FOOTHILLS
REGIONAL COMMISSION
COMPREHENSIVE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY
2023

PREPARED BY THE
Western Piedmont
Council of Governments

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INTRODUCTION

The Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) is an important tool used to encourage and equip the region's counties and communities with strategies to improve economic conditions and the quality of life for residents. The CEDS for the Foothills Regional Commission was created in 2023 through a Board-appointed Sub-Committee. The 12 members represent community leaders from Polk, Rutherford, McDowell, and Cleveland Counties. This document includes a summary background, the results of a SOAR (strengths, opportunities, aspirations, and results) analysis, regional resiliency analysis, CEDS Strategies by topic, and CEDS Performance Measures. In order to continue to measure performance measures and communicate successes, the Sub-Committee will continue to hold quarterly meetings. Additional information pertaining to the 2023 CEDS, includes the regional profile, a summary of the CEDS process, CEDS survey and stakeholder interview results, CEDS performance measures spreadsheet, and the CEDS Committee meeting minutes, which can be found on the Foothills Regional Commission's website.
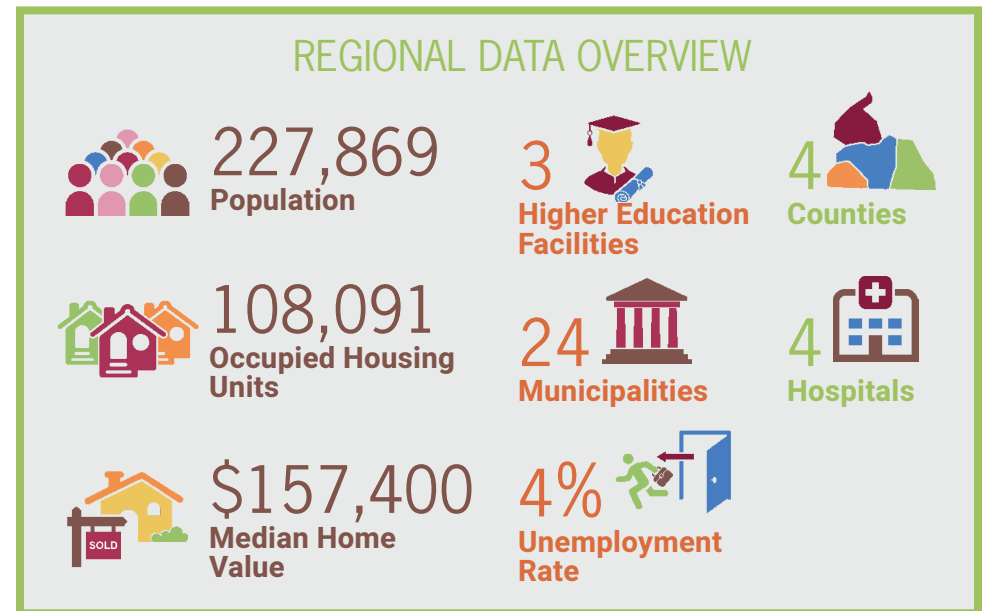
SUMMARY BACKGROUND

The Foothills Regional Council (also known as the Isothermal Council of Government) is a region of 227,829 people, consisting of Polk, Rutherford, McDowell, and Cleveland Counties. While Polk, Rutherford, and McDowell Counties are part of the Foothills Rural Planning Organization, Cleveland County is part of the Gaston-Cleveland-Lincoln Metropolitan Planning Organization. Cleveland County had the fastest growth rate over the past 10 years (1.5%), while McDowell, Polk, and Rutherford Counties had a loss. The North Carolina Office of Management and Budget projects a population growth of 4% from 2022 - 2042 with a majority of growth occurring in Rutherford and Cleveland Counties. The projected growth is a product of growing pressures from the Charlotte region trickling westward through Gaston County and following the I-74 corridor.

VISION STATEMENT

The Foothills Regional Commission (also known as Isothermal Region) is one of sixteen regional councils with in North Carolina. The Commission serves its member local governments and their citizens by fostering collaboration and providing professional and technical expertise. The Commission houses the region's Area Agency on Aging, Housing Programs, Rural Planning Organization, and Workforce Development Board and provides services through its Economic & Community Development, Workforce Development programs, and Technical Assistance programs.
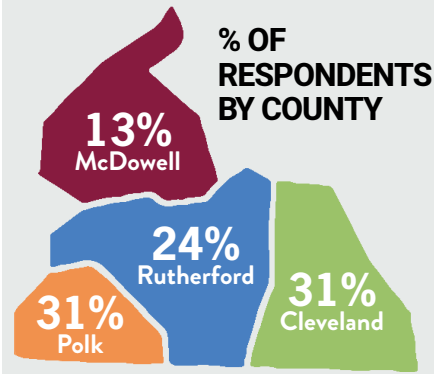
The CEDS document will foster the Commission's goals of valuing economic diversity and partnering collaboration, sharing risks and rewards to build opportunities and enhance economic growth.

CEDS BY THE NUMBERS

12 Committee Members

28 Survey Questions

6 CEDS Subject Categories

6 Committee Meetings

600 Survey Responses

23 1-on-1 Stakeholder Interviews

32 CEDS Strategies

REGIONAL DATA OVERVIEW

227,869 Population

3 Higher Education Facilities

4 Counties

108,091 Occupied Housing Units

24 Municipalities

4 Hospitals

$157,400 Median Home Value

4% Unemployment Rate

CEDS SURVEY RESPONSES DEMOGRAPHIC BREAKDOWN

600 RESPONSES

% OF RESPONDENTS BY COUNTY

- 13% McDowell
- 24% Rutherford
- 31% Polk
- 31% Cleveland

% OF RESPONDENTS BY RACE

- **87%** White
- **3.7%** Black
- **1.3%** Hispanic
- **0.3%** Asian/Asian American
- **0.2%** American Indian/Alaska Native
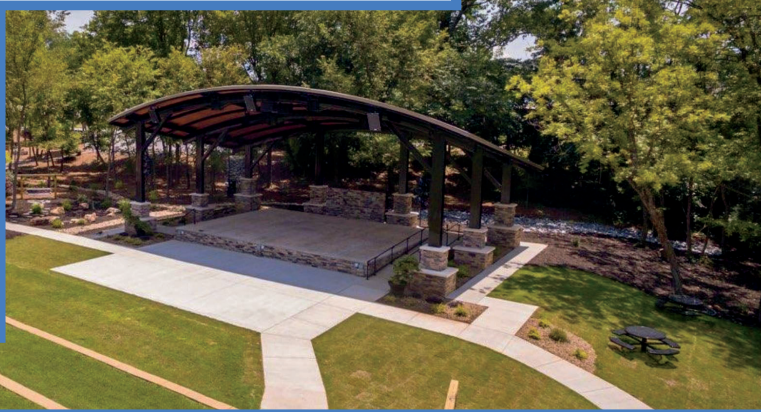
% OF RESPONDENTS BY GENDER

- **62%** Female
- **32%** Male

6% of the total surveyed did not answer this question

57% of Respondents had a bachelors degree or higher

REGIONAL POPULATION ESTIMATES (2010-2022)

County	Census 2010	Census 2020	Change 2010-2020	%Change 2010-2020	2022 Estimate
Cleveland	98,078	99,519	1,441	1.5%	101,874
McDowell	44,996	44,578	-418	-0.9%	44,443
Polk	20,510	19,328	-1,182	-5.8%	19,571
Rutherford	67,810	64,444	-3,366	-5.0%	64,184
Foothill Region	231,394	227,869	-3,525	-1.5%	230,072

REGIONAL RESILIENCY

As part of the CEDS process, Committee members discussed "resiliency" in the Foothills Commission Region. Below are the committee's answers to questions concerning regional resiliency.

How are we resilient now?

RESILIENCY IN THE REGION

- Strong community colleges and school system
- Diverse and strong small business
- Collaboration & ability to ask others for help
- Diverse economy
- Interstate linkages
- Ability to adapt to job market needs

IMPROVEMENTS TO RESILIENCY

- Strengthen the education pipeline
- Offer more broadband options
- Encourage young people to stay, live, and work in the region
- Always strive for further improvements
- Agricultural pipeline
- Businesses providing more opportunities for young people
- Have educators at the decision-making table
- Increase communication with teachers

S.O.A.R. ANALYSIS

A regional SWOT (**Strengths**, **Opportunities**, **Aspirations**, & **Results**) analysis was developed by the CEDS Committee. The process was used by the Committee to assess the region's current conditions and to determine specific strategies for future development.

