

EAST ARKANSAS PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT DISTRICT

2015-2035



Igniting Our Region's Capacity for Growth



A REGIONAL PLAN FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT



EAST ARKANSAS PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT DISTRICT'S
reNEW EAST ARKANSAS

DAWNING OF THE DELTA REVIVAL
*IGNITING OUR REGION'S CAPACITY FOR
GROWTH*

A REGIONAL PLAN FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Adopted By
EAPDD Board of Directors
On
June 18, 2015

Prepared By



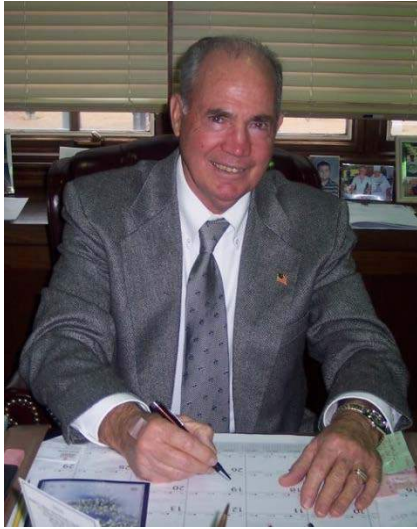
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Message from the Chair of the Board



Don Gentry
Phillips County Judge
Board Chairman

Thank you for taking the time to learn more about the long-term plan for our region and East Arkansas Planning & Development District. Through the ongoing support of EAPDD and the relationships the District has been able to grow, our communities have been able to accomplish more over the past three years than they have in decades. I am truly excited about the direction this work will take our region.

For the first time, our counties and communities have a framework for economic and community success. We are able to define our own priorities and move forward in achieving them. This work has provided the opportunity for ongoing progress and the ability to measure growth and impact as we move forward. This creates a level of intentionality within the region that is bubbling to the surface.

I am especially enthusiastic about the unprecedented regional data platform that will help us tell our story. This unique tool will provide access to key economic and community indicators. Each county will have their own snapshot that is data driven. We will be able to tell our story, measure our successes, identify emerging trends and make the necessary adjustments.

The District continues to innovate and develop their services to better address the needs and priorities identified on the ground in our communities. As implementation gets into full swing, the District will be developing additional resources that will directly impact the economic, infrastructure, housing and capacity building challenges within our region.

The District is better positioned than ever to provide community assistance on everything from concept to closeout. In this time of limited financial resources, it's critical to have a partner like the District that stands in the gap and assists in cultivating success.

Message from the Executive Director



Melissa Rivers
Executive Director
East Arkansas Planning & Development District

Michelangelo once said, “I saw the angel in the marble and I carved until I set him free.” Over the past three years, east Arkansas and EAPDD have been carving the future that we see before us.

In this plan, you’ll see that our region and our communities have a vision for the areas that will drive success for them. Vision is the key – our communities do not have to fly blindly into their future. They can now determine their path and intentionally grow the local leadership it will take to achieve their goals. They have taken the necessary steps to define what economic and community development, growth and progress mean to their community. They are deliberately defining their product and taking ownership of their future.

The EAPDD team is focused on helping to make their vision a reality. We have realigned our team to better serve those priorities. We are offering and growing new lines of service to directly impact success rates. We have developed unique, comprehensive tools to assist in telling our communities’ stories, measuring progress and making smart, data-driven decisions. We have grown our relationships with public and private partners in order to leverage resources and build capacity on the ground.

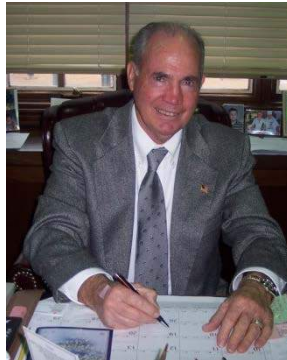
I’m increasingly excited about what the future holds for our region. The leadership of the EAPDD Board and the local steering committees has been exceptional throughout this extensive planning process. I appreciate the many partners who have joined us in this work. Mostly, I’m so excited to work with local leaders and communities that are purposefully pursuing the development that they envision.

John F. Kennedy once said, “Efforts and courage are not enough without purpose and direction.” The work done through the Regional Plan for Sustainable Development grant over the past three years has uncovered the purpose and direction for our region – and EAPDD. It is a new day in the east Arkansas Delta, and I’m delighted that EAPDD is playing a key role in the future of our communities.

Acknowledgments

EAPDD Board of Directors

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Chairman of the Board
Phillips County



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Blytheville

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Judge Randy Carney
Mississippi County

Acknowledgments

Special Acknowledgments in Memoriam

Judge Charles Nix
Poinsett County

Mayor Gerald Morris
City of Piggott

"Only a life lived for others is a life worthwhile."
~Albert Einstein



Acknowledgments

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Woody Wheelless

Local Steering Committees

Blytheville
Clay County
Craighead County
Crittenden County
Cross County
Earle
Greene County
Harrisburg
Hughes
Jonesboro
Lawrence County

Lee County
Manila
Marion
Mississippi County
Osceola
Phillips County
Poinsett County
Randolph County
St. Francis County
West Memphis

Federal Partners

US Department of Transportation
US Environmental Protection Agency
US Housing and Urban Development

Acknowledgments

Local Partners

Arkansas Community Foundation
Arkansas Economic Development Commission
Arkansas Northeastern College
Arkansas State University Delta Center
Arkansas State University-Newport/Marked Tree
Senator John Boozman
Clinton School of Public Service
Crossroads Coalition
Senator Tom Cotton
Congressman Rick Crawford
East Arkansas Community College
Memphis-Shelby County Office of Sustainability
Mid-South Community College
Phillips Community College of the University of Arkansas
Southern Bancorp Community Partners
Thrive
USDA Rural Development-Arkansas
Winthrop-Rockefeller Foundation

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Section I

About reNEW East Arkansas

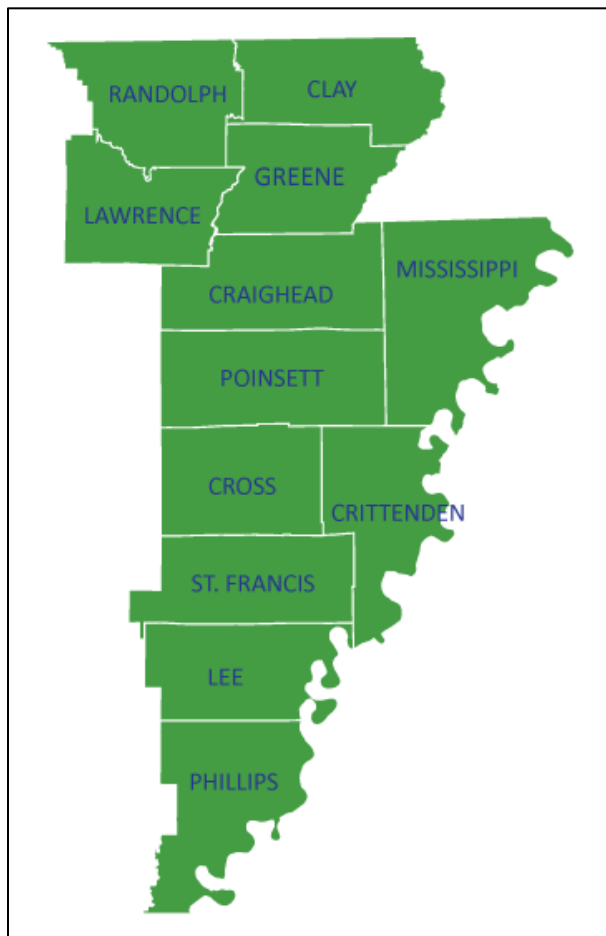


About reNEW East Arkansas

Our Region

Nestled against the Mississippi River to the east, Missouri to the north and the Ozark Mountains to the west, East Arkansas is an area of lush farms, rich heritage and diverse population. Its natural beauty is surpassed only by the beauty of the people who call this place home.

It's a region of contrasts: areas of economic growth versus severe decline; fertile land versus extreme poverty; a variety of educational options versus low educational attainment. Yet even with the dichotomous complexity, there is a spirit that pervades the region and binds it together. The gritty determination to persevere through hardship and make a positive difference is embedded in the culture.



This determination is what sets East Arkansas apart. It's an area with great, untapped potential. As one of the world's leaders in agricultural production, the land is a valuable resource. However, there are other attributes that make East Arkansas a region on the brink of revitalization. Wondrous beauty, unique heritage, excellent access to markets, top-notch educational institutions and world-class healthcare facilities provide the backbone for development and growth.

The challenge for the region is one of resources. Years of decline have left communities – especially small towns – in financial straits. Finding the funds to take care of existing assets is difficult – investing in new projects is nearly impossible. This has led to a cycle of outmigration and additional decline, leaving the best and the brightest with

no choice but to leave the area to seek opportunity.

About reNEW East Arkansas

Change is coming, however slowly. In recent years, though the population has continued to decline in much of the region, every county saw positive growth in the age group between 25 and 44. New, significant investments from outside of the region have started to impact economic opportunity. Growth in cities like Jonesboro and Paragould has begun to spread. For the first time in many years, there is a sense of optimism about the future.

Our Culture

The Qualitative Side. The counties and communities in the East Arkansas region share many commonalities. While each town has its individual traits, there are collective themes that have made growth and progress difficult.

***"Somebody someday will have to do something."**
~Quote from local citizen interviewed as part of the community engagement analysis.*

Pervasive in the region is a sense of fatalism about the future. Though the seeds of optimism have been planted, these have yet to take root and become widespread. Many citizens feel that the challenges are too big to tackle. This has led to a sense of apathy, where local citizens don't get involved because they see no possible positive outcome.

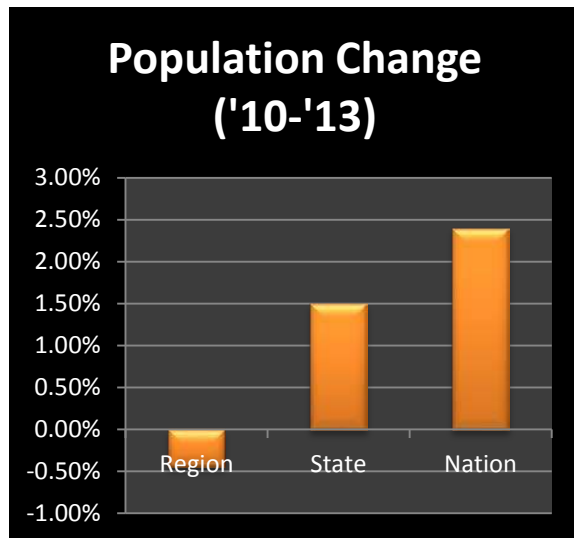
Some areas of the region have conquered these issues and are seeing substantial changes to their communities. New projects and investments are abundant in areas of Craighead and Greene Counties. Because these communities have strong, proven leadership, the citizens have rallied to support them.

Yet these successes need regional support to sustain them. The rest of the communities in East Arkansas must also see progress in order to raise the tide for all.

The Quantitative Side. The only way to ensure that progress is made in the future is to know where we stand today. Throughout this document, measurement indicators have been identified that will provide a quantitative analysis of success. This allows our citizens to see how they stack up to the rest of the region, state and nation, while also providing opportunities for course correction along the way.

Though hundreds of data points have been collected, there are several that are especially meaningful when it comes to measuring overall progress. As such,

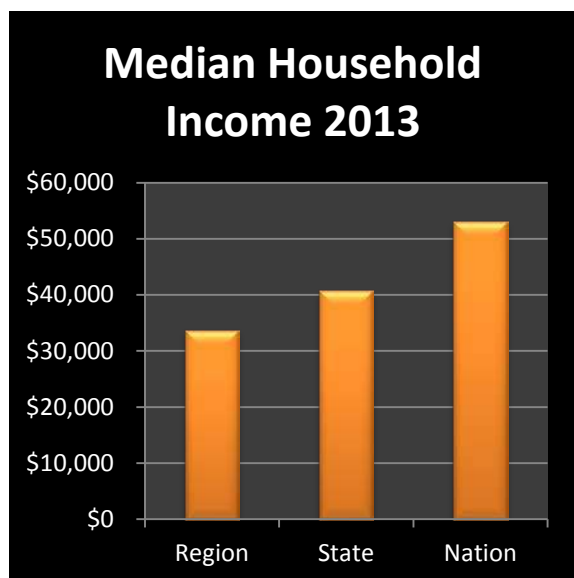
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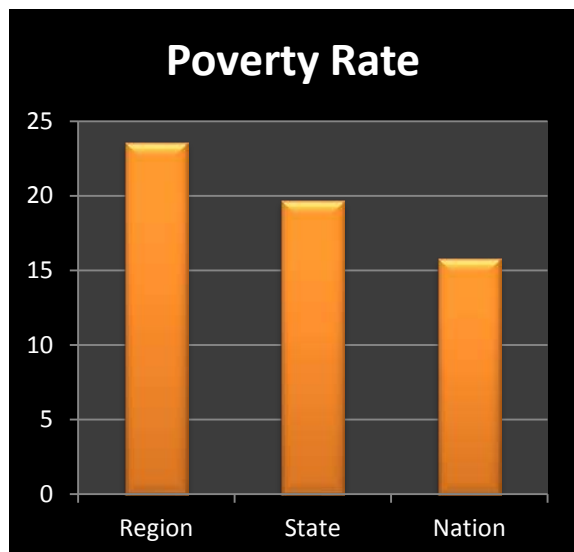
eight indicators have been identified as the “baseline measurements” for the region and each community. These eight do not tell the entire story. Instead, they provide a snapshot of the region’s strengths and challenges.

Population has steadily declined in the region over the past fifty years. In all but two of the twelve counties, population is shrinking. Eight of the twelve have fewer people now than they did in 1980.

The result is a region with a contracting tax base, decreasing resources and fewer opportunities for its citizens. Changing this trend will be an important milestone for the region in the future.



Household income in East Arkansas has not kept pace with the state and the nation. While the case can be made for a lower cost of living, this does not always translate into a comfortable way of life for most of our residents. Combined with high poverty, low educational attainment and a large percentage of income going to rental expenses, those citizens on the lower end of the pay scale are struggling to make ends meet.



Poverty rates continue to be high in East Arkansas, as is the case for much of the Delta. In fact, six of the twelve counties in the region are classified as “Persistent Poverty Counties,” having rates of over 20% consistently for the past thirty years. Extreme poverty takes its toll on a region, making the climb to prosperity even more difficult.

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A shining example of something on the right path is evident in the **Pre-K Enrollment** data. The region is leading both the state and the nation by a significant margin. Because low educational attainment is a challenge here, it's good to know that a foundation is in place upon which to build.

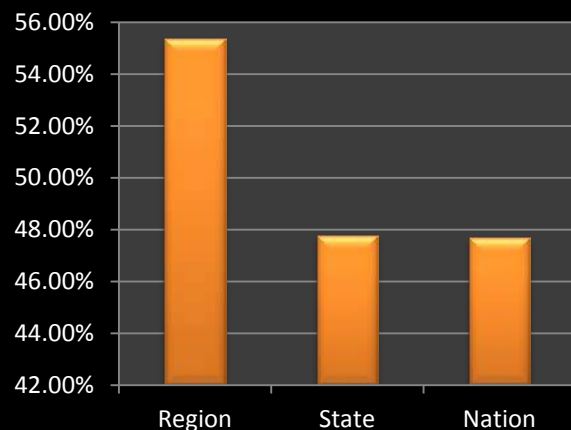
Transitioning from pre-k to post-secondary demonstrates an important piece of demographic information. **Educational attainment** is low in the region, lagging behind the state and nation. This is a factor in all aspects of both economic and quality of life issues.

The **unemployment rate** for the region is also higher than state and national averages. In a region with low median incomes, low educational attainment and high poverty, it's no surprise that unemployment would also be higher.

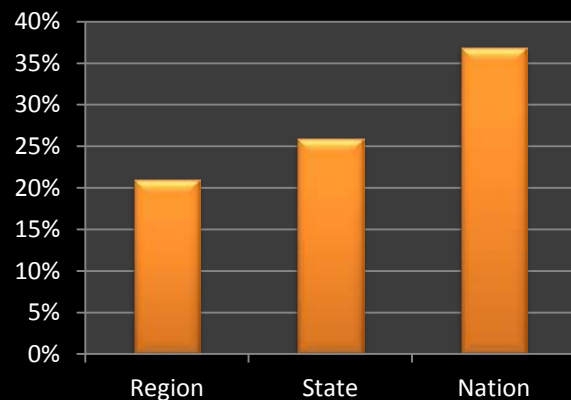
One interesting indicator of the region's overall health has to do with just that – health. **Life expectancy** rates are alarmingly lower than both state and national averages, in some counties by nearly twelve years.

Finally, **housing affordability** data demonstrates both positives and negatives for the region. For those residents who own their homes, the costs are well below state and national averages. Those residents who rent don't fare as well, with costs close to or slightly above state and national averages.

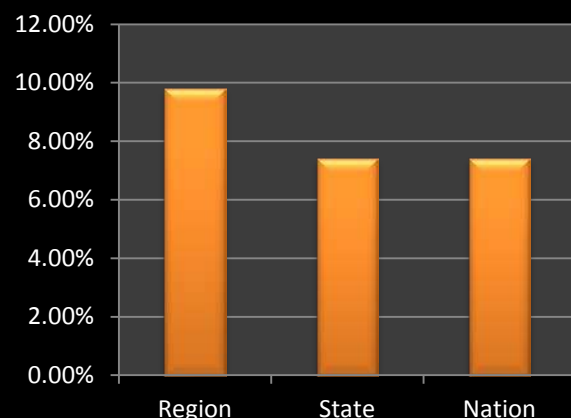
Pre-K Enrollment 2013



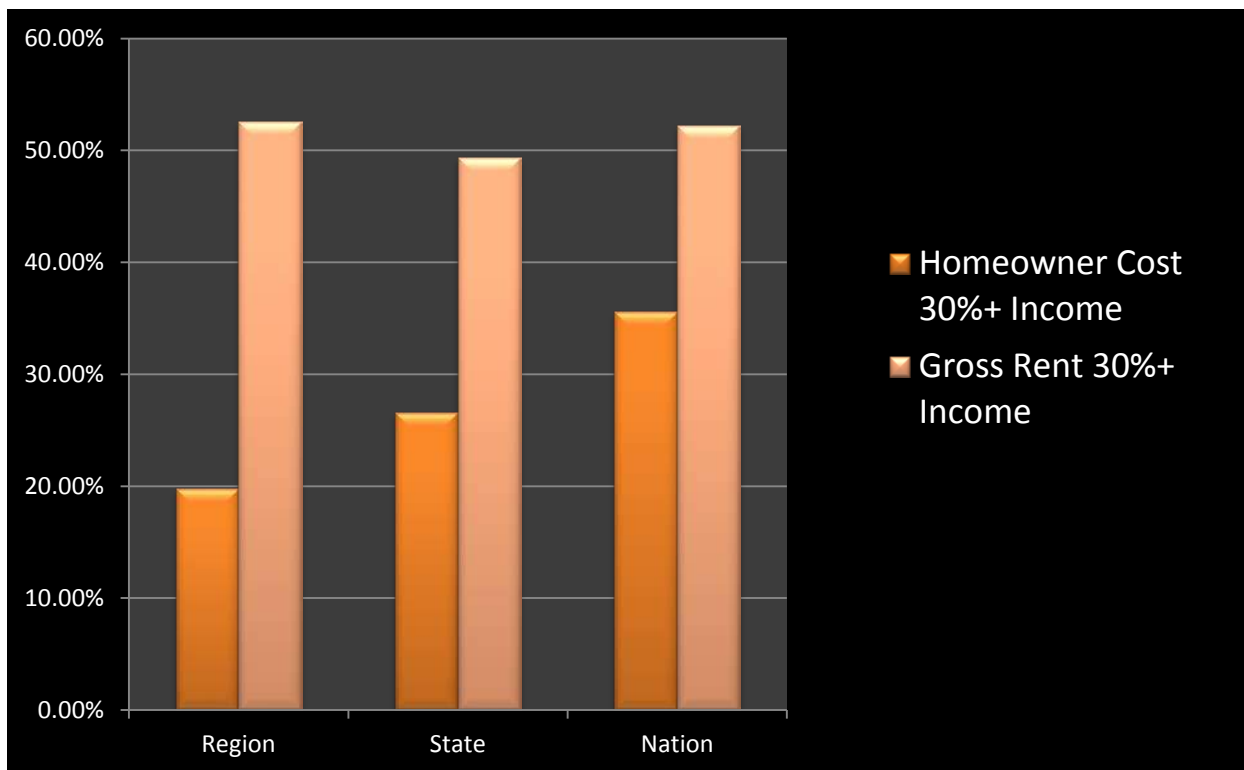
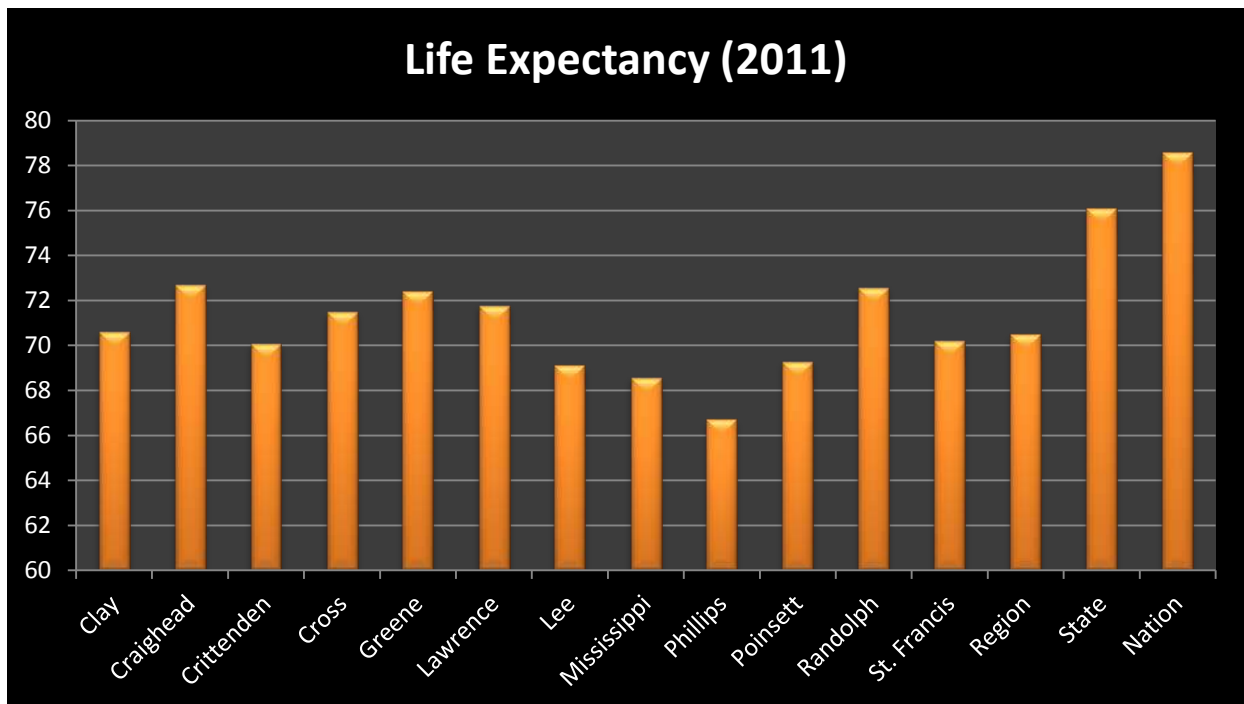
Over 25 with Associate's or better



Unemployment Rate



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About reNEW East Arkansas

Our Vision

We began this journey in 2012, not quite sure where it would lead. This was not the first time for planning efforts in the Delta. In the past, organizations have come to East Arkansas with the mission to help our region overcome its challenges.

How will this plan be different? How will we ensure lasting, impactful change? After three years of planning, how will the results reflect what truly matters to our citizens? These are the questions we have had to ask throughout the process – and hopefully have answered.

By starting locally, we've grown our plan organically, adapting the process to meet the needs identified along the way. The East Arkansas Planning & Development District has provided the structure for planning and implementation, but the communities have supplied the desire and direction. It's these two halves of the equation that – when combined – make a stronger, more viable whole.

We know that, as a region, we face many challenges. We will be better prepared and more able to surmount those challenges if we work together. The purpose of this plan is to develop partnerships and strengthen the ties that will propel our region into a brighter future.

Change is inevitable. It can happen to us, or it can happen with us. Our goal is to create *intentional*

About East Arkansas Planning and Development District

Under the provisions of the Economic Development Act (Public Law 89-136, 89th Congress, August 25, 1965), and the applicable laws of the State of Arkansas, Act 176 of 1963 (Ark. Stat. 64-1901, 21), the local government units, hereinafter referred to as counties, as subsequently named, created East Arkansas Planning & Development District.

East Arkansas Planning & Development District was created for the following purposes:

- To prepare and develop a district overall economic development program for long-range economic growth which includes adequate land use and transportation planning and contains a specific program for District cooperation, self-help, and public investment.
- To formulate, develop, and administer a program for planning and development in order to improve economic conditions in the District in respect to unemployment, underemployment, and distressed economic conditions.
- To coordinate the overall economic planning and development in the District among the member counties.
- To carry out such research, planning, and advisory functions as are necessary and helpful to the foregoing.



About reNEW East Arkansas

change, encouraging new investment that will have impacts in the areas our citizens have identified as priorities.

It's a new day for East Arkansas. Our course to date has led us to a choice. We have chosen to follow an ambitious path full of bold initiatives and new concepts. It is only by taking the more challenging route that we will see true, positive, intentional change in the Delta. We invite you to join us on this journey, one that has no end, one that only leads to new beginnings.

***"You must be the change you wish to see in the world."
~Mahatma Ghandi***

Our Aspirations

The East Arkansas Planning and Development District developed this twenty-year regional plan with two sets of guiding principles in mind (see table below). First, there are issues related to our region that have served as deterrents to growth and development for many years. Second, there are guideposts for consideration from the Partnership for Sustainable Communities, the collaboration between HUD, EPA and DOT that funded this planning project. Both sets of principles are important, and both represent the aspirations we have for this 12-county region.

East Arkansas Principles for Growth and Development		Partnership for Sustainable Communities Livability Principles
Address Low Capacity: Identify strategies to build capacity at every level	✓	Provide More Transportation Choices: Identify strategies that provide more options for residents
Address High Poverty: Identify strategies to reduce extreme poverty	✓	Promote Equitable, Affordable Housing: Identify strategies to provide more housing options
Address Population Decline: Identify strategies to retain and attract people, especially young adults	✓	Enhance Economic Competitiveness: Identify strategies to increase economic opportunity
Address Low Attainment: Identify strategies to increase educational attainment	✓	Support Existing Communities: Identify strategies to ensure sustainability of local communities.
Address Limited Access: Identify strategies to better connect residents with services	✓	Coordinate and Leverage Federal Policies and Investment: Identify strategies to better utilize resources
Address Critical Health Issues: Identify strategies to encourage healthier lifestyles	✓	Value Communities and Neighborhoods: Identify strategies to improve local neighborhoods

About reNEW East Arkansas

Our Project

The formation of what has become known as the reNEW East Arkansas regional plan began in 2011. Melissa Rivers had just taken the helm as the new Executive Director of East Arkansas Planning and Development District (District). She was looking to turn things around for the District and bring an underperforming organization to the forefront of economic progress in the region.



The work that provided the basis for this publication was supported by funding under an award with the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. The substance and findings of the work are dedicated to the public. The author and publisher are solely responsible for the accuracy of the statements and interpretations contained in this publication. Such interpretations do not necessarily reflect the views of the Government.

At the same time, interest had been shown by some in East Arkansas to apply for the second round of the HUD Regional Sustainability Planning Grant. Finding an organization that could handle the day-to-day management and operations as well as lead implementation upon completion proved a challenge in an underrepresented area of the country. The

District realized the potential of the planning process to help shape the region's future and jumped on board to lead the way.

Partnerships were developed with all twelve counties, most of the 107 cities, Arkansas State University, University of Arkansas Little Rock, five community colleges and a consulting team. Using the Partnership for Sustainability's Livability Principles, a project scope was developed to engage the local communities and traditionally marginalized populations through outreach, local planning, data collection and several specific deliverables designed to provide detailed analyses of existing conditions. The final scope of work



About reNEW East Arkansas

identified the following deliverables to be utilized in the development of the regional plan:

- Community Engagement
- Local Strategic Planning
- Regional Housing Analysis
- Land Use/Transportation Scenario Planning
- Data Collection and Analysis
- Local Foods Analysis

In September of 2011, a grant application was submitted to HUD. In November, the announcement was made that the District had been awarded \$2.6 million for the planning process. After finalizing agreements, work plans, logic models and flagship indicators, the District's team began putting the pieces in place for this unique, once-in-a-lifetime project for East Arkansas. (See "Approach & Methodology in Appendix A for more information.)

Our Plan

After three years, thousands of people and tens of thousands of hours, the regional plan has taken on new meaning. This is not just a plan of action (it is!); it doesn't just provide direction for regional priorities (it does!). It embodies the imagination and spirit of East Arkansas people, the history and heritage of our towns, and the desire to see a better future for our children and grandchildren.

Community Involvement

4,000
People

29,000
Hours

The Plan is organized into seven priority strategies:

Strategy Title	Focus Areas
1. Civic & Leadership Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Leadership Capacity Building• Community Engagement• Public Relations
2. Infrastructure Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Transportation• Water & Wastewater• Telecommunications• Land Use Planning
3. Affordable, Quality Housing	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Access to Housing• Redevelopment of Dilapidated Neighborhoods

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Strategy Title	Focus Areas
4. Healthy Communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Community Beautification• Disaster Preparation and Resilience• Health Care Expansion• Local, Healthy Foods• Environmental Restoration
5. Education & Workforce Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Pre-K through 12• Post-secondary• Workforce Development & Training
6. Tourism & Cultural Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Downtown Development• Local/Regional Tourism• Cultural Tourism• Pass-through Visitor Services
7. Business Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Business Recruitment• Business Retention & Expansion• Entrepreneurial Development• Value-added Agriculture

The strategies are designed to build upon one another based on the level of complex structures needed by communities and the region to implement. At the base, there is a need for Civic and Leadership Development, the foundation upon which all other strategies are built. Infrastructure Development is also a foundational need in any community but cannot be successfully completed without leadership and civic engagement. Likewise, housing efforts must first have a solid base of leadership and infrastructure, and so on.

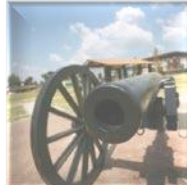
About reNEW East Arkansas



7. Business Development



6. Tourism & Cultural Development



5. Education & Workforce Development



4. Healthy Communities



3. Affordable, Quality Housing



2. Infrastructure Development



1. Civic & Leadership Development

Goals and Objectives have been formulated for each priority area based on several methods of input. First, information was collected from the local strategic planning process to determine what projects, programs and services were needed. Second, data was collected and analyzed to identify potential issues to be addressed related to the priorities. Third, discussions were held with District staff and board members, consortium partners and steering committee participants to gather feedback. Fourth, various plans and documents pertinent to the region were reviewed (see list in Appendix C). Finally, the consulting team provided recommendations based on their studies and expertise.

One final consideration was used in determining the relevance and appropriateness of recommended goals and objectives: does/could the recommendation fall under the purview of the District? Plan implementation will be led by the District. While partnerships will play an important role, the District must consider its existing and potential resources that can be invested in carrying out the plan.

About reNEW East Arkansas

Types of Goals and Objectives Considered	
Capacity Building	What types of local community education, organization, training, community engagement or other issues need to be addressed?
Organizational	What types of resources (staff, education, training, technology, etc.) might be needed by the EAPDD to accomplish this task?
Planning	Are additional feasibility studies, research analyses or other types of specific technical assistance needed? If so, what might those be?
Policy	Are legislative or local policy changes needed? Will advocacy by the District be needed for these changes?
Execution	What specific, actionable items will it take to reach completion?

