other partners and make more efficient use of resources? 2. How will this plan benefit the west side of Rockford? 3. Will this plan benefit the Rock 39 Industrial Park that Winnebago County helped develop? 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Staff explained how the plan was intended to achieve that goal. Due to this and other comments, the following phrase was added to the SWOT analysis: "Forming such collaborative organizations and/or 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." 2. Staff explained tactical plan items that specifically were directed to the west side of Rockford, as well as other tactics that can benefit residents there. Additionally, language was added to the Background and SWOT sections of the document (outlined below in the response to commenter Jack Becherer) in response to comments such as this. 3. Staff explained that while Rock 39 was not specifically referenced in the plan, the plans's focus on Distribution and Logistics industries will help that development, as well as a general focus around the area of Chicago Rockford International Airport. It was noted that a water tower for Rock 39 was in the previous CEDS and successfully completed.

Pace

- On pages 26 and 27 there is a general mention of transit, specifically – McRide. There is no mention of other Pace service in McHenry County – Routes 550, 806, 807, 808, and 809. Additional no mention of Pace paratransit services in McHenry County which are quite extensive.
- Throughout the document there is no mention of ongoing specific improvements to transit services such as Tollway development adjacent to McHenry County. The County’s access to the Tollway has limited commercial development in the County. There is some mention of general need but the Pace projects can be identified.
- The document should include a specific section on coordinated transit improvement plans (rail - bus) to reduce automobile connections, senior transportation, medical transportation, disabled services, and connectivity between towns/villages in the county.
- Page 29 mentions “opportunities” to zoning for multi-family development in traditional downtowns – but the trend has been to exploit quick cheap box store development, i.e. Randall Road. This is short sited and not transit friendly. This promotes connection and limited transportation opportunities for employees. Sound land use planning and transit connections will act as the backbone of future development in this region.

Thank you for your comments. The plan has been revised in a number of ways to address these comments. Language has been added to note these services. As this is a multi-county document, it must touch on the broad needs of three counties. All three counties share a need for more coordinated transportation and this is discussed in the SWOT section, along with recommendations under goals four, five and six.

<p>Kelly Liebmann, McHenry County resident</p>	<p>1. The CEDS does nothing to address the problems with why businesses and residents are leaving the region and state--the CEDS only grows government spending (through grant seeking and creating more studies, cooperatives and marketing themes).</p> <p>CREATING and maintaining a competitive local and state tax and regulatory environment for businesses and residents should be goal #1, not just a "strategy". Specific to the tactical plan--why is this important "strategy" not included in the implementation and tracking portion of the plan?!</p> <p>2. The wording for Goal #5 in the NIR 2016-20 CEDS "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." has changed since Goal #5 from the 2010-2015 CEDS for Boone and Winnebago Counties "Redeploy existing underused commercial and industrial properties and sites (greyfields and brownfields), protect natural amenities and resources, and restructure land use patterns for more sustainable economic development." was written. I do not feel this slight wording change was done without purpose. Many residents in the rural areas</p>	<p>1. Thank you for the comments. The above-referenced changes made in response comments from the McHenry County Board regarding taxation also address these comments. Additionally, in response to the concern that the plan grows government spending, the following clarifying language was added to the SWOT analysis: "Forming such collaborative organizations and/or 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."</p> <p>2. This wording change was made due to stakeholder input to clarify the goal, but is not intended to prioritize any of the items over others within the goal. Protection of natural resources remains as important a part of this CEDS as it was previously. As such, no change was made to the draft due to this comment.</p> <p>3. The "culture of yes" language was added in response to comments from the business survey, government partners, and other stakeholder input asking that improvements to permitting and other government processes not be simply to reduce roadblocks but to affirmatively help business development. At the same time, the language of the action item underscores the importance of retaining the local control the commenter seeks and balancing development with land-use plans and public concerns. The intent of the action is not to force governments to relinquish such control. As such, no change was made to the draft due to this comment.</p>
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	<p>of the tri-county region feel that conservation and protecting natural resources are a priority for the region. I would like to see the NIR 2016-20 CEDS change Goal #5 back to the previous wording (and meaning), listing protection of natural amenities and resources first within the goal, instead of last.</p> <p>3. The "tactical plan" is nothing more than "smoke an mirrors" with the goal of reducing local control in the development of our communities. What else are residents to believe, when, as stated in "strategy" 5.2B, the CEDS wants to implement a "culture of yes" in regards to permitting and review processes?</p>	
<p>Michael Smith, Winnebago County resident</p>	<p>1. First, the CEDS is a thorough, comprehensive document that is well-organized and well-written. Good work.</p> <p>One question. 5.4a notes "Use growth boundary agreements to protect prime farmland..." Are there such agreements in place already? Portland, among other places, has established an Urban Growth Boundary; perhaps some benchmarking could be done here.</p> <p>2. For 6.1C in particular, and issues of housing within downtown or adjacent (e.g. 1st-ring streetcar suburbs), here are some Groups to consider. Friends of Ziock Neighborhood Associations or Business Districts (e.g. Midtown Business District)</p>	<p>1. There are no growth boundary agreements similar to the Portland example in the region. Some parts of the region have done much work to preserve natural and agricultural areas. McHenry County created the Agricultural Conservation Easement to permanently protect farmland from conversion to other uses. We will look at Portland and other places for future benchmarking. Thank you for the suggestion.</p> <p>2. Thank you for the suggested groups. We will look to those groups for potential partnerships as we begin implementation of the CEDS. Since none of those groups have been contacted about being included in the CEDS yet, they will not be formally added to the document but may be tied to action items in future annual update if there is interest.</p> <p>3. In response to comments such as this, the added action item (1.4.D) recommending the development of a joint legislative agenda for the three counties could include advocacy for retention of tax incentives. Use of</p>