STRENGTHS

- Tourism
- Cost of living and affordability
- Leadership
- Natural Resources/ environment/climate
  » Trails and outdoor recreation
- Partnerships and relationships
  » Collaboration
- Manufacturing industries
- Location
  » Transportation corridors
  » Access to airports and metropolitan areas
- Workforce
- Education
- Post-secondary education
- Welcoming and friendly
- Pro-business
- Events and festivals
- Towns, cities, and local governments
  » Downtowns
- Resiliency
- Infrastructure

OPPORTUNITIES

- Affordable housing
  » Increase housing supply with diverse housing options
- Regional public transportation
- Childcare
- Strengthen education system (K-12, CTE, higher education)
  » Trades
  » More apprenticeships
  » Opportunities for children
- Grow and revitalize advanced manufacturing industries
- Leveraging connections, funds, and partnerships
- 74 as an interstate
- Enhancing and growing tourism assets
  » e.g. outdoor recreation
- Increase access to healthy foods and lifestyles
  » Agriculture and food industries
- Creating and expanding events and festivals
- Leveraging faith-based communities
- Growth
- Acknowledge the realities of the region
- Leveraging and growing in focus areas
- Increase median household income
- Expand water, sewer, and broadband infrastructure
- Population retention
- Equitable distribution/access of assets and opportunities
- Small business and entrepreneurship support
- Partnering jobs with residents
  » Market public service jobs
- Increase channels of communication
- Maximize art and culture

ASPIRATIONS

- Reduce child poverty
- Keeping and retaining residents
- Increase affordable communities
  » Avoid gentrification and displacement
- Youth programs
  » Engage young people with community and opportunities
- Thriving families
- Teach financial literacy
- Celebrating and maintaining what we have
- Giving youth the tools for success
  » Break generational poverty
- Increase collaboration
- Building strong and enduring communities
- Build a better place to live, work, and play
- Sustainability of farmlands
- Increase business growth

RESULTS

- Measuring and celebrating Investment in the region
- Data-driven successes
  » e.g. recreation trail counters
- Safer and healthier citizens
  » Improvement in county health ratings
  » Reduction in drug-related deaths and drug use
- Following student's success
- Increased graduation rates, enrollment numbers, and salaries
- More citizens are happy
  » positive feedback
- The 5-year plan is being utilized
- More access to broadband
- Reduction in social service needs
- Improve public transit ridership
- Track money being spent
- Track annual progress
- There are more strengths than opportunities

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

The economy in the Foothills Region has historically relied on manufacturing and service industries. Changes to these industries have resulted in the entry of new employers and created opportunities to strengthen existing industry sectors and raise income levels. Efforts are underway to embrace business development. The strategies found in this portion of the CEDS lead to economic development and job creation opportunities for the region. These include constructing additional shell buildings and pad-ready sites, increasing capacity for economic development projects and grant development, maximizing building reuse and site development, and promoting economic development assets.
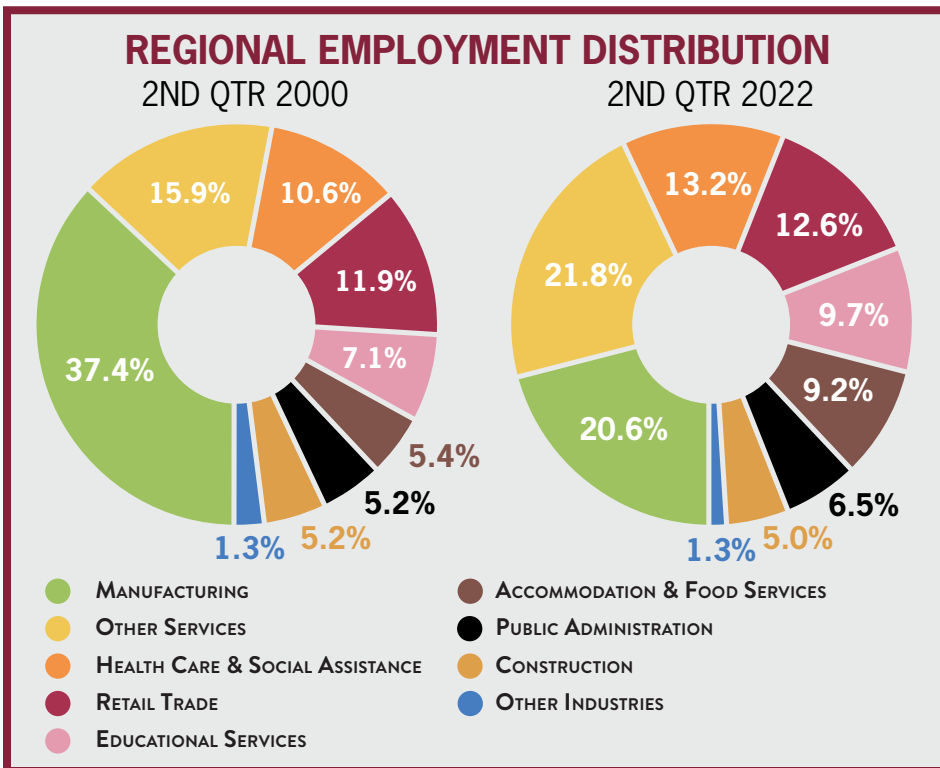
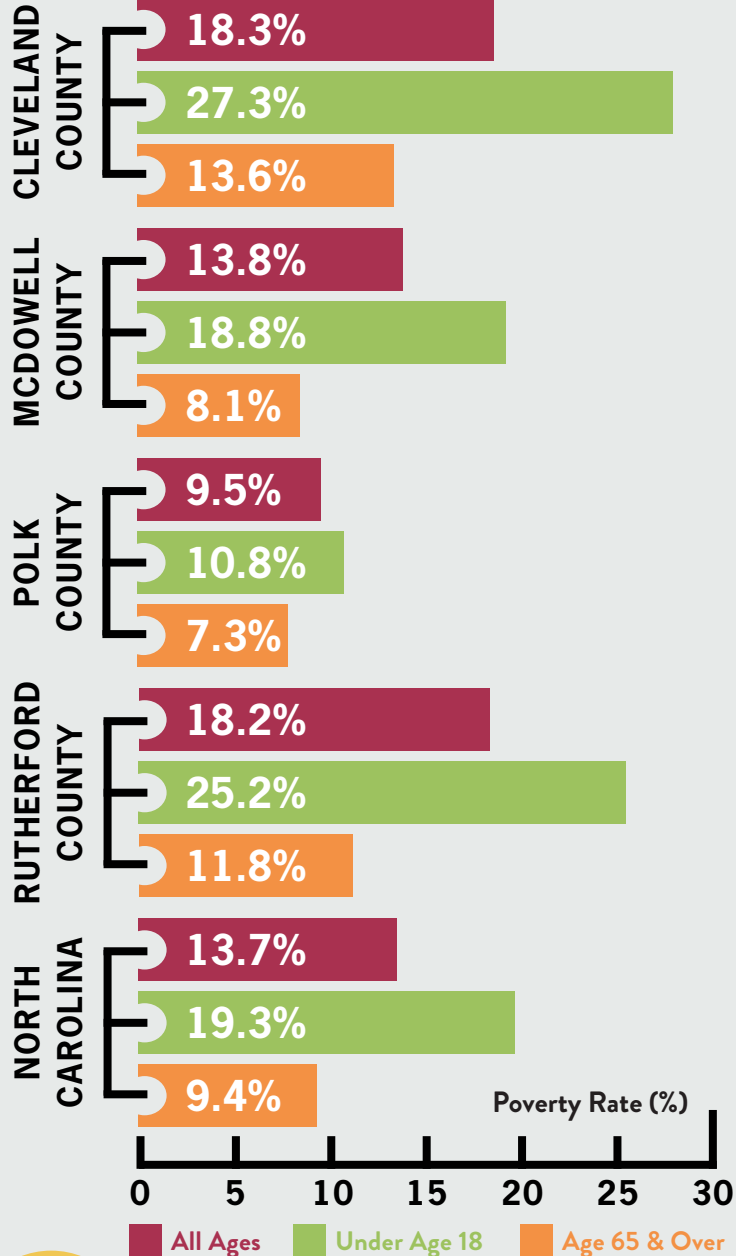## REGIONAL EMPLOYMENT BY INDUSTRY 2017-2021

EMPLOYMENT CATEGORY	CLEVELAND	MCDOWELL	POLK	RUTHERFORD	TOTAL
Information	554	157	139	401	1,251
Wholesale trade	595	363	137	251	1,346
Agriculture, forestry, fishing, hunting, mining	483	476	276	455	1,690
Finance, insurance, real estate, rental, leasing	1,042	408	608	894	2,952
Public administration	1,698	783	168	907	3,556
Transportation, warehousing, utilities	2,200	772	273	1,551	4,796
Other services, except public administration	2,233	626	573	1,585	5,017
Construction	3,108	1,527	773	1,875	7,283
Professional, scientific, and management; & admin & waste mgmt. services	3,181	1,071	787	2,357	7,396
Arts, entertainment, & recreation; & accommodation & food services	3,655	1,133	642	2,054	7,484
Retail trade	5,762	2,517	1,014	3,495	12,788
Manufacturing	8,497	4,979	1,059	1,998	16,533
Educational services, health care, social assistance	9,535	4,241	2,158	5,334	21,268
Civilian employed population 16 years & over	42,543	19,053	8,607	26,157	96,360

REGIONAL EMPLOYMENT DISTRIBUTION

2ND QTR 2000

15.9% | 10.6% | 11.9% | 7.1% | 37.4% | 5.4% | 5.2% | 1.3% | 5.2%

2ND QTR 2022

13.2% | 12.6% | 9.7% | 21.8% | 9.2% | 20.6% | 6.5% | 1.3% | 5.0%

- 🟢 MANUFACTURING
- 🟡 OTHER SERVICES
- 🟠 HEALTH CARE & SOCIAL ASSISTANCE
- 🔴 RETAIL TRADE
- 🌸 EDUCATIONAL SERVICES
- 🟤 ACCOMMODATION & FOOD SERVICES
- ⚫ PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION
- 🟧 CONSTRUCTION
- 🔵 OTHER INDUSTRIES

REGIONAL EMPLOYMENT CHANGE BY INDUSTRY QTR 2 | 2017-2022

Retail trade	766	Real Estate & Rental & Leasing	63
Construction	543	Other Services (except Public Admin.)	31
Professional, Scientific, & Tech. Services	382	Mining, Quarrying, & Oil & Gas Extraction	20
Transportation and warehousing	367	Management of Companies & Enterprises	-15
Accommodation & Food Services	324	Finance & Insurance	-23
Administrative & Support Services	263	Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing, & Hunting	-52
Arts, Entertainment, & Recreation	165	Manufacturing	-58
Utilities	100	Educational Services	-324
Wholesale trade	78	Information	-336
Public Administration	71	Health Care & Social Services	-762

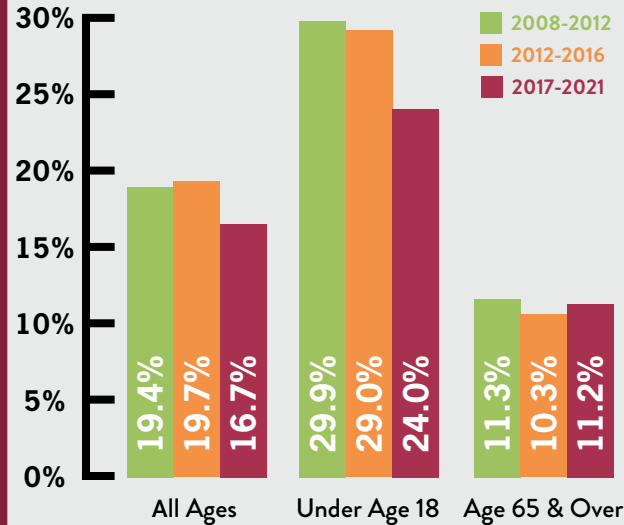## REGIONAL POVERTY RATES BY COUNTY, (2017-2021) ACS

Source: 2017-2021 American Community Survey, US Census Bureau.