In April of 2015, recommended goals and objectives were presented to the District Board and Project Consortium for their review and prioritization. For each goal, participants were asked to choose from three options:

1. Include the goal in the regional plan as a HIGH priority;
2. Include the goal in the regional plan as a LOW priority;
3. Do not include the goal in the regional plan.

The results provided the framework for the development of each strategy of the regional plan. Goals have been listed in ranking order and labeled as either “Priority Goals” (for those receiving high priority ranking) or “Secondary Goals” (for those receiving low priority ranking). Those recommendations that were not chosen for inclusion are presented in Appendix B.

Priority Goals will be given the most attention from the District in that existing resources will be realigned and new resources diligently pursued to accomplish the tasks. Secondary Goals will also receive attention from the District but only as resources allow. Though timelines have been established for Secondary goals, these are the most fluid and dependent upon available means.

There are some Secondary Goals that will be needed to further other priorities. Because a collaborative process was utilized to rank goals, they may not have ranked as high as necessary. All Secondary Goals will be reviewed by District staff and ranked again based on available resources, immediate need and interconnectivity to the Priority Goals.

About reNEW East Arkansas

In all, 26 Priority Goals and 19 Secondary Goals were chosen for action by the Board and Consortium members. Specific objectives, timelines and performance measures were then assigned to each goal. Additional indicators were also identified to assist the District with tracking impacts. As a result, the District will have both quantitative and qualitative means of measuring progress.



MOVING THE NEEDLE

In each section, indicators have been identified to provide quantitative analysis of progress. These, in addition to the more qualitative performance measures listed for each goal, will give the District and its constituents a way to track success at various levels and determine whether adjustments need to be made.

Section II

Strategy 1 Civic & Leadership Development



Strategy 1. Civic & Leadership Development



Overview of Existing Conditions

The issue of capacity in East Arkansas is a serious one, and it starts at the community level. Enhancing local capacity to advance community development priorities is the foundation for everything else addressed in this plan. Without it, success on a large scale will be impossible.

There are communities within the region that have strong leadership and engaged citizenry. And in most cases, the highest elected officials are savvy and experienced. However, there is not a “deep bench” of leadership willing to step up and take on projects.

Overcoming the Past

If the region is going to reinvent itself, a new style of leadership is needed. For the most part, even, the best leaders in the region are trying to recreate the past, hold onto what is here or put out fires.

This reactionary style permeates communities as well. Since leaders are on this path, followers are this way as well. This ultimately makes change and creating a vision for the future very difficult.

The region’s past plays a big role in its future. There is a sense of fatalism – and in some

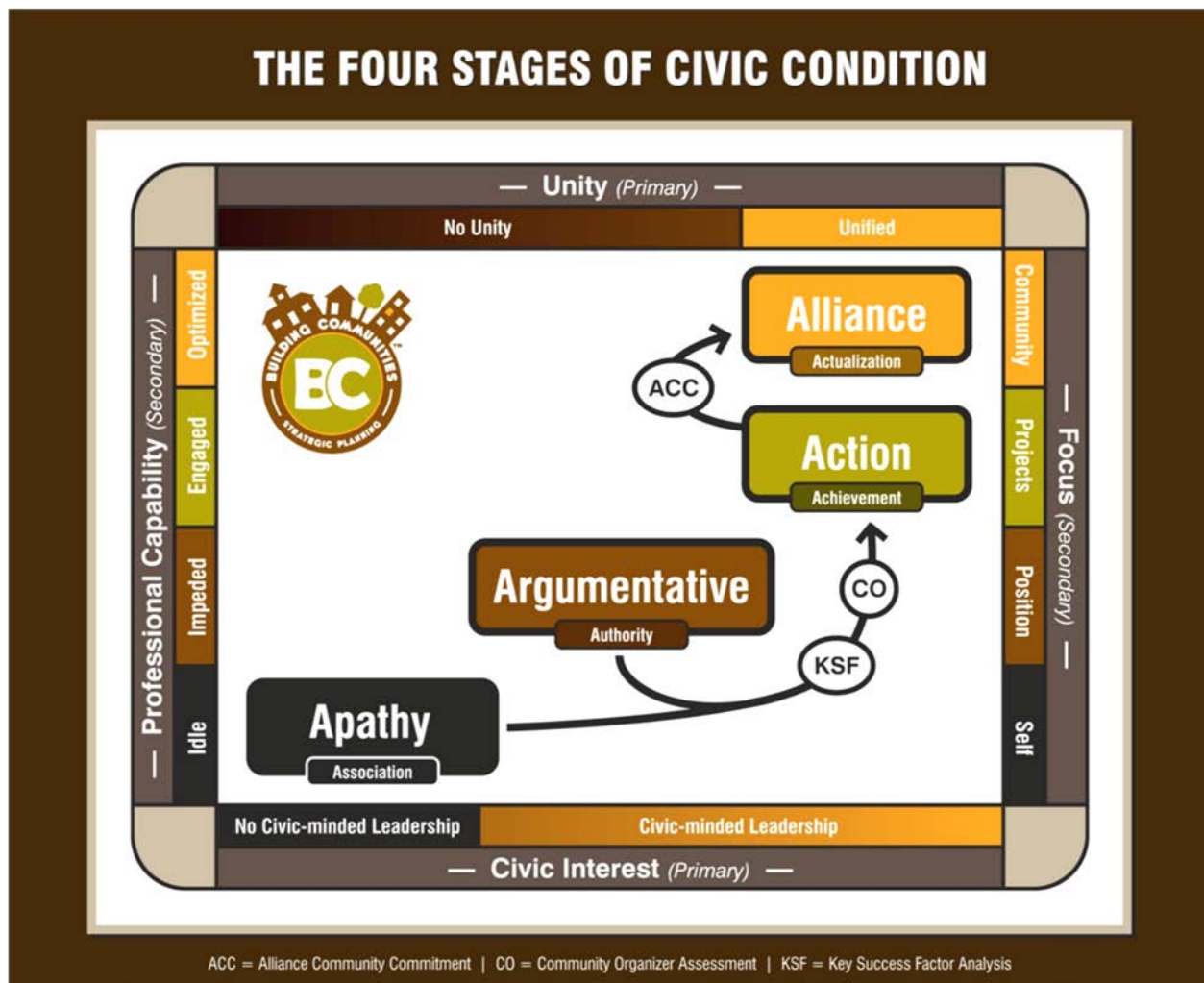
*Isolation is a friend to
communities in the
Apathy and
Argumentative Stages.*

~Building Communities, Inc.

Strategy 1. Civic & Leadership Development

cases grief – related to loss: of population, of opportunity, of optimism, of hope. Because residents sometimes feel that any effort is in vain, community engagement is a challenge.

Building Communities, Inc. has developed a model that describes the civic condition of a community in order to better understand why some communities see achievement and others seem to stagnate or decline. This model, called “The Four Stages of Civic Condition,” takes into consideration a number of factors that determine a community’s likelihood of success (see the depiction of the model below).



Strategy 1. Civic & Leadership Development

The Four Stages of Civic Condition	
<p>Apathy Stage Communities at the Apathy Stage are characterized by having little, if any, drive amongst their civic leaders (elected and non-elected). Perhaps the simplest test is: "How many people wake up on Saturday morning thinking about civic projects that are being advanced by the community?" While many communities have paid staff charged with advancing community development projects, are there individuals who are self-motivated to advance the project beyond any professional requirements?</p> <p>Apathy Stage communities are also characterized by a lack of vision and drive for community achievements. The community may be largely comprised of impressive individuals with other worthy values related to family and their religion but not those with a civic focus. These communities typically assume or decide that they cannot control their destiny, that state and federal government serves only as a regulator rather than a partner and that any attempts to change that philosophy will be doomed to failure.</p>	<p>Argumentative Stage Argumentative Stage communities move significantly forward on the <i>willingness continuum</i> but generally have not advanced on the <i>ability continuum</i>.</p> <p>Argumentative Stage communities are characterized by a group of civic leaders who do have goals and dreams for their community. These communities, however, generally lack both the <i>professional capability</i> and the <i>unity</i> to carry these dreams forward.</p> <p><i>Professional capability</i> refers to a community's investment in an individual and/or organization that serves as an advocate. Although the individual need not be a paid professional, communities generally find this necessary in order create the stability needed for long-term advocacy.</p> <p><i>Unity</i> refers to the community's acceptance of the individual development projects being advanced. A lack of unity creates a dynamic in which the greatest obstacles to project advancement are created within the community itself.</p> <p>Argumentative Stage communities frequently create a "lose-lose" dynamic.</p>
<p>Action Stage Action Stage communities are characterized by a track record of consistently identifying and advancing development projects. These communities have a high level of willingness and a high level of ability. They typically have a sense of overall direction whereby they can immediately identify whether or not proposed projects are consistent with that direction. Projects that are inconsistent are typically discarded. The rest are usually embraced and advanced.</p> <p>Like Argumentative Stage communities, however, Action Stage communities are still faced with limited resources. While there are, at times, opportunities for collaboration among projects in Action Stage communities, typically the agenda becomes so large that</p>	<p>Alliance Stage Alliance Stage communities take the ultimate step on the ability continuum. These communities are not only willing, but are also completely able to advance their development agenda. Like Action Stage communities, Alliance communities are skilled at envisioning, defining and advancing development projects. They have a record of success which reinforces a "we will succeed at this—it is only a matter of time" approach.</p> <p>Alliance Stage communities make a paradigm shift from project orientation to community orientation. That is, it is simply not enough to succeed with advancing community development projects—it is necessary to examine how each of these projects serves larger community goals. Such communities</p>

Strategy 1. Civic & Leadership Development

competition for available technical and financial resources becomes a limiting factor. As such, Action Stage communities sometimes face a "win-lose" situation.	strive for "win-win" solutions.
Source: Building Communities, Inc.	

The above model illustrates four stages that most communities fall under: Apathy, Argumentative, Action and Alliance. Low-achievement communities are usually in either the Apathy or Argumentative stages, while high-achievement communities fall into either the Action or Alliance categories. In East Arkansas, many communities are stuck in an Apathy situation (nothing is going to happen, so why get involved) or an Argumentative phase (we'd like something to happen, but we can't agree on what it will be, who will do the work or who will get credit).

Throughout the region, community leaders and participants in the reNEW East Arkansas steering committees are often frustrated with the challenge of community engagement. Many do not understand how to engage others, while some do not believe that engagement is important.

When newcomers or younger adults try to get involved, there is often skepticism about their capability. People returning to the Delta after moving away also find it difficult to work their way into the fabric of the community.

Civic engagement is the only way to break out of the low-performance phases. Isolation is a friend to communities in the Apathy and Argumentative Stages. Without bringing the community together to collectively envision and enact its future, the very simple association motivation, as well as the corrosive authority motivation persist—and the people who have most at stake in the future of their communities are rendered ineffective.

"Somebody someday will have to do something."
~Quote from local citizen interviewed as part of the community engagement analysis.

Communication and Collaboration

The ability to communicate internally is hampered by a lack of technology – both in infrastructure and in usage. Many communities don't have even simple websites, a form of communication accepted as a basic necessity in much of the country. Word of mouth is the most-utilized method of communication in the region.

Strategy 1. Civic & Leadership Development

In most of the communities, there is very little cooperation between and among churches. This is not a surprise for Delta culture but it is a barrier for collaboration. Because the culture is reliant on sectarian organizations to meet many of the social needs, a stronger bond between these groups could be beneficial to everyone.

Confusion also abounds when it comes to what resources are available. There is a perception of too many different “development” organizations, some regional, some local and all confusing. Distinguishing between each group – and finding common ground – will be important for future success.

Regional economic and community development requires collaboration among counties, towns, groups and individuals. Within towns there are groups working on the same issue but not working together. In some towns, one or two individuals believe they are doing all the work and collaboration is not possible. Isolation, factionalism and cultural history also separate towns.

In one county, there are three reNEW East Arkansas Strategic Planning Steering Committees. Development in each of the towns depends in large part on development across the county. Implementing the strategic plans in each of these communities depends on the success or failure of implementation by their neighbors. Yet, the three steering committees are not supporting one another or coordinating efforts – and no one seems to think this is a problem.

The good news is that almost anyone asked has expressed an interest in becoming more involved. Many who were interviewed through the community engagement study reported unsuccessful attempts to do so. There is a general consensus from community members that it is a challenge to find out what is happening at the local and regional levels.

Local Organizational Capacity

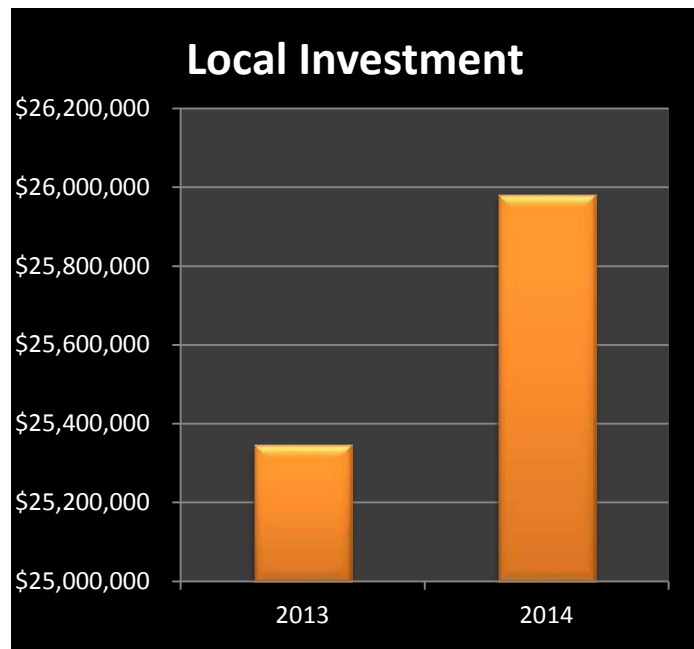
Organizational capacity for the purposes of this plan addresses several questions:

1. Is the work relevant in that it effectively meets a defined need?
2. Is the organization vision and mission focused?
3. Is there effective leadership in place?
4. Is there organizational transparency?
5. Is the operation of the organization such that it will be in place for as long as needed?

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Even though resources are scarce, there are people with the means to make local investment. However, there is a perception (true or not) that the capacity of local organizations is low with little understanding of how to solve problems. This translates into a lack of local private investment, as people with resources don't feel as if the region and its local nonprofits are good options.

There is very little accountability for nonprofits. Most local residents do not know who manages the nonprofits in their town, where the money comes from or the organization's mission. And, organizations do not have the capacity or the resources to change this status.



Community leaders and members say they want economic growth through tourism and business growth, but this is not reflected in preparations for outside visitors. Quality customer service, welcoming signage, clean bathrooms and hospitality amenities are lacking. Many times, these projects take a backseat to basic operational needs.

There is generally confusion as to what various government offices and other organizations are doing. At the community level, there are a number of organizations whose work overlaps. For example, Chambers of Commerce are responsible for promoting tourism. In some instances, there may be an independent committee also working on tourism related projects but with different ideas about how to move forward. This committee may be linked with a regional group that also has an agenda for tourism development and promotion. The same type of example is repeated for other types of economic and community development.

Studying the capacity of local organizations yielded interesting results. In general, interviews and observations revealed that most organizations in the region are on their own in terms of capacity building. They are fragile and yet expected to move mountains by the funders, voters, other supporters or recipients of services.

Strategy 1. Civic & Leadership Development

Capacity building is needed around leadership development, community engagement, moving past fatalism, utilizing data in decision-making and conducting effective meetings. Record keeping is a struggle and most organizations do not understand how to determine their financial position, let alone improve it. Having a strong vision for the future is rare for organizations and communities alike.

Strategy 1. Civic & Leadership Development

Goals and Objectives

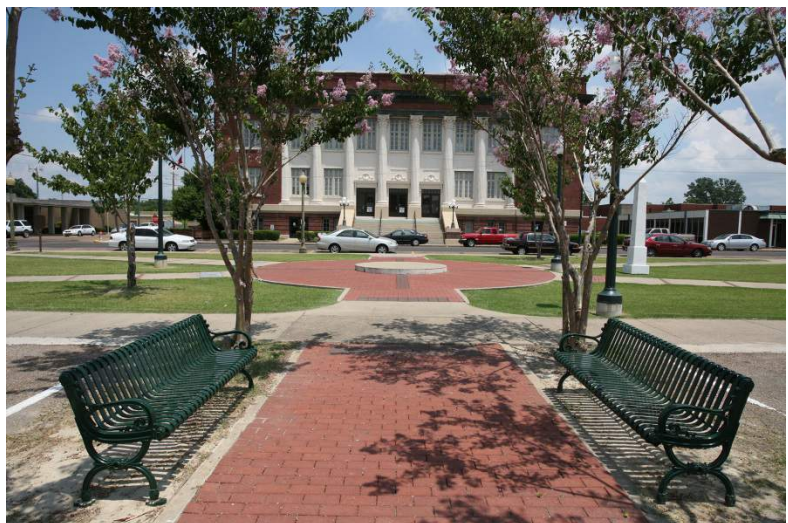
PRIORITY GOALS

Goal 1.1: Utilizing this regional plan as a foundation, continue to expand and promote the identified 20-year vision of and for East Arkansas that focuses on change, the future, optimism and meeting challenges head on.

- Objective 1.1.1. Ensure that there is broad knowledge of the reNew East Arkansas plan and its components.
- Objective 1.1.2. Develop a system for the Board, Consortium and staff of EAPDD to continually modify the regional plan as needed for a more visionary approach to change.
- Objective 1.1.3. Enlist Board, Consortium and staff members to speak to groups around the region and share the vision.
- Objective 1.1.4. Utilize all available technology to aid with sharing the vision for the region (website, Facebook, twitter, TV, radio, newspapers).
- Results Expected In: 2016
- Performance Measure:
 - Broad promotion of vision and regional plan complete

Goal 1.2: Increase knowledge of public administration and available resources in local leaders throughout the region.

- Objective 1.2.1: Partner with the Arkansas Municipal League, Arkansas Association of Counties and Association of Development Organizations to develop a regional



Strategy 1. Civic & Leadership Development

leadership and elected official training for those interested in public service.

- Objective 1.2.2: After each election cycle, partner with the Arkansas Municipal League, Arkansas Association of Counties and Association of Development Organizations to hold a newly elected official retreat and workshop to learn about public administration laws and practices, current projects and available resources.
- Results Expected In: 2016
- Performance Measures:
 - Number of Leadership Trainings Held
 - Number of Participants
 - Local officials well-versed in the activities and goals of reNEW East Arkansas

SECONDARY GOALS

Goal 1.3: Engage Foundations and Philanthropists in building local and regional capacity through education and training.

- Objective 1.3.1: Establish a regional nonprofit designed to: 1) capture local investment and philanthropic contributions for priority projects and initiatives related to this plan; 2) serve as the anchor organization for regional and national foundation relationships; and 3) provide support to local and regional nonprofits.
- Objective 1.3.2: Identify alternative methods of local investment, such as crowd-funding, venture capital opportunities, etc.
- Objective 1.3.3: Establish a regional partnership of local nonprofits to determine methods to improve transparency, enhance credibility and streamline fundraising, public relations, staff training, reporting and grant funding.
- Results Expected In: 2018
- Performance Measures:
 - Nonprofit established
 - Alternative methods of funding identified
 - Regional philanthropic partnership established

Strategy 1. Civic & Leadership Development

Goal 1.4: Increase involvement by youth and young adults in Steering Committees, Regional boards and Committees and local projects.

- Objective 1.4.1:
Add a youth and/or young adult (25 or younger) representative to EAPDD Board and each committee working on implementation of this plan.



- Objective 1.4.2:
Develop a Youth Service and Leadership Program in partnership with local schools designed to train students in project development and management.
- Objective 1.4.3: Engage EAST Initiative programs in regional projects.
- Results Expected In: 2018
- Performance Measures:
 - Youth and/or Young Adults engaged
 - Youth Service and Leadership Program in place
 - EAST Initiative program engaged

EAST® (Environmental and Spatial Technology, Inc.) is unlike any other model in modern education. It is a project-based, service-learning oriented program that provides students with high-end technology available in the most progressive fields in the world. At its heart, EAST is a coordinated effort to provide today's students with an educational atmosphere that allows them to gain insight into their own abilities to acquire and use information, solve problems and develop valuable experience. Since its inception in 1996, the EAST model has expanded to over 200 schools in five states (Arkansas, Iowa, Louisiana, Oklahoma and Pennsylvania).

~From the EAST Initiative Website
<http://www.eastinitiative.org/aboutcontact/>

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Goal 1.5: Showcase success stories from throughout the region.

- Objective 1.5.1: Develop a series of small- and large-scale success stories from around the region that demonstrate progress on a community's strategic priorities.
- Objective 1.5.2: Post success stories regularly on EAPDD Website, the local community's website and a variety of other mediums.
- Objective 1.5.3: Annually recognize volunteers and elected officials who have made significant impacts in the local/regional community; share their stories on EAPDD Website and link to community websites.
- Results Expected In: 2015
- Performance Measures:
 - Success stories developed and posted
 - Annual recognition of volunteers
 - Communities adapting other models for their own use



Goal 1.6: Educate and train communities in customer service, promoting their community and engaging everyone including newcomers.


- Objective 1.6.1: Disseminate information about the importance of engagement and promotion while conducting other outreach

Strategy 1. Civic & Leadership Development

related to the regional plan, data platform and EAPDD services.

- Objective 1.6.2: Develop mini-conferences with specific training targeted to engagement and promotion.
- Objective 1.6.3: Partner with local Chambers of Commerce to conduct customer service training programs.
- Results Expected In: 2018
- Performance Measures:
 - Outreach and information disseminated
 - Mini-conferences developed and underway
 - Customer service training programs initiated

Goal 1.7: Build a cadre of regional leaders who work together for the overall improvement of the district.

- Objective 1.7.1: Develop a rigorous leadership program that focuses on community engagement; positive change; critical thinking; ethics; high level problem solving; networking in, around and outside the region; and developing the ability to see the whole and move beyond “what is good for my community.”
- Objective 1.7.2: Hold a retreat with church and ministerial leaders from throughout the region to determine how they can plug into the implementation efforts.
- Objective 1.7.3: Develop partnerships with other local and regional organizations providing economic and community development services.

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- Objective 1.7.4: Utilize tools developed by EAPDD to promote a one-stop resource of available services and points of contact.
- Objective 1.7.5: Develop a “community-to-community” program, whereby neighboring communities work together to complete local projects.
- Results Expected In: 2018
- Performance Measures:
 - Leadership Program in Place
 - Retreat held with church and ministerial alliance
 - Partnerships with other economic developers
 - One-stop resource information in place
 - “Community-to-Community” program in place

Goal 1.8: Increase involvement by local community members in Steering Committees and Regional boards and commissions.

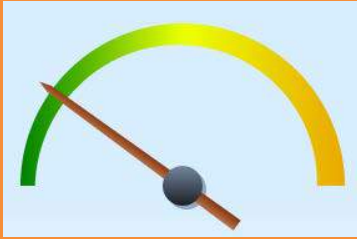
- Objective 1.8.1: Develop targeted information tools in a variety of mediums to promote involvement locally and regionally.
- Objective 1.8.2: Hire a Director of Engagement to coordinate all aspects of outreach and engagement programs.
- Results Expected In: 2016
- Performance Measures:
 - Informational tools developed
 - Director of Engagement Hired

Strategy 1. Civic & Leadership Development

East Arkansas Principles for Growth and Development		Partnership for Sustainable Communities Livability Principles
Address Low Capacity: Identify strategies to build capacity at every level	✓	Provide More Transportation Choices: Identify strategies that provide more options for residents
Address High Poverty: Identify strategies to reduce extreme poverty		Promote Equitable, Affordable Housing: Identify strategies to provide more housing options
Address Population Decline: Identify strategies to retain and attract people, especially young adults	✓	Enhance Economic Competitiveness: Identify strategies to increase economic opportunity
Address Low Attainment: Identify strategies to increase educational attainment	✓	Support Existing Communities: Identify strategies to ensure sustainability of local communities.
Address Limited Access: Identify strategies to better connect residents with services	✓	Coordinate and Leverage Federal Policies and Investment: Identify strategies to better utilize resources
Address Critical Health Issues: Identify strategies to encourage healthier lifestyles	✓	Value Communities and Neighborhoods: Identify strategies to improve local neighborhoods



Strategy 1. Civic & Leadership Development



MOVING THE NEEDLE

Measurement	Current Regional Baseline	Five-Year Desired	Ten-Year Desired
Voter Participation ¹	48.48% (50.43% State)	State Average	Exceed State Average
Sales and Use Tax Collections ²	\$74,603,870	\$85 million	\$100 million
Active Steering Committees ³	19	21	21
Local Governments with Online Information	N/A	30%	50%
Number of Participants in EAPDD Leadership Program	N/A	25	100
Local Investment Made ⁴	\$25,982,281	\$30 million	\$50 million
Number of Formal, Local Leadership Programs in Place ⁵	5	8	12
Nonprofit funds raised/distributed	N/A	\$1 million	\$5 million
Active Regional Boards and Committees ⁶	N/A	3	6
High school graduate or higher, percent of persons age 25+, 2009-2013 ⁷	77.5% (83.7% State) (86.0% Nation)	State Average	National Average
Associate's degree or higher, percent of persons age 25+ ⁸	21% (26% State) (37% Nation)	State Average	National Average

Sources:

¹Arkansas Secretary of State, 2014 General Election Official Results

²Arkansas Department of Finance & Administration, 2013.

³East Arkansas Planning & Development District, 2015; Local Steering Committees

⁴East Arkansas Planning & Development District, 2014; Local investment in District administered projects.

⁵Arkansas State Chamber; Leadership Blytheville, Leadership Jonesboro, Leadership Paragould, Leadership Phillips County, Leadership Crittenden County

⁶East Arkansas Planning & Development District, 2015; Regional Boards and Committees

⁷US Census Bureau State and County Quickfacts, 2009-2013.

⁸2009-2013 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

Section III

Strategy 2 Infrastructure Development



Strategy 2. Infrastructure Development



Overview of Existing Conditions

More than any other strategy, Infrastructure Development was named as a priority in every aspect of the planning process. After three years of study, it's obvious that infrastructure is a significant pro and con in East Arkansas. The foundation has been laid for tremendous economic growth, with access to interstate, rail, port facilities, air service and freight transport. Water is an asset in the region, with a plentiful supply in place.

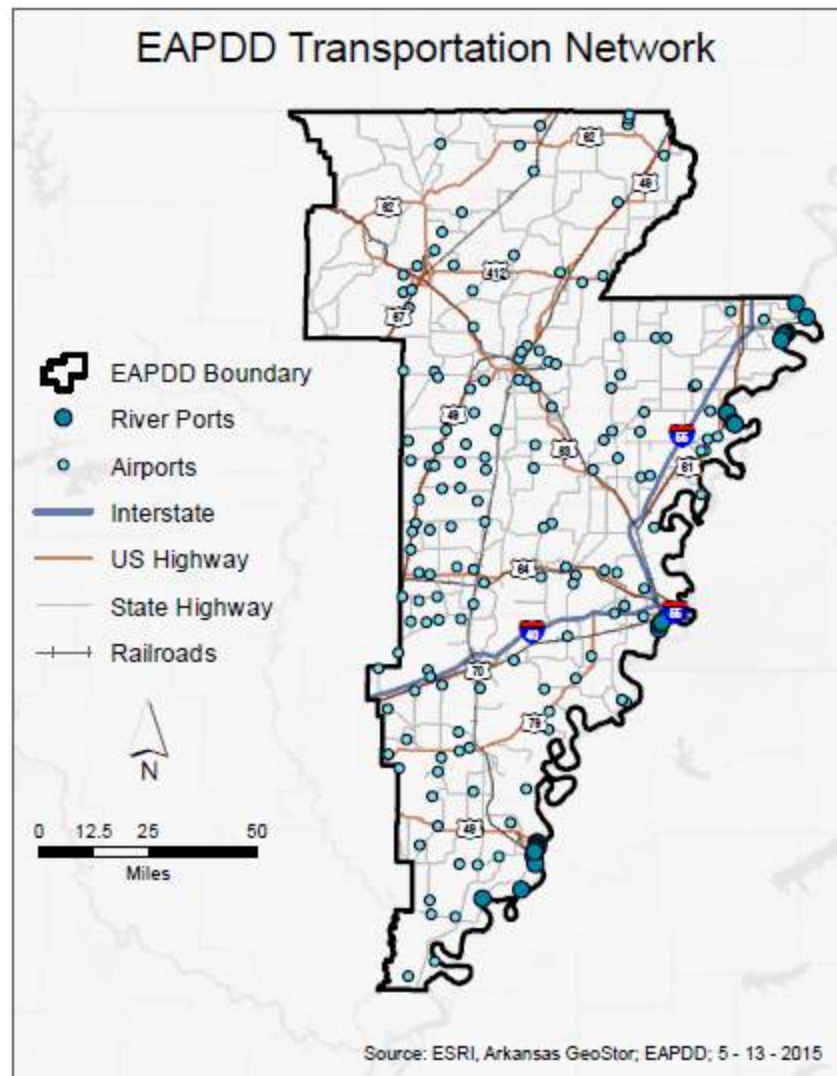
Yet there are also substantial issues with infrastructure. The quality of the road network is subpar, and major extensions of freight-worthy roads are badly needed. Access to transportation options is in short supply. Maintenance dollars are difficult to find in communities seeing shrinking populations. And, while water may be available now, there is no guarantee that the aquifer will always be so plentiful, especially without long-range conservation efforts.

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Transportation

The transportation network in East Arkansas is extremely important to the future of the region. Finding a way to connect people to resources – economic, social, educational, health, etc. – is going to be a big part of the region's success.

Interstates 40 and 55, along with their connecting highways, provide a backbone for freight transportation in America. These major highway systems serve as trade routes for global commerce, connecting with major port systems along the Mississippi, Class I Rail Systems and international air freight operations in neighboring Memphis, Tennessee.



Even with world-class access, there are challenges to ensuring that improvements continue to be made that actually provide better service. Improved regional connectivity has been cited by community leaders and residents as necessary to attract new employers and improve the economic development opportunities in the region. The following bullet points highlight the issues faced in East Arkansas related to transportation.

Planning

- There is no cohesive, regional vision for transportation infrastructure. Efforts to complete projects outside of the Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) are singular in nature rather than part of a larger effort. Local leaders are

Strategy 2. Infrastructure Development

often competing against neighboring communities and counties within the region for limited resources.

- Overall, communities lack the existence of – or local capacity to develop – long-range planning that identifies priorities for street improvements, whether maintenance or expansion.
- Arkansas is one of 18 states that do not officially recognize Rural Transportation Planning Organizations (RTPOs), which provide transportation planning support to rural areas.
- Funding for projects is limited, especially outside of urban areas. Local maintenance dollars are even more difficult to come by. Although the State of Arkansas ranks 9th overall in transportation disbursements¹, funding needs outweigh the resources.