	<p>Perhaps the City's Historic Preservation Commission? I'd love to see the HPC further activated, and expand its work to include tools such as Revolving Loan Funds. An example: Historic Savannah Foundation (http://www.myhsf.org)</p> <p>3. I'm concerned about the fate of the RERZ/State Historic Tax Credit, which is set to expire later this year. This has been an important part of development downtown, and it seems like the State may cut it, given the state of our budget.</p>	<p>such incentives identified by the commenter are a key part of the tactical plan.</p>
<p>Online commenter who didn't provide name</p>	<p>1. Correction to the business name of a McHenry County Steering Committee representative.</p> <p>2. I'm thinking that there should be some sort of housing group in the mix. If you want to increase urban residential use (i.e. UW health complex in Rockford, you need housing in those areas so there is reduced need for infrastructure and parking to get people within walking distance of work and quality of life.</p>	<p>1. This was corrected.</p> <p>2. Thank you for the suggestion. We will look to those groups for potential partnerships as we begin implementation of the CEDS. Since none of those groups have been contacted about being included in the CEDS yet, they will not be formally added to the document but may be tied to action items in future annual update if there is interest.</p>
<p>Andy Snarski, McHenry County resident</p>	<p>1. The Vision is too ambitious for 5 years. In particular, commenter noted large gaps with the "peer communities" in per capita GRP that seemed too hard to overcome.</p> <p>2. Concerns about the ability of region to enact the plan without coordination with the State of Illinois</p>	<p>1. Due to comments, GRP data was examined and an error was discovered. Revised data puts Northern Illinois Region amid the peer communities. Regarding the overall Vision, stakeholders wanted a high bar to aim for, but also included peer communities for attainable results.</p> <p>2. Staff explained that Action 1.4A would assist with this. Additionally, the legislative advocacy action added, as referenced, above, would assist with this concern.</p>