CLEVELAND COUNTY
- 18.3% (All Ages)
- 27.3% (Under Age 18)
- 13.6% (Age 65 & Over)

MCDOWELL COUNTY
- 13.8% (All Ages)
- 18.8% (Under Age 18)
- 8.1% (Age 65 & Over)

POLK COUNTY
- 9.5% (All Ages)
- 10.8% (Under Age 18)
- 7.3% (Age 65 & Over)

RUTHERFORD COUNTY
- 18.2% (All Ages)
- 25.2% (Under Age 18)
- 11.8% (Age 65 & Over)

NORTH CAROLINA
- 13.7% (All Ages)
- 19.3% (Under Age 18)
- 9.4% (Age 65 & Over)

Poverty Rate (%)

0 5 10 15 20 25 30

Legend: ■ All Ages ■ Under Age 18 ■ Age 65 & Over

REGIONAL POVERTY RATES 2007-2011 & 2017-2021

Source: 2017-2021 American Community Survey, US Census Bureau.

Legend: ■ 2008-2012 ■ 2012-2016 ■ 2017-2021

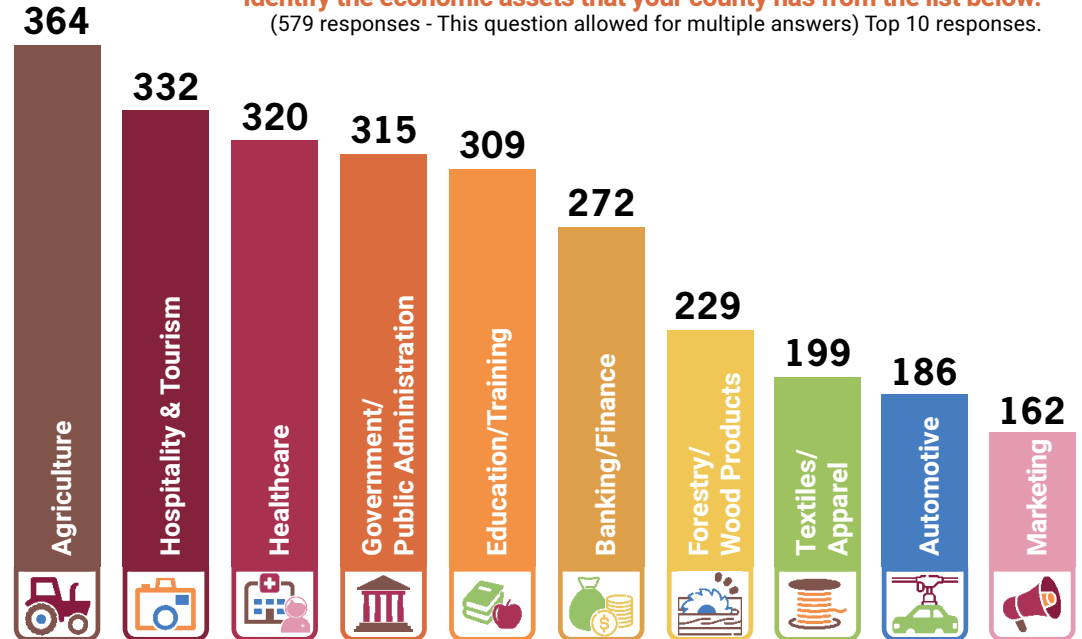|	2008-2012	2012-2016	2017-2021
All Ages	19.4%	19.7%	16.7%
Under Age 18	29.9%	29.0%	24.0%
Age 65 & Over	11.3%	10.3%	11.2%

CEDS PUBLIC SURVEY RESPONSES

What are the biggest threats to economic resiliency in the region?

Surveyor Select up to (3) three. Economic resiliency is defined by the ability to recover quickly from a shock, the ability to withstand a shock, and the ability to avoid the shock altogether. (600 responses).

SUPPLY CHAIN DISRUPTION	245
CHANGES IN THE WORKFORCE	206
CLOSURE OF LARGE PLANTS	196
PUBLIC HEALTH CRISIS	194
FLUCTUATING GLOBAL ECONOMY	175
DECLINE OF IMPORTANT INDUSTRY	162
NATURAL HAZARDS	133
TECHNOLOGICAL ADVANCEMENTS	76
CYBER SECURITY RISKS	70
OTHER	89

CEDS PUBLIC SURVEY RESPONSES

Identify the economic assets that your county has from the list below.
(579 responses - This question allowed for multiple answers) Top 10 responses.

Asset	Responses
Agriculture	364
Hospitality & Tourism	332
Healthcare	320
Government/Public Administration	315
Education/Training	309
Banking/Finance	272
Forestry/Wood Products	229
Textiles/Apparel	199
Automotive	186
Marketing	162

6

STRATEGY 1 — Create a regional business/industrial park with roads, lots and shell buildings to be competitive with surrounding areas

Actions

> Seek grant funding for feasibility studies to identify potential park sites
> Work with economic development offices and electric utilities to identify/improve/market sites
> Seek to develop an initial 30,000 to 100,000-square-foot shell building (revolving program)
> Meet with other local governments in NC/NC Commerce to learn about successful shell-building development strategies
> Identify the elements of a desirable pad-ready site.
> Evaluate future land use plans to ensure they include locations for business/industrial parks and pad-ready sites
> Increase regional awareness of the NC Department of Commerce "Certified Sites" program and include interested parties in a blast list
> Evaluate rail corridors and rights-of-way for potential economic development opportunities/site locations
> Encourage local governments to add website links to relevant state and federal economic development resources, such as the NC Department of Commerce site inventory map

Metrics

> Number of grant applications submitted; amount of funding awarded
> Number of sites identified/improved/listed for possible sale/rent
> Number of pad-ready sites available/developed
> Number of strategies used and deemed successful
> Number of elements implemented
> Number of plans reviewed and number of sites identified
> Number of parties reached through marketing techniques
> Number of corridors identified for opportunity
> The number of added links to federal and state resource sites and inventory maps

RESPONSIBLE PARTIES — Foothills Regional Commission, local governments, EDCs, private partners, Chambers of Commerce, federal & state granting agencies

STRATEGY 2 — Repurpose and revitalize vacant buildings and lots for commercial, industrial, and residential opportunities

Actions

> Create an engagement plan that can survey and reach out to the public regarding the identification of community/commercial/residential needs
> Evaluate sites that could be candidates for CDBG/NC Commerce/brownfields/additional grants and other funding sources.
> Identify developable sites and conduct feasibility studies
> Evaluate zoning and subdivision ordinances in order to reduce potential barriers to the redevelopment process

Metrics

> Create an engagement plan that can survey and reach out to the public regarding the identification of community/commercial/residential needs
> Evaluate sites that could be candidates for CDBG/NC Commerce/brownfields/additional grants and other funding sources.
> Identify developable sites and conduct feasibility studies
> Evaluate zoning and subdivision ordinances in order to reduce potential barriers to the redevelopment process

RESPONSIBLE PARTIES — Local governments, federal and state grant agencies, Chambers of Commerce, Foothills Regional Commission and EDCs

STRATEGY 3 | Continue to improve grant development capacity

Actions

> Provide assistance to local governments and nonprofits by identifying potential funding sources and assisting with grant writing
> Consider hiring additional Community and Economic Development staff to assist with grant writing capacity and administration
> Work with EDCs to ensure communication and coordination during the grant application and administration phases of projects

Metrics

> Number of applications and funding sources successful administered
> Additional grant writing and administrative staff hired
> Number of projects with joint communication

RESPONSIBLE PARTIES Local governments, federal and state grant agencies, Chambers of Commerce, Foothills Regional Commission, and EDCs

STRATEGY 4 | Provide support for small business development, retention, and expansion

Actions

> Create a database that identifies minority owned businesses
> Promote business services available through the NC Small Business and Technology Development Center, area community colleges, EDCs, agricultural extension offices, and Chambers of Commerce
> Support local agricultural industries and strengthen local agricultural supply chain
> Promote the historic rehabilitation tax incentives and grants available through the NC Dept. of Natural and Cultural Resources and other relevant entities
> Support the development of co-working and business incubation/entrepreneurial spaces
> Support, promote, and provide outreach to minority-owned small businesses

Metrics

> Number of businesses added to database; continue to update list quarterly and share with local officials and chambers
> Number of services offered; the number of businesses supported
> Amount of outreach and initiatives provided
> Amount of outreach provided
> Number of businesses supported and created
> Number of Minority-owned businesses supported

RESPONSIBLE PARTIES Foothills Regional Commission, Economic Development Commissions, local industry, local governments, chambers of commerce, NC Department of Commerce, community colleges, universities, MPO, RPO, Public Transportation, federal and state grant agencies