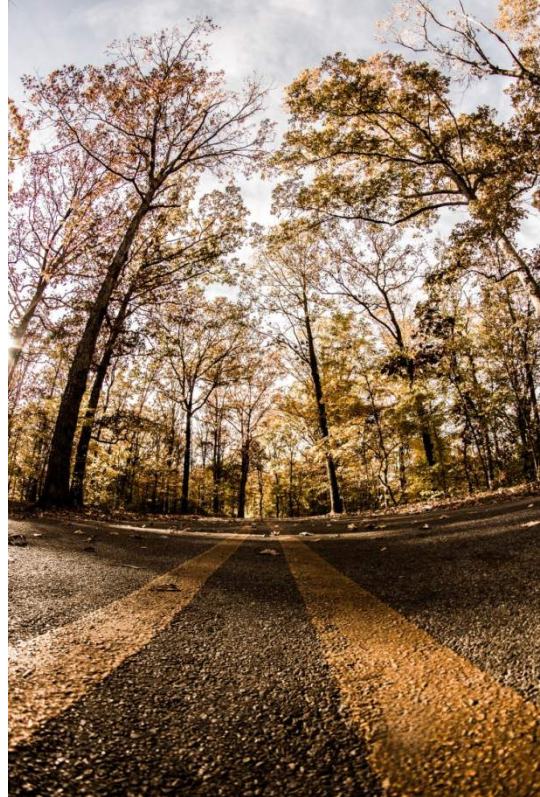
Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) 2013-2016		
County	Number of Projects	Amount (x \$1,000)
Clay	0	\$0
Craighead	7 (including 1 shared with Mississippi County)	\$127,095
Crittenden	14	\$73,743
Cross	1	\$1,100
Greene	3	\$28,300
Lawrence	2	\$46,200
Lee	3 (including 1 shared with Phillips County)	\$55,445
Mississippi	4	\$74,415
Phillips	2	\$2,200
Poinsett	1	\$1,250
Randolph	1	\$8,500
St. Francis	4	\$137,818
TOTAL		\$556,066
Source: Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) 2013-2016; Arkansas State Highway and Transportation Department		

¹ Hartgen, David T.; Fields, M. Gregory; Feigenbaum, Baruch. "21st Annual Report on the Performance of State Highway Systems (1984-2012)." Reason Foundation September 2014: 5.

Strategy 2. Infrastructure Development

Safety

- On average, drivers in the region spend over 40 minutes per day commuting, and over 80% of commuters travel alone.
- As of 2012, the state of Arkansas ranked 35th in overall quality and performance of their highway system². Despite higher rankings for funding disbursements, the state is near the bottom in several categories affecting East Arkansas:
 - Ranks 44th in Rural Interstate Pavement Condition
 - Ranks 31st in Rural Arterial Pavement Condition
 - Ranks 47th in Urban Interstate Pavement Condition
 - Ranks 46th in Fatality Rate
 - Ranks 47th in Narrow Rural Arterial Lanes
- Safety is a major concern for the region due to a mix of traffic on a number of rural roads. This mix includes passenger vehicles, farm vehicles and tractor trailers.
- Lack of sufficient lanes on rural roads contributes to the safety issue but is increasingly causing congestion in highly traveled corridors, particularly in rural corridors connecting metro areas.
- Disasters – especially those related to weather (particularly ice storms and flooding) – cause serious delays in the transportation system, sometimes shutting down traffic for days at a time.



Options and Affordability

- Households that lack reliable transportation have consistently raised concerns regarding the ability to reach necessary services, such as shopping, entertainment and medical services, due to the lack of multimodal options.

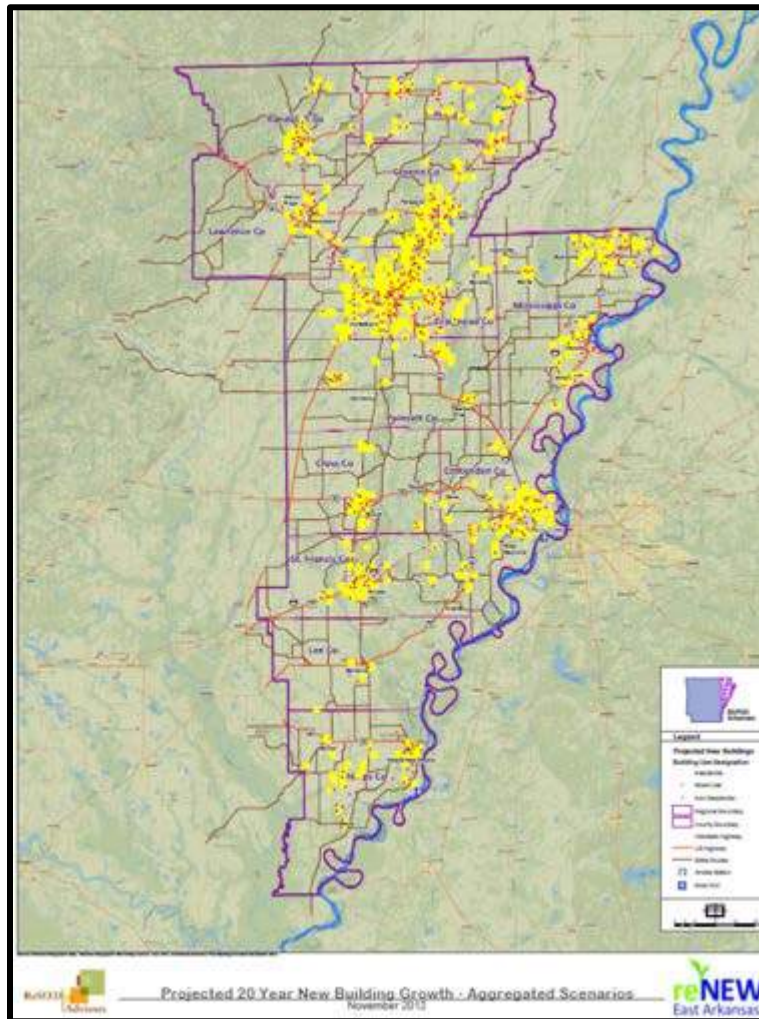
² Hartgen, David T.; Fields, M. Gregory; Feigenbaum, Baruch. "21st Annual Report on the Performance of State Highway Systems (1984-2012)." Reason Foundation September 2014: 5.

Strategy 2. Infrastructure Development

- Public Transit Services are limited to only parts of the region, leaving many citizens without transportation options. While coverage is offered in most of the counties, services are most on-call for certain segments of the population and not offered to everyone.
- Affordability for housing and transportation is an issue in many counties. Driving is a part of the culture in the region. Most people commute for work, health care, education, shopping and other services. Transportation costs are a major component of total living expenses, especially in the counties that can least afford it.

County	Housing Costs (% of Income)	Transportation Costs (% of Income)	Total Location Affordability (Housing + Transportation, % of Income)	Miles Driven Annually
Clay	26%	41%	67%	30,813
Craighead	26%	32%	58%	26,949
Crittenden	25%	27%	52%	27,575
Cross	26%	34%	60%	30,308
Greene	26%	33%	59%	27,904
Lawrence	26%	42%	68%	31,130
Lee	28%	50%	78%	30,073
Mississippi	25%	36%	61%	28,257
Phillips	28%	46%	74%	28,373
Poinsett	25%	34%	59%	30,366
Randolph	26%	41%	67%	30,446
St. Francis	27%	42%	69%	28,433
Source: Location Affordability Portal, US Department of Housing and Urban Development				

Strategy 2. Infrastructure Development



Projections

As a part of the planning process, participants from around the region took part in a series of scenario planning exercises in an effort to project where growth will occur over the next twenty years. The results – as seen visually in the adjacent map – demonstrate growth centered around existing communities and transportation routes.

The majority of the growth is projected to occur in and around the northeastern hub of Jonesboro, an area that has seen steady growth for the past twenty years. Yet there are other areas where growth is expected. Utilizing population projections provided by the US Census Bureau, an estimated

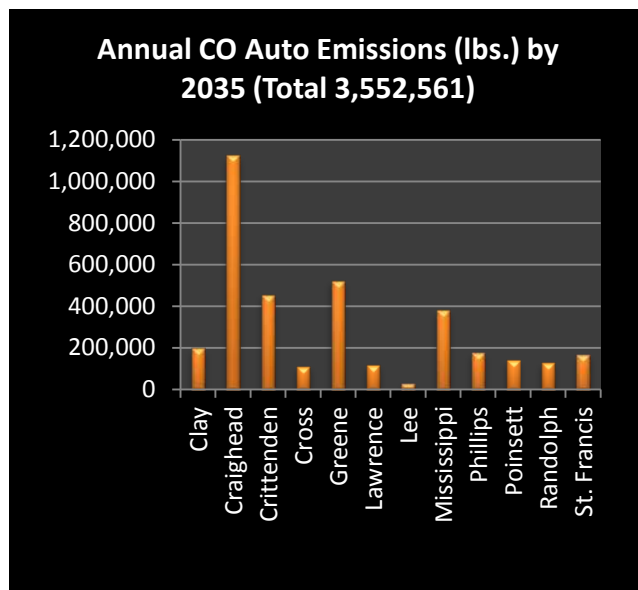
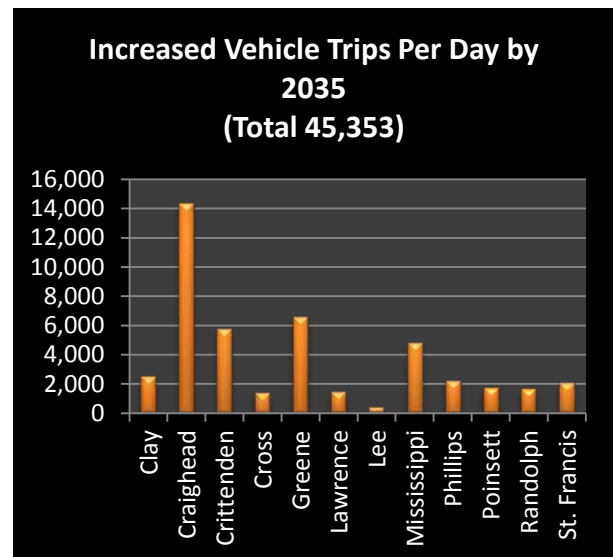
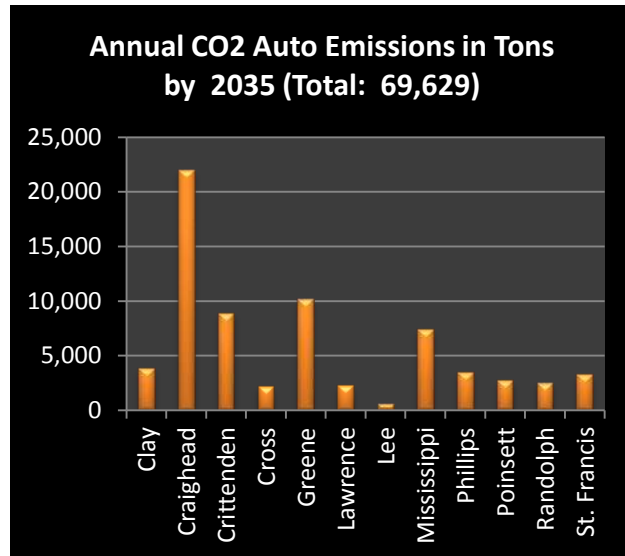
regional population growth of just over 20,000 people was divided up throughout the region by local leaders and community members.

It's important to keep in mind that these are only projections and are based on historical trends and factors known at the time. Since the scenario planning exercises occurred in 2012 and 2013, things have already changed. For example, a successful business recruitment effort was recently completed in the northern part of the region that will bring an estimated 1,100 new jobs to Randolph, Clay and Lawrence Counties. This area had not anticipated such a massive influx of jobs and the resulting demands on infrastructure.

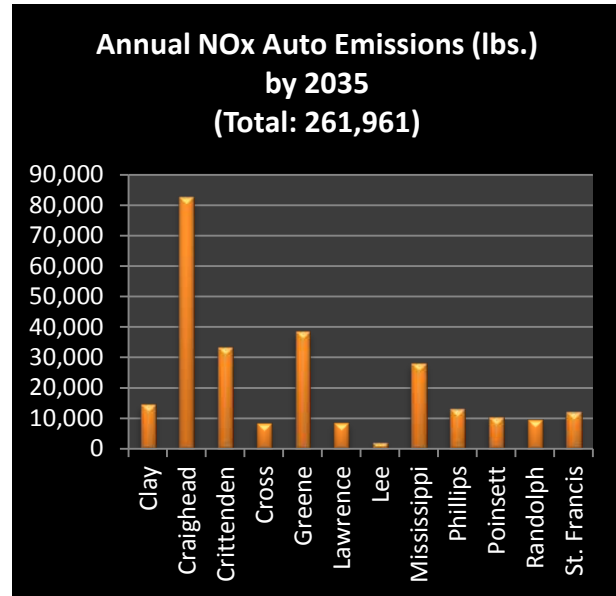
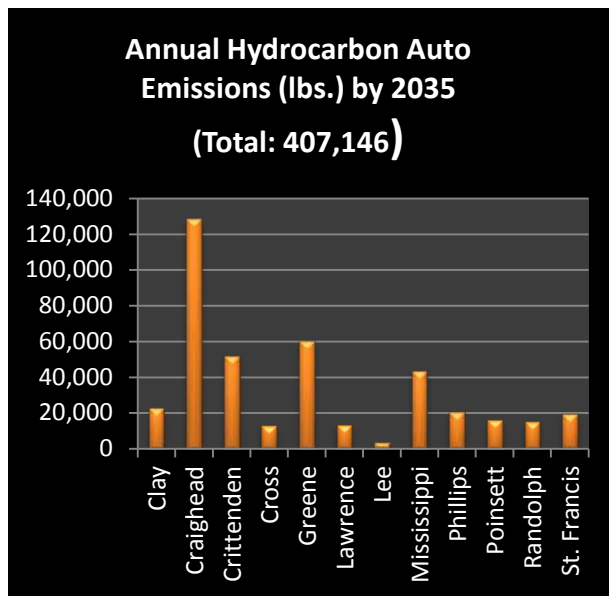
Still, the scenario planning exercise allowed the region to determine how growth is expected to occur and what impacts even a small amount of growth will have.

Strategy 2. Infrastructure Development

By plugging the results of the scenario planning exercise into projection software, an estimate of future impacts was produced. This information is fully delivered in the Land Use & Transportation Scenario Planning Report in the Appendices. A few of the more meaningful results are highlighted here.



Strategy 2. Infrastructure Development



Even a small projection in population growth over the next twenty years has a significant effect on the region. Increases in emissions and vehicle trips per day could have a substantial effect on air quality, traffic congestion and other factors that will affect quality of life.

Strategy 2. Infrastructure Development

Water & Wastewater

Water and wastewater infrastructure faces many of the same types of issues as transportation. Lack of planning and funding are major concerns for the long-term viability of communities and industry.

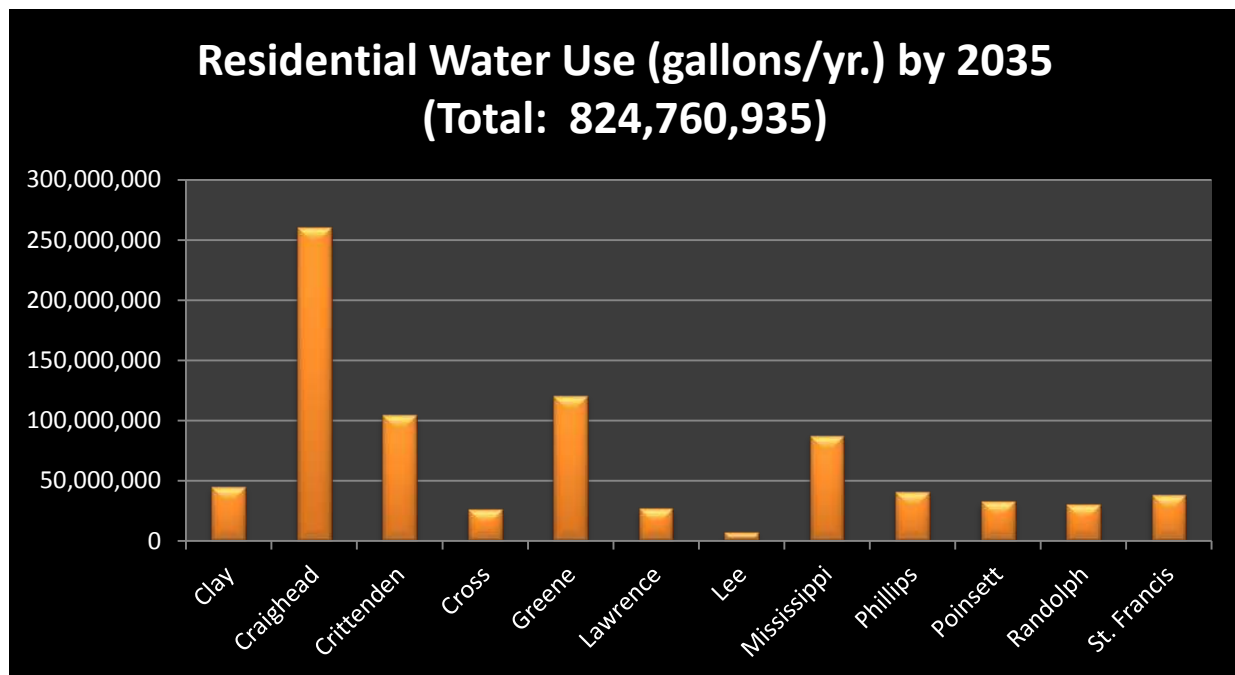
Agriculture is a key industry in East Arkansas. Farmers rely on consistent sources of water for large-scale crop production that drives the economy. Cotton, soy beans and rice are major commodities grown in the region – all are dependent upon water.

- Overall, communities lack the existence of – or local capacity to develop – long-range planning that identifies priorities for water or wastewater improvements, whether maintenance or expansion. Municipal budgets are often spent on “fixing the latest problem” instead of preventive solutions.
- The agricultural community is dependent upon a consistent water source and does its best to promote conservative water practices. However, long-term planning needs to be done to ensure the aquifer remains charged and available for use well into the future. Additionally, there is a concern about costs of waste management for agricultural activities, especially if additional food processing were to occur.
- In most cases, water quality and availability is adequate in the region.
- Mostly, wastewater services are adequate, though there are exceptions around the region. In some smaller communities, open ditches transport sewage to treatment facilities.
- The mix of municipal water providers and rural water districts can make for confusing policies and procedures and create an overlap of jurisdictions.



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- There is a need for increased maintenance funding for water and wastewater systems. Many communities need assistance to replace antiquated water and wastewater systems, including transmission lines, storage facilities and treatment facilities.
- Rates for water and wastewater utilities are relatively low in much of the region, making it difficult to keep up with maintenance costs or qualify for financial assistance. In many such instances, rates have not been raised regularly to accommodate increases in maintenance costs.
- Projected population increases, though small, will have an impact on the usage of water.



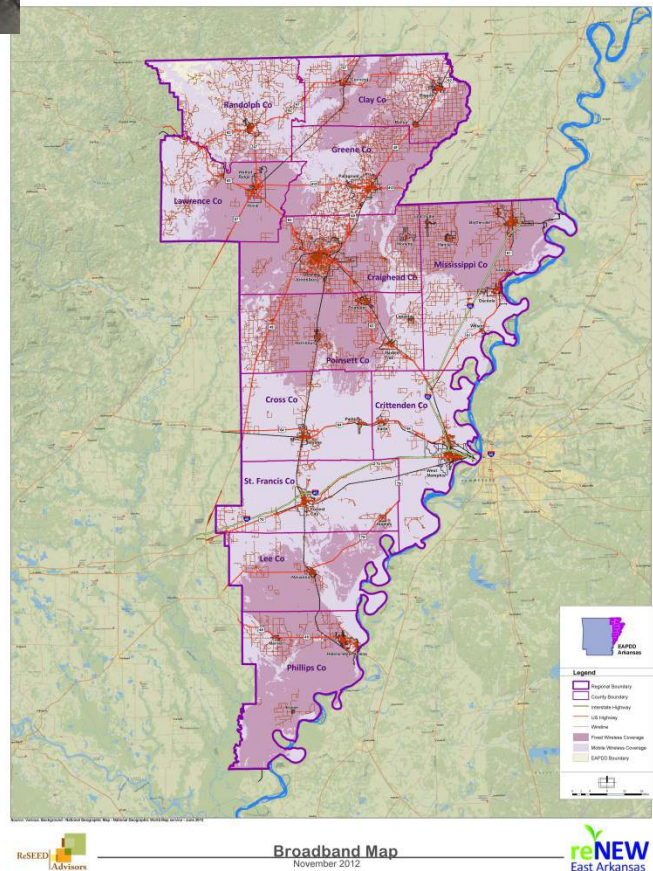
Strategy 2. Infrastructure Development

Telecommunications



Connectivity is more and more important, especially as small communities fall further behind. In urban areas, one can count on finding wireless connectivity and a strong cellular signal. In more rural areas, this service is not a given. People who live in these areas are at a disadvantage in today's online world.

Many small communities and rural areas of the region lack cost-effective, reliable access to high-speed Internet service or cellular service. The cost of installing the needed technology is prohibitive to small communities and counties. The lack of these services causes difficulties in all aspects of a community's livability.



Strategy 2. Infrastructure Development

Goals and Objectives

PRIORITY GOALS

Goal 2.1: Fully connect East Arkansas to high-speed telecommunications services.

- Objective 2.1.1: Conduct research analysis to determine options, feasibility and potential funding sources; consider models being developed outside of the US in rural areas of low population density.
- Objective 2.1.2: Based on results of analysis, develop a prioritized implementation plan in partnership with Connect Arkansas, corporate farmers, businesses, municipalities and land owners.
- Results Expected In: 2025
- Performance Measure: High-speed telecommunications throughout the region

Goal 2.2: Fully cover East Arkansas with quality cellular phone service.

- Objective 2.2.1: Conduct research analysis to determine options, feasibility and potential funding sources.
- Objective 2.2.2: Based on results of analysis, develop a prioritized implementation plan in partnership with Connect Arkansas.
- Results Expected In: 2025
- Performance Measure: Cellular phone coverage throughout region.

Strategy 2. Infrastructure Development

Goal 2.3: Develop a Regional Transportation Vision and Plan.

→ Objective 2.3.1: Form a Transportation Committee with representatives from all twelve counties, MPOs and additional expertise as needed.

→ Objective 2.3.2: Develop a model of the existing transportation network to show the existing federal, state and significant local roadways; funded projects that are or will be constructed; network performance data (traffic, accidents, average speed, etc.); and any special corridor or activity designations.



→ Objective 2.3.3: Develop and formalize procedures for prioritizing projects, including a process schedule, scoring criteria, voting system and voting process.

→ Objective 2.3.4: Based on the approved process, issue a call for projects, distribute and score projects and vote on a final prioritized list.

→ Objective 2.3.5: Utilize the prioritized list to promote projects within the region for inclusion in the Statewide Transportation Improvement Plan (STIP).

→ Objective 2.3.6: Utilize the prioritized list to promote projects to state and federal legislators.

→ Results Expected In: 2018

→ Performance Measure: Prioritized transportation project list in place

TOOLS TO USE:

Field Guide
For
Regional
Transportation
Development

&

Appendix:
Land Use &
Transportation in
East Arkansas

Strategy 2. Infrastructure Development

Goal 2.4: Develop a Rural Transportation Planning Organization.

- Objective 2.4.1: Review the Transportation and Land Use Plan Sample Guidelines for Formation of Rural Transportation Planning Organization (RTPO).
- Objective 2.4.2: Talk to Transportation Departments and RTPOs from other states that allow these organizations to learn firsthand the benefits and costs.
- Objective 2.4.3: Develop data supported material that tells the story of rural transportation systems in East Arkansas, especially related to the prioritized list of projects and the flow of funding to rural areas.
- Objective 2.4.4: Present information to Arkansas State Highway and Transportation Department Commissioner and staff to discern next steps.
- Objective 2.4.5: Work with elected officials to garner support from legislators representing the region.
- Results Expected In: 2025
- Performance Measure: Rural Transportation Planning Organization in place

SECONDARY GOALS

Goal 2.5: Promote policy change to allow cities and rural water districts to consolidate.

- Objective 2.5.1: Hold a retreat with municipal and rural water providers and Arkansas Natural Resources Commission staff to discuss options and develop a plan of action.



Strategy 2. Infrastructure Development

→ Results Expected In: 2025

→ Performance Measure: Policy is changed, if feasible

Goal 2.6: All communities in need of financial assistance for water and wastewater facilities will have an adequate rate structure in place by 2035.

→ Objective 2.6.1: Host educational summits around the region for community leaders that allow resource providers to demonstrate the need for adequate utility rates.

→ Objective 2.6.2: Prepare and provide take-away material for community leaders to utilize and share with citizens on the necessity for adequate rates.

→ Objective 2.6.3: Host educational forums with resource experts such as Arkansas Natural Resources Commission, Communities Unlimited, Arkansas Economic Development Commission's Grants Management Division, USDA, etc. to inform leaders about options.

→ Objective 2.6.4: Work with partners to identify resources to fund five utility rate studies per year; contract to perform such services.

→ Objective 2.6.5: Identify possible sources of funding to upgrade municipal technology to allow for better record keeping.

→ Results Expected In: 2018

→ Performance Measures:

- Educational summits held
- Educational material developed and shared
- Five utility rate studies per year
- Upgrades to municipal technology

Goal 2.7: All communities have adequate and safe community facilities, water and wastewater systems in place by 2035.

→ Objective 2.7.1: Identify communities with immediate community facilities, water and wastewater needs and review existing rate structures for necessary adjustments.

Strategy 2. Infrastructure Development

- Objective 2.7.2: Identify potential funding sources for assistance and work with communities to develop a funding plan, including rates, grants and loans.
- Objective 2.7.3: Assist communities in the preparation and administration of funding assistance applications.
- Objective 2.7.4: Ensure projects are completed in compliance with funding source and ADEQ regulations.
- Objective 2.7.5: Continue the cycle of identifying and completing projects as rate studies in Goal 2.6 are completed.
- Results Expected in: 2018 and ongoing
- Performance Measures:
 - Three communities receive upgrades facilities by 2018
 - All communities in need have upgraded facilities by 2035

Goal 2.8: All communities over 1,500 in population will have long-range comprehensive plans for water, wastewater, transportation and land use in place by 2035.


- Objective 2.8.1: Identify which communities have current plans in place and determine which communities desire to create such a plan.
- Objective 2.8.2: Develop educational forums to discuss the needs and benefits for long-range planning and bring to light any concerns from community leaders.
- Objective 2.8.3: Determine the cost of conducting such analyses, and identify potential funding resources.
- Objective 2.8.4: Fund and deliver three long-range, comprehensive plans per year.
- Results Expected In: 2018
- Performance Measures:
 - Educational forums held
 - Three long-range plans done per year

Strategy 2. Infrastructure Development

East Arkansas Principles for Growth and Development			Partnership for Sustainable Communities Livability Principles
Address Low Capacity: Identify strategies to build capacity at every level	✓	✓	Provide More Transportation Choices: Identify strategies that provide more options for residents
Address High Poverty: Identify strategies to reduce extreme poverty			Promote Equitable, Affordable Housing: Identify strategies to provide more housing options
Address Population Decline: Identify strategies to retain and attract people, especially young adults		✓	Enhance Economic Competitiveness: Identify strategies to increase economic opportunity
Address Low Attainment: Identify strategies to increase educational attainment		✓	Support Existing Communities: Identify strategies to ensure sustainability of local communities.
Address Limited Access: Identify strategies to better connect residents with services	✓	✓	Coordinate and Leverage Federal Policies and Investment: Identify strategies to better utilize resources
Address Critical Health Issues: Identify strategies to encourage healthier lifestyles	✓	✓	Value Communities and Neighborhoods: Identify strategies to improve local neighborhoods



Strategy 2. Infrastructure Development

<div>  <h1>MOVING THE NEEDLE</h1> </div>			
Measurement	Current Regional Baseline	Five-Year Desired	Ten-Year Desired
Average Commute Time (one-way) ¹	21.7 minutes	15 minutes	15 minutes
Commuters driving alone to work (16 and older) ²	80.9%	70%	60%
Miles of Interstate, Freeways, Expressways and Other Principal Arterials ³	645	To be determined	To be determined
Highway Fatality Rates in Region ⁴	80	70	60
Communities with Current Land Use Plans in Place ⁵	38%	45%	50%
Communities with Current Capital Facilities plans in place ⁶	To Be Collected	5	10
Average Water Rate ⁷	To Be Collected	To be determined	To be determined
Average Wastewater Rate ⁸	To Be Collected	To be determined	To be determined
% of Region with High-speed Internet Access ⁹	http://www.connect-arkansas.org/internet-availability/county-coverage-maps	75%	100%
% of Region with Cellular Phone Coverage ⁹	http://www.connect-arkansas.org/internet-availability/county-coverage-maps	75%	100%

Strategy 2. Infrastructure Development

Sources

¹2009-2013 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

²2009-2013 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

³U.S. Arkansas State Highway and transportation department-Road and Street Report 2011

⁴Arkansas State Police; 2012 Traffic Crash Statistics.

⁵Community-based surveys

⁶Information will need to be collected with community-based surveys

⁷Information will need to be collected with community-based surveys

⁸Information will need to be collected with community-based surveys

⁹Connect Arkansas

Section IV

Strategy 3 Affordable, Quality Housing



Strategy 3. Affordable, Quality Housing



Overview of Existing Conditions

Throughout the planning process, lack of quality housing stock was continually raised as an issue for much of the region. This is one area where both urban and rural areas are affected. Lack of affordable housing, dilapidated neighborhoods, poor credit and low incomes are all contributing factors.

Some communities in the region are seeing economic growth and investment only to see the people filling jobs end up residing elsewhere. The dearth of quality housing is one of the reasons.

This is the case in Mississippi County, where economic development successes have brought thousands of new jobs to its communities over the past ten years. However, those jobs haven't translated to a growing, thriving county. Instead, Mississippi County continues to see more population decline, lower educational

Strategy 3. Affordable, Quality Housing

attainment rates and higher poverty percentages than the region as a whole. A separate housing analysis was conducted in partnership with the reNEW project. The following excerpt from this analysis reveals findings that, while specifically designed for Mississippi County, seem to be typical in many parts of the region.

Establishing the condition of a community's housing inventory is important for determining policy solutions needed to meet the demand of future residents. Evaluating the type of housing, age of housing stock, rental and homeownership status, foreclosure and vacancy rates, and overcrowding conditions provides a full picture of housing opportunities and challenges. After analyzing the housing stock of Mississippi County and Blytheville as compared to the East Arkansas Region, several important housing conditions and trends have been revealed.

Housing Stock is Older on Average - Housing stock is older in the study areas when compared with the region, both for rental and owner-occupied housing. Aging units and the need for modernization and ongoing maintenance can have an impact on the value of rental and owner occupied housing units.

Higher Vacancies and Overcrowding Rates –Both vacancy rates and overcrowding rates in the study areas are higher than the East Arkansas Region as a whole, which supports previous findings of high cost-burdens in both the rental and ownership markets.

Lack of Housing Options - Both homeowners and renters alike are faced with significantly limited housing options. A shortage of multi-family rental units places a burden on the existing single-family housing by creating a stronger market for single-family rental housing and reducing potential for owner-occupation of existing single-family units. The development of more multifamily rental housing could result in the conversion of single-family rental housing stock to owner-occupied units.

What follows is a summary of findings by topic.

- Between 2006 and 2011, 3% of new single-family homes permitted in the Eastern Arkansas Region were developed in Mississippi County.
- According to the 2010 U.S. Census, 433 multifamily units were issued building permits in the entire East Arkansas Region. This amount equates to roughly 1% of all permitted units in the region during this period. Data was not provided on building permits for Mississippi County and Blytheville.
- There may be a shortage of multi-family housing options in Mississippi County, as indicated by the high rate of single-family housing stock for Mississippi County (72.1%) and Blytheville (72.6%), and low percentages of multi-family housing stock for Blytheville (16.8%) and for Mississippi County (11.1%). These trends are comparable to the region.

Strategy 3. Affordable, Quality Housing

- Mississippi County (47.3%) and Blytheville (56%) have significantly higher percentages of pre-1970 housing stock than the East Arkansas Region (36.8%). Older homes can often require more maintenance and improvement than newer homes. Maintaining this housing stock over time is critical to supporting community reinvestment.
- Renters in Blytheville, Mississippi County, and East Arkansas were more likely to be in dwellings that were built before 1970. The age and quality of rental properties could be having a significant impact on the local rental markets. The recent construction and successful leasing of new multi-family rental property developments in Blytheville are some indication of this trend.
- Homeownership rates in the study areas are lower than the region on average. Between 2006 and 2010, 62% of units were owner-occupied in East Arkansas, compared to 57.8% in Mississippi County and 51.8% in Blytheville.
- The percentage of single-family rental housing in Blytheville (53.1%) and Mississippi County (53.8%) is slightly higher than the region (50.0%).
- African-American and Hispanic households had lower ownership rates in all of the study areas.
- Although the foreclosure rate in Blytheville and Mississippi County (1 in every 1,550 homes) is higher than the statewide average (1 in every 1,747 homes), it is also lower than several neighboring communities, including Jonesboro (1 in every 843 homes) and Craighead County (1 in every 854 homes).
- For 2006-2010, the vacancy rate for housing in Blytheville (20.9%) was significantly higher than Mississippi County (17.1%) and East Arkansas (16.2%), which follows declining population trends.
- Overcrowding, while not a significant factor, is slightly more common in Mississippi County (3.3%) and Blytheville (3.5%) than the East Arkansas Region as a whole (2.5%), which follows the major trend of poverty in those areas.

