

COMPREHENSIVE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY (CEDDS)

2024 UPDATE

October 1, 2023 – September 30, 2024



High Country Council of Governments

November 18, 2024

High Country Council of Governments
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Introduction

The most recent CEDS developed by HCCOG was adopted on November 21, 2022. The next full CEDS update is planned for 2027. The High Country Workforce Development Board (HCWDB) serves as the Strategy Committee to assist HCCOG staff in developing the CEDS. The HCWDB is comprised primarily of private-sector representatives.

The CEDS analyzes regional demographics, infrastructure, economic sectors, and economic development efforts. It also identifies economic development goals and objectives, local economic development projects, projects deemed vital to the region, and performance measures by which to gauge implementation of the CEDS.

This Update discusses changes to the CEDS document and process, and provides update on the CEDS implementation.

Adjustment to the Strategy

There are no adjustments to the 2024 High Country Council of Governments CEDS.

Report on Economic Development Activities

Significant economic development initiatives in the District in FFY 2023-24 include:

- Continued Development of the Ashe County Industrial Park
- Development of the Masthead Tech Hub in Wilkes County
- Development of Outdoor Recreation Plans in Ashe, Wilkes, and Watauga counties
- Continued redevelopment of the Pinebridge Complex in Town of Spruce Pine by Mayland Community College
- Development/Implementation of High Country Digital Inclusion Plan
- Development of Workforce Housing Analysis for Avery County
- Begin Crossnore Comprehensive Plan Update
- Begin Watauga County Comprehensive Plan Update

Major activities undertaken by High Country COG staff in FFY 2024 to support implementation of the CEDS include:

- Continued administration of the High Country Rural Transportation Planning Organization (RPO)
- Maintained GIS data for Towns of Wilkesboro, North Wilkesboro, Banner Elk, West Jefferson, and Blowing Rock

- Maintained E911 road and address data for Town of Beech Mountain, and Wilkes and Avery Counties
- Developed the following grant applications:
 - Watauga County Slaughter Facility (ARC, EDA)
 - Ashe County Livestock Facility (ARC)
 - Town of Jefferson Streetscape (ARC, NCDOT)
 - Mayland Community College Three Peaks Kitchen (EDA)
 - Ashe County Industrial Park (Golden LEAF Foundation)
 - Town of West Jefferson Asset Inventory and Assessment – Water (NCDEQ)
 - Town of West Jefferson Asset Inventory and Assessment – Sewer (NCDEQ)

- Continued administration of the following projects:
 - Avery County Broadband Expansion – Phase 2
 - Ashe Agricultural Center
 - Jefferson/West Jefferson Water Interconnect Feasibility Study
 - Middle Fork Greenway
 - Town of Boone Deck Hill Water Tank CDBG
 - Town of Boone Asset Inventory and Assessment
 - Watauga Slaughter Facility
 - NC GoldenLeaf Foundation CBGI Program grants for the following projects:
 - Ashe County Industrial Park
 - Town of Spruce Pine NC Hwy. 226 Waterline
 - Watauga CDBG-CV
 - Ashe CDBG-CV
 - Town of Spruce Pine Highway 226 Water Line Project
 - Town of Burnsville Main Sewer Interceptor (West)
 - Town of Burnsville Main Sewer Interceptor Improvements (East)
 - Town of Burnsville Bakers Creek Pump Station Improvements
 - Town of Burnsville Bolens Creek Raw Waterlines & Cane River Intake
 - Town of Burnsville Main St/Bennett St/Glendale Ave. Waterline Improvements
 - Avery County Domestic Violence Shelter CDBG-NR
 - Ashe County Business Park Grading and Shell Building

Evaluation of Progress on Action Plan and Goals

The 2022 High Country Council of Governments CEDS contains the following goals (with example project from 2024 in District):

1. Connect employers to a skilled workforce

2. Maintain and improve the district’s infrastructure to meet future demand
3. Continued development of Town of Wilkesboro Community Commons and Pavilion
4. Increase agricultural output
 - Ashe County Agricultural Facility

The EDD’s work in FFY 2024 directly addressed each of the six goals.

The 2022 High Country Council of Governments CEDS contains the following performance measures:

- Announced job creation
- Announced private-sector investment
- Increases in average household wages and income
- Number of new businesses
- Federal, state, and local investment in the district
- Educational attainment
- Work Ready Community designations
- Number of self-employed
- Retail sales
- Tourism revenue
- Agricultural impact
- Number of CEDS strategies advanced or accomplished

During FFY 2022, there were 24 new jobs and \$342,000 in private investment announced in the District (Economic Development Partnership of NC).

The following tables depict recent data at county level that illustrate the unemployment numbers. Source- NC Commerce September, 2024

Alleghany	3.5%
Ashe	2.5%
Avery	2.5%
Mitchell	2.9%
Watauga	2.5%
Wilkes	3.5%
Yancey	3.7%

Taxable Revenue by County- NC Department of Revenue

County	Taxable sales and purchases Aug 2024(\$mil)
Alleghany	14.883
Ashe	38.652
Avery	55.814
Mitchell	20.974
Watauga	135.718
Wilkes	76.334
Yancey	20.757

The table below shows most current available data from NC Commerce on certain CEDS performance measures.

County	Tourism Expenditures 2023 (\$mil)	Jobs from Tourism 2023
Alleghany	48.31	283
Ashe	112.59	554
Avery	259.45	1531
Mitchell	46.60	239
Watauga	517.51	3064
Wilkes	114.47	701
Yancey	74.55	361

Schedule of Goals for the Next Year

For FFY 2024, the High Country COG will work on the following strategies:

1. Assist local governments to apply for and administer grants for economic development projects
2. Assist local governments with economic development planning
3. Assist local governments with planning for and incentivizing workforce housing projects
4. Assist local governments in securing funding for physical infrastructure projects that support economic development (water, sewer, broadband, transportation)

5. Assist local governments in developing/expanding outdoor recreation infrastructure to support tourism in the district
 6. Assist local governments with value-added agricultural projects
- **Due to the impacts of Hurricane Helene, our main priority will be to support the recovery of the region, with focus on supporting Workforce Development, Housing, Critical Infrastructure, Industry, Business, Agriculture and Tourism**