STRATEGY 5 | Recruit businesses that will help diversify the economy

Actions

> Focus on higher wage sectors that will benefit from the region's strategic location and business-friendly environment
> Create an economic development marketing campaign that highlights the regions' business-friendly attitude and available land
> Recruit and retain technology based businesses that diversify the economy
> Promote and support regional assets, such as community colleges and workforce development programs that play key roles in a diverse economy

Metrics

> Identified higher-wage sectors; the number of businesses that pay minimum wage or above
> Economic development marketing campaign established and number of promoted parcels
> Number of technological businesses recruited; Number of technological jobs created
> Number of regional assets identified; the number of programs offered that support a diverse tax base

RESPONSIBLE PARTIES Foothills Regional Commission Staff, Local Governments, Economic Development Commissions, NC Commerce, Economic Development Partnership of NC, Center of Rural Innovation, Appalachian Regional Commission, Economic Development Administration

STRATEGY 6 | Work with businesses and local governments to provide contingency and resiliency planning support

Actions

> Focus on providing support and education for business owners for the continuation of business after retirement
> Provide support to farmers and agriculture workers to have contingency plans in place. Assist in the development of farmland sustainability plans that address the continuation of agriculture in the region
> Develop resiliency plans for the region that focus on improving supply chain resiliency
> Promote dialogue between businesses and community colleges regarding industry changes and employment needs
> Support private and public sector contingency and succession planning efforts

Metrics

> Number of contingency plans established
> Number of farmers contact; number of contingency plans put in place; number of farmland sustainability plans created and implemented
> Number of resiliency plans created and implemented
> Number of collaborative meetings and assistance provided
> Establish a contingency/succession plan template; number of businesses using template

RESPONSIBLE PARTIES | Local governments, federal and state grant agencies, Small Business Center, Small Business Administration, EDCs, community colleges, Chambers of Commerce, Cooperative Extension, Farmland Preservation Boards, and Foothills Regional Commission

STRATEGY 7 | Continue to market & fund tourism throughout the region, specifically outdoor recreation, to help diversify tax base

Actions

> Leverage grants that will assist in the funding of outdoor recreation amenities and expand the outdoor economy
> Provide marketing assistance to outdoor recreation retailers, outfitters, and services within the region.
> Identify opportunities to connect trails, greenways, and blue ways
> Gather and utilize location data to evaluate the market potential of overnight guests. Assess the potential needs of these guests in order to stay in the region
> Create a marketing campaign that focuses on outdoor assets and experiences

Metrics

> Number of grant applications submitted and awarded; the number of outdoor amenities and businesses funded
> Number of successful outreach efforts; the number of businesses marketed; number of successful grant applications submitted; amount of funding awarded
> Number of opportunities identified and areas connected
> Data Collection; Number of guests leaving region for over-night accommodations
> Number of participants using outdoor amenities and assets

RESPONSIBLE PARTIES | Local governments, federal and state grant agencies, Small Business Center, Small Business Administration, EDCs, community colleges, Chambers of Commerce, Cooperative Extension, Farmland Preservation Boards, and Foothills Regional Commission

STRATEGY 8 | Leverage existing partnerships and develop new partnerships to strengthen funding sources

Actions

> Research the benefits of creating a regional revolving loan fund
> Evaluate partnerships that can be created, strengthened, or expanded
> Strengthen communication and partnerships between the Commission and philanthropic organizations
> Identify areas where municipalities and counties can partner to fund more regional projects and services
> Strengthen regional partnerships between EDCs, tourism agencies, Chambers of Commerce, and businesses to enhance economic development and talent recruitment efforts

Metrics

> Benefits identified and listed
> Number of partners identified
> List of communication methods and number of successful outreach efforts
> Number of funded projects and services
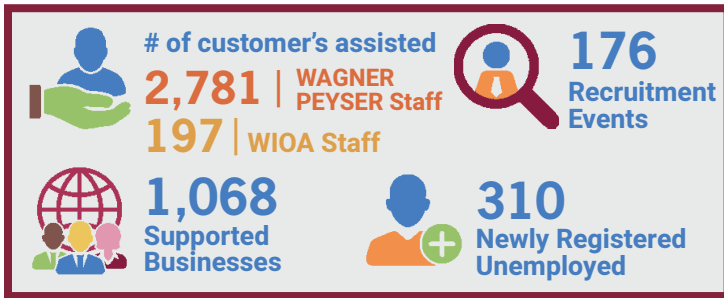> Number of talent recruitment efforts; successful collaborations

RESPONSIBLE PARTIES | Local governments, Nonprofits, Foothills Regional Commission, Federal and State agencies, Chambers of Commerce, EDCs, TDAs, and community college systems

WORKFORCE

Business, industry and public employers in the Foothills region depend on the education, training and skill development of the workforce. Critical elements to workforce development success are the programs that synchronize educational resources with job demand and availability, incorporation of social media in communicating employment and training opportunities for the workforce, and providing current analysis of wage and labor market information. The strategies described in this portion of the CEDS intend to build upon the region's efforts to improve career pathways with education and training opportunities to meet industry needs; marketing of workforce development activities across and within the region, ensure availability of competitive wage information, and its impact on job recruitment and retention in the region.

# of customer's assisted

2,781 | WAGNER PEYSER Staff

197 | WIOA Staff

176 Recruitment Events

1,068 Supported Businesses

310 Newly Registered Unemployed

NEXTGEN
(Job programs, traning, and services for eligible youth and young adults, age 16-25)
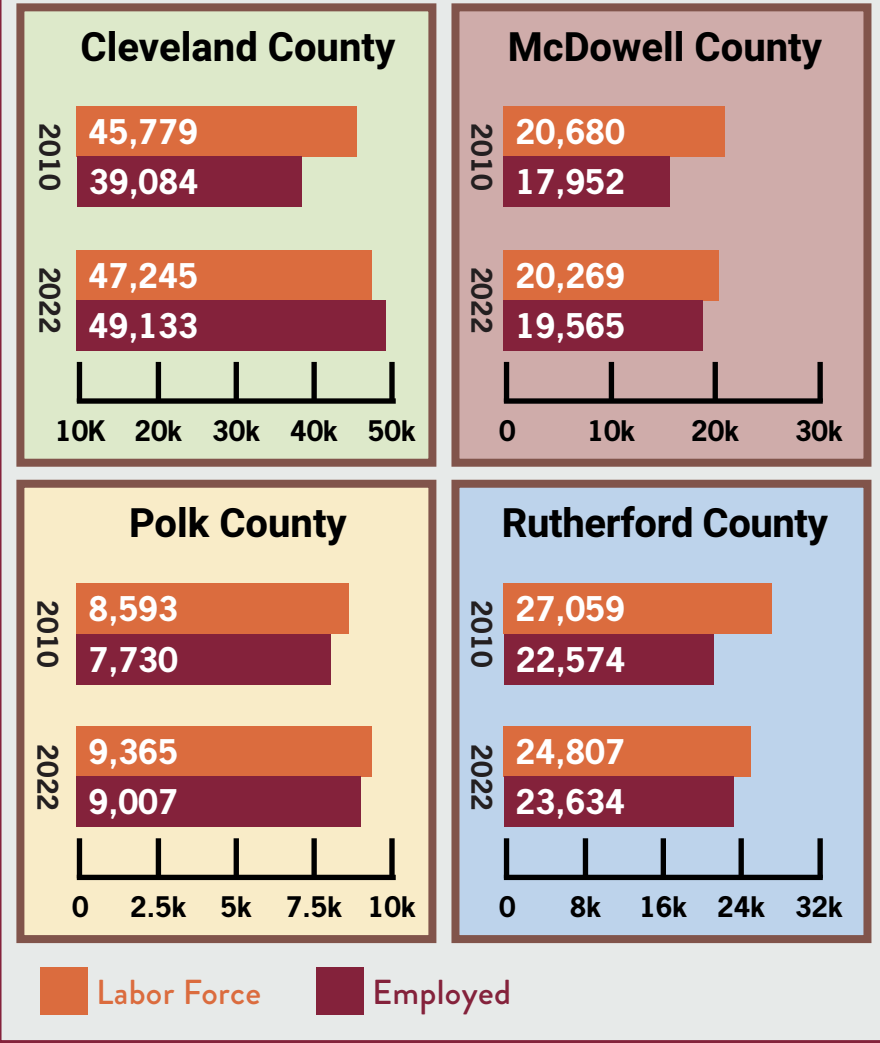
11 GED/HS Completed

13 Entered into Permanent Employment

26 Enrolled in Post-secondary Education

16 Participants in Work Experience

2 Participants in short-term paid internships

REGIONAL LABOR FORCE & NUMBER OF EMPLOYED PERSONS, NOV. 2010 vs. NOV. 2022

Source: Labor and Economic Analysis Division, NC Dept. of Commerce.