Source: Mississippi County Smart Growth Evaluation Report DRAFT 2015

Regional Conditions

For the purposes of the regional plan, a complete housing analysis was conducted by JQUAD Planning Group (see Appendices for the full report). This plan included six components:

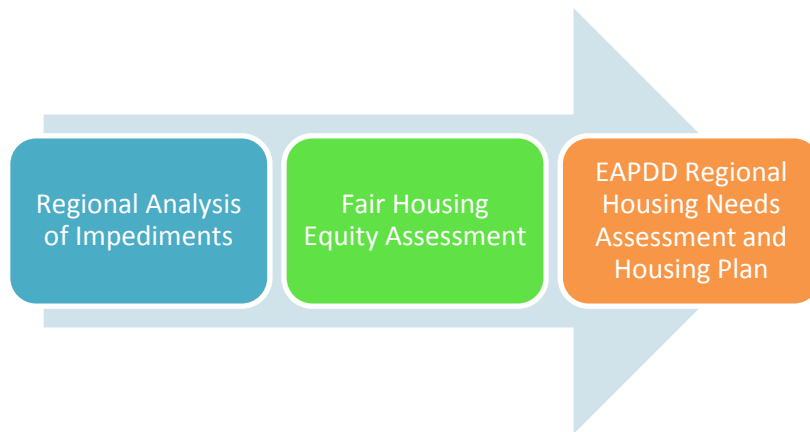
1. Socio Economic Characteristics/Housing Market Analysis – Supply, Demand, and Gap Analysis.
2. Housing Needs Analysis/Key Issues Assessment.
3. Housing Strategies, Recommendations and Regional Housing Policies, and Interdisciplinary Problem Solving of Issues Relative to Housing.
4. Regional Fair Housing Impediment (FHEA) and Economic Opportunity Assessment of Populations Performing Below Regional Median, and Racial Segregation and Housing De-concentration Analysis.

Strategy 3. Affordable, Quality Housing

5. Community Engagement and Public Policy Analysis.
6. Housing Element Recommendations.

The 12-county East Arkansas Planning Region was divided into two submarket regions for purposes of this analysis: the Northern Region Submarket with seven counties and Southern Region Submarket with five counties. The Northern Region consists of Clay, Craighead, Greene, Lawrence, Mississippi, Poinsett, and Randolph Counties, and various cities including Jonesboro, Blytheville, Paragould, etc. The Southern Region Submarket consist of Crittenden, Cross, Lee, Phillips, and St. Francis Counties, and various cities including West Memphis, Helena-West Helena, Forrest City, etc. (See Appendices for a complete explanation of the approach and methodology used).

After thoroughly assessing the region and its housing needs, the findings below were realized to be common conditions throughout the twelve counties.



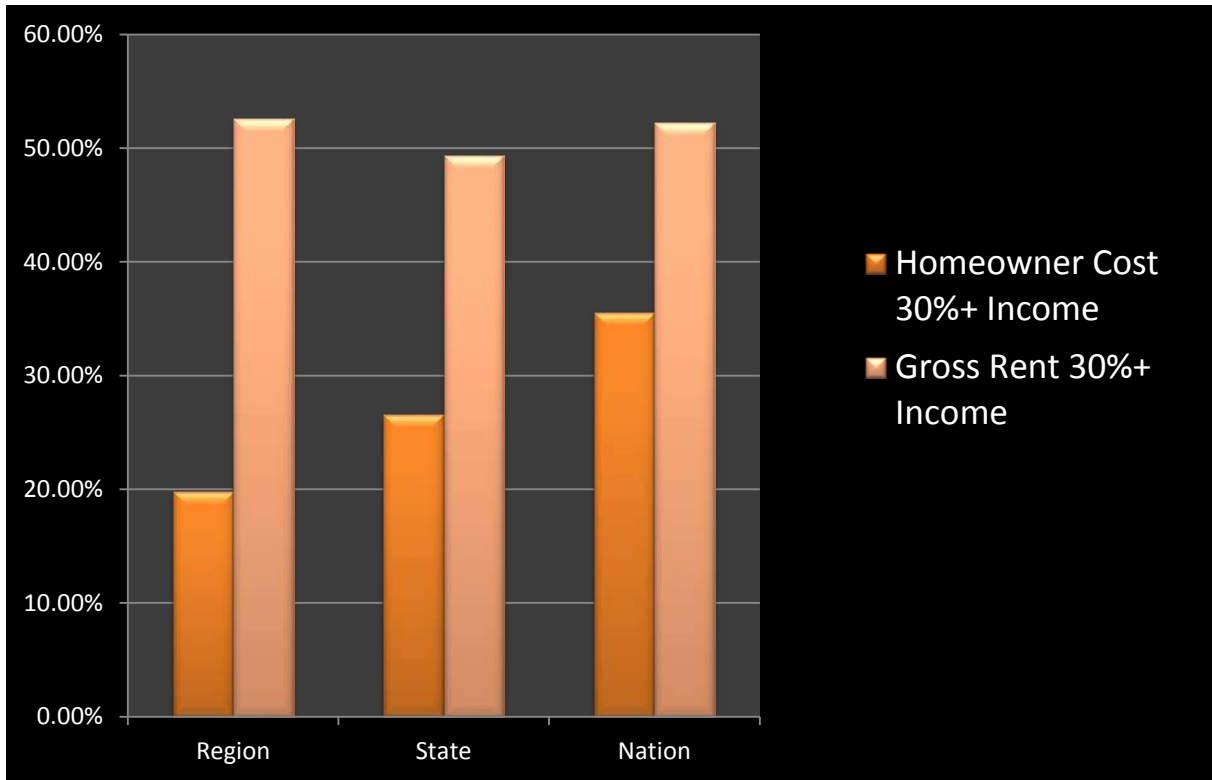
Affordability

Housing affordability and insufficient income hinder the ability to find quality housing in the region:

- Affordability and Financing for Housing is Limited.
- Cost is increasing and subsidy for lower income wage earners is limited.
- Access to Affordable Housing near Major Employment Centers is limited.
- Housing for Seniors and People with Disabilities is limited.
- Affordable Units for Large and Extended Families are limited.
- Market rents are generally affordable to median income households, but not for low, very low- and extremely-low income households.
- Supply of Available Land and Land Costs are Constraining.
- Construction Costs are not a factor.

Strategy 3. Affordable, Quality Housing

- The subprime mortgage lending crises and increased foreclosures have impacted the region.
- Predatory lending and other industry practices are problems in the region.



Options

- There are limited resources available to assist lower income, elderly and indigent homeowners maintain their homes and stability in neighborhoods.
- There are historical and sustained patterns of segregation and concentration of racial/ethnic minority populations, poverty and low income population, and public and assisted housing.
- Barriers exist to Fair Housing Choice that impact special need populations, including:
 - Elderly Persons and Households.
 - Persons with Disabilities.
 - Homeless Individuals.
 - Limited English Proficiency (LEP) Individuals.
 - Female Headed, Female Headed with Children and large Family households.
 - Unemployed Persons.

Strategy 3. Affordable, Quality Housing

- Public transportation and mobility are limited and inefficient.

Policy

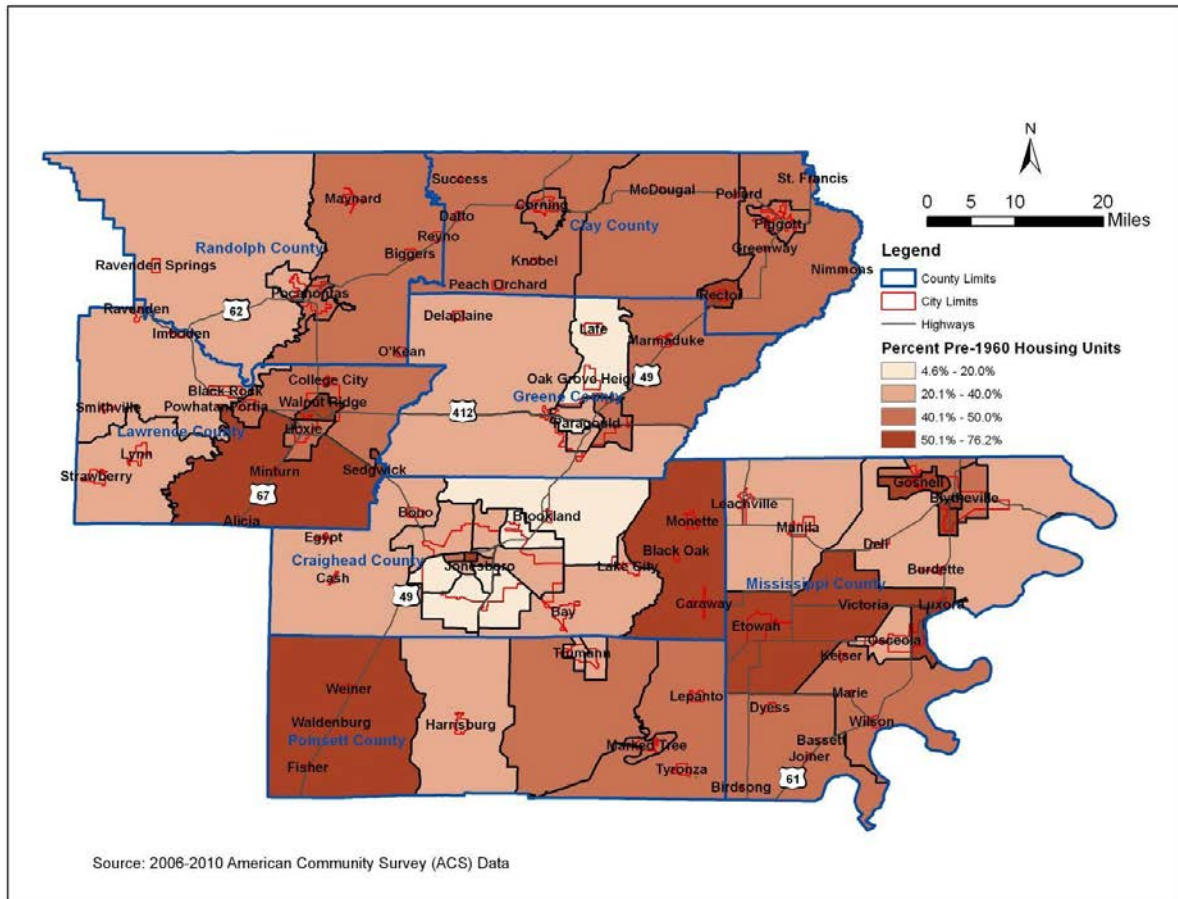
- A structure for regional governance does not exist for implementation of the Regional Analysis of Impediments and Fair Housing Equity Assessment.
- Public awareness of fair housing rights is lacking.
 - Greater public awareness of Fair Housing is needed.
 - Additional Fair Housing services are needed.
- No overall housing policy exists for the EAPDD Region.
- Arkansas is unique among the 50 states in regards to state Landlord/Tenant law. A.C.A. §18-16-110 doesn't afford the same habitability protections to renters as other states. This has a big impact on the quality of rental housing in Arkansas, let alone the region. The state law also has a "criminal eviction" section (A.C.A. §18-16-101) whereby a renter who misses a rent payment and fails to vacate within 10 days of being notified is automatically guilty of a misdemeanor.

Strategy 3. Affordable, Quality Housing

Goals and Objectives

PRIORITY GOALS

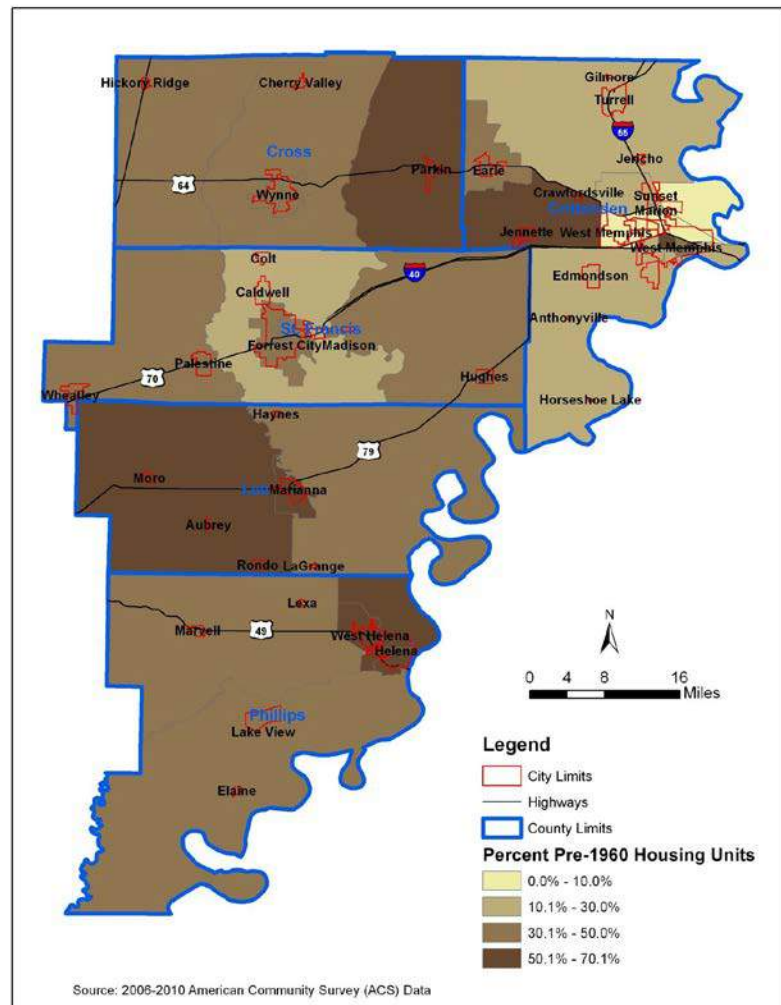
Goal 3.1: Develop a regional program to redevelop blighted and dilapidated properties.



- Objective 3.1.1: Design and Implement a Land Acquisition and Land Bank Program.
- Objective 3.1.2: Develop regional code enforcement program, including legal assistance for code development, sample ordinances and guidelines, and regional enforcement activities.

Strategy 3. Affordable, Quality Housing

- Objective 3.1.3: Develop plan to utilize vacant land held in Land Bank for other purposes until redevelopment is feasible (e.g., community gardens, parks, gathering spaces, parking areas).
- Results Expected In: 2020
- Performance Measures:
 - Land Bank Formed
 - Regional Code Enforcement program in place
 - Plan for vacant land in place



Goal 3.2: Develop an overall housing policy for the EAPDD Region.

- Objective 3.2.1: Define Affordable Housing providing a consistent basis for understanding the levels of support needed to address each population of need (persons at 30% of median, 50% and below, 80% and below and incomes above 80% of the area median income), and designating the appropriate agency – program – resource to respond to each segment of the population.
- Objective 3.2.2: Establish Numerical Production Goals for affordable housing and market rate housing based on the housing market analysis.

Strategy 3. *Affordable, Quality Housing*

- Objective 3.2.3: Create a Regional Affordable Housing Trust Fund and support a call for appropriations for the State of Arkansas Housing Trust Fund as a resource that supports production of Affordable Housing in the EAPDD Region.
- Objective 3.2.4: Utilize Local Incentives for Affordable Housing such as Tax and Fee Abatement, Tax Increment Finance, Public Improvement Districts, and Public Utility Districts, Elimination of Non-Tax Lien Encumbrances, Subsidies, Land Acquisitions, and Regulatory Incentives/Inclusionary Zoning.
- Objective 3.2.5: Adopt and implement effective Regulatory Changes in Code Enforcement, for distress rental properties at the local jurisdiction level.
- Objective 3.2.6: Seek increases in local allocations of Federal Section 8 Rental Assistance Vouchers from U.S. Department of HUD.
- Objective 3.2.7: Seek Local allocation of federal funding for Homeless Facilities and Domestic Violence Shelters.
- Objective 3.2.8: Promote the availability of housing for persons with disabilities and adopt “visitable housing standards” as part of the local building codes.
- Objective 3.2.9: Promote “green building” and energy efficiency in new construction and substantial rehabilitation of housing units.
- Objective 3.2.10: Actively pursue funding to support the development of new scattered site public and assisted housing in non-minority census tracts and areas that are not currently low income concentrated areas. Enact public policies that remove barriers and that support these developments throughout the city.
- Objective 3.2.11: Promote the creation of a regional housing agency and designation of that agency as an Entitlement Jurisdiction for CDBG and HOME Program allocations and funding as

TOOLS TO USE:

**Field Guide
For
Housing
Redevelopment**

&

**Appendix:
HUD Regional
Sustainable
Community Plan
Housing Element**

Strategy 3. Affordable, Quality Housing

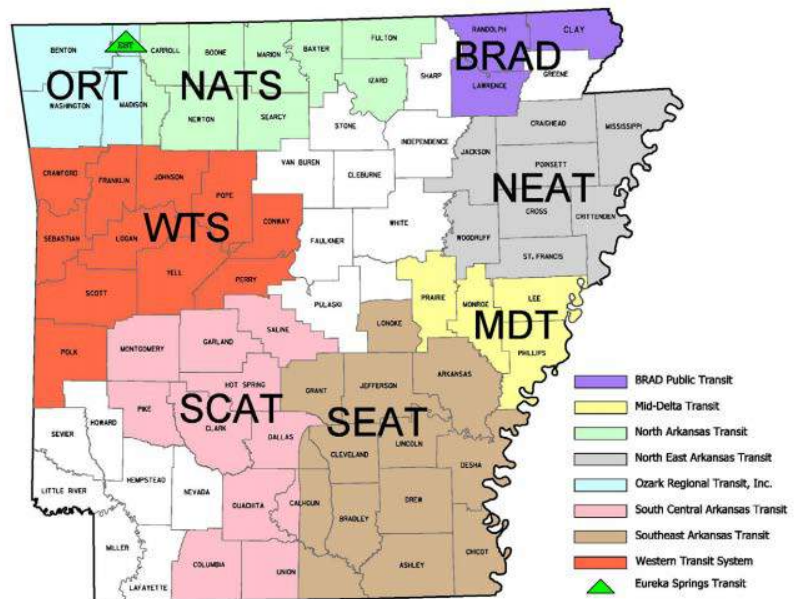
a Regional Public Housing Authority Agency for Public and Assisted Housing and Section 8 Rental assistance for rural communities not receiving entitlement or PHA funds.

- Objective 3.2.12: Consider advocating for revisions to the Landlord/Tenant law that would promote affordable, decent, safe, and sanitary rental housing.
- Results Expected In: 2017
- Performance Measures: Regional Housing Policy in Place

SECONDARY GOALS

Goal 3.3: Provide more opportunities for income-hindered citizens to access affordable housing.

- Objective 3.3.1:
Support the increased production of affordable housing through public private partnerships with developers and capacity building for nonprofits.
- Objective 3.3.2:
Facilitate access to below-market-rate units.
- Objective 3.3.3:
Maintain a list of partner lenders.
- Objective 3.3.4: Identify and seek additional sources of funds for affordable housing.



Source: Rural Public Transit Systems in Arkansas

Strategy 3. Affordable, Quality Housing

- Objective 3.3.5: Encourage private sector support for affordable housing initiatives.
- Objective 3.3.6: Provide credit counseling services to educate citizens on the importance of credit, how to improve credit and how to qualify for a mortgage.
- Results Expected In: 2025
- Performance Measures:
 - New, affordable, mixed income housing in place
 - Credit counseling programs in place

Goal 3.4: Assist lower income, elderly and indigent homeowners maintain their homes and stability in neighborhoods.

- Objective 3.4.1: Research available programs that could be utilized.
- Objective 3.4.2: Develop in-house expertise in these programs.
- Objective 3.4.3: Design and implement a centralized program of self-help initiatives.
- Results Expected In: 2020
- Performance Measure: Centralized program in place

Goal 3.5: Develop programs to combat historical and sustained patterns of segregation and concentration of racial/ethnic minority populations, poverty and low income population, and public and assisted housing.

- Objective 3.5.1: Create a voucher disbursement strategy which results in a 30 percent reduction of Section 8 voucher utilization in R-ECAP poverty and minority impacted census tracts, and no more than 30 percent utilization in any census tract in other jurisdictions.
- Objective 3.5.2: Create a Regional Housing "Move to Opportunity" Advisory Group as part of the EAPDD.

Strategy 3. Affordable, Quality Housing

- Objective 3.5.3: Support scattered site development which focuses on non-impacted areas of the Cities, or Counties.
- Objective 3.5.4: Implement programs that improve safety and decrease perceptions of crime in concentrated areas including Crime Prevention, Law Enforcement community policing, Weed and Seed, and Crime Prevention through Environmental Design Standards (CPTED).
- Results Expected In: 2025
- Performance Measures:
 - Voucher disbursement strategy in place
 - Advisory Group in place
 - Safety programs in place

Strategy 3. Affordable, Quality Housing

East Arkansas Principles for Growth and Development			Partnership for Sustainable Communities Livability Principles
Address Low Capacity: Identify strategies to build capacity at every level	✓	✓	Provide More Transportation Choices: Identify strategies that provide more options for residents
Address High Poverty: Identify strategies to reduce extreme poverty	✓	✓	Promote Equitable, Affordable Housing: Identify strategies to provide more housing options
Address Population Decline: Identify strategies to retain and attract people, especially young adults		✓	Enhance Economic Competitiveness: Identify strategies to increase economic opportunity
Address Low Attainment: Identify strategies to increase educational attainment		✓	Support Existing Communities: Identify strategies to ensure sustainability of local communities.
Address Limited Access: Identify strategies to better connect residents with services	✓	✓	Coordinate and Leverage Federal Policies and Investment: Identify strategies to better utilize resources
Address Critical Health Issues: Identify strategies to encourage healthier lifestyles		✓	Value Communities and Neighborhoods: Identify strategies to improve local neighborhoods

Strategy 3. Affordable, Quality Housing



MOVING THE NEEDLE

Measurement	Current Regional Baseline	Five-Year Desired	Ten-Year Desired
Homeowner Costs 30%+ Income ¹	19.8%	Same	Same
Gross Rent 30%+ Income ¹	52.6% (49.4% State)	State Average	Below State Average
Homeownership Rate ²	62.0%	Same	Same
African-American Homeownership Rate ²	40.7%	45%	Equal to Regional Average
Hispanic Homeownership Rate ²	39.3%	45%	Equal to Regional Average
Median Home Value ²	\$72,758	\$80,000	\$90,000
Median Gross Rent ²	\$531	n/a	n/a
Percentage of Home Purchase Loans Denied – Minorities ³	40.5%	35%	30%
Percentage of Home Purchase Loans Denied – White ³	23.7%	To Be Determined	To Be Determined
Percentage of Denials attributed to Credit History ³	65%	50%	40%
Sources ¹ U.S. Census Bureau, 2009-2013 5-Year American Community Survey ² U.S. Census Bureau, 2006-2010 5-Year American Community Survey ³ Federal Financial Institutions Examination Council Home Mortgage Disclosure Act, 2004-2009.			

Section V

Strategy 4 Healthy Communities



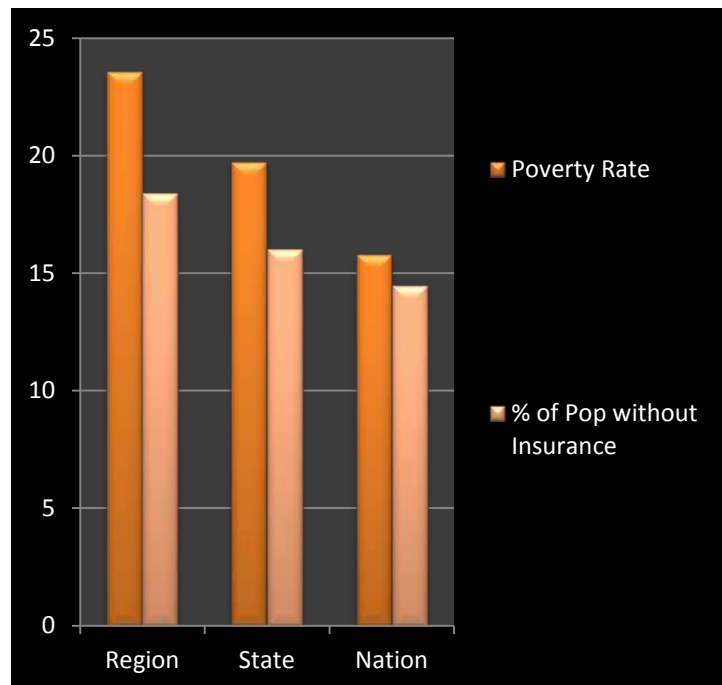
Strategy 4. Healthy Communities



Overview of Existing Conditions

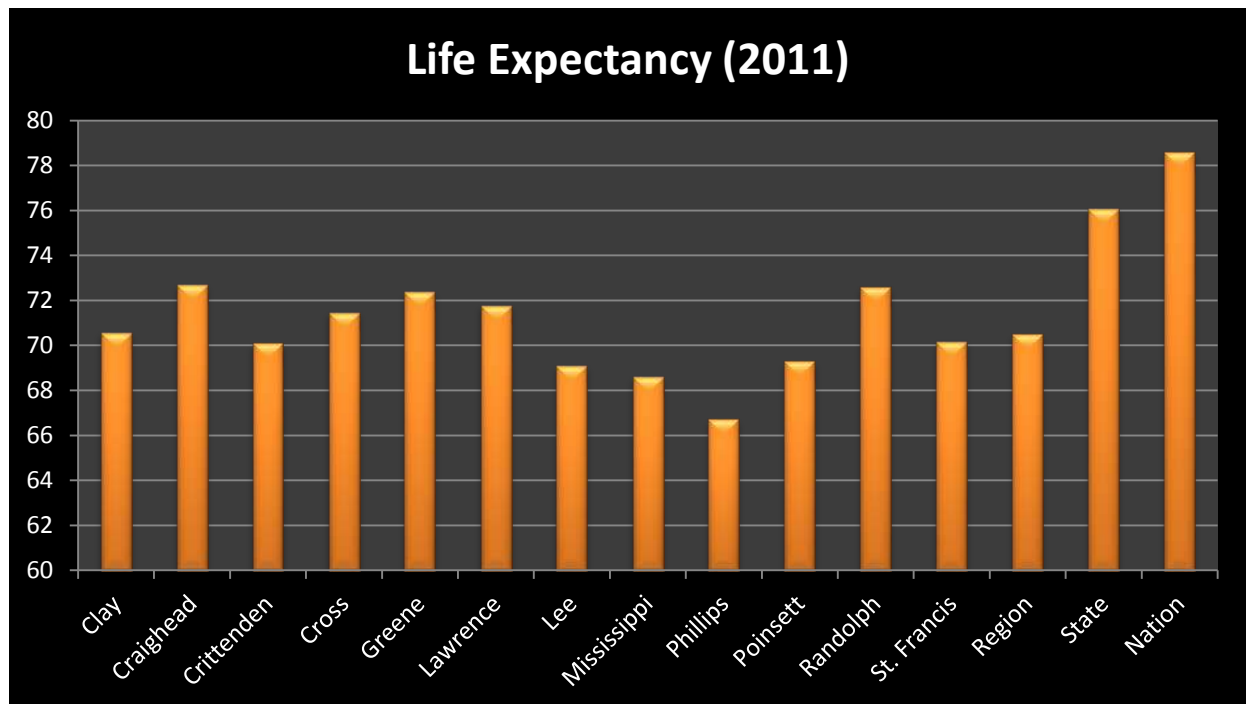
A healthy community is many things. It's a place where people have access to healthy lifestyle choices. It's a vibrant, lively and welcoming home for all ages. It's a clean, nurturing environment. And it's a location where safety comes first.

In East Arkansas, years of population and economic decline has taken its toll on communities in the region. There is a lack of community pride that is visible in the form of dilapidated and run-down properties, litter and overall malaise. Natural disasters – especially weather-related issues like flooding, tornadoes and ice storms – plague the region each year. Many communities are ill-equipped to deal with these disasters.



Strategy 4. Healthy Communities

People within the region also suffer from poor health. In some counties, the life expectancy rates are 10-12 years below the national average. Obesity, diabetes, heart disease and other chronic illnesses are observed at much higher rates. Even though chronic disease is common, there is little recognition of this issue from the general public. Many times, health problems are ignored until there is a crisis.



A contributing factor is the high poverty rate in the region of 23.6%, compared to 19.7% for the state and 15.8% nationally. Six of the twelve counties in the region are classified as “persistent poverty” counties, which means that the poverty rates have consistently been over 20% for the past 30 years. Relatedly, the percentage of the population with no health insurance coverage is higher in

Persistent Poverty Counties	
Crittenden	Lee
Mississippi	Phillips
Poinsett	St. Francis
Source: USDA Economic Research Service using US Census Data 1990-2010	

the region (18.4%) than the rest of the state (16.0%) and the nation (14.5%). Furthermore, while high quality healthcare services are prevalent in portions of the region, there are many areas where access is limited.

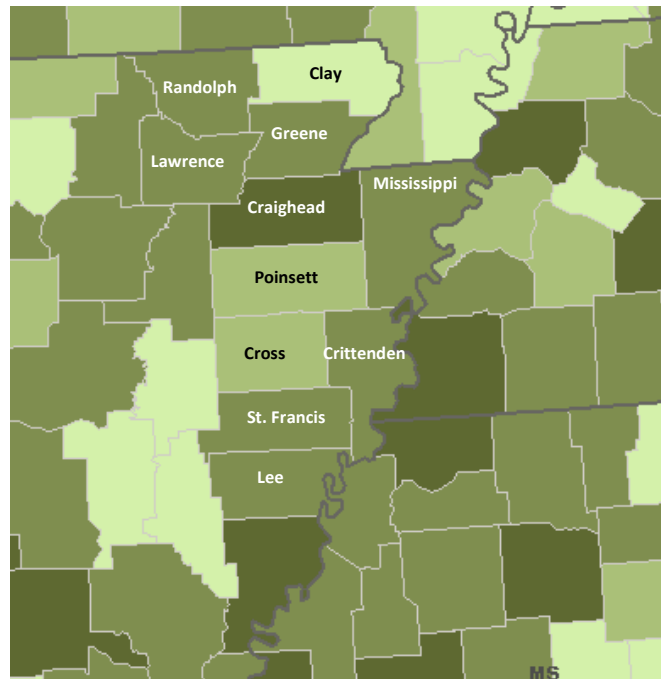
Strategy 4. Healthy Communities

Healthy lifestyles are not the norm in the region. Having access to healthy food and lifestyle choices is a serious concern in many communities. In an area of widespread agricultural production, there is little focus on fresh produce for the local population. Many urban and rural portions of the region are “food deserts” lacking retail access to fresh produce and other healthful foods. Yet, despite rich natural resources and community support, it is difficult for local farmers to make a living growing produce. In order to increase local produce access, consumer education will also be required to make healthy, local options more competitive.

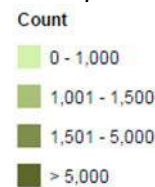
Specialty crops are more resource-intensive than commodity crops. In the Delta, profitability per acre is higher for commodities. Commodity crop farmers have also invested substantial resources in equipment and county on government subsidies each year. Changing to specialty crops is not an easy transition, made more difficult by the aerial chemical application needed for commodity crops that subsequently damages produce.