<p>Jack Becherer, Winnebago County resident</p>	<p>1. The disparity of Winnebago’s urban core is not addressed. Rockford’s west side seems to be mostly ignored in the development of the economic development strategy. While there is a brief mention of the Barber-Coleman campus in Rockford, there is no mention of the west side of Rockford in the Development Strategy.</p> <p>If the Joint Economic Plan for our three counties ignores the West Side of Rockford, it also ignores the disparity of opportunities between Caucasian, African American and Latino opportunities, education and job readiness in our region.</p> <p>Ignoring the west side of Rockford in this plan significantly increases the likelihood that the Joint Economic Plan will fail. Winnebago County cannot address the challenges of the west side of Rockford by partnering on its competitive advantages while trying to assume its challenges by itself.</p> <p>2. Access throughout McHenry County’s roads should be listed as a concern, or at least a challenge. Parts of the County are simply difficult to navigate. Getting to I-39 close to the Illinois/Wisconsin line from parts of McHenry County can be a challenge.</p>	<p>1. Thank you for the comments. Staff showed the commenter other tactical plan items that specifically were directed to the west side of Rockford, as well as other tactics that can benefit residents there.</p> <p>Additionally, the following language was added to the background section of the plan in response to this and other comments: “Finally, while the CEDS process is largely focused on regional economic development challenges, assets and initiatives, stakeholders noted that special effort must be made to ensure economic growth is spread across all parts of the region. In particular, economically distressed communities and neighborhoods of the region and their residents will benefit from both locally specific tactics and regionally important tactics outlined in this plan. This complements regional commitments toward place-based economic development, as well as the EDA’s commitment to benefiting distressed areas.”</p> <p>Also, the following language was added to the SWOT analysis regarding Land Use and Sustainable Development: “A concerted effort to prioritize development and redevelopment in existing commercial and industrial corridors would not only mitigate sprawl but could lead to more equitable investment as existing economically distressed areas would benefit from more development opportunities.”</p> <p>2. This is already addressed in the plan – the SWOT analysis notes McHenry County is the only county in the region without interstate access. Staff shared with the commenter two projects in the tactical plan that address the concern (Actions 4.4B and 4.4C). Additionally, Action 4.5A includes support of McHenry County and CMAP projects to address this concern.</p>
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<p>City of Rockford</p>	<p>“Place-based economic development” (neighborhood focused economic development strategies) are not specifically stated in the plan but should be. There is, however, a clear overarching theme that community/neighborhood development is important though it is not explicitly stated.</p>	<p>Language was added to the document, as outlined above, referencing the importance of place-based economic development and promoting economic growth in distressed areas.</p>
<p>Unnamed McHenry County commenter</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Complete the 90/Rt 23 interchange to help develop business along the 90 corridor. This needs to be done as soon as practical. 2. I recently read about the unemployment in Rockford with minorities. How will this unemployed workforce be trained so they are employable 3. What are the financial obligations of McHenry County to participate & implement these plans? 4. Commuter rail service between McHenry & Winnebago is a great idea – what about bus service? 5. Identify this area as the business friendly area rather than just another part of Illinois. Identity is a unique region. 6. Even though unemployment is relatively low, many are underemployed or have left the workforce. We really need economic development – Thank You. 7. Turn our County agencies (P&D, Health etc.) into resources rather than roadblocks. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. This is a priority project in the CEDS (Action 4.4 B) 2. Many of the Actions under Goal 3 (Workforce) will include components to train minority residents, and Strategy 3.1 specifically calls out “emphasis on providing education and training to individuals of all ages and socioeconomic groups.” Specific relevant actions include Action 3.1F (centralized Career and Technical Education in Rockford) and Action 2.4 (a manufacturing-based training and incubation center on the west side of Rockford). 3. This plan includes no financial obligation to McHenry County or any other partner. It is up to individual partner governments and agencies to decide what projects they wish to spend time and resources on. 4. Action 4.6C includes the possibility of developing bus service for commuters within the region and between the region and the wider Chicago area. This will be explored as well as commuter rail. 5. Thank you for this comment. Many items in this CEDS were included to achieve this. 6. Thank you for your comments. 7. It is the intent of Action 5.2B (implementing a “culture of yes” in local government) to cause this to happen.