Cleveland County

	Labor Force	Employed
2010	45,779	39,084
2022	47,245	49,133

10K 20k 30k 40k 50k

McDowell County

	Labor Force	Employed
2010	20,680	17,952
2022	20,269	19,565

0 10k 20k 30k

Polk County

	Labor Force	Employed
2010	8,593	7,730
2022	9,365	9,007

0 2.5k 5k 7.5k 10k

Rutherford County

	Labor Force	Employed
2010	27,059	22,574
2022	24,807	23,634

0 8k 16k 24k 32k

■ Labor Force   ■ Employed

REGIONAL MEDIAN EARNINGS FOR POPULATION OVER 25 BY EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENTS LEVEL (2017-2021)

$22,155	$28,252	$30,838	$42,808	$49,296
Less than High School Graduate	High School Graduate (Includes Equivalency)	Some College or Associate's Degree	Bachelor's Degree	Graduate or Professional Degree

CEDS PUBLIC SURVEY RESPONSES

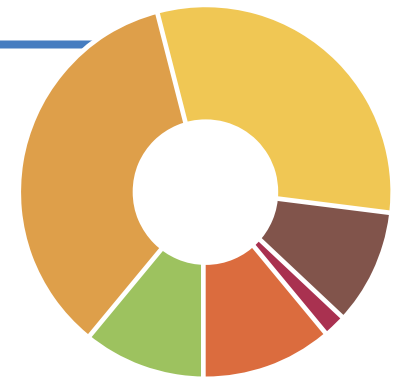**Did you work home during the COVID-19 pandemic?** (600 responses)

35.6% | YES
50.2% | NO
14.2% | OTHER

CEDS PUBLIC SURVEY RESPONSES

The job training resources that I need are available to me. (597 responses)

11.1% | Strongly Agree
35.3% | Agree
31.2% | Neither Agree or Nor Disagree
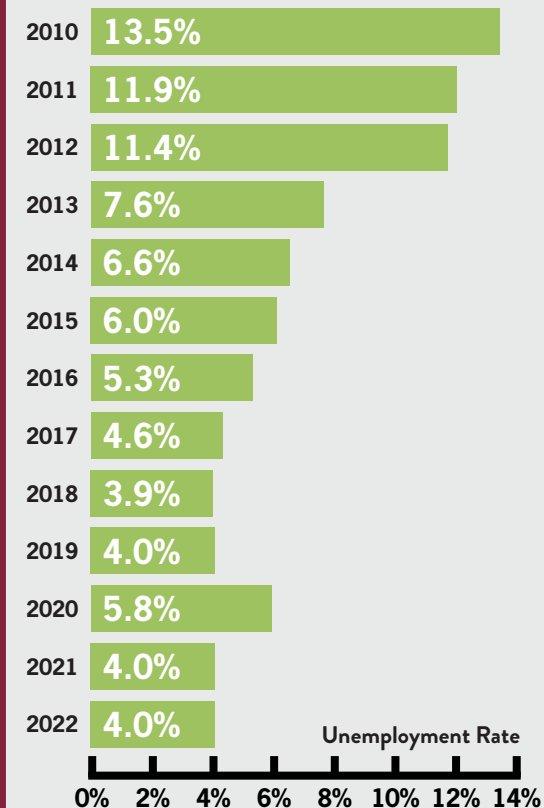**9.9% | Disagree**
2.0% | Strongly Disagree
10.6% | I Don't Know

NC WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT BOARD % OF EMPLOYMENT CHANGE | QTR. 2, 2017-2022

Source: Labor and Economic Analysis Division, NC Department of Commerce.

	2017	2022	CHANGE	% CHANGE
Turning Point WDB	114,358	108,708	-5,650	-4.9%
Kerr-Tar WDB	61,425	60,082	-1,343	-2.2%
High Country WDB	71,728	70,923	-805	-1.1%
Northeastern WDB	60,331	59,664	-667	-1.1%
Eastern Carolina WDB	212,810	213,467	657	0.3%
Lumber River WDB	85,785	86,075	290	0.3%
Rivers East WDB	113,740	114,156	416	0.4%
GuilfordWorks WDB	281,293	283,013	1,720	0.6%
Triangle South WDB	84,842	85,498	656	0.8%
Cumberland County WDB	119,534	120,835	1,301	1.1%
Western Piedmont WDB	151,857	153,716	1,859	1.2%
Piedmont Triad Regional WDB	271,191	276,097	4,906	1.8%
Foothills WDB	74,152	75,755	1,603	2.2%
DavidsonWorks WDB	43,659	45,419	1,760	4.0%
Southwestern WDB	63,774	66,583	2,809	4.4%
Regional Partnership WDB	220,592	230,961	10,369	4.7%
Gaston County WDB	72,248	75,843	3,595	5.0%
Mountain Area WDB	180,513	190,121	9,608	5.3%
Centralina WDB	308,896	333,958	25,062	8.1%
Charlotte Works WDB	680,439	751,063	70,624	10.4%
Capital Area WDB	590,683	652,104	61,421	10.4%
Cape Fear WDB	172,403	191,673	19,270	11.2%
Durham WDB	199,496	226,980	27,484	13.8%

REGIONAL UNEMPLOYMENT RATE, NOV. 2010 - NOV. 2022

Source: Labor and Economic Analysis Division, NC Department of Commerce.

Year	Unemployment Rate
2010	13.5%
2011	11.9%
2012	11.4%
2013	7.6%
2014	6.6%
2015	6.0%
2016	5.3%
2017	4.6%
2018	3.9%
2019	4.0%
2020	5.8%
2021	4.0%
2022	4.0%

CEDS PUBLIC SURVEY RESPONSES

Which group or organization needs to do more to prepare students to be successful in the workplace? (599 responses)

45.9% Parents
28.6% Public Schools
7.7% I Don't Know
5.2% Community Colleges
1.1% Public or Private Universities
11.5% Other

STRATEGY 1 — Meet the demands of businesses and industries in the region by aligning career development needs and training opportunities with the educational system and examining future workforce needs

Actions

> Strengthen the agricultural education to the workforce in the K-16 pipeline and strengthen entrepreneurship training
> Assist and stimulate organizations that promote science, technology, engineering, art, and math skills in youth
> Analyze the potential impacts of automation and artificial intelligence on the region's workforce
> Promote small business and entrepreneurship career opportunities
> Promote tourism career opportunities
> Establish/strengthen education to workforce pathways for skilled tradespeople and manufacturing positions
> Strengthen partnerships between businesses, schools K-16 and higher education

Metrics

> Number of efforts/initiatives and training opportunities introduced and implemented
> Identify funding opportunities; number of organizations assisted
> Identify the number of possible impacts, action items and initiated solutions
> Identify number of people currently working at a small business; current number of entrepreneurs; number of new positions created; number of new positions filled
> Identify number of people currently in the tourism industry; the number of new positions added post promotional efforts
> Identify and advertise trades and certifications required for skilled labor; number of added programs and number of students enrolled
> Identify number of partnerships created and collaborative efforts implemented

RESPONSIBLE PARTIES

Workforce Development Board, Workforce Development Board partners, K-16 groups (public and private school systems and community colleges), higher education institutions, business & industry, Chambers of Commerce, CTE programs, STEM West, Foothills Regional Commission

STRATEGY 2 — Support Local Businesses

Actions

> Encourage local businesses to create opportunities for students through internships, apprenticeships, on the job training programs, etc.
> Encourage and create career path programs that activate grades 8-12 in school systems. Such as, mentorship and job shadowing opportunities
> Coordinate with local employers to assist in the promotion of workforce development programs
> Seek funding from other philanthropic organizations and government agencies to support local business creation, expansion, and entrepreneurship

Metrics

> Identify number of internships/apprenticeships/ on the job training existing and number of new participants
> Identify number of opportunities created; number of participants in the programs
> Identify number of successful promotional campaigns
> Identify number of funding opportunities engaged and amount of funding obtained

RESPONSIBLE PARTIES

Foothills Regional Commission Communications, Workforce Board, NC Works Career Centers/Advisors, Workforce Intel Committee, public/private school systems, CTE program leaders, Community College Career Centers, local governments, Chambers, EDCs, NC Office of Secretary of State, and other workforce partner career services.

STRATEGY 3 — Identify sustainable opportunities to encourage individuals to remain and/or re-enter the workforce despite challenges (childcare, disconnected youth, lack of transportation, homelessness, drug abuse, previous incarceration, etc.)

Actions

> Seek funding from philanthropic organizations to create accessibilities for employment
> Assess demand for and supply of childcare programs; Explore innovative childcare programs (vouchers, employer-provided/assisted, etc.)
> Support/expand workforce re-entry programs
> Explore the feasibility of expanding transit service to major employers and residences
> Explore innovative solutions to provide workers with affordable and accessible housing
> Work to establish a mentoring program to reduce the number of disconnected youth

Metrics

> Number of relevant funding sources and amount of funding obtained
> Create a childcare needs survey, publish results with suggested solutions and create an action plan; research other companies within the US that offer work-related benefits; number of businesses that offer childcare support
> Number of people supported by the re-entering program; the number of businesses that accept re-entry workers
> Number of employers and residents reached and showed interest in participation; Research other locations within the US that offer microtransit service
> Number of new workers with permanent housing; number of case studies identified of similar companies who provide housing solutions (i.e. subsidies/vouchers/on site housing)
> Program created; the number of youth reached

RESPONSIBLE PARTIES — Workforce Development Board, EDCs, community colleges, higher education institutions, Chambers of Commerce, youth groups, Foothills Regional Commission Data group, LEAD NC

STRATEGY 4 — Build and expand access to specialty healthcare providers in the region

Actions

> Conduct a regional survey to measure required out-of-region travel to specialty healthcare providers
> Develop a GIS-based 'Specialty Healthcare Desert Map' of the region and market to needed providers
> Seek grant funding from philanthropic organizations to train and retain healthcare workers

Metrics

> Number of people surveyed; the number of people that leave the region for service
> completion of GIS tool for speciality health desert; create marketing campaign; number of new providers established
> Number of grant applications submitted; the amount of funding awarded

RESPONSIBLE PARTIES — Foothills Regional Commission Staff, Foothills Regional Commission Regional Housing Authority, Workforce Development Board, Area Agency on Aging, NC Commerce, and medical facilities

INFRASTRUCTURE

Infrastructure plays a vital role in economic development. The availability and overall condition of a region's infrastructure (water, sewer, broadband, roads, sidewalks, and greenways) are critical elements in both the retention of existing businesses and the recruitment of new businesses and industries.

Infrastructure also significantly impacts community development. The strategies described in this section of the CEDS are designed to ensure that the region has access to infrastructure. Transportation infrastructure strategies include developing and expanding the bicycle and pedestrian network; creation of public transportation to municipalities within all four counties. Water, sewer and broadband infrastructure strategies include encouraging and assisting local governments to develop and maintain asset management and capital improvement plans; improving broadband speeds and access to rural areas.