Regional farm production can meet only 5% of the fresh vegetable and 23% of the fresh fruit demand, unless the region is expanded. In the Mid-South, local capacity limits produce availability primarily to farmers markets and independent restaurants.

Consumers seeking local produce, and low-income markets needing fresh food access, are both critical targets. Income-limited consumers, as well as those willing to pay a premium for local food, represent a \$550 million produce market.



**Food Desert Distribution:
Number of Low Income Population with
Low Access to Stores, 2010**



Strategy 4. Healthy Communities

	Whole Population	Population Willing to Pay Up to 10% Premium for Local Food	Price-Sensitive Population
Low-Income (32% of population)	4,765	1,381 (29% of income)	3,383
Middle-Income (64% of population)	45,743	14,638 (32% of income)	31,105
High-Income (5% of population)	10,269	4,827 (47% of income)	5,443
Total	60,777	20,846 (34% of income)	39,931
Sources: US Census Bureau income data by county and AT Kearney <i>Ripe for Grocers – The Local Food Movement</i> national market assessment; Local food demand figures on the following pages assume the population willing to pay a premium would choose local whenever available, resulting in a 'maximum demand' figure. As shown on the barriers page, even populations willing to pay a premium for local foods often require education about seasonality, preparation, storage, and other factors before they will consistently choose the local option first.			

Brownfield properties are also abundant throughout the region. There is significant opportunity for redevelopment of these properties that would restore them to productive use.



Strategy 4. Healthy Communities

Goals and Objectives

PRIORITY GOALS

Goal 4.1: Ensure that all counties and the region as a whole are prepared for disasters.

- Objective 4.1.1: Survey all communities to identify where storm shelters and sirens are needed.
- Objective 4.1.2: Assist those communities in need with grant applications to supply these facilities.
- Objective 4.1.3: Conduct Hazard Mitigation planning for all counties to ensure that each has a current, FEMA-approved mitigation plan in place.
- Objective 4.1.4: Identify hazards with regional impacts and develop a region-wide mitigation plan to address.
- Objective 4.1.5: Conduct analysis to determine need, feasibility and potential structure of regional disaster response program.
- Results Expected In: 2025
- Performance Measures:
 - Storm shelters and sirens in all communities
 - Updated Hazard Mitigation plans for all counties
 - Regional mitigation plan in place
 - Feasibility of regional disaster response determined



Strategy 4. Healthy Communities

Goal 4.2: Support and expand existing low-income and food desert retail efforts to reach 40% adequate adult fruit and vegetable consumption in all counties by 2030.

- Objective 4.2.1: Ensure all regional farmer's markets are able to accept EBT through registration with USDA for appropriate equipment.
- Objective 4.2.2: Convene existing organizations to establish a tri-state community of practice, which can share best practices and gather/distribute regional data about the number of initiatives, dollars invested, residents served, sales of fresh or healthfully preserved produce, sales of local produce, and changes in dietary habits. The continued collection and provision of data will be a prerequisite to receiving regional funding support.

TOOLS TO USE:

**Field Guide
For
Local Food System
Development**

&

**Appendix:
Mid-South Regional
Food System Plan**

- Use data and leadership input to raise and direct funds toward expanding and replicating the most effective retail model(s).
- Results Expected In: 2030
- Performance Measures: 40% adequate adult fruit and vegetable consumption in all counties



Strategy 4. Healthy Communities

SECONDARY GOALS

Goal 4.3: Develop countywide beautification efforts for all twelve counties in the region.

→ Objective 4.3.1:
Through the newly developed nonprofit foundation, find funding for mini-grant programs to be utilized for community entrance beautification and countywide clean-up efforts.



→ Objective 4.3.2:
Develop success stories to showcase how beautification efforts can be completed quickly and easily and have an immediate impact on a community and county.

→ Objective 4.3.3: Educate Board and public on the connection between community beautification and economic development of all kinds.

→ Objective 4.3.4: Form a taskforce that includes leaders from cities, counties, Keep Arkansas Beautiful, Boy and Girl Scouts, Boys and Girls Clubs, senior centers, churches and schools to develop an annual "Clean Up East Arkansas" program.

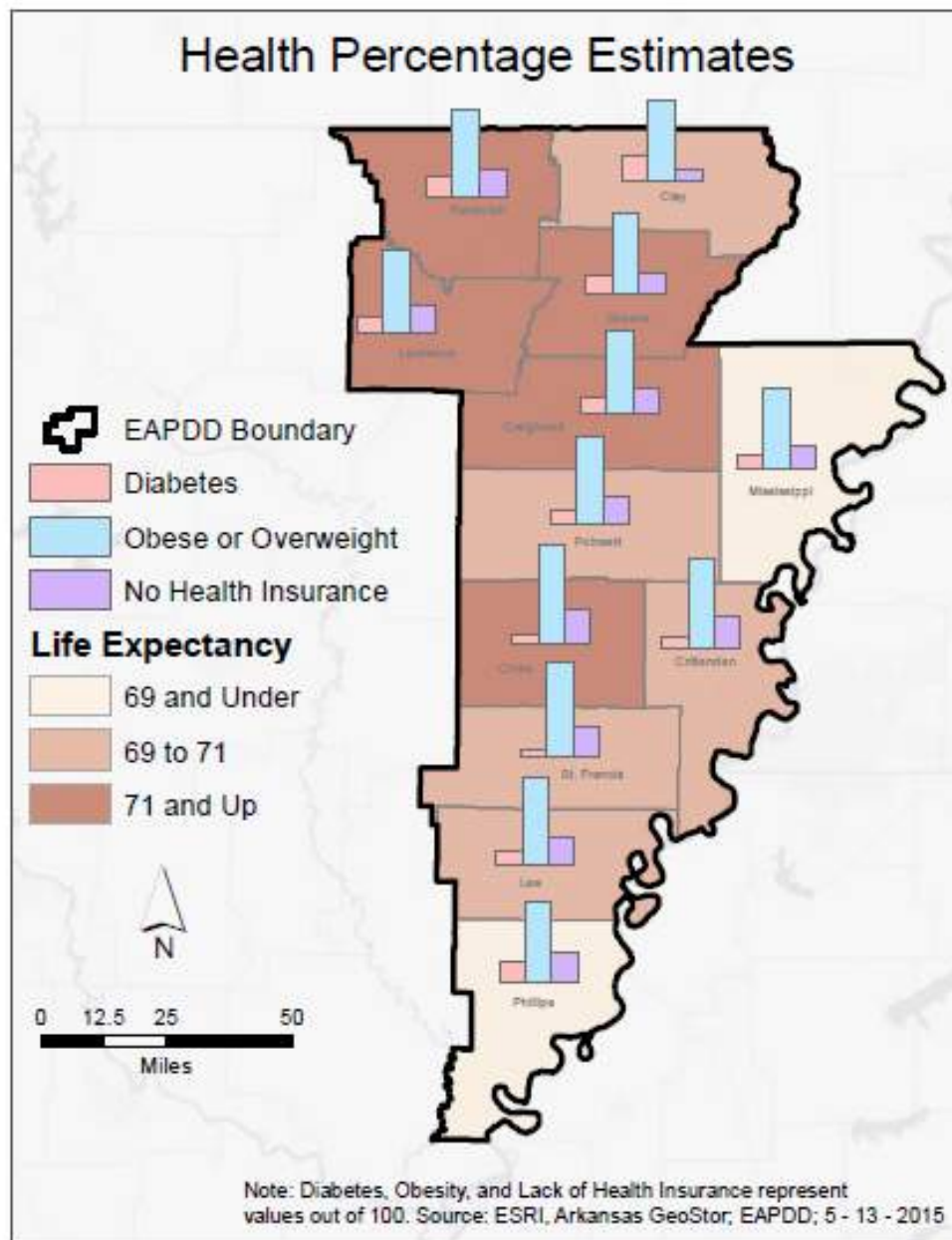
→ Results Expected In: 2020

→ Performance Measures:

- Mini-grants for community beautification in place
- Educational programs conducted
- "Clean Up East Arkansas" program in place

Strategy 4. Healthy Communities

Goal 4.4: Decrease the prevalence of chronic disease in the region.



- Objective 4.4.1: Conduct an economic impact analysis to demonstrate the effects of health quality on economic development and quality of life; share with leadership.
- Objective 4.4.2: Convene leaders from cities, counties, healthcare, education and business to form and launch a regional prevention campaign.

Strategy 4. Healthy Communities

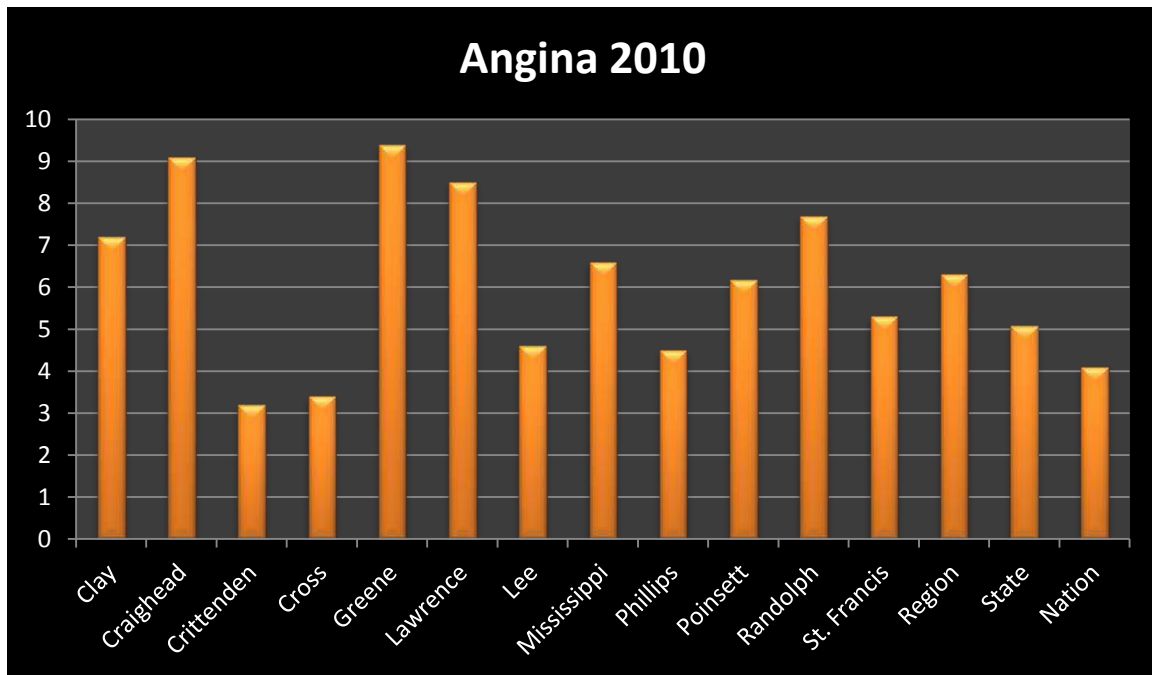
→ Objective 4.4.3: Expand Coordinated School Health Program throughout region.

→ Results Expected In: 2025

→ Performance Measures:

- Economic Impact Analysis completed
- Regional Prevention Campaign launched
- Coordinated School Health program expanded

2009	High Cholesterol	Hypertension
Region	44.7%	41.2%
Arkansas	38.7%	34.4%
United States	37.5%	28.7%
Source: Arkansas Center for Health Statistics		



Strategy 4. Healthy Communities

Goal 4.5: Reduce the number of brownfield sites in the region by 30%.

- Objective 4.5.1: Acquire funding to conduct Phase I and II environmental assessments for all identified properties within the region with potential contamination.
- Objective 4.5.2: Prepare a prioritized list of properties for clean-up and reuse, with a focus on redevelopment of properties that help to meet a strategic direction of this plan.
- Objective 4.5.3: Develop funding sources (including grants and revolving loan funds) to conduct clean-up efforts.
- Results Expected In: 2035
- Performance Measures:
 - Environmental assessments completed
 - Prioritized list of projects developed
 - Funding sources in place

TOOLS TO USE:

**Field Guide
For
Brownfields
Restoration**

Goal 4.6: Coordinate a regional effort to connect citizens to healthcare services.

- Objective 4.6.1: Utilize the economic impact analysis completed in Objective 4.4.1 to develop education pieces for local leadership.
- Objective 4.6.2: Develop a map showing service areas and identifying gaps.
- Objective 4.6.3: Coordinate a meeting between healthcare providers, public transportation agencies and elected officials to determine how to connect citizens to services.
- Results Expected In: 2020
- Performance Measures:
 - Economic Impacts Analysis shared
 - Map of service areas developed
 - Coordinated plan for providing services in place

Strategy 4. Healthy Communities

Goal 4.7: Establish and maintain 250 institutional gardening and composting programs, including at least one in every school district, by 2035.

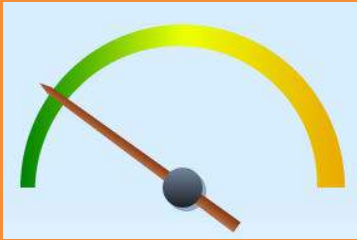
- Objective 4.7.1: Meet with The Kitchen Community of Memphis and other existing organizations to assess the feasibility of extending model into rural areas.
- Objective 4.7.2: Expand the Memphis and Shelby County Food Landscape Map of school and institutional gardens to incorporate all 12 counties in the East Arkansas region, and engage students in updating production data. Encourage voluntary listing of garden leader contact information for best practice sharing.
- Objective 4.7.3: Begin composting of garden and kitchen waste 1-2 years after each garden is established, allowing time to build buy-in.
- Results Expected In: 2035
- Performance Measures:
 - Institutional gardening and composting program established in East Arkansas region.

Strategy 4. Healthy Communities

East Arkansas Principles for Growth and Development		Partnership for Sustainable Communities Livability Principles
Address Low Capacity: Identify strategies to build capacity at every level	✓	Provide More Transportation Choices: Identify strategies that provide more options for residents
Address High Poverty: Identify strategies to reduce extreme poverty	✓	Promote Equitable, Affordable Housing: Identify strategies to provide more housing options
Address Population Decline: Identify strategies to retain and attract people, especially young adults	✓	✓ Enhance Economic Competitiveness: Identify strategies to increase economic opportunity
Address Low Attainment: Identify strategies to increase educational attainment		✓ Support Existing Communities: Identify strategies to ensure sustainability of local communities.
Address Limited Access: Identify strategies to better connect residents with services	✓	✓ Coordinate and Leverage Federal Policies and Investment: Identify strategies to better utilize resources
Address Critical Health Issues: Identify strategies to encourage healthier lifestyles	✓	✓ Value Communities and Neighborhoods: Identify strategies to improve local neighborhoods



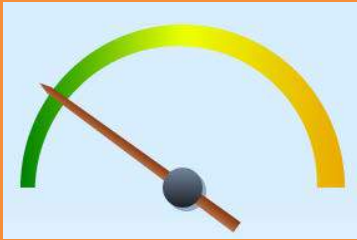
Strategy 4. Healthy Communities



MOVING THE NEEDLE

Measurement	Current Regional Baseline	Five-Year Desired	Ten-Year Desired
Median age ¹	38.2 years	State Average	National Average
Obesity (2010) ²	71.0%	State Average	National Average
Angina (2010) ²	6.3%	State Average	National Average
High Cholesterol (2009) ²	44.7%	State Average	National Average
Hypertension (2009) ²	41.2%	State Average	National Average
Diabetes Rate (2010) ²	12.7%	State Average	National Average
No health insurance ³	18.4%	State Average	National Average
Poverty Rate ⁴	23.6%	State Average	National Average
Life Expectancy (2011) ⁵	70.5 Years	5 Years Below State Average	State Average
Health Care Employment ⁶	19,813	21,000	23,000
Food Deserts	To Be Collected	To Be Determined	To Be Determined
Farmers Markets	To Be Collected	To Be Determined	To Be Determined
Community Gardens	To Be Collected	To Be Determined	To Be Determined
Percentage of Communities with Tornado Shelters	To Be Collected	To Be Determined	100%
Percentage of Communities with Warning Sirens	To Be Collected	To Be Determined	100%
Counties with current, FEMA-approved Hazard Mitigation Plan in place	To Be Collected	To Be Determined	100%
Number of Brownfield Properties	To Be Collected	To Be Determined	To Be Determined

Strategy 4. Healthy Communities



MOVING THE NEEDLE

Measurement	Current Regional Baseline	Five-Year Desired	Ten-Year Desired
<p>Sources:</p> <p>¹2009-2013 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates</p> <p>²Arkansas Center for Health Statistics</p> <p>³2009-2013 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates</p> <p>⁴U.S. Census Bureau, 2012 and 2013 American Community Surveys</p> <p>⁵Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation</p> <p>⁶EMSI listing extracted employment specific to healthcare from NAICS 62, 2013.</p>			

Section VI

Strategy 5 Education & Workforce Development



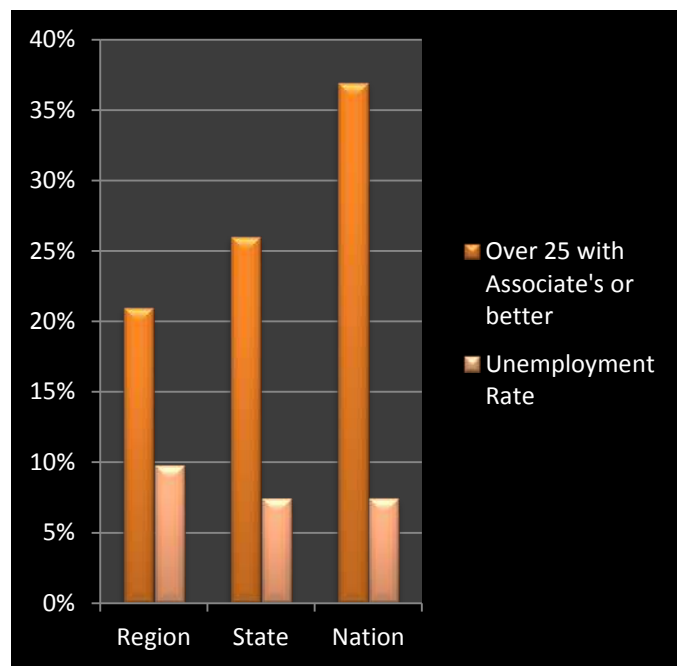
Strategy 5. Education & Workforce Development



Overview of Existing Conditions

Educational opportunities are key to the future success of the East Arkansas region. While many of the strategic priorities address economic conditions and quality of life, there is no better way to increase opportunity than through a well-rounded and purposeful education.

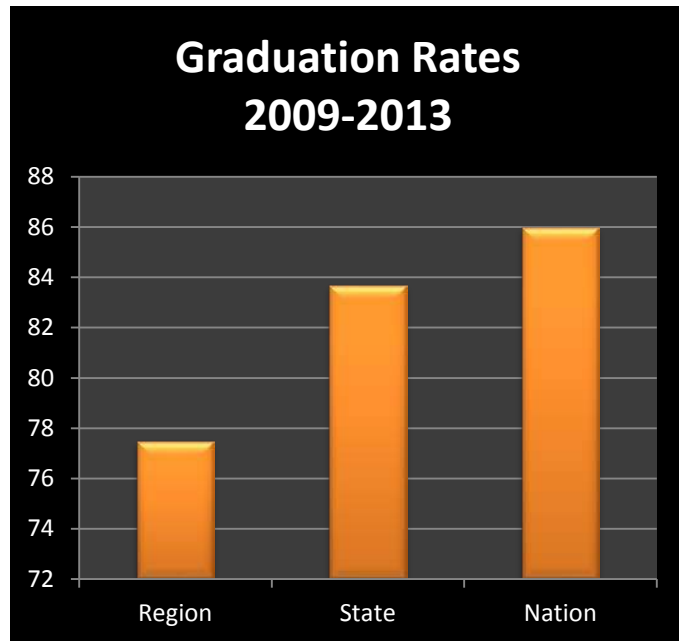
Attainment levels in the region are low. Only 21% of the population in the region age 25 or older have an associate's degree or better, compared to 26% statewide and 37% nationwide. High school graduation rates are also lower than average, at 77.5% versus 83.7% for the state and 86% for the nation.



Strategy 5. Education & Workforce Development

One bright spot in the region is that the Pre-K enrollment figures are substantially higher than average for either the state or the nation. In all twelve counties, there is a determination to begin the education process at a young age.

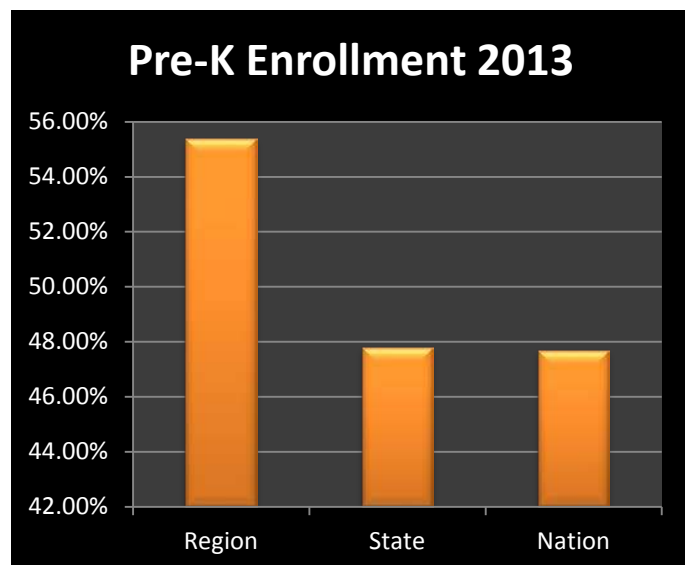
In areas of high poverty like the Delta, there is often a correlation between low incomes and low attainment. Studies indicate that children from low-income homes often leave school earlier to begin working and help with the household expenses. This certainly could be the case in East Arkansas. Ensuring that the children of the region have a solid education that prepares them for the workforce will be a critical factor to reducing long-term, chronic poverty.



Primary and Secondary Education

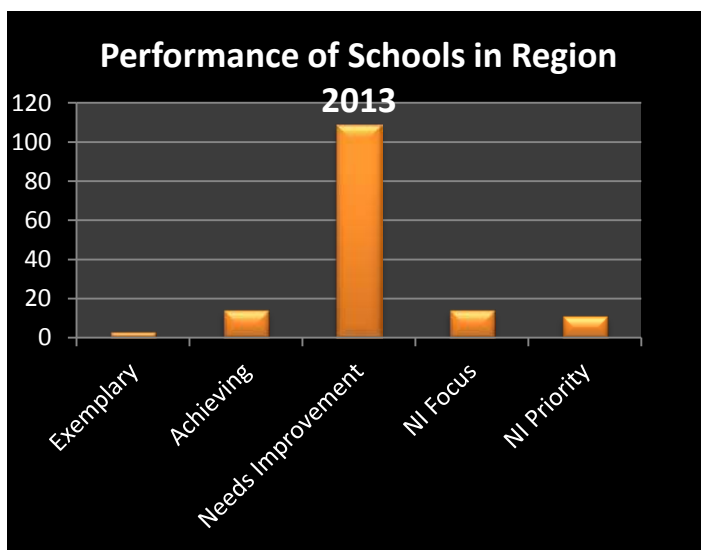
The primary and secondary educational system is struggling to succeed in the region. A number of factors may contribute to these struggles, but the fact is that many schools are underperforming.

The Arkansas Education Department uses a five-tier ranking system to rate school performance. In the table below, a description of each tier is provided. While there are some schools that are performing at an outstanding level, these are few and far between. The vast majority of the schools in the region are in need of improvement according to the state grading system.



Strategy 5. Education & Workforce Development

Accountability Status	Description	ADE Engagement/ District Autonomy
Exemplary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> High performance High progress High TAGG* high performance High TAGG high progress 	Very low ADE engagement/Very high district autonomy
Achieving	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 3-yr ACSIP – meet all performance, graduation rate and growth AMOs for all students and TAGG 1-yr ACSIP – meet all performance and graduation rate AMOs for all students and TAGG, but miss growth AMOs for all students or TAGG 	Very low ADE engagement/High district autonomy
Needs Improvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does not meet performance, graduation rate or growth AMOs for all students and TAGG 	Low to Moderate ADE engagement/ Moderate district autonomy
Needs Improvement Focus (NI Focus)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Schools with largest, persistent gaps between Non-TAGG and TAGG students 	High ADE engagement/Low district autonomy
Needs Improvement Priority (NI Priority)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Schools with persistently lowest achievement in math and literacy over three years for all students 	Very high ADE engagement/Lo district autonomy
*TAGG: Targeted Achievement Gap Group, including economically disadvantaged, English learners and/or students with disabilities.		
Source: Arkansas Department of Education (ADE)		

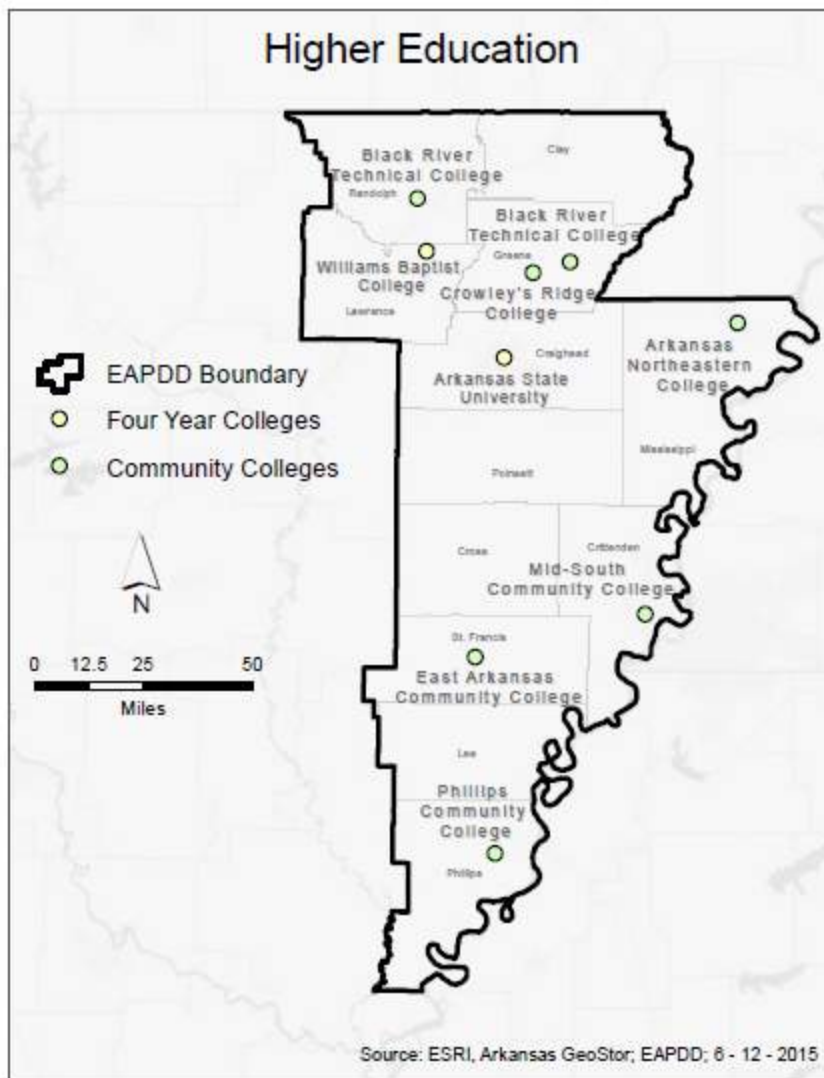


Currently, there are:

- 3 “Exemplary” schools
- 14 “Achieving” schools
- 109 “Needs Improvement”
- 14 “NI Focus” schools
- 11 “NI Priority” schools

Strategy 5. Education & Workforce Development

There is another education-related issue that has impacted small communities in the region. Act 60 is a 2004 state law that requires consolidation of schools once enrollments drop below 350 students. Statistics as to the success of the consolidation program are difficult to find, but available reports are mixed as to whether or not students reach higher achievement levels in consolidated school districts. Since 2004, at least 13 schools within the region have been consolidated. The latest consolidation was announced in April of 2015 for the community of Hughes.



For many of these towns, the school is the lifeblood of the community. Once it is shuttered, leaders have a difficult time sustaining their already small populations. Around the state, this issue has become quite controversial, with communities on the verge of losing their schools crying out for a change. As a result, Governor Hutchinson has formed a task force to consider changes to the law.

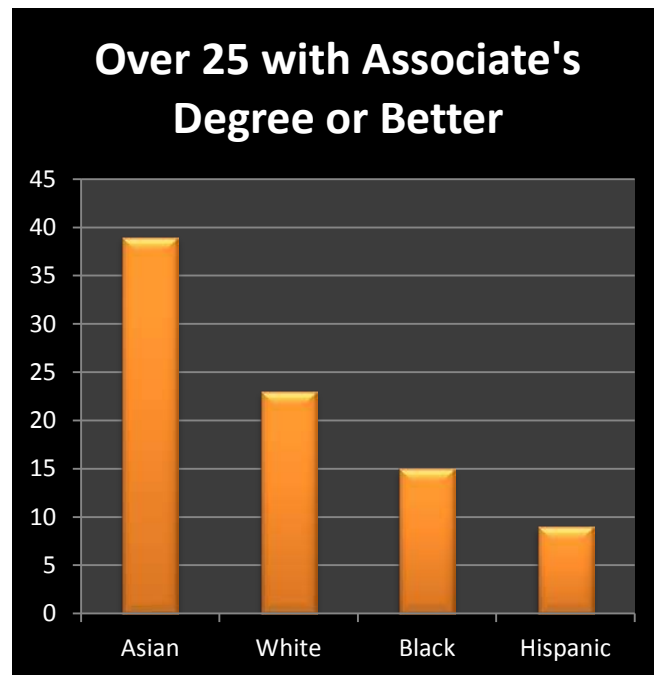
Postsecondary and Workforce Development

The majority of living wage jobs in the future will require some form of completed

postsecondary education. Whether it's a four-year degree or a specialized certification, employers are looking for people who are skilled and need a minimum amount of on-the-job training.

Strategy 5. Education & Workforce Development

In East Arkansas, there are excellent options for postsecondary education. A growing Arkansas State University is located in Jonesboro. Five community colleges also provide services in the region, each offering a variety of specialty degree and certificate programs.



With only 21% of the population age 25 or older having an Associate's degree or better, the people of East Arkansas may be lacking the skills needed to supply an effective workforce for employers.

Several diverse food processors are located in the region and are part of the industries which anticipate growth in the coming years. Workforce development needs have been cited as critical, though

not unique to food processing – they are similar to the needs of other highly automated manufacturing industries. Broader regional interventions to development manufacturing workforce should incorporate food processor feedback into their planning and implementation.

Development of a robust workforce training program in the region will be an important part of growing the economy and, therefore, improving quality of life. Employers are expanding and relocating to the area to be closer to the resources available – agriculture, transportation and freight mobility to name a few. The challenge will be finding and retaining employees who have the skills needed.



Strategy 5. Education & Workforce Development

Goals and Objectives

PRIORITY GOALS

Goal 5.1: Train residents for jobs in strategic clusters or industries every year.

- Objective 5.1.1: Achieve “ACT Work Ready Community” Status in all twelve counties by 2025.
- Objective 5.1.2: Work with workforce development officials to inventory skills and work experience of unemployed residents so they can be matched to hiring needs of strategic clusters/industries and market to employers.
- Objective 5.1.3: Ensure that employers are aware of any job training or hiring subsidies offered in Arkansas for unemployed workers.
- Objective 5.1.4: Create at least one customized training program in each strategic cluster/industry using the sector strategies model.
- Objective 5.1.5: Support expansion of planned workforce development efforts, such as those underway at the Jonesboro Existing Industries Association (Jonesboro Regional Chamber of Commerce).
- Objective 5.1.6: Engage food processing companies in future workforce development planning and implementation.
- Results Expected In: 2018
- Performance Measures:
 - ACT Work Ready Community status achieved
 - Workforce programs developed an in use

ACT Work Ready Communities (WRC) empowers states, regions and counties with data, process and tools that drive economic growth. Participants are leveraging the National Career Readiness Certificate (NCRC™) to measure and close the skills gap — and building common frameworks that link, align and match their workforce development efforts.