Unnamed Winnebago County commenter	Need to make sure that the redevelopment of vacant/blighted properties is a priority and strongly stated in the plan	Staff explained to commenter the details of Goal 5 (Land Use and Sustainable Development) and its specific actions that address this concern.
Unnamed Winnebago County commenter	Build a platform (bridge type structure) that would serve as entertainment venue and parking near Davis Park in Rockford.	Comment was forwarded to City of Rockford CED Department. Resident was informed of upcoming Davis Park visioning meeting.
Unnamed Boone County commenter	A reference should be made to Boone County's water management plan.	A reference was added to the Threats section of Land Use and Sustainable Development where flooding and groundwater are discussed.
Comments at Boone County Open House	<p>During a discussion with a few Boone County residents at the December 16 Open House, the following comments were made:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Return on Investment was important when discussing government spending by Boone County. 2. Commenter had concerns about other counties running the plan, and the smaller Boone County not having say. 3. Concerns were expressed about the county's Strategic Plan, which was being updated concurrently with the CEDS, and public input. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Staff explained that Boone County was not obligated by the CEDS to fund any projects or initiatives. However, "return on investment" would be an important calculation when considering the outlined projects, and EDDNI staff offered to assist in that calculation at the appropriate time. 2. Staff explained Boone County's representation in the plan, and showed examples of projects that would directly benefit Boone County. Additionally, it was reiterated that Boone County would not be obligated to fund initiatives in the plan without its approval. 3. Concerns were directed to Boone County staff, and CEDS project staff explained the public input process of the CEDS update.
Comments at Winnebago County Open House	During a discussion with a few Winnebago County residents at the January 6 Open House, project staff was asked about accountability and reporting measures in the CEDS	Project staff explained the Measuring Progress section of the CEDS. Additionally, EDDNI staff outlined how annual reports would be completed, explaining progress on action items and outlining reasons where actions did not meet expected schedules. Annual reports would be released to the public and distributed to partner organizations.
McHenry County Conservation District	<p>ALIGNMENT WITH EXISTING PLANS</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. It is suggested that the McHenry County Green 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The plan was added to the section as suggest. 2. This was fixed in the final draft.

	<p>Infrastructure Plan (July 2012) be included as one of the plans. GIV plans are known and recognized throughout the region through CMAP, Chicago Wilderness, etc. and is an important land management document for McHenry County – Page 5.</p> <p>BACKGROUND</p> <p>2. The Figures 1: Regional Context and Figure 2: EDA distressed areas seems pixelated and it is difficult to read clearly. Page 9 and Page 14.</p> <p>III SWOT</p> <p>3. #4 Infrastructure. Second to last paragraph under weaknesses discussing “last mile: connections. It is suggested that it be noted that there is a need for cooperation in building and maintaining bike/pedestrian connections from rail stations to work or home. Page 26.</p> <p>4. #5 Land Use and Sustainable Development. Under the Threats section, ecosystem services (air scrubbing, flood protection, groundwater recharge, water purification, carbon storage, etc.) are highlighted; however the McHenry County portion of the GIV Report should be highlighted and not just listed as a footnote. Page 30.</p> <p>5. #6 Quality of Life. Under the Strengths section, last sentence in first paragraph replace “forest preserves” with “conservation areas” or “more than “25,000</p>	<p>3. Staff believes the existing language in that section already conveys this concern.</p> <p>4. A reference to this plan was added in this section.</p> <p>5. This was changed as requested.</p> <p>6. This was changed as requested</p> <p>7. This was not changed because the intent of the Action was to list highlighted sites among the three counties, not a comprehensive list of resources. In practice, the “green getaway” marketing will promote all of the Conservation Districts sites.</p> <p>8. Thank you for your comments. The intent was to list key regional actions in the tactical plan, though some local projects were added representing each county. If during CEDS implementation, additional McHenry County actions need to be added, they can be in annual updates. Also, because of the Conservation District’s interest, the Responsible Parties for Actions 6.2C and 6.2D were updated to include “county conservation districts”. McHenry County Conservation District can be a good partner in these and other initiatives.</p>
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acres of conservation areas.” McHenry County has a Conservation District not a Forest Preserve District. Page 31.

6. #6 Quality of Life. Last paragraph refers to the national award received by the Rockford Park District by the American Academy for Park and Recreation Administration (AAPRA) in partnership with the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA). The official name of the award is the “2012 National Gold Medal for Excellence in Park and Recreation.” It should also be noted and added that the McHenry County Conservation District received the 2013 National Recreation and Park Association’s Barb King Environmental Stewardship Award, which should be added as well. Page 31.

IV TACTICAL PLAN

7. Goal 6, Strategy 6.2, Action 6.2D. Suggest replacing “Glacial Park” with “one of McHenry County Conservation District’s 35 sites or regional trails.” Page 55.

MISCELLANEOUS

8. In general, this plan is very heavy on the Rockford action items and very light on the McHenry County actions. We find the items listed under Strategy 6.2 to be interesting including implementing Greenways plans, promotion of Fox River opportunities and green getaways from Chicago destinations.



**313 N MAIN ST
ROCKFORD, IL 61101
www.eddni.org
779.348.7009
info@eddni.org**