CEDS PUBLIC SURVEY RESPONSES

I have adequate high-speed internet access at: (Select any that apply).
(599 responses)

66.9% | HOME
48.9% | WORK
13.2% | PUBLIC SPACES
16.9% | NONE OF THE ABOVE

My town/city promotes investment in its downtown. (600 responses)

19% | STRONGLY AGREE
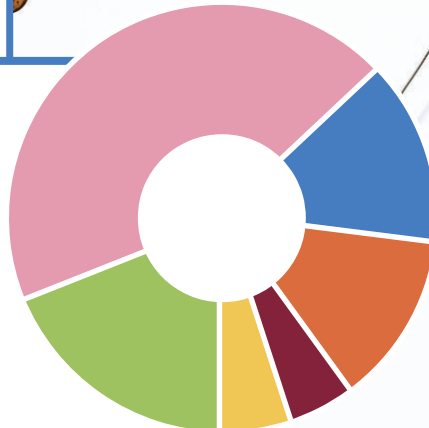**44% | AGREE**
14% | NEITHER AGREE OR DISAGREE
13% | DISAGREE
5% | STRONGLY DISAGREE
5% | I DON'T KNOW

My community invests in walkable infrastructure (ex. sidewalks, greenways, etc.). (599 responses)

14% | STRONGLY AGREE   16% | DISAGREE
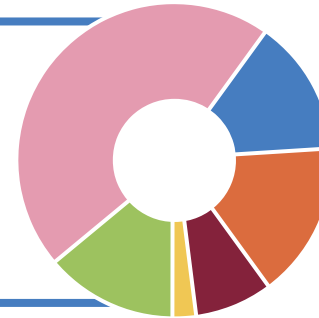
46% | AGREE   8% | STRONGLY DISAGREE

14% | NEITHER AGREE OR DISAGREE   2% | I DON'T KNOW

STRATEGY 1 — Create a regional public transportation system that is accessible and affordable

Actions

> Create a regional taskforce to explore the feasibility of establishing a regional public transportation system that serves major employers and other key community destinations

> Explore the feasibility of expanding transit service to major employers, medical facilities, and residences

> Evaluate potential public, non-profit and private funding partnerships

Metrics

> Taskforce established; yearly evaluation of successful task force goals

> Number of employers and residents reached and showed interest in participation; research other locations within the US that offer microtransit service

> Number of successful partnerships created; amount of funding awarded

RESPONSIBLE PARTIES   Public/private partnerships, Public Transportation, MPO, RPO, Federal Transit Administration (FTA), NCDOT, local governments, Chambers, EDCs, and state and federal grant opportunities.

STRATEGY 2 — Improve infrastructure resiliency by identifying and implementing hazard mitigation projects throughout the region (flood, landslide and wildfire mitigation)

Actions

> Support local governments by identifying resiliency and hazard mitigation planning and recovery grant opportunities; aid local governments with grant applications.

> Initiate and lead natural disaster drills. Provide outreach with information and resources to local businesses in case of a natural disaster/emergency

> Work with local emergency managers to identify and map known flood locations that are not included on Federal Emergency Management Agency maps

Metrics

> Establish a list of grant opportunities and note the number of grants applications submitted; the number of contracts between Foothills Commission and local governments; amount of funding awarded

> Number of drills held; number of participants; number of ways outreach was provided; number of businesses reached

> Number of locations identified not on the FEMA Maps to aid in resiliency

RESPONSIBLE PARTIES   NCDEQ, FEMA, local governments, county emergency managers, Foothills Regional Commission, Chambers of Commerce, Soil and Water Conservation departments, EDCs, NC Department of Public Safety and NC Department of Environmental and Natural Resources.

STRATEGY 3 — Continue to develop water and sewer infrastructure

Actions
> Create a regional GIS asset inventory of water and sewer infrastructure database
> Use the asset inventory to identify necessary improvements and apply for grant funding
> Use the asset inventory to plan for future economic growth and identify infill development opportunities
> Apply for grant funding through the NC Department of Commerce, ARC and other sources to extend or improve water and sewer infrastructure

Metrics
> Number of local governments mapped infrustructure
> Number of grant applications and list of improvements; amount of funding awarded
> Number of sites identified infill development
> Number of grant applications; mile of sewer and water lines extended; amount of funding awarded

RESPONSIBLE PARTIES   Foothills Regional Commission, local governments, local utility providers, EDCs, federal and state agencies

STRATEGY 4 — Develop transportation projects that will rank well in NCDOT project prioritization process

Actions
> Work with local governments and NCDOT to create a regional list of transportation projects that will address future transportation needs and maximize economic development
> Add transportation projects that promote economic development in the State Transportation Improvement Plan
> Increase the amount of direct communication with impacted areas.

Metrics
> Number of projects identified and prioritized; the number of action items on the list; the number of local governments engaged in collaboration
> Number of projects added to the STIP
> Types of outreach methods used; the number and the types of contact made with people inside the impacted areas.

RESPONSIBLE PARTIES   RPO, MPO, Foothills Regional Commission, NCDOT, state and local governments

STRATEGY 5 — Evaluate potential improvements to airports (hangars, runways, taxiways) & rail service (Charlotte - Asheville passenger service)

Actions
> Work to ensure that applicable airport projects are considered in the NCDOT project prioritization process via the Foothills Rural Planning Organization and Metropolitan Planning Organization
> Continue to support the Western North Carolina Passenger Rail Feasibility Study and future efforts to bring passenger rail service and stops to the region - through collaboration and on-going conversations to identify need

Metrics
> Number of airport projects included and prioritized in the RPO and MPO
> Number of actions taken to support this initiative (provide a list); number of sites identified for economic development opportunities

RESPONSIBLE PARTIES   Local Governments, EDCs, Foothills Regional Commission, RPO, MPO, NCDOT, other federal and state agencies

STRATEGY 6 — Construct sidewalks, outdoor trails, and bike/pedestrian paths to improve regional connectivity, local walkability and tourism development

Actions

> Through the Foothills Rural Planning Organization, work with local governments to identify improvement projects that are in alignment with NCDOT's Complete Streets Policy
> Encourage the adoption of plans (Land Use, Comprehensive, Bicycle/Pedestrian, etc.) that contain specific recommendations for complete street facilities (sidewalks, side paths, on road/separated bicycle facilities, etc.)
> Establish a regional committee to identify ways to improve the trail, multiuse path, and sidewalk connectivity by identifying gaps; encourage local governments to connect to existing and funded trail networks
> Apply for grant funding to increase connectivity, walkability, and downtown streetscaping

Metrics

> Number of projects identified and prioritized for funding
> Number of plans adopted; number of recommendations completed
> Date of committee establishment of goals and quarterly, semi-annually, annually goals met; miles of sidewalk/trail identified and connected
> Number of grant applications; the amount of funding awarded; number of new trail connections made; number of improvements made within the downtown areas

RESPONSIBLE PARTIES   Public Transportation, MPO, RPO, Local Governments, nonprofits, public/private partnerships, EDCs, TDAs, and NCDOT

STRATEGY 7 — Expand and improve broadband and cell phone service

Actions

> Apply for grant funding from the North Carolina Department of Information Technology and the Federal Communications Commission to improve broadband/cell phone infrastructure and connectivity
> Improve broadband accessibility and digital literacy by seeking grant funds from the North Carolina Department of Information Technology and other funders to implement Digital Inclusion Plans
> Work with the North Carolina Department of Information Technology and the Federal Communications Commission to develop updated broadband coverage maps of the region
> Use updated coverage maps to prioritize areas in the region that lack adequate broadband and cell phone service
> Survey local businesses to determine areas that have needs for faster broadband service
> Survey school systems to determine student broadband accessibility needs

Metrics

> Number of grant applications submitted; amount of funding awarded
> Number of maps updated
> Number of identified sites; the number new clients served (gap filled)
> Number of survey respondents; number of local businesses/employees identified and served
> Number of survey respondents; number of students identified and served

RESPONSIBLE PARTIES   Foothills Regional Commission, local governments, other local utility providers, Chambers of Commerce, EDCs, federal and state agencies

STRATEGY 8 — Designate U.S. Route 74 as an Interstate Highway

Actions

> Work with local governments to plan ahead for future development along U.S. Route 74 to identify growth management tools. Continue to support the completion of the U.S. 74 Bypass around Shelby

> Work with state and federal transportation agencies to obtain interstate highway designation - obtaining "High Priority Corridor" status for U.S. Route 74 (Charlotte – Asheville connection)

Metrics

> Number of meetings with local government to address future development needs and cohesive vision for expected growth

> Completion of feasibility study; number of partners engaged

RESPONSIBLE PARTIES   Local Governments, EDCs, NCDOT, MPO , RPO, and Private Sector

STRATEGY 9 — Increase access to electric vehicle (EV) charging stations

Actions

> Apply for grants to install new and upgrade existing EV charging stations that are strategically and equitably placed throughout the region

> Monitor where existing EV charging stations are in the region area and ensure that information on the location of stations is accurate and up to date.