ACT is leading this national effort and offers the ACT Work Ready Communities Academy — a performance-driven program WRC leadership teams use to initiate, deploy and drive carefully-tailored efforts that grow the number of counties certified as work ready communities.

~Excerpt from ACT Work Ready Communities website:

workreadycommunities.org

Strategy 5. Education & Workforce Development

Goal 5.2: Keep more students who graduate in the region in the region after completing their education.

- Objective 5.2.1: Develop job shadowing and internship programs for middle and high school students with local businesses and manufacturers.
- Objective 5.2.2: Work with superintendents and business/industry leaders to coordinate skills trainings with job openings.
- Objective 5.2.3: Develop better access to trade programs (electricians, plumbers, carpenters), including the necessary skills to manage a business.
- Objective 5.2.4: Provide certified workforce training programs directly tied to local industry needs.
- Objective 5.2.5: Develop support systems and training for those interested in owning or starting their own businesses in the region, including:
 - Catalogue locally owned businesses
 - Develop succession planning tools for business owners preparing to retire
- Results Expected In: 2020
- Performance Measures:
 - Job shadowing and internships created
 - Coordination with local schools
 - Trade Programs expanded
 - Certified workforce training in place
 - Entrepreneurial development support in place

TOOLS TO USE:

**Field Guide
For
Workforce
Development**

Goal 5.3: Surpass the statewide postsecondary educational attainment rate for residents age 25 or older.

- Objective 5.3.1: Close gaps in postsecondary educational attainment by race/ethnicity in the region.
 - Publish information targeted for school districts and parents about high-wage, high-demand jobs in the region that require various levels of postsecondary education (certificate and up).

Strategy 5. Education & Workforce Development

- Coordinate volunteers with Chambers of Commerce and school districts to help parents and students understand the availability of financial aid for postsecondary education of all types.
- Create an inventory of career and technical education programs in the region and ensure they are aligned with living wage employment opportunities at local companies in each school district.
- Create “sector strategy” initiatives under each strategic cluster/industry to align K-16 education and training programs to living wage jobs in the clusters/industries. Consider adapting Kentucky’s nationally recognized sector strategy work for the EAPDD region.



→ Results Expected In: 2025

→ Performance Measures:

- Postsecondary educational achievement increased for all races/ethnicities

Goal 5.4: Amend Act 60 to reduce the impacts on small communities in the region.*

→ Objective 5.4.1: Develop economic impact analysis of school closures/consolidations on small communities in region.

→ Objective 5.4.2: Develop analysis of educational attainment statistics comparing local school and consolidated school achievement.

→ Objective 5.4.3: Prepare legislative recommendations with approval from the Board and local leadership; deliver to regional legislators to garner support.

→ Results Expected In: 2018 Legislative Session

→ Performance Measure: Act 60 amended or repealed

Strategy 5. Education & Workforce Development

**Note: An exploratory team has been formed by the Governor to determine whether or not to repeal this law. This goal will be placed on hold until a decision is made.*

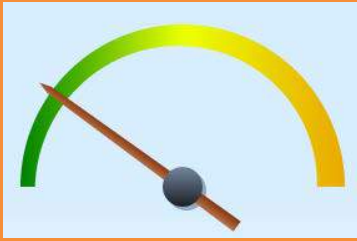
Goal 5.5: Improve the quality of K-12 programs in the region by increasing the number of “Achieving” and “Exemplary” schools and reducing the “Needs Improvement” schools.

- Objective 5.5.1: Develop a data driven tool for communities to utilize to identify school districts that are underperforming and how poor school performance affects the local economy and quality of life.
- Objective 5.5.2: Build capacity within those communities to create a locally driven accountability of school district performance.
- Objective 5.5.3: Develop a method to acknowledge and celebrate improving districts.
- Objective 5.5.4: Expand EAST program to elementary, middle and high schools across the region.
- Objective 5.5.5: Engage teachers in local and regional projects and programs to make them feel more invested and a part of the community.
- Objective 5.5.6: Form a task force to recruit and retain “Teach for America” program participants and other high-performing teachers.
- Objective 5.5.7: Through the newly formed non-profit, develop programs to assist struggling school districts to offset costs of higher performing instructors.
- Objective 5.5.8: Expand access to technology in smaller communities around the region to provide better access to high-speed Internet.
- Results Expanded In: 2018
- Performance Measures:
 - Number of “Needs Improvement” schools reduced

Strategy 5. Education & Workforce Development

East Arkansas Principles for Growth and Development			Partnership for Sustainable Communities Livability Principles
Address Low Capacity: Identify strategies to build capacity at every level	✓		Provide More Transportation Choices: Identify strategies that provide more options for residents
Address High Poverty: Identify strategies to reduce extreme poverty	✓		Promote Equitable, Affordable Housing: Identify strategies to provide more housing options
Address Population Decline: Identify strategies to retain and attract people, especially young adults	✓	✓	Enhance Economic Competitiveness: Identify strategies to increase economic opportunity
Address Low Attainment: Identify strategies to increase educational attainment	✓	✓	Support Existing Communities: Identify strategies to ensure sustainability of local communities.
Address Limited Access: Identify strategies to better connect residents with services	✓	✓	Coordinate and Leverage Federal Policies and Investment: Identify strategies to better utilize resources
Address Critical Health Issues: Identify strategies to encourage healthier lifestyles		✓	Value Communities and Neighborhoods: Identify strategies to improve local neighborhoods

Strategy 5. Education & Workforce Development



MOVING THE NEEDLE

Measurement	Current Regional Baseline	Five-Year Desired	Ten-Year Desired
High school graduate or higher, percent of persons age 25+, 2009-2013 ¹	77.5% (83.7% State) (86% Nation)	State Average	National Average
Associate's degree or higher, percent of persons age 25+ ²	21% (26% State) (37% Nation)	State Average	National Average
Children age 3-4 enrolled in school ²	55.4%	60%	65%
Per Student Spending ³	\$9,894	\$10,000	National Average
School Consolidations (to date) ⁴	13	0 additional	0 additional
Student Enrollment K-12 ⁵	67,008	n/a	n/a
Number of "Exemplary" schools ⁶	3	8	12
Number of "Achieving" schools ⁶	14	22	42
Number of "Needs Improvement" schools ⁶	109	100	80
Number of "Needs Improvement Focus" schools ⁶	14	12	10
Number of "Needs Improvement Priority" schools ⁶	11	9	7
Number of Career Readiness Certificates Issued ⁷	21,203	24,000	28,000

Sources:

¹US Census Bureau State and County Quickfacts, 2009-2013.

²2009-2013 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

³Arkansas Department of Education, District Report Card 2013-2014

⁴Arkansas Department of Education

⁵Arkansas Department of Education, ADE Data Center; EAPDD Counties highlighted by IEA, 2014

⁶Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) Report, ADE, July 2014

⁷Department of Workforce Services, March 2015

Section VII

Strategy 6 Tourism & Cultural Development



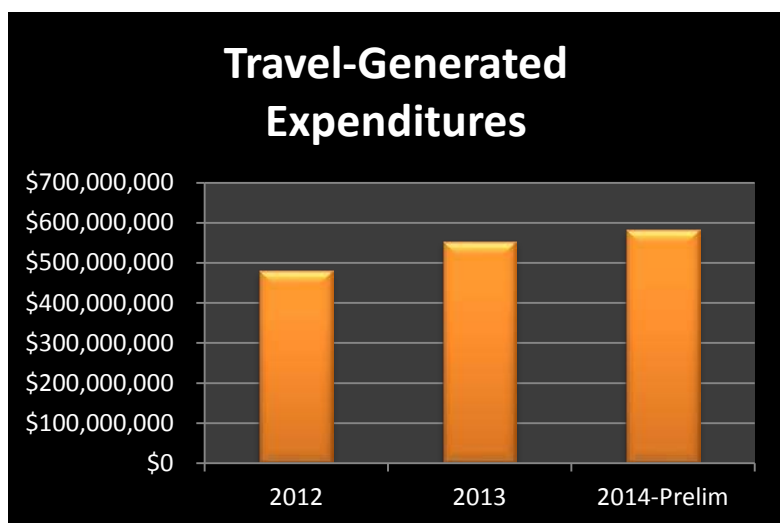
Strategy 6. Tourism & Cultural Development



Overview of Existing Conditions

Tourism is a major industry in East Arkansas, bringing in over \$550,000,000 in revenue in 2013. This was an increase of almost 15% from 2012. Preliminary figures for 2014 show another significant rise in travel-generated expenditures.

The region is home to thirteen state parks, some of the largest attractions in the area. Marketing for tourism is mostly conducted by the Arkansas Parks &



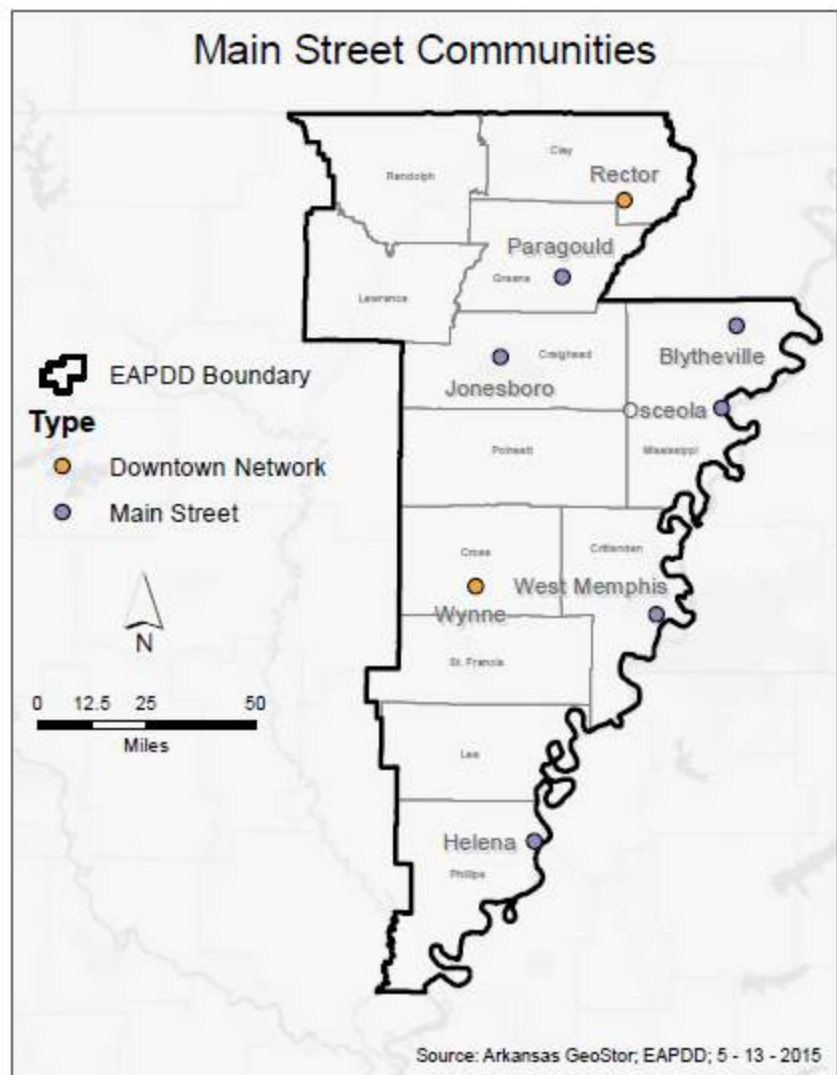
Strategy 6. Tourism & Cultural Development

Tourism and its regional associations that represent the region: Arkansas Delta Byways and Ozark Gateway. Local marketing efforts are limited, mostly due to a lack of funding dedicated to promotional efforts.

The region is located strategically for tourism, with excellent access to travel routes and a plethora of existing and potential attractions. Yet though there is a desire for tourism and cultural promotion, this is not reflected in preparations for visitors. Amenities such as hotels, signage, clean bathrooms, hospitality and visitor centers and more are scarce and only found in the more urbanized areas of the region, if at all.

Main Street Programs also offer another opportunity for cultural, tourism and business development. Downtown districts can play a significant role in a community's overall quality of life and vibrancy. The Main Street Arkansas program offers a variety of technical and financial services for communities to utilize in cultivating a downtown development strategy. Currently, there are six Main Street Programs and two Main Street Network Programs in the region.

Agritourism is another area of potential growth. It's already heavily promoted by state resources, offering opportunities to highlight additional regional stories. Additionally, it can bring new revenue to regional producers and connect residents deeply with the roots of their own food system.



Strategy 6. Tourism & Cultural Development



Development of tourism and cultural assets is difficult for several reasons:

- Though many communities have local festivals, events and attractions, there are few systems in place to track their success or market them to a larger area.
- There is a lack of collective data that demonstrates the impacts of downtown business districts and local tourism attractions on the local economy.
- Funding for tourism and downtown development is very limited. Few communities in the region have dedicated funding for either option.
- Not only is funding limited, but expertise is limited as well. Sophisticated marketing programs are rare and mostly coordinated through the state. Staffing for downtown development is present in some of the larger communities, but smaller communities rely on volunteer efforts.
- Tourism and cultural development as an industry is not largely recognized as an economic driver.
- While there are numerous concepts for new tourism and cultural assets throughout the region, there is no overall vision and prioritized strategy for development, marketing and management.

Strategy 6. Tourism & Cultural Development



Goals and Objectives

PRIORITY GOALS

Goal 6.1: Increase awareness of tourism as an industry and its impact on the local economy.

- Objective 6.1.1: Prepare economic impact analysis of tourism for each county and the region as a whole and share with Board and local leadership.
- Objective 6.1.2: Develop tools for communities to utilize to track and measure the impacts of local visitor attractions and events.

TOOLS TO USE:

Field Guide
For
Heritage Tourism
Planning

Strategy 6. Tourism & Cultural Development

- Objective 6.1.3: Utilize community liaisons to help communities collect local information to provide a better measurement of regional impacts.
- Objective 6.1.4: Develop a public relations plan for the region to market internally and externally about what's available and progress made.
- Results Expected In: 2018
- Performance Measures:
 - Economic Impact Analysis completed
 - Tracking tools in place
 - Data being collected
 - Public relations plan in place

Goal 6.2: Increase tourism industry impacts (revenue, employment, payroll and facilities) in the region by 5% annually.

- Objective 6.2.1: Develop a region-wide assessment of tourism assets (including festivals and events, attractions, lodging facilities, support amenities, recreational areas and potential attractions).
- Objective 6.2.2: Determine opportunities for cooperation between communities to jointly promote tourism attractions.
- Objective 6.2.3: In partnership with other tourism organizations and advocacy groups, develop a regional tourism marketing strategy.
- Objective 6.2.4: Analyze the feasibility of new attractions (such as the Good Road Trail, SS Sultana Interpretive Center and



Strategy 6. Tourism & Cultural Development

others) and the amenities needed to support visitor stays; identify how the District can support the development of new tourism projects.



- Objective 6.2.5: Conduct analysis of potential agri-tourism projects to determine whether or not this has potential.
- Objective 6.2.6: Improve the visitor experience by offering quality support amenities, such as new visitor centers, rest areas with clean and safe bathrooms and a variety of lodging facilities.
- Objective 6.2.7: Develop and administer customer service training throughout the region targeting front-line employees in each community.
- Objective 6.2.8: Create a uniform, regional signage program to identify attractions and services on each major travel route in East Arkansas.
- Results Expected In: 2020
- Performance Measures:
 - Region-wide assessment completed
 - Regional tourism marketing program in place
 - Regional attraction priorities identified
 - Analysis of agri-tourism completed
 - Customer service training administered
 - Regional signage program in place
 - Tourism impacts increasing 5% annually

Goal 6.3: Develop a cohesive narrative to highlight the region's unique attributes through established promotional efforts to reach \$3 million in agritourism revenues in the 2022 census.

- Objective 6.3.1: Convene existing assets to define and articulate unique regional narrative (including elements such as Crowley's Ridge Produce, catfish and other aquaculture, Delta farming history, product-specific festivals, ASU rural heritage sites, etc.) to be added to or expanded within existing promotional efforts.

Strategy 6. Tourism & Cultural Development

- Objective 6.3.2: Incorporate statewide and extension-related agritourism resources into all new producer training, including opportunities or support for producers to incorporate branded communications into their own activities.
- Objective 6.3.3: Ensure regional narrative is incorporated into regional and state-level promotional efforts and updated as producer base expands.
- Results Expected In: 2022
- Performance Measures:
 - More producers aware of and participating in agritourism activities
 - \$3 million in agritourism revenues by 2022



SECONDARY GOALS

Goal 6.4: Develop programs to encourage local artisans and build the creative economy.

- Objective 6.4.1: Form a taskforce in partnership with the Arkansas Arts Council, local artisans and art educational professionals to determine and prioritize options, including for consideration:
 - Shared studio and gallery spaces in downtowns;
 - Regional art shows and musical festivals;



Strategy 6. Tourism & Cultural Development

- Development of small, outdoor performance areas;
- Creation of an art and design incubator in conjunction with an educational institution.
- Development of an Artist Entrepreneurial Program that provides technical assistance, small grants and micro-lending programs for those in the creative industry;
- Additional public art throughout the region; and
- Educational programs for all ages.

→ Results Expected In: 2020

→ Performance Measures: Artisan support program in place

Goal 6.5: Increase the participation in the Arkansas Main Street and Main Street Network programs.

- Objective 6.5.1: Provide sample guidelines and ordinances for communities to adopt.
- Objective 6.5.2: Work with Arkansas Main Street to develop new program for regional Main Street networks that would provide resources at a lower cost per community.



- Objective 6.5.3: Educate community leaders on the importance of historic preservation, the economic impacts of downtown development and how to track progress.
- Objective 6.5.4: Seek additional resources and incentives to assist property owners with rehabilitation, including the establishment of small revolving loan funds for façade renovation.
- Objective 6.5.5: Work with community leaders to understand the importance of property maintenance and how to engage absentee landlords.

→ Results Expected In: 2018

TOOLS TO USE:

Field Guide
For
Downtown
Development

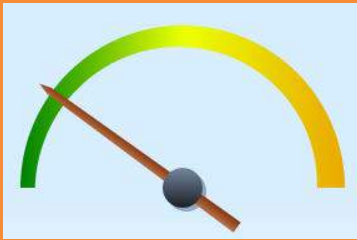
Strategy 6. Tourism & Cultural Development

→ Performance Measures:

- Guideline and ordinance samples in place
- Regional Main Street program, if feasible
- Educational program in place
- Additional resources and incentives available
- Property maintenance enforcement in place
- More communities in Main Street program

East Arkansas Principles for Growth and Development		Partnership for Sustainable Communities Livability Principles
Address Low Capacity: Identify strategies to build capacity at every level	✓	Provide More Transportation Choices: Identify strategies that provide more options for residents
Address High Poverty: Identify strategies to reduce extreme poverty	✓	Promote Equitable, Affordable Housing: Identify strategies to provide more housing options
Address Population Decline: Identify strategies to retain and attract people, especially young adults	✓	Enhance Economic Competitiveness: Identify strategies to increase economic opportunity
Address Low Attainment: Identify strategies to increase educational attainment		Support Existing Communities: Identify strategies to ensure sustainability of local communities.
Address Limited Access: Identify strategies to better connect residents with services	✓	Coordinate and Leverage Federal Policies and Investment: Identify strategies to better utilize resources
Address Critical Health Issues: Identify strategies to encourage healthier lifestyles		Value Communities and Neighborhoods: Identify strategies to improve local neighborhoods

Strategy 6. Tourism & Cultural Development



MOVING THE NEEDLE

Measurement	Current Regional Baseline	Five-Year Desired	Ten-Year Desired
Number of Downtowns Participating in Arkansas Main Street ¹	6	10	12
Number of Downtowns participating in Arkansas Main Street Network ¹	2	5	8
Number of restaurants	To Be Collected	To Be Determined	To Be Determined
Number of Lodging Facilities	To Be Collected	To Be Determined	To Be Determined
Number of Museums	To Be Collected	To Be Determined	To Be Determined
Number of Community/Fitness/Recreation Centers	To Be Collected	To Be Determined	To Be Determined
Sales and use tax collections ²	\$74,603,870	\$85 million	\$100 million
Travel-Generated Expenditures ³	\$584,297,902 (2014 Prelim.)	\$740,000,000	\$950,000,000
Travel-Generated Employment ³	5,942 (2014 Prelim.)	7,500	9,500
Travel-Generated Payroll ³	\$105,552,972 (2014 Prelim.)	130,000,000	165,000,000
Number of State Parks ³	13	13	13
Sources: ¹ Main Street Arkansas ² Arkansas Department of Finance & Administration, 2013. ³ Arkansas Department of Parks and Tourism Economic Impact Report 2014			

Section VIII

Strategy 7 Business Development



Strategy 7. Business Development



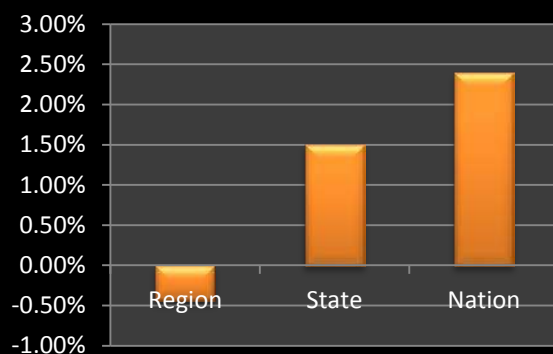
Overview of Existing Conditions

Looking at the overall economic condition of the region, one can see that work needs to be done. Incomes are low, poverty is high, population is declining and communities have few resources to invest. The facts are not surprising for anyone from the Delta area. For those outside of the region, the facts paint an interesting picture.

Population

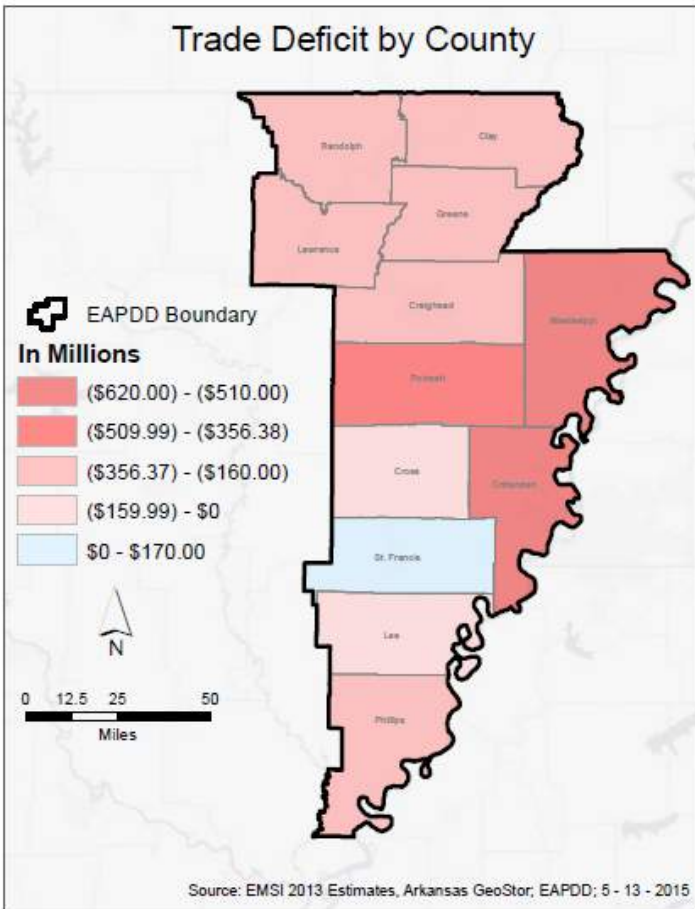
- Eight of the twelve counties in the EAPDD region have fewer residents today than they did in 1980.

Population Change ('10-'13)



Strategy 7. Business Development

- In all but two of the twelve counties, population is declining. Portions of the region are seeing strong employment and population growth, while others have seen decades of decline.
- All twelve counties are seeing an increase in the population of those between the ages of 25-44 years.



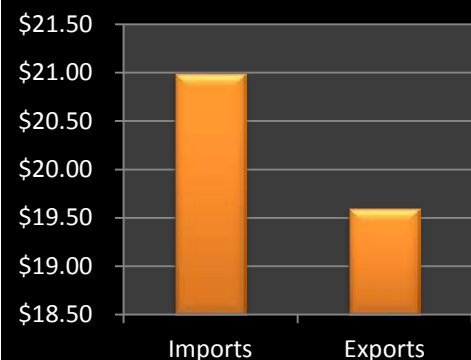
state average and 36% lower than the national average.

- The region has a number of assets attractive to growing or prospective companies, including available land, infrastructure, freight mobility, low cost of living and education systems.
- There is a lack of understanding in the communities, especially smaller towns,

Economy

- The regional unemployment rate is 32% higher than the state and national average.
- The region is running a trade deficit. As of 2013, the region had \$19.60 billion in exports and \$20.99 billion in imports, a deficit of \$1.39 billion.
- Economic growth in the region is trailing the state. Between 2012 and 2013, the region had a GDP growth rate of 3.4% versus 4.2% statewide.
- The average median household income for the region is 17% lower than the

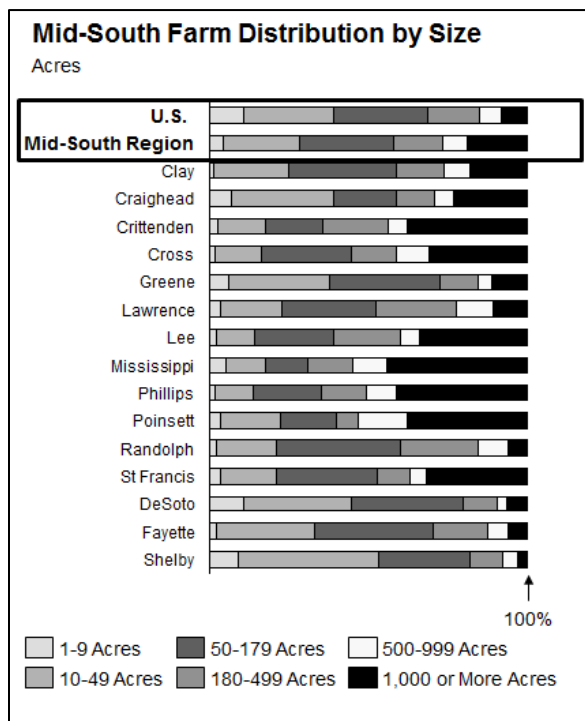
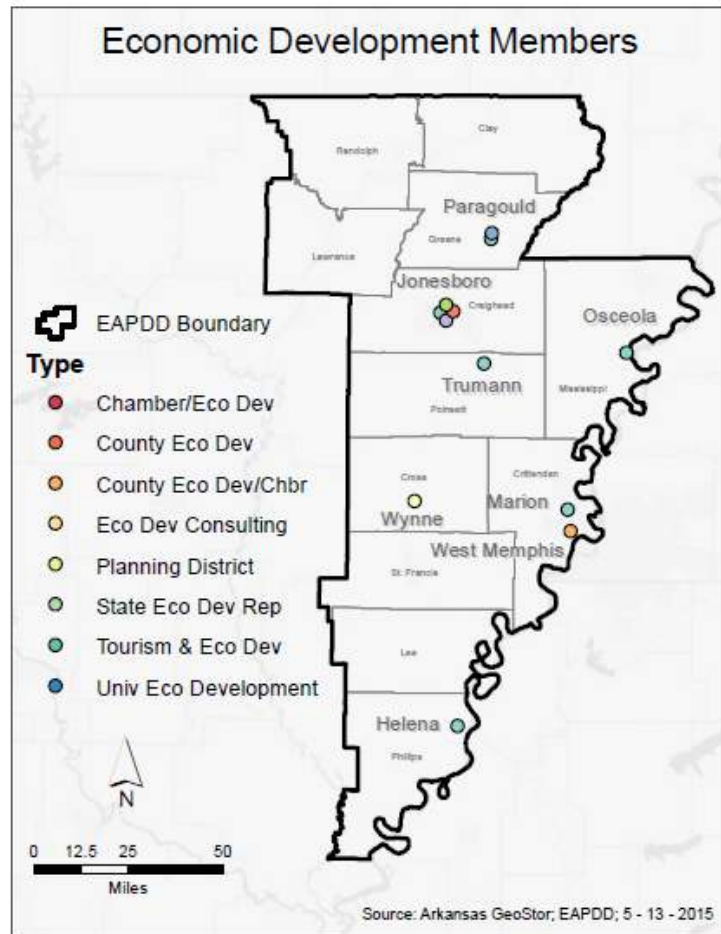
Value in \$Billion ('12-'13)



Strategy 7. Business Development

about the level of commitment needed for large-scale business development opportunities, the benefits of entrepreneurship and the best methods to produce economic growth.

- Within the twelve counties of the region, there are few local, professional economic development programs committed to business development activities.
- Support for entrepreneurial development is limited. Few resources exist to



encourage, advocate and provide assistance to small business start-ups.

- The region has seen new economic investment that will add thousands of new jobs over the next several years.

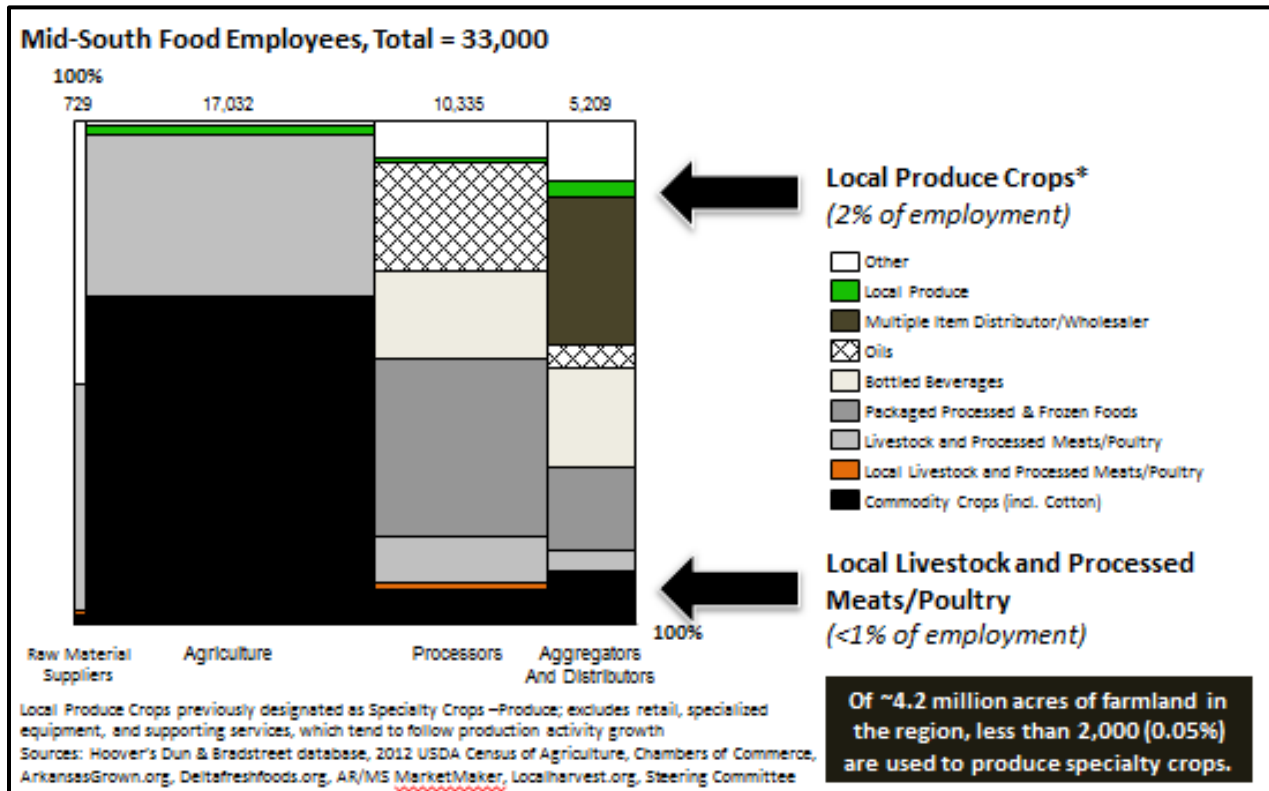
Agriculture

- The average farm size in the region is 841 acres, larger than the national average.
- Agricultural activity in the region accounts for \$5 billion in gross revenues.

Source: USDA, Census of Agriculture, "County Summary Highlights", 2012

Strategy 7. Business Development

- Growers of commodity crops, livestock, cotton and specialty crops account for 96% of the agricultural business establishments but only 51% of the agriculturally related employees. Forty-six percent (46%) of employees work for processors, aggregators and distributors (value-added agriculture companies).



- Meat and poultry are a \$1.3 billion local market for the Mid-South region, but only \$90 million is spent by those willing to pay a premium for local product.
- Fully 98% of the beef, chicken and lamb raised locally is shipped out of the region, resulting in capacity shortages similar to local produce.
- Most USDA-inspected processing in the region is large-scale for national markets, not slaughter and processing for local markets.
- The region's food processing activity is poised to grow, but is too fragmented to support narrowly focused intervention.

Strategy 7. *Business Development*

- Many of the strengths and challenges cited by food processors are common to other regional manufacturers. Challenges include quality workforce availability, wastewater management costs and rising transportation expenses.



Strategy 7. Business Development

Goals and Objectives

PRIORITY GOALS

Goal 7.1: Develop a food value chain facilitator to coordinate transactions between local specialty crop and livestock farmers and processors with traditional aggregators, retailers and restaurants. Implement in conjunction with New Producer Training and Support to achieve \$20 million in new annual revenue for local producers by 2025.

- Objective 7.1.1: Convene existing food hubs, extension agencies, marketing programs, producer programs and processing assets to select organizational home and job description for facilitator.



- Objective 7.1.2: Develop business plan, likely including selection of food hub management software, contracted transport and branding/packaging assistance.
- Objective 7.1.3: Engage producers and distributor/retailer purchasers in establishing annual, product-specific production goals and timelines. Begin with specialty crops, then expand into meats and processed goods.
- Objective 7.1.4: Promote the facilitator as to “go-to” connection point for producers and business customers of local food.
- Objective 7.1.5: As farming capacity expands, evaluate regional opportunity to expand local processing/value-added capacity.

Strategy 7. Business Development

→ Results Expected In: 2025

→ Performance Measures:

- Food value chain facilitator in place
- Annual revenue doubled to \$20 million for specialty crops by 2025
- Expanded opportunities for meat and poultry farmers as well as value-added processors.

Goal 7.2: Expand existing training and support to develop 400 new or converted specialty crop and local livestock producers by 2025.

→ Objective 7.2.1: Identify existing training programs interested in being part of a regional referral/promotion program. In exchange for participant referrals and complementary fund-raising, training programs will provide participant data to measure program completion and track producer success over time.

→ Objective 7.2.2: Develop process to identify and vet training participants, and direct them toward appropriate training. Ensure promotion and recruitment efforts span the full geographic region and are accessible to limited resource farmers, including scholarship funding as appropriate.

→ Objective 7.2.3: Direct new trainees toward appropriate programs, and use program completion/follow-up survey data to determine needs for additional funding support (such as GAP Certification, acreage conversion, protective infrastructure). Support complementary fundraising and distribution.

→ Objective 7.2.4: Work closely with the food value chain facilitator (Goal 7.1) to exchange data and monitor regional supply and demand dynamics, to ensure training programs match demand for local product. Monitor opportunities to enhance sustainable farming practices in a way that makes local producers more competitive and resilient.

→ Results Expected In: 2025

→ Performance Measures:

- New Producer Training and Support program in place
- 400 new or converted specialty crop and livestock producers in place by 2025

Strategy 7. Business Development

Goal 7.3: Surpass the state's annual economic growth rate (change in GDP) by attracting, retaining and growing companies.

- Objective 7.3.1: Partner with local economic developers to create new research and data products that can help identify opportunities.
- Objective 7.3.2: Identify opportunities to market the region's assets for business development.
- Objective 7.3.3: Launch strategic cluster development program that brings together employers to address common needs, opportunities and challenges. Candidates based on employment by traded cluster could include:



- Objective 7.3.4: Contract with local communities to develop economic impact analyses for prospective or expanding companies.
- Objective 7.3.5: Formulate a Business Retention & Expansion training program in partnership with local economic development and chamber professionals, as well as local leaders.
- Results Expected In: 2020
- Performance Measures:
 - Tools for recruitment developed
 - BR&E Training completed
 - Region's GDP surpassing state's

TOOLS TO USE:

**Field Guide
For
Business
Development**

&

**Appendices:
Local Community
and Economic
Development
Strategic Plans**

Strategy 7. Business Development

Goal 7.4: Achieve a trade surplus by growing the region's export base and reducing the flow of money leaking from the region through imports.

- Objective 7.4.1: Create an export plan for the region, including an inventory of export assistance organizations and services, database of companies that are currently exporting, and FAQs for small businesses.



- Objective 7.4.2: Assemble an export taskforce of companies and technical assistance providers to help EAPDD conduct a needs assessment for the export plan, monitor ongoing progress, and track performance metrics.
- Objective 7.4.3: Develop an import substitution strategy – i.e., identify gaps in the region's supply chain where companies are importing goods and services from outside the region that could be filled by existing or new businesses.
- Results Expected In: 2025
- Performance Measures: Trade surplus achieved

Goal 7.5: Every county and community of over 3,000 people will have clearly developed goals with identified performance measures for economic development.

- Objective 7.5.1: Host Economic Development 101 training for community leaders, Steering Committee members, local economic development staff and Board Members to address the basics of economic development, its complexity, and how EAPDD can help to deliver gap services.

Strategy 7. Business Development

→ Objective 7.5.2: Develop and administer training program for the Board and Staff on economic development and the services provided by EAPDD.

→ Objective 7.5.3: Hold meetings with all local Steering Committees to refine strategic plans based on what has been learned and the acquired data.



→ Objective 7.5.4: Organize speaking engagements for EAPDD Board and Staff members to showcase to regional organizations the services and goals of the District.

→ Objective 7.5.5: Maintain economic development data and provide regular updates to the Board and communities served.

→ Objective 7.5.6: Ensure Community Liaisons regularly collect “critical information” from communities as identified in the regional plan.

→ Results Expected In: 2017

→ Performance Measures:

- Economic Development 101 Training held
- Trainings held for EAPDD Board and Staff
- Strategic Plans refined
- Speaking circuit developed and utilized
- Economic data platform regularly updated
- Economic data regularly collected
- Communities have prioritized goals in place

Strategy 7. Business Development

Goal 7.6: Add financial, technical and advocacy services to promote entrepreneurship in the District.

- Objective 7.6.1: Assemble an entrepreneurial development taskforce of existing small business owners, Small Business Development Center officials, local banking and finance representatives, community colleges and other experts to identify the needs and resources available for entrepreneurs.



- Objective 7.6.2: Develop a resource guide for existing and would-be entrepreneurs that is posted in a variety of mediums (website, brochures, etc.).
- Objective 7.6.3: Identify one point of contact for the region as the ombudsman to connect entrepreneurs to available resources (technical, financial, marketing, educational, legal, managerial, etc.).
- Objective 7.6.4: Develop financial tools to assist small business owners, including revolving loan funds and the establishment of a Community Development Financial Institution.
- Results Expected In: 2017
- Performance Measures:
 - Entrepreneurial task force developed
 - Resource Guide developed
 - Entrepreneurial Ombudsman in place
 - Financial tools in place

Goal 7.7: Develop facilities and programs to teach entrepreneurship and encourage the development of small business.

- Objective 7.7.1: Research the feasibility of entrepreneurial facilities, such a business incubator, a "Tech Village" or a Woman's Entrepreneurial Institute.

Strategy 7. Business Development

- Objective 7.7.2: Work with local schools, including the EAST programs, to development entrepreneurial programs for students.
- Results Expected In: 2025
- Performance Measures:
 - Feasibility of facilities determined and plan in place
 - Schools engaged in entrepreneurial programs

Goal 7.8: Every county in the EAPDD region will see positive population growth.

- Objective 7.8.1: Create employment opportunities at a sufficient pace to achieve net in-migration of primary working age population.
 - Create a targeted cluster/industry plan for each county.
- Objective 7.8.2: Work with public and private sector stakeholders to develop and execute a marketing plan to start/recruit/grow businesses to fill gaps in supply chains and/or add value to regional clusters.
- Objective 7.8.3: Work with schools and existing residents to compile a database with contact information of primary working age people who have moved away from the region.
 - Monitor job postings and publicize opportunities to database of former residents and through social media channels.
 - Create short videos about existing companies and market to database of former residents and through social media channels to inform existing and prospective residents of interesting work going on in the region.
- Results Expected In: 2035
- Performance Measures:
 - Population growth is seen in every county

TOOLS TO USE:

**Field Guide
For
Business
Development**

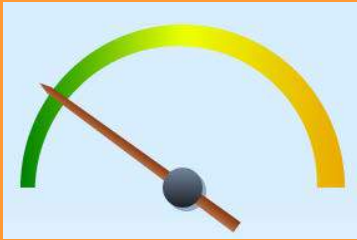
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**Appendices:
Local Community
and Economic
Development
Strategic Plans**

Strategy 7. Business Development

East Arkansas Principles for Growth and Development			Partnership for Sustainable Communities Livability Principles
Address Low Capacity: Identify strategies to build capacity at every level	✓		Provide More Transportation Choices: Identify strategies that provide more options for residents
Address High Poverty: Identify strategies to reduce extreme poverty	✓		Promote Equitable, Affordable Housing: Identify strategies to provide more housing options
Address Population Decline: Identify strategies to retain and attract people, especially young adults	✓	✓	Enhance Economic Competitiveness: Identify strategies to increase economic opportunity
Address Low Attainment: Identify strategies to increase educational attainment	✓	✓	Support Existing Communities: Identify strategies to ensure sustainability of local communities.
Address Limited Access: Identify strategies to better connect residents with services	✓	✓	Coordinate and Leverage Federal Policies and Investment: Identify strategies to better utilize resources
Address Critical Health Issues: Identify strategies to encourage healthier lifestyles		✓	Value Communities and Neighborhoods: Identify strategies to improve local neighborhoods

Strategy 7. Business Development



MOVING THE NEEDLE

Measurement	Current Regional Baseline	Five-Year Desired	Ten-Year Desired
Unemployment Rate ¹	9.8%	State Average	National Average
Trade Surplus (Deficit) ²	-\$1.39 billion	\$0	+\$1 billion
GDP Growth Rate ³	3.4% (4.2% State)	State Average	1% Above State Average
Median Household Income ⁴	\$33,747 (\$40,768 State)	State Average	1% Above State Average
Rate of Population Change ⁴	-2.0% (1.5% State)	State Average	State Average
Population Ages 25-44 Growth Rate ⁵	1.8%	2.0%	2.5%
Market Value of Agricultural Products Sold ⁶	\$2,529,430,000	5% Increase Annually	5% Increase Annually
Value-added Agriculture Employees ⁷	15,248	n/a	50% of All Agricultural Employees
Number of Professional Economic Development Organizations in Region ⁸	12	15	18

Sources:

¹Bureau of Labor Statistics

² EMSI 2013 Estimates

³ EMSI 2013 Estimates

⁴2009-2013 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

⁵ U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2010 Summary File 1. Esri forecasts for 2014 and 2019.

⁶ Source: USDA Census of Agriculture 2012

⁷Hoover's Dun & Bradstreet database, 2012 USDA Census of Agriculture

⁸ Arkansas Economic Development Association Membership; Includes Chamber/Eco Dev; County Eco Dev; County Eco Dev/Chamber; Eco Dev Consulting; Planning District; State Eco Dev Rep; Tourism & Eco Dev; Univ Eco Development

Section IX

Appendices



Appendix A. Approach & Methodology

Project Background

The formation of what has become known as the reNEW East Arkansas regional plan began in 2011. Melissa Rivers had just taken the helm as the new Executive Director of East Arkansas Planning and Development District (District). She was looking to turn things around for the District and bring an underperforming organization to the forefront of economic progress in the region.

At the same time, interest had been shown by some in East Arkansas to apply for the second round of the HUD Regional Sustainability Planning Grant. Finding an organization that could handle the day-to-day management and operations as well as lead implementation upon completion proved a challenge in an underrepresented area of the country. The District realized the potential of the planning process to help shape the region's future and jumped on board to lead the way.

Partnership for Sustainable Communities Livability Principles



- Provide More Transportation Choices
- Promote Equitable, Affordable Housing
- Enhance Economic Competitiveness
- Support Existing Communities
- Coordinate and Leverage Federal Policies and Investment
- Value Communities and Neighborhoods

Partnerships were developed with all twelve counties, most of the 107 cities, Arkansas State University, University of Arkansas Little Rock, five community colleges and a consulting team.

Using the Partnership for Sustainability's Livability Principles, a project scope was developed to engage the local communities and traditionally marginalized populations through outreach, local planning, data collection and several specific deliverables designed to provide detailed analyses of existing conditions. The final scope of work identified the following deliverables to be utilized in the development of the regional plan:



- Community Engagement

Appendix A. Approach & Methodology

- Local Strategic Planning
- Regional Housing Analysis
- Land Use/Transportation Scenario Planning
- Data Collection and Analysis
- Local Foods Analysis

In September of 2011, a grant application was submitted to HUD. In November, the announcement was made that the District had been awarded \$2.6 million for the planning process. After finalizing agreements, work plans, logic models and flagship indicators, the District's team began putting the pieces in place for this unique, once-in-a-lifetime project for East Arkansas.

Community Engagement

Phase I: Local Community and Economic Development Strategic Planning Outreach

The overarching methodology for this Regional Plan is to start local and then build the Regional Plan. Cities and counties were invited to participate in a planning process that yields specific action plans to help communities diversify their local economy and improve overall quality of life. A major component of this process is community outreach and involvement.

Building Communities and District staff worked with city and county leaders to identify the following prerequisites for local planning:

1. A willingness to commit the time and effort to planning AND implementation;
2. The commitment of one person (or a small team of people) to serve as the Plan Director;
3. A Steering Committee of at least eight people (preferably more) to work through the planning process and serve as the implementation task force; and
4. A desire to reach out and involve the community in the planning process.

In the 12-county region, Building Communities conducted 21 local plans. Each county formed its own plan, and nine communities did the same.

Phase II: On-the-ground Outreach and Interviews

Though the local planning processes were successful in capturing feedback from community members about the direction of economic and community development, there was still a need to develop deeper connections. Traditional means of outreach – such as flyers, press releases and public announcements – were not terribly effective in reaching a large population of traditionally

Appendix A. Approach & Methodology

marginalized citizens. In East Arkansas, these populations are substantial. Developing a method for continued and sustained outreach would be an important part of the region's success.

To that end, an unorthodox approach was considered by the District. Bridget Ciaramitaro, an Anthropologist by education and training, had been utilizing a unique, on-the-ground approach to determine the best methods of reaching



deep into the fabric of communities in the Delta. Her success in finding root causes for disenfranchisement had been well-documented. Because of this, her firm was selected to assist the District in preparing a truly sustainable outreach methodology.

The purpose of this effort was to present findings from qualitative research in twelve counties that make up the District: Clay, Craighead, Crittenden, Cross, Greene, Lawrence, Lee, Mississippi, Phillips, Poinsett, Randolph and St. Francis. Ciaramitaro and

Associates, LLC conducted this research beginning in February 2014 through May 8, 2015. The methodology was limited to in-depth, open-ended interviews, participant observation, and non-random reviews of newspapers, websites, Facebook sites and a review of other sources of internal and external written communication. In addition, researchers conducted short informal interviews with groups and individuals while conducting research. Finally, researchers attended public meetings including, but not limited to, the Delta Bridge Project steering committee, reNEW East Arkansas strategic planning steering committees, cultural tourism committee, chambers of commerce, presentations by EAPDD staff and an EPA Smart Growth presentation.

Ciaramitaro and Associates, LLC utilized an open-ended interview style based on the assumption that the person being interviewed was the teacher and the person doing the interview was the student. In addition to interviews, they engaged in participant observation at meetings, in restaurants, in businesses and on the street. Ciaramitaro and Associates staff chatted briefly with anyone that was encountered within the 12 counties even if there was not time for a full interview.

Appendix A. Approach & Methodology

Nearly three hundred individuals were interviewed and many more were encountered as part of the participant observation experience. Initially the methodology was developed to conduct research only in the towns where there was a reNEW East Arkansas Steering Committee. The interviews were to focus on community engagement and needs. This was expanded to include other communities in each county and other topics. This was important since cities and towns within counties are interdependent in many ways and often do not collaborate. Open school enrollment, commutes to other communities for work, and dependence on other towns and even states for shopping make it impossible to understand one community or one county without having insight into the whole.

Respondents were interested in a wide range of topics about their community. This interest expanded the focus to include leadership, jobs, housing, community events, tourism, families, friendships, hardships and more. These inductive interviews made it possible to understand the community from an insider's perspective.

Selection of persons to interview began in the public domain--libraries, restaurants, stores, parks, senior centers, businesses, government offices and neighborhoods. The individuals and groups encountered were diverse in race, religion, age, gender, economic status, length of residency, employment status, type of job, level of education and their formal and informal roles in the community.

In order to maintain confidentiality, names were not associated with interviews. However, in several cases, there were individuals who were willing to share this information because they wanted to be more involved in planning and development activities in their community and even in the region.

The information gathered was shared freely by those interviewed. It is clear that the citizens both long-term and new residents care about their community and this region. Respondents were aware that they were being interviewed for the District. When anyone asked for something to be "off the record," that thought or opinion was not written down or carried forward. Most everyone appeared eager to tell his or her story. In most cases, the researchers were invited to come back and learn more. Some eager leaders attempted to recruit the interviewers to be a part of their local projects.

This methodology proved to be effective in that all but one person approached was willing and happy to talk. The data were analyzed through a theme matrix. If something was mentioned only one time, it did not appear on the matrix. If it was mentioned by a second person, it was added to the matrix. If it was mentioned by a third person, then it was considered a pattern. With a few

Appendix A. Approach & Methodology

exceptions, these patterns are what appear in the final report (see Appendices for full report).

The Methodology is basically an anthropological approach as outlined by Michael Agar in "The Professional Stranger" and by a long list of other anthropologists.

Phase III: Regional Housing Analysis Outreach

For the housing analysis component, community engagement included public meetings and stakeholder sessions hosted by East Arkansas Planning and Development District (EAPDD) and JQUAD Planning Group attended by stakeholders, city and county government official, consortium members, public housing and Section 8 program residents, and general public. Interviews and meetings were also held with select stakeholders, as well as city and county officials. Community engagement participants provided their input using the University of Arkansas Little Rock (UALR) Automated Response System (ARS) software tool administered by UALR institute director Dr. Jim Feld.

Additional input was received through supplemental interviews with City staff, City and County government representatives. Attendees were gathered through invitations sent to select resident and community leaders, organizations, industry professionals and public officials and a public meeting notices published in the local newspaper. At each session, general issues related to the housing market, neighborhoods and concerns pertaining to fair housing choice were discussed. The UALR also administered two online surveys using its Qualtrics survey tool to receive regional input on fair housing and priority housing and community needs. Copies of these surveys and their results and the results of the ARS reply mini system are presented in the final report (see Appendices for full report).

Phase IV: Material Development

Even though traditional methods of outreach were only marginally effective at getting people involved, it was found that a need exists to provide information in a consistent and official manner to keep them informed. Many communities in the region operate without the most basic of communication needs in today's society: a community based website.

The District utilized funding from the HUD grant to develop a website that is informative and educational for each of the twelve counties in the region. The new website provides up-to-date data that illustrates comparisons between the county, region, state and nation. Additionally, there is information about the local strategic plan and how to get involved in both local and regional efforts.

Appendix A. Approach & Methodology

To enhance each community's ability to conduct outreach, informational materials have been developed for each Steering Committee to utilize to draw more people into the process. Person-to-person invitations have proven to be the best way to encourage participation. By providing Steering Committee members with hand-out information about the local and regional plans, more people are being included every day.

Local Strategic Planning

In order to maximize community participation in the planning process, and to identify regional objectives, the District engaged Building Communities to employ its unique strategic planning methodology in the development of this plan. The Building Communities approach to strategic planning bypasses traditionally used planning and research components—such as lengthy demographic studies, which often add little to a plan in terms of usefulness over time and focuses instead on the development of action-oriented projects and initiatives. The Building Communities planning approach is objective, comprehensive and expeditious.

- Objective: Communities select community and economic development strategies and initiatives based on a logical analysis of the factors most relevant to community advancement.
- Comprehensive: Communities consider a host of possible strategies and initiatives to improve local economic conditions, and to sustain and advance overall quality of life.
- Expeditious: The process is fast-paced (typically 13 hours total) and excludes discussion unrelated to the development and implementation of the strategic plan.

The Building Communities planning approach brings together three important components to produce a strategic plan—people, analysis and action. These components were carefully combined and organized for Blytheville in order to minimize time spent on relatively fruitless planning activities, while maximizing the power that each of the components brings to the process:

- People: The Plan Director, Plan Facilitator, Building Communities Support Staff, Steering Committee—and the Community at large.
- Analysis and Action: Plan Week, which included these analyses and action-assignment sessions:
 - Key Success Factor Analysis
 - Quality-of-Life Initiatives (QOLIs) Session
 - Community Organizer Assessment
 - Voice of the Community Meeting
 - Strategy & QOLIs Selection Session

Appendix A. Approach & Methodology

- Assigning Essential Action Steps
- Elevator Speech Session

The People

County/ Community	Planning Date
Blytheville	September 2012
Clay County	July 2012
Craighead County	September 2012
Crittenden County	March 2013
Cross County	September 2012
Earle	October 2012
Greene County	October 2012
Harrisburg	August 2014
Hughes	January 2013
Jonesboro	February 2012
Lawrence County	March 2013
Lee County	October 2012
Manila	March 2013
Marion	October 2012
Mississippi County	March 2013
Osceola	January 2013
Phillips County	March 2013
Poinsett County	September 2012
Randolph County	October 2012
St. Francis County	August 2012
West Memphis	May 2012
See Appendices for Individual Plans	

Communities are people. And, this strategic plan is a road map to better the individual and collective lives of its people. As such, the Building Communities methodology places high value on involvement of the people.

In fact, the Building Communities approach invites—no, requires!—community members themselves to do the analyses and evaluations, determine the strategic projects and initiatives to be pursued, develop the content which constitutes the “meat” of the completed strategic plan and conduct follow-up activities to ensure that it is implemented, with Building Communities guiding the process.

Overview of Plan Week

The bulk of the analysis and data gathering needed to build the strategic plan were accomplished during Plan Week—a term actually coined by a Building Communities client to describe the series of rapid-fire Building Communities planning sessions.

Data-gathering and analysis sessions were first in the process. They drew on the

knowledge and experience of Steering Committee members and community members. Evaluation sessions followed, in which collected data and information were assessed and weighed. Next were decision-making sessions during which Steering Committee members determined the strategies and initiatives which would define the community’s mission during the life of the plan. Initial plan implementation steps were also determined by the Steering Committee in the later sessions.

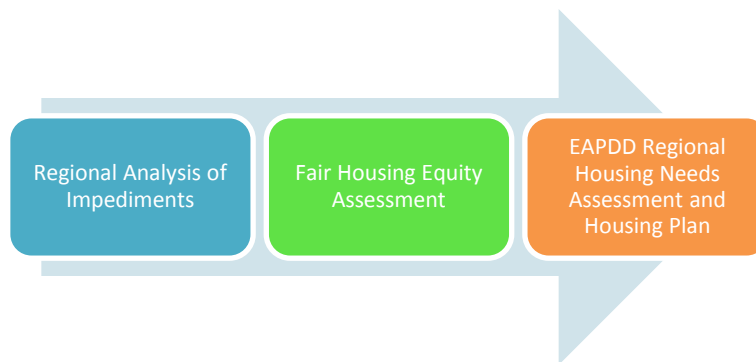
In the final session of Plan Week, Steering Committee members were invited to reflect on the results of the preceding sessions, and to merge these with their

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community's identity and aspirations to create an expanded statement of its vision and direction.

The seven sessions of Plan Week are designed to capture the "full body" of community and economic development considerations:

- A logical assessment of what the community should do based on the likelihood of success (the "mind");
- The passion the community has to advance in a desired direction, or what it wants to do (the "heart"); and
- The capacity of the community to advance based on its human, financial and technical resources, or what it can do (the "muscle").



Regional Housing Analysis

The Regional Housing Analysis was completed by JQUAD Planning Group. Managing partner James Gilleylen provided the expertise to guide the District through the complexities of the Regional Analysis of Impediments and the Fair Housing Equity Assessment to reach the recommendations presented in the final report (see Appendices for full report).

There are six components of the Regional Housing Analysis:

1. Socio Economic Characteristics/Housing Market Analysis – Supply, Demand, and Gap Analysis.
2. Housing Needs Analysis/Key Issues Assessment.
3. Housing Strategies, Recommendations and Regional Housing Policies, and Interdisciplinary Problem Solving of Issues Relative to Housing.
4. Regional Fair Housing Impediment (FHEA) and Economic Opportunity Assessment of Populations Performing Below Regional Median, and Racial Segregation and Housing De-concentration Analysis.
5. Community Engagement and Public Policy Analysis.
6. Housing Element Recommendations.

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The 12-county East Arkansas Planning Region was divided into two submarket regions: the Northern Region Submarket with seven counties and Southern Region Submarket with five counties, for purposes of this analysis. The Northern Region consists of Clay, Craighead, Greene, Lawrence, Mississippi, Poinsett, and Randolph Counties, and various cities including Jonesboro, Blytheville, Paragould, etc. The Southern Region Submarket consist of Crittenden, Cross, Lee, Phillips, and St. Francis Counties, and various cities including West Memphis, Helena-West Helena, Forrest City, etc.

The datasets and analysis provide a comparison of key demographic and housing indicators for the Northern and Southern Region submarkets. Various demographic variables were compared among the counties within the two submarkets to the overall East Arkansas Region.

Specific City-County comparisons were made between the City of Jonesboro and Craighead County, and with the City of Blytheville and Mississippi County within the Northern Submarket Region. Additional comparisons were made between key factors identified in the Northern Submarket and those same factors analyzed in the Southern Submarket Region, including submarket to submarket comparisons and City-County comparisons for West Memphis and Crittenden County. Key findings were illustrated through tables, maps (at Census Tract Level), and charts throughout the report. The housing market analysis and socio-economic profile evaluates housing market conditions and characteristics. It has been structured to serve as a planning tool and reference, and provide policy options to encourage future housing development to meet the demands of current and future residents and local governments of the two EAPDD Region Submarkets.

Socio-Economic Overview: This section describes the Region in terms of its demographic characteristics, such as income, education level, and employment. The section also describes the region's public transportation. Much of the data for the analysis in this section is drawn from the U.S. Bureau of the Census, although, whenever available, more data sources are used.

Housing Supply: This section describes the region's existing housing stock in terms of age, tenure, type, location. The Housing Supply by Tenure section looks at the characteristics of the region's rental and owner-occupied housing, examining homeownership rates, age of owner and rental housing. The Housing Supply by Type section analyzes the region's single-family and multifamily housing stock, and manufactured housing. The section also examines new construction, both single-family and multifamily.

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Housing Demand: This section contains housing demand to aid the region in encouraging the development of appropriate housing options. It also examines sales prices, rents, affordability, and cost burdens among homeowners and renters, and foreclosure information.

Regional Analysis of Impediments: The Regional Analysis of Impediments (RAI) and Fair Housing Equity Assessment (FHEA) are integral components and contribute to the critical underpinnings of the Sustainable Communities Regional Planning Initiative. Through the planning process and analyses, East Arkansas Planning and Development District (EAPDD) strives to create a more inclusive conversation on regional issues, with a particular emphasis on engaging those who have traditionally been marginalized from the community planning process. Through the inclusion of these two components in the planning process, the resulting plan should provide new insight into the disparate burdens and benefits experienced by the diverse populations across the EAPDD Region. The RAI and FHEA recommendations are intended to address these disparities.

The regional analysis of impediments is designed to identify impediments to fair housing choice through a study methodology that includes **Community Engagement** by gathering community input through public meetings, interviews and focus group sessions(see Community Engagement above); the construction of a demographic analysis resulting in a **Community Profile, Fair Housing Index, Home Mortgage Disclosure Act Analysis**; and the analysis of **Fair Housing Law and Public Policy** including court litigation, legislation, regulatory issues, fair housing ordinances and entitlement grant and public housing program impact.

The Community Profiles and Home Mortgage Disclosure Act analyses provide the basis for the demographic assessment, including a disparate impact analysis to determine if the protected class members afforded protection under the Federal Fair Housing Act are disproportionately impacted when compared to Whites or regional and citywide medians. The Fair Housing Index examines the standardized form of ten total variables providing a means of identifying individual census tracts where fair housing choice is at high risk due to demographic factors most often associated with housing discrimination.

Fair Housing Equity Assessment: The Fair Housing Equity Assessment is designed to document the extent to which the most critical demographics impacting fair housing choice are contributing to protected class members who are documented as performing below the regional or area median. Most important to the process are measuring and reducing racial and ethnic isolation and segregation in the region; identifying and reducing racially and ethnically concentrated areas of poverty; and identifying and reducing social and economic disparities. A reversal in the trends for demographics performing

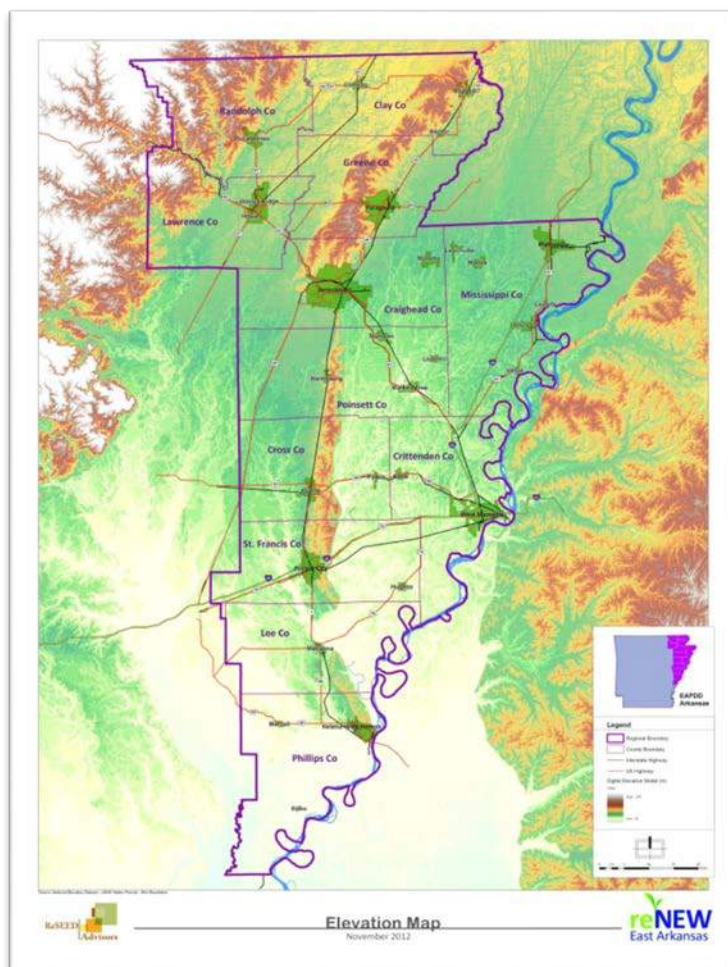
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below the area median and those with disparate impacts is viewed as most impactful in removing the barriers to housing choice.