Metrics

> Assessment completed and locations identified; Number of grant applications; amount of funding awarded; number of improvements made; number of new EV charging stations installed

> Number of locations of charging station corrected

RESPONSIBLE PARTIES   Local governments, Foothills Regional Commission staff, utility companies, Chambers of Commerce, NCDEQ, NCDOT, EDCs
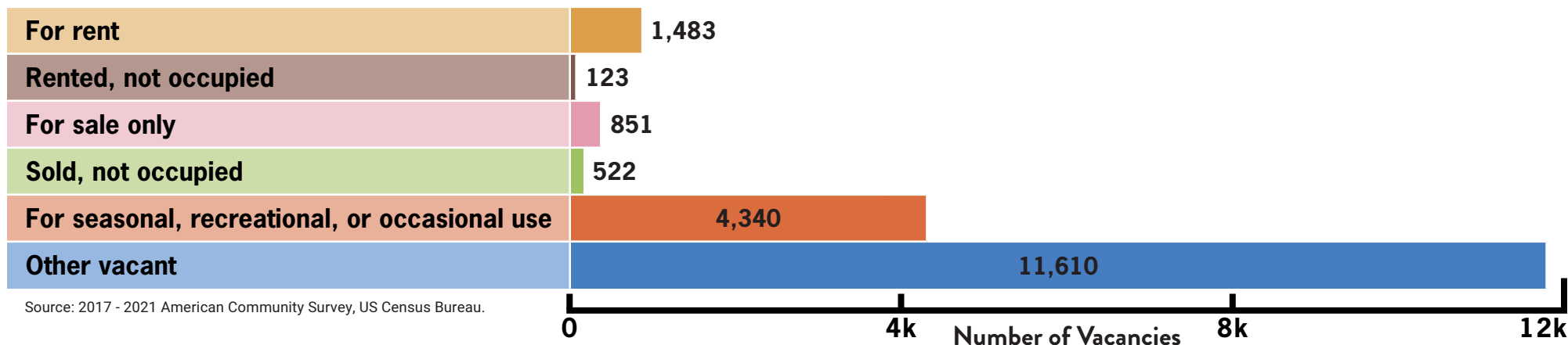
HOUSING

Housing stock plays a key role in a region's overall economic development. When a region offers a wide range of housing options, it becomes more competitive in its efforts to attract new residents, businesses, and industry. Providing a variety of housing stock requires the participation and cooperation of many groups including private developers, the construction industry, realtors, and local governments. Finding the right balance to meet local housing needs and strategies should be a goal in every community. The strategies described in this portion of the CEDS intend to build upon the region's efforts to improve housing conditions. The strategies include reducing the number of vacant/substandard housing units, increasing the number of affordable housing choices for current and new residents, and adding new market-rate housing stock throughout the region, including downtown areas.

REGION-YEAR BUILT OF HOUSING UNITS

Year	Housing Units	% of Housing Units
Total housing units	108,324	100%
Built 2010 to 2021	4,790	4.4%
Built 2000 to 2009	15,114	14.0%
Built 1990 to 1999	19,091	17.6%
Built 1980 to 1989	15,270	14.1%
Built 1970 to 1979	17,963	16.6%
Built 1960 to 1969	11,565	10.7%
Built 1950 to 1959	10,152	9.4%
Built 1940 to 1949	6,175	5.7%
Built 1939 or earlier	8,204	7.6%

REGIONAL VACANT HOMES BY TYPE, 2017 - 2021

Type	Number of Vacancies
For rent	1,483
Rented, not occupied	123
For sale only	851
Sold, not occupied	522
For seasonal, recreational, or occasional use	4,340
Other vacant	11,610

Source: 2017 - 2021 American Community Survey, US Census Bureau.

REGIONAL HOUSING UNITS, 2000 - 2020

Source: 2000, 2010, 2020 Census, US Census Bureau.

County	2000	2010	2020	Change 2010-2020	%Change 2010-2020	Change 2020-2022	%Change 2020-2022
Cleveland	40,317	43,373	43,630	3,056	7.6%	257	0.6%
McDowell	18,377	20,808	21,242	2,431	13.2%	434	2.1%
Polk	9,192	11,432	10,775	2,240	24.4%	-657	-5.7%
Rutherford	29,535	33,878	32,444	4,343	14.7%	-1,434	-4.2%
Region Totals	97,421	109,491	108,091	12,070	12.4%	-1,400	-1.3%

STRATEGY 1 — Explore the development of public/private partnerships to stimulate housing construction

Actions

> Explore the development of partnerships with philanthropic groups, nonprofit agencies and private developers
> Incentivize and encourage the sale of government-owned property for the development
> Ensure developers and property owners are aware of applicable funding sources by creating a resource guide

Metrics

> Number of contacts created; number of meetings held
> Number of government owned property sold for residential development or upfit
> Number of informational guides shared

RESPONSIBLE PARTIES — Foothills Regional Commission Staff, local governments, EDCs, Home Builders Association, financial institutions.

STRATEGY 2 — Address vacant and dilapidated buildings/houses throughout the region

Actions

> Identify vacant properties in the region and bring them up to code through proactive code enforcement; encourage landlords and developers to address vacant/dilapidated properties; assist landlords and developers in the revitalization of commercial/industrial properties for residential housing. Develop a regional cost-sharing program for code enforcement activities
> Identify structures/land that is tax delinquent, foreclosed, and turn properties over for redevelopment, renovation and upfit
> Consider using the CDBG-NR program and other grant opportunities for applicable projects in the region

Metrics

> Number of properties identified of blight and brought into compliance; number of landlords and developers assisted; number of participants in cost-sharing program
> Number of structure/land identified; number of properties improved
> Number of applications submitted; amount of funding awarded

RESPONSIBLE PARTIES — Local governments, Foothills Regional Commission, Building Inspection departments, banks, property owners, NC General Assembly.

STRATEGY 3 | Increase supply of all housing types

Actions

> Conduct a housing suitability study to identify locations for housing types
> Reduce developer costs by encouraging new housing developments to locate where infrastructure is already in place
> Meet with elected officials to identify ways to stimulate workforce housing development
> Continue to preserve access to affordable housing
> Convene a regional housing summit to examine methods to stimulate housing development
> Encourage infill housing development where feasible
> Focus on senior housing to accommodate retirees

Metrics

> The housing study is completed; number of recommendations completed
> Number of new housing units located and developed within a 1/2 mile of water/sewer
> Number of meetings held; number of actions items on list achieved
> Number of affordable units built
> Housing summit held; number of participants in attendance; number of identified action items
> Number of infill housing units built
> Number of senior housing units built or renovated to meet needs

RESPONSIBLE PARTIES Local governments, Foothills Regional Commission, USDA, NC Housing Finance Agency, HOME Consortium, HUD, local non-profits and community groups, banks, property owners, real estate brokers and developers.

STRATEGY 4 | Update land use regulations to reflect housing market preferences

Actions

> Evaluate lot size and building density requirements that reflect market preferences.

Metrics

> Number of ordinances updated to meet reflected market preferences

RESPONSIBLE PARTIES Foothills Regional Commission Staff, local governments

MARKETING

A healthy economy relies on growth in working-age segments of the population in order to meet the needs of current and future employers. An opportunity exists to attract new residence through marketing and branding efforts. Strategies described in this portion of the CEDS intend to build upon the region's efforts to develop a regional approach to marketing, and identify and promote regional attractions, events and natural resources.

REGION POPULATION PROJECTIONS BY AGE GROUP, 2022 - 2042

Age Group	2022 Estimate	2042 Projection	Change 2022-42	% Change 2022-42
Under 5 Years	11,857	12,776	919	7.8%
5 to 9 Years	11,959	13,333	1,374	11.5%
10 to 14 Years	13,045	13,925	880	6.7%
15 to 19 Years	14,110	13,962	-148	-1.0%
20 to 24 Years	14,117	12,277	-1,840	-13.0%
25 to 34 Years	28,924	25,853	-3,071	-10.6%
35 to 44 Years	25,448	30,243	4,795	18.8%
45 to 54 Years	28,835	31,882	3,047	10.6%
55 to 59 Years	15,971	13,673	-2,298	-14.4%
60 to 64 Years	15,972	13,817	-2,155	-13.5%
65 to 74 Years	27,968	27,493	-475	-1.7%
75 to 84 Years	16,292	21,227	4,935	30.3%
85 Years & Over	5,574	8,804	3,230	57.9%
Total	230,072	239,265	9,193	4.0%

NC Office of Management and Budget, 2023.

REGION POPULATION PROJECTIONS, 2022 - 2042

County	2022	2032	2042	Growth 2022-42	% Change 2022-42
Cleveland	101,874	106,317	107,272	5,398	5.3%
McDowell	44,443	44,744	44,775	332	0.7%
Polk	19,571	19,642	19,658	87	0.4%
Rutherford	64,184	65,891	67,650	3,376	5.3%
Total	230,072	236,594	239,265	9,193	4.0%

NC Office of Management and Budget, 2023.

*Foothills region's projected population growth is 0.20% per year through 2042.

CEDS PUBLIC SURVEY RESPONSES

My community is a good place to retire.
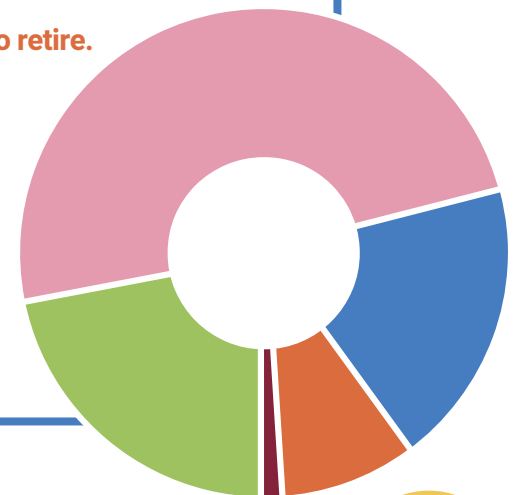**(599 responses)**

22% | STRONGLY AGREE

49% | AGREE

19% | NEITHER AGREE OR DISAGREE

9% | DISAGREE

1% | STRONGLY DISAGREE

STRATEGY 1 | Create a regional communication program

Actions

> Highlight Foothills Regional Commission initiated and community-led successes through story-telling
> Increase communication between businesses, non-profits, and local governments.
> Provide communications assistance to community organizations

Metrics

> Number of successes shared to the public; number of views; number of outlets reached
> Number of collaborative meetings held; number of action items created and administered; number of correspondents; number of outlets reached
> Number of community events shared

RESPONSIBLE PARTIES — Foothills Regional Commission, local governments, Chambers of Commerce, CVBs, TDAs, federal and state agencies, private and non-profit partnerships, educational facilities, tourism development resources.

STRATEGY 2 | Create a regional brand identity & marketing program

Actions

> Initiate outreach to cultural and minority-owned businesses and leaders about community events that can expand target market segments
> Develop methods to encourage relocation to the region, such as jobs, housing, and promotion of quality of life boosting opportunities.
> Reach out to HR departments in the region to promote brand identity and marketing plan
> Promote a variety of recreation opportunities within the region in order to reach multiple target market demographics. For example, market sports tourism, outdoor recreation, and passive recreation.
> Focus business recruitment, retention, and expansion by marketing the region, in partnership with municipal/ county economic development leaders and Chambers of Commerce, as business-friendly. Highlight the success stories of businesses in the region.
> Provide outreach and promotion of agritourism in the region. Specifically, during peak seasons for visitation.

Metrics

> Number of businesses and leaders communicated with; the number of new target market segments identified
> List of goals created; the number of actions administered
> Number of HR departments reached
> Identify recreational opportunities and demographics to market to
> Business-friendly marketing campaign was created; number of success stories told; number of outlets reached; number of correspondents and views
> Number of local growers coordinated with; number of resources provide to patrons

RESPONSIBLE PARTIES — Foothills Regional Commission, local governments, state and federal grants, private and nonprofit partnerships tourism development resources, Cooperative Extension, and Chambers of Commerce.

Actions

> Create partnerships that incorporate local values. Market how living, working, and playing in the region enhances quality of life
> Assist local governments in developing recreation plans to obtain grant funding for implementation
> Work with land trusts to leverage grant funding for project implementation

Metrics

> Number of collaborative partnership meetings are held
> Number of plans created; number of grants awarded; amount of funding awarded
> Number of collaborative planning sessions held; number of grants applied for; amount of funding awarded

RESPONSIBLE PARTIES | Foothills Regional Commission, local governments, state and federal grants, private and nonprofit partnerships, faith-based communities, and tourism development resources.

COMMUNITY LIFE

Economic development has a direct relationship to enhancing community life in a region. A growing, healthy economy should encompass opportunities for inclusive public participation in decision-making processes; pathways to economic success for all members of the workforce; and downtown revitalizations made with an eye toward the needs of the region's growing senior population, and attracting younger residents. The strategies described in this section of the CEDS intend to build upon the region's efforts to improve community life. These strategies include cultivating community involvment, creating robust downtowns throughout the region, promoting healthy living initiatives, and developing methods to encourage active senior citizen and minority participation.

REGIONAL POPULATION BY RACE/ETHNIC GROUP, 2010 - 2020

Race/Ethnic Group	2010 Census	% of Pop.	2020 Census	% of Pop.	Change 2010 to 2020	% Change 2010 to 2020
Total Population	231,394	100	227,869	100	-3,525	-1.5
White	191,731	82.9	179,174	78.6	-12,557	-6.5
African American	29,812	12.9	28,492	12.5	-1,320	-4.4
American Indian	664	0.3	798	0.4	134	20.2
Asian American	1,503	0.6	1,721	0.8	218	14.5
Two or More Races	3,549	1.5	11,864	5.2	8,315	234.3
Some Other Race	4,135	1.8	5,820	2.6	1,685	40.7
Hispanic (Any Race)	8,667	3.7	11,298	5.0	2,631	30.4
White, (Not Hispanic)	187,955	81.2	176,693	77.5	-11,262	-6.0

Source: 2010 and 2020 Census, US Census Bureau.

REGION POPULATION PROJECTIONS BY AGE GROUP, 2010 - 2022

Age Group	2010 Census	2022 Estimate	Change 2010-22	% Change 2010-22
Under 5 Years	13,224	11,857	-1,367	-10.3%
5 to 9 Years	14,075	11,959	-2,116	-15.0%
10 to 14 Years	15,134	13,045	-2,089	-13.8%
15 to 19 Years	15,655	14,110	-1,545	-9.9%
20 to 24 Years	12,496	14,117	1,621	13.0%
25 to 34 Years	24,214	28,924	4,710	19.5%
35 to 44 Years	30,765	25,448	-5,317	-17.3%
45 to 54 Years	34,566	28,835	-5,731	-16.6%
55 to 59 Years	16,648	15,971	-677	-4.1%
60 to 64 Years	15,844	15,972	128	0.8%
65 to 74 Years	21,690	27,968	6,278	28.9%
75 to 84 Years	12,319	16,292	3,973	32.3%
85 Years & Over	4,764	5,574	810	17.0%
Total	231,394	230,072	-1,322	-0.6%

Source: 2010 Census, US Census Bureau, and NC Office of Management and Budget, 2023.

REGION POPULATION BY ETHNIC GROUP (BY COUNTY), CENSUS 2020

County	% White	% African American	% American Indian	% Asian American	% Other Race	% Two or More Races	% Hispanic	% White (Not Hispanic)
Cleveland	71.4	20.3	0.3	0.9	2.1	5.1	4.1	70.5
McDowell	86.0	3.9	0.5	0.9	4.0	4.7	6.6	84.8
Polk	87.6	3.6	0.4	0.4	2.3	5.7	5.3	86.5
Rutherford	81.9	9.2	0.3	0.6	2.3	5.6	5.1	80.7
Total	78.6	12.5	0.4	0.8	2.6	5.2	5.0	77.5

Source: 2010 and 2020 Census, US Census Bureau.

STRATEGY 1 — Increase opportunities for civic engagement across a wide range of populations

Actions

> Formulate a community outreach initiative that directly serves the outreach of minority communities. Consistently reach out to historically underrepresented groups for public input and community engagement activities. Utilize community leaders to lead and promote outreach to their communities.

> Address accessibility of public engagement by providing opportunities for direct outreach, such as increasing the number of print copies of surveys and in-person participation.

Metrics

> Number of community leaders identified, number of meetings held and goals established; number of new participants involved in civic engagement opportunities

> Number of printed copies distributed; number of in-person events; number of participants

RESPONSIBLE PARTIES — Foothills Regional Commission staff, local non-profits such as but not limited to CULA, Church and faith based organizations, and community leaders.

STRATEGY 2 — Encourage public particpation in volunteer and civic group activities

Actions

> Develop a youth engagement plan that focuses on disconnected youth and youth retention strategies and develop a youth leadership development task force to encourage civic engagement in the region and youth activation

> Create opportunities that take into account time and fiscal restraints of residents that are working, low income, and/or have families.

> Continue the creation of opportunities and encouragement of senior citizen participation in civic group activities/volunteering

Metrics

> Plan completed; taskforce established, strategies identified and goals met; number of youth participating in the program

> Number of opportunities to participate; number of new participants

> Number of senior citizen participants, number of new participants, number of new opportunities created

RESPONSIBLE PARTIES — Foothills Regional Commission, local governments, community groups, private sector, youth leadership programs, K-12, higher education, Chambers, senior centers, senior living centers, nonprofits, and consultants. i.e. Leadership Rutherford and the "Three E's" (Polk), Leader in Me.

STRATEGY 3 | Continue downtown revitalization efforts

Actions

> Develop a youth engagement plan that focuses on disconnected youth and youth Survey young adults and families to determine interest in potential new downtown events/festivals/retail needs; identify gaps in accessibility and variety of events and festivals, such as family-friendly oriented events.
> Promote the unique cultural heritage of the downtown areas; encourage partnerships between small local museums and school systems, summer camps, and after-school care.
> Continue to actively promote events and festivals; create a shared regional online space that markets community events
> Continue to invest in walkability and improvements (street-scaping opportunities such as outdoor dining, the upgrading of current amenities, and parklets) to encourage downtown activity
> Seek opportunities to use the NC Commerce Building Reuse grant program

Metrics

> Number of surveys completed; the number of identified gaps; the number of opportunities created
> Number of partnerships; number of programs; number of new visitors
> Shared space created; number of events marketed; number of people reached
> Opportunities identified and executed; amount of funding invested in downtown areas
> Number of applications submitted; amount of funding awarded

RESPONSIBLE PARTIES — Local governments, downtown development associations, EDCs, tourism agencies, Foothills Regional Commission, private sector, community groups.

STRATEGY 4 | Increase the overall health and well-being of the region

Actions

> Create a (mental/behavioral/physical) health resource inventory list that can be distributed to local businesses and responsible parties
> Support strategies to address the region's drug addiction and homelessness challenges by providing assistance by hosting an informational forum to share ideas and successes, research other counties/regional successful initiatives, and aid in additional research and resource-sharing needs
> Improve access to healthy foods by promoting and supporting food hub initiatives; assess the economic impact of agritourism in the region; encourage the funding and creation of food hubs, local markets, and community gardens: identify areas that would qualify as food deserts to improve access to healthy foods.
> Promote healthy lifestyles by investing in outdoor recreation opportunities; identify trails that can create a regionally connected trail network
> Increase access to healthcare and healthy living programs, such as, mobile care units
> Continue to support healthcare-related workforce development programs
> Work to expand access to Naloxone throughout the region

Metrics

> Creation of inventory list; number of organizations distributed to; number of resources identified
> Informational forum held; the number of people in attendance; list opportunities identified and executed
> Inventory of food deserts; number of new people with access to healthy food; the number of food hubs created, number of successful initiatives
> Create a map of trails; existing and proposed to promote outdoor recreation; number of people reached
> Number of new participants in healthy living programs
> Number of programs created and number of participants
> Identify suppliers; the number of units of Naloxone available; the number of overdoses

RESPONSIBLE PARTIES — Foothills Regional Commission, local governments, nonprofits, school systems, NC Department of Agriculture, Cooperative Extension, County Public Health Departments, local mental health agencies, local law enforcement state and federal Department of Human Services (DHS).

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