As part of the FHEA, JQUAD performed a **Dissimilarity Index** designed to measure the evenness of a group's population distribution across a broad region. The resulting number indicates percentage of the two measured groups' population that would have to change residence for an even distribution of the two races. The Dissimilarity Index reveals that 54.5 percent of the White population of the region (0.545) would have to move to even the population distribution of African Americans and Whites across all census tracts. Similar results (0.358) were determined for Hispanic populations relative to Whites. This analysis was done with 2010 Census data (100% count vs. estimate).

Land Use/Transportation Scenario Planning

For this analysis, Building Communities subcontracted with ReSEED Advisors of Arizona to collect information on existing conditions and possible future scenarios for land use and transportation in East Arkansas. This information was then compiled into a final report that presented recommendations for consideration by the District.



GIS Base Mapping

Today, most regional planning agencies and professional planners are familiar with Geographic Information Systems. It has touched many aspects of life just through web mapping services alone. However, on a professional level, lack of relevant and usable planning related spatial information in rural settings is a major problem for rural regional and local level planners.

In many rural communities, the benefits of GIS technology have not been realized. One of the primary reasons is the lack of resources required to develop GIS programs and fund the maintenance and

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future growth of the system. This challenge was no different for the EAPDD; therefore the goal when initiating this portion of the project was to provide a low-cost, long-term solution for establishing a baseline GIS database.

City	Plan Type	Prime Format	Used
Bay	Land Use Plan	dwg	Yes
Blytheville	Proposed Land Use Plan	dwg	Yes
Cherry Valley	Land Use Plan	dwg	Yes
Crawfordsville	Land Use Plan	dwg	Yes
Dell	Zoning	dwg	Yes
Elaine	Zoning	dwg	Yes
Forrest City	Zoning	shp	Yes
Gilmore	Land Use and Zoning	dwg	Yes
Gosnell	Land Use Plan	dwg	Yes
Helena-West Helena	Land Use Plan	fc	Yes
Hoxie	Zoning	dwg	Yes
Jennette	Land Use Plan	dwg	Yes
Jonesboro	Zoning	fc	Yes
Lake City	Zoning	dwg	Yes
Leachville	Zoning	dwg	Yes
Lepanto	Land Use Plan	cdr	Yes
Marion	Zoning	shp	Yes
Marked Tree	Zoning	dwg	Yes
Osceola	Land Use Plan	dwg	Yes
Paragould	Land Use and Zoning	fc	Yes
Piggott	Land Use Plan	cdr	Yes
Trumann	Land Use Plan	dwg	Yes
Trumann	Zoning	dwg	Yes
Trumann	Land Use Plan	cdr	Yes
Turrell	Land Use Plan	dwg	Yes
Turrell	Zoning	dwg	Yes
Turrell	Land Use Plan	cdr	Yes
West Memphis	Land Use Plan	shp	Yes

To begin the process, the team developed a list of potential data layers. This list included easily attained datasets such as County and MPO boundaries as well as more localized, hard-to-acquire datasets like land use plans and zoning maps. Through researching several publicly available national, state and regional resources, including GIS Data Depot and Arkansas State's Geostor, the team was able to secure several datasets to create usable base layers for the project. These base layers were used to develop several thematic layers such as Elevation and Population Density to help understand the context of the region.

Following the development of the base layers, the team

went to work developing a usable land use layer, based on existing adopted land use and zoning plans. A list of available plans is provided in the accompanying table. As can be seen in the list, very few data sources were in a usable .shp file format. More commonly, the data was in a .dwg (Autocad) or .cdr (CorelDraw) format. These diverse datasets had to be standardized and converted into a common dataset in order to be utilized. The Building Communities team incorporated the Engineering Mapping Solutions Utility

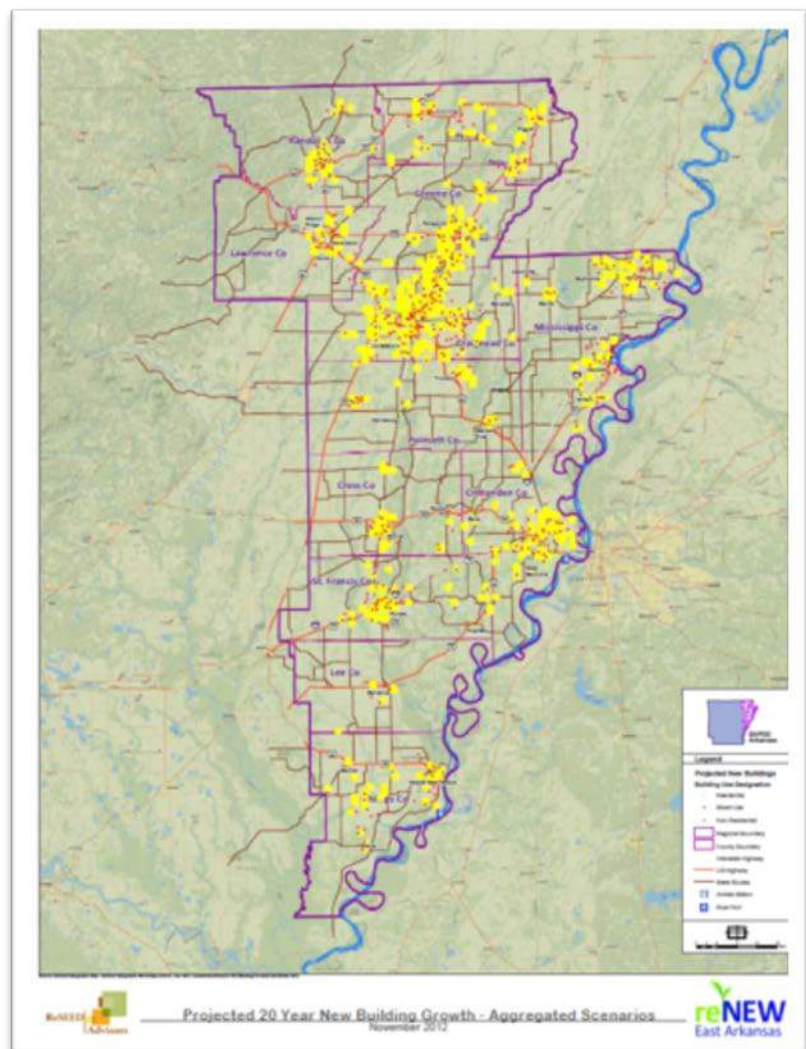
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Management Process™ (EMS UMaP™). This approach provided various levels of data conversion. The team used scanned images as a base layer for on screen data capture. Data displayed on the image is captured and linked to the graphical entities. The resulting drawing files are merged and fit to a single digital base layer. These datasets can then be used for engineering analysis and presentation quality output. This system and process provides engineering quality spatial analysis and utility modeling using a variety of engineering and geographical information system software.

Scenario Planning Exercise

In October 2012, ReSEED Advisors held two transportation and land use scenario planning visioning meetings that were attended by more than 100 participants in a southern and northern sub-region. At these sessions, attendees broke into separate sub-groups to review detailed maps of the region. They were given data on population and investment trends and then developed scenarios of where the region could be headed in the future in regard to land use, transportation, housing, and business development opportunities. With a mantra to “think outside the box,” participants used the Scenario Planning exercise to explore their ideas about how and where to grow the region to ensure the highest quality of life.

ReNEW East Arkansas Scenario Planning provided an opportunity for community members to come together and participate in a regional visioning exercise to develop robust new growth alternatives. The goal was not to develop regional plans, but rather to educate people about growth and its impacts and develop new alternatives to consider.



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The questions the region's leaders faced were:

1. How do we ensure balanced growth while preserving the environment and adding value to the region's communities?
2. Data shows that by 2035 the region will have generated 8,000 new jobs and 20,000 new residents, requiring an additional 8,000 housing units. Where will these new homes go? Where will new residents and families live, work, and play?

Scenario Planning is a computer-based, analytical approach to assessing the impacts of transportation and land use decisions on mobility, infrastructure costs, economic development and other community and environmental impacts. For East Arkansas, the analysis was based on specific datasets in a geographic information system (GIS) database.

Guiding Principles and Patterns of Growth

To develop an overarching regional vision for the future, the diverse participants held lively discussions around the general principles that should guide the region's growth and development. These provided the foundation for any strategic regional or local comprehensive planning that ensues. From the various discussions, the following five principles emerged:

- Capitalize on regional assets and promote community identity;
- Provide mobility choices;
- Promote infill development;
- Promote economic vitality and competitiveness; and
- Protect and conserve open spaces, agricultural lands and natural resources.

The greatest support was for conserving land and resources by primarily locating growth within existing urban centers and identifying highly desirable transportation corridors to facilitate movement between the centers.

Recommendations and the Next Steps

The input from the values survey and results from the mapping exercises were used in the analysis of a series of scenarios, then incorporated into a final series of recommendations for the region that are leveraged to become resources for future growth and development. This process gives East Arkansas' leadership additional tools to make more informed decisions when development opportunities arise.

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Data Collection and Analysis

In order to track progress, there must be both qualitative and quantitative information collected and analyzed over the entirety of the 20-year implementation phase. Part of the planning process included an intensive and extensive collection of quantitative data indicators by which progress can be measured and courses corrected.

Furthermore, a data infrastructure platform was established utilizing the gathered information. This system can be used in the future by the District and its communities to better demonstrate the successes and challenges faced by the region.

Data was collected by two consulting partners: University of Arkansas at Little Rock (UALR) and Civic Analytics of Austin, Texas. The majority of the data was assembled and analyzed by UALR, which used both primary and secondary sources of data. Civic Analytics also compiled economic data from secondary sources. Data points were selected based on the priorities identified through the local strategic planning process. There was an effort to find as much information as possible through publically available resources, though some data had to be sought from subscription programs such as ESRI. Public resources included, but were not limited to:

- American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates
- Arkansas Cancer Registry
- Arkansas Census of Agriculture
- Arkansas County Statistics
- Arkansas Department of Education
- Arkansas Department of Environmental Quality
- Arkansas Department of Finance & Administration
- Arkansas Department of Finance & Administration
- Arkansas Department of Health
- Arkansas Department of Workforce Services
- Arkansas Highway & Transportation Department
- Arkansas Parks & Tourism
- Arkansas State Chamber
- Bureau of Economic Analysis
- Bureau of Labor Statistics
- Environmental Protection Agency
- Main Street Arkansas
- Measures of America
- National Cancer Institute
- National Center for Education Statistics

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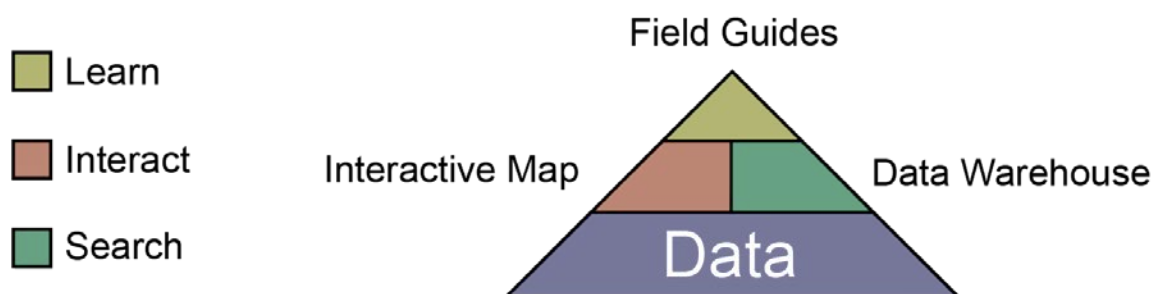
- National Telecommunications and Information Administration
- National Vital Statistics System
- North American Industry Classification System
- U.S. Cluster Mapping
- US Census Bureau
- USDA National Agriculture Statistics

Assembled data was used in two ways. First, important baseline indicators were identified for tracking related to each of the seven priority areas. These will be continuously updated and monitored throughout implementation to see where improvements are made and where more effort is needed.

Secondly, several assets were created for use by both the District and its constituents. These include a Data Warehouse, an Interactive Web Map, and Field Guides containing numerous tutorials. The Initiative also involved the collection and storage of documents, tabular and spatial data, and other information pertinent to the region. The resulting data infrastructure is unique to the region and provides a framework for communities to tell their stories using up-to-date, quantifiable indicators.

The core of the data infrastructure is hosted on Google Drive, a file storage and synchronization service created and managed by Google¹. This service allows for low-cost storage and management of data and integration with various other Google Applications like Fusion Tables, Forms, Spreadsheets, Scripts, and Docs. These services and applications are currently free with a Google account. However, there is no guarantee a pay-wall or systemic change will be implemented or a particular service/application will be removed.

Purpose of each component in data infrastructure



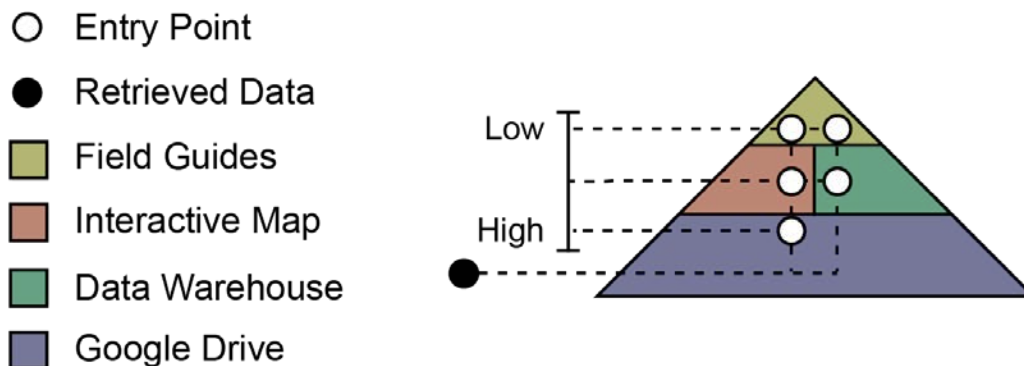
The above image shows a pyramid with data located at the bottom. To the left is a legend explaining the purpose of each component of the pyramid: to learn,

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interact, or search. The data is hosted on Google Drive while the above components sitting on top are the Interactive Map, the Data Warehouse, and Field Guides. Each of those components has a different purpose as illustrated by the legend.

The next image is meant to illustrate the complexity of interacting with the data:

Level of complexity for interacting with data infrastructure



To the left is a legend showing what each component of the triangle represents. Again, the data is located on Google Drive and will be the final source for extraction. The above image shows interaction complexity from a user perspective. The District will be the manager of the data infrastructure and be able to interact with the data from any level.

As a result of this intensive data collection activity, several unique tools were created that will be utilized for many years by the District and the communities it serves.

Field Guides. The Field Guides were created to be learning resources that provide hands-on application and produce useful products. They also teach the user how to make better use of the Interactive Map, Data Warehouse, and various Google Applications. They contain tutorials as well as useful links to related resources that can connect interested readers to deeper learning. Below is a current list of topics covered in the Field Guides:

- Workforce Development
- Downtown Redevelopment
- Housing Redevelopment
- Business Development

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- Regional Transportation
- Brownfields Restoration
- Heritage Tourism

This list can easily be expanded upon if the data infrastructure continues to grow. For example, if many counties were interested in learning about public engagement, a new Field Guide could be written explaining current practices and associated technologies.

Interactive Map. The Interactive Map is a web-based GIS viewer. It enables users to examine, download, and understand spatial data within a web browser. It harnesses the power of Google Maps and Google Fusion Tables. The Interactive Map is a very useful tool for visualizing and extracting EAPDD data from the web to the user's local computer.

Data Warehouse. The Data Warehouse is a useful interface for exploring and downloading additional data that is not accessible via the Interactive Map. The Data Warehouse allows a user to search and view categorized maps, tables, and files in a much simpler space.

Warehouse Checklist. The Warehouse Checklist is designed to show the user everything that is in the warehouse as well as if it's available by region, city, zip code, or county.

Primary Data Collection Tool. Although the data warehouse is filled with secondarily sourced information, there is need for the District to collect primary information as well. In order to facilitate this work, a new tool was developed to assist the District staff and local leaders in gathering pertinent information on a regular basis. A snapshot of the collection tool is shown here.

COMMUNITY NAME HERE	
What are local utility rates?	
<input type="text"/>	Residential Clients
<input type="text"/>	Commercial Clients
<input type="text"/>	Industrial Clients
How many total water/sewer customers?	
<input type="text"/>	Residential
<input type="text"/>	Commercial
<input type="text"/>	Industrial
<input type="text"/>	Other
Who picks up solid waste?	
<input type="text"/>	City
<input type="text"/>	County
<input type="text"/>	Private
<input type="text"/>	Other

Relevant data points were identified by the staff and consulting team in relation to the priorities chosen. For example, there is a need by many communities to upgrade existing water and wastewater systems. However, rates for such utilities are reportedly low in comparison to state averages, making it difficult for communities to find grant and loan programs to assist with

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the cost of the improvements. No collective information exists to demonstrate the rates being charged within the region. Without it, the District will have a difficult time building a program to provide assistance. Data will need to be collected individually in order to understand the full extent of the issue.

Local Food System Analysis

The District was not the only recipient of a HUD Regional Plan for Sustainable Development grant in the area. At the same time, Shelby County Government of Tennessee was also awarded a grant from the program. The resulting regional sustainability planning processes identified access to food as important for both regions in terms of health and economic development. Given the proximity of the two regions and similarities in planning objectives, EAPDD and Shelby County partnered to commission a food system assessment to:

- Outline a vision for a sustainable food system for the Mid-South region;
- Develop a comprehensive baseline and framework of the Mid-South's current food system to include an understanding of issues, opportunities, and practices from other jurisdictions;
- Provide a gap analysis between the current state and the vision;
- Inventory public and private programs that can be leveraged to accomplish priorities identified through this effort;
- Create a community action plan identifying implementable and locally appropriate recommendations to address the region's food system issues.

Bush Consulting Group, with extensive background in competitive strategy development for private sector and regional economic development clients, facilitated the development of the community action plan to enhance the regional food system's economic, community, and environmental health impacts. The strategic planning process utilizes Bush's nationally recognized cluster development approach, applied to more than ten regional clusters since 2010. The geographic scope of the effort was the 15-county combined HUD planning districts represented by EAPDD and Shelby County.

Bush Consulting's approach to creating a community action plan leveraged and developed competitively advantaged clusters or "geographic concentrations of interconnected businesses, suppliers, service providers, and associated institutions in a particular sector." They used a proven, rigorous methodology and depth of analysis to identify the most valuable focus areas within the Mid-South region's food system, and the key interventions required to capitalize on the opportunities they represent. From this effort they estimated economic, environmental, and social sustainability impact – gross product, jobs,

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land use implications, and healthy food access, among other critical metrics. The outcome of this work has provided the Mid-South region with a concrete action plan for pursuing the most promising market opportunities. This enabled a strategic, return-on-investment approach, which, in turn, will allow the region to optimally apply limited resources toward the highest leverage interventions.

Bush Consulting Group's cluster development approach was organized in three major phases:

- Phase I: Define Regional Food Cluster Scope and Analyze Core Competences
- Phase II: Conduct Regional Market and Competitiveness Assessment
- Phase III: Engage Industry in Defining the Region's Food Cluster Vision, Goals, and Interventions

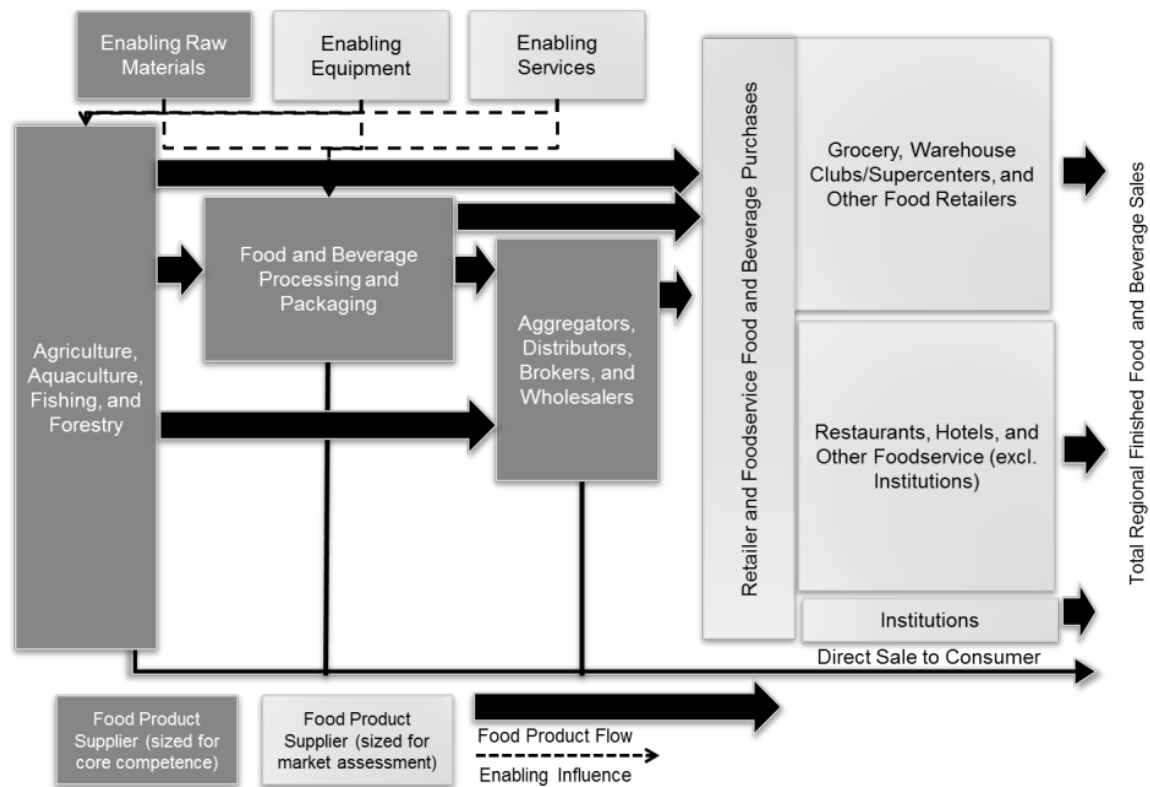
A key differentiator of this approach was its emphasis on financial analysis and economic principles. To be clear, Bush Consulting does not see environmental and social sustainability parameters as separate from financial performance; instead, they recognize them as integral to the way companies go to market and compete. They also recognize the generation of lasting economic value as vital to resourcing positive social and environmental impact in the long term.

Phase I: Define Regional Food Cluster Scope and Analyze Core Competences

The first phase answered the questions: "What are relevant food supply products, services, and enabling activities?", "What does the Mid-South region do in these areas today?", and "What should be the Mid-South region's focus for capitalizing on current activities?" This phase used a value chain segmentation framework to understand relevant food business products and services being commercially pursued within the region, as well as an analysis that suggested areas of critical mass and priority. We also identify non-commercial enablers, such as non-profit, research, government, or philanthropic activity related to sustainable food system development.

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Regional Food Business Sector Product Flow and Value Chain Segmentation Framework



The outcome of Phase I was a clear picture of the region's know-how and critical mass of organizations against specific market and product segments. This ensured the region was building upon existing strengths, to seize opportunities in local, regional, or potentially larger markets. With a focused and rigorous approach to understanding regional assets, EAPDD and Shelby County will be better able to target limited resources to pursue economic impact within short and intermediate time horizons, as well as prepare for longer-term opportunities. At the end of this phase, regional stakeholders selected three focus areas at the intersection of regional food supply and target market demand to anchor the remaining assessment and strategy development.

Phase II: Conduct Regional Market and Competitiveness Assessment

The second phase built from the region's understanding of critical mass and clearly defined set of promising focus areas, to answer the questions:

- "From where could demand come?"
- "At what scale and over what time frame?"
- "How unique or competitively advantaged is the region?"
- "What best practices from other U.S. regions might be applicable in this region's context?"; and

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- “What is the growth potential and opportunity associated with the region’s activities?”

Exploring food business opportunities specific to the Mid-South region included a close look at a wide range of factors, from market demand and competitive landscape to specific products and technologies, regional supply chains and business-supporting infrastructures. Therefore, while supplemented by targeted secondary research into local and national market data and best practices, the most critical insight came directly from regional industry participants engaged via interview.

It was also this phase which took into account regionally differentiating environmental or social factors, such as fertile Delta soil, deep water aquifers, the Mississippi River, population centers, and so forth. These are not quantified in the core competence analysis, but critically enhance the regional food system. By addressing them as part of market opportunity and competitiveness, Bush Consulting positioned them as part of, not separate from, the regional cluster’s economic performance.

Another differentiator of the approach was that it distinguished between import substitution and export-oriented cluster development. In import substitution, the objective is meeting more of the regional demand with regional supply; in this case displacing some of the food imports brought into the region. In export-oriented development, the focus is on increasing the sale of regional food product outside of the region, most likely to a broader U.S. market. While this effort was predominantly oriented toward import substitution given its local sustainability impacts, Bush Consulting identified regional export opportunities to the extent that they impact regional sourcing and employment dynamics. Export-oriented development allows new dollars to be brought into the region to generate long-term economic value, which is an important engine for driving regional economic growth.

Ultimately, Phase II provided a meaningful framework for thinking about regional strengths, growth barriers, and economic development interventions, as well as a benchmark from which to project the region’s future market share and growth potential. It also yielded a list of critical industry contacts to involve in Phase III’s selection of the region’s food cluster vision, goals, and interventions.

Phase III: Engage Industry in Defining the Region’s Food Cluster Vision, Goals, and Interventions

The final phase of work focused on putting together the individual pieces of intelligence to answer the question: “In light of this insight, what should the region do to most effectively and sustainably grow the regional food system?” It

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culminated in a refined set of recommendations and a specific plan of action based on this insight.

In Phase III, the industry interviewees from Phase II were invited to a working session to vet the findings of Phases I and II, and participate in drafting the regional recommendations and action plan before the Steering Committee's review. In this way, interventions meant to impact food businesses were developed and approved by food industry leaders. It is also this group that EAPDD, Shelby County, and the Steering Committee will likely leverage to initiate the activities that emerge from the roadmap, champion its cause, and facilitate the addition of connections and new parties into the cluster.

Regional Plan

In forming the regional plan, information was utilized from all of the above components. First, the local strategic plans assisted in identifying the top priorities for the region. Next, information was collected from the individual analyses for land use and transportation, housing and local foods. After analyzing the most selected strategies and initiatives chosen in each county and community, a list of seven strategic priority areas was compiled.

Strategy Title	Focus Areas
1. Civic & Leadership Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Leadership Capacity Building• Community Engagement• Public Relations
2. Infrastructure Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Transportation• Water & Wastewater• Telecommunications• Land Use Planning
3. Affordable, Quality Housing	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Access to Housing• Redevelopment of Dilapidated Neighborhoods
4. Healthy Communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Community Beautification• Disaster Preparation and Resilience• Health Care Expansion• Local, Healthy Foods• Environmental Restoration
5. Education & Workforce Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Pre-K through 12• Post-secondary• Workforce Development & Training

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Strategy Title	Focus Areas
6. Tourism & Cultural Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Downtown Development• Local/Regional Tourism• Cultural Tourism• Pass-through Visitor Services
7. Business Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Business Recruitment• Business Retention & Expansion• Entrepreneurial Development• Value-added Agriculture

The strategies are designed to build upon one another based on the level of complex structures needed by communities and the region to implement. At the base, there is a need for Civic and Leadership Development, the foundation upon which all other strategies are built. Infrastructure Development is also a foundational need in any community but cannot be successfully completed without leadership and civic engagement. Likewise, housing efforts must first have a solid base of leadership and infrastructure, and so on.

Data points were analyzed in relationship to each of these priorities, leading to the selection of significant indicators that could be measured over time to show progress. Based on the data analysis, recommended goals and objectives were then established for each of the seven priority areas. The recommendations were formulated with a series of questions in mind:

1. For each priority area, what should the District's role be? What actions could the District realistically take to impact the issue?
2. Capacity Building: What types of local community education, organization, training, community engagement or other issues need to be addressed?
3. Organizational: What types of resources (staff, education, training, technology, etc.) might be needed by the District to accomplish this task?
4. Planning: Are additional feasibility studies, research analyses or other types of specific technical assistance needed? If so, what might those be?
5. Policy: Are legislative or local policy changes needed? Will advocacy by the District be needed for these changes?
6. Execution: What specific, actionable items will it take to reach completion?

In April of 2015, recommended goals and objectives were presented to the District Board and Project Consortium for their review and prioritization. For each goal, participants were asked to choose from three options:

Appendix A. Approach & Methodology

1. Include the goal in the regional plan as a HIGH priority;
2. Include the goal in the regional plan as a LOW priority;
3. Do not include the goal in the regional plan.

The results provided the framework for the development of each strategy of the regional plan. Goals have been listed in ranking order and labeled as either “Priority Goals” (for those receiving high priority ranking) or “Secondary Goals” (for those receiving low priority ranking). Those recommendations that were not chosen for inclusion are presented in Appendix B.

Priority Goals will be given the most attention from the District in that existing resources will be realigned and new resources diligently pursued to accomplish the tasks. Secondary Goals will also receive attention from the District but only as resources allow. Though timelines have been established for Secondary Goals, these are the most fluid and dependent upon available means.

There are some Secondary Goals that will be needed to further other priorities. Because a collaborative process was utilized to rank goals, they may not have ranked as high as necessary. All Secondary Goals will be reviewed by District staff and ranked again based on available resources, immediate need and interconnectivity to the Priority Goals.

In all, 26 Priority Goals and 19 Secondary Goals were chosen for action by the Board and Consortium members. Specific objectives, timelines and performance measures were then assigned to each goal. Additional indicators were also identified to assist the District with tracking impacts. As a result, the District will have both quantitative and qualitative means of measuring progress.



MOVING THE NEEDLE

In each section, indicators have been identified to provide quantitative analysis of progress. These, in addition to the more qualitative performance measures listed for each goal, will give the District and its constituents a way to track success at various levels and determine whether adjustments need to be made.

Appendix B. Recommendations Not Selected

RECOMMENDATIONS NOT SELECTED	
Infrastructure Development	
Develop passenger rail service for the entire region.	
Expand public transit services to the entire region.	
Affordable, Quality Housing	
Develop a regional governance structure for implementation of the Regional Analysis of Impediments and Fair Housing Equity Assessment.	
Increase Public awareness of fair housing rights.	
Minimize the impacts of the subprime mortgage lending crises and increased foreclosures in the region.	
Work with traditional lenders to reduce citizens' reliance on predatory lenders.	
Address the barriers to Fair Housing Choice that impact special need populations.	

Appendix C. Literature Review

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D. Additional Appendices

Additional Appendices are available electronically at www.eapdd.com and include the following:

- i. Community Engagement and More: Twelve Counties Served by the East Arkansas Planning & Development District (EAPDD)**
- ii. Local Economic and Community Development Strategic Plans**
 - a. Blytheville
 - b. Clay County
 - c. Craighead County
 - d. Crittenden County
 - e. Cross County
 - f. Earle
 - g. Greene County
 - h. Harrisburg
 - i. Hughes
 - j. Jonesboro
 - k. Lawrence County
 - l. Lee County
 - m. Manila
 - n. Marion
 - o. Mississippi County
 - p. Osceola
 - q. Phillips County
 - r. Poinsett County
 - s. Randolph County
 - t. St. Francis County
 - u. West Memphis
- iii. HUD Regional Sustainable Community Plan Housing Element**
- iv. Land Use & Transportation in East Arkansas**
- v. Delta Roots: The Mid-South Regional Food System Plan**
- vi. Field Guides:**
 - a. Workforce Development:
 - i. www.eapdd.com/workforce-development
 - b. Downtown Redevelopment
 - i. www.eapdd.com/downtown-redevelopment
 - c. Housing Development
 - i. www.eapdd.com/housing-redevelopment
 - d. Business Development
 - i. www.eapdd.com/business-dvelopment
 - e. Regional Transportation
 - i. www.eapdd.com/regional-transportation
 - f. Brownfield Restoration
 - i. www.eapdd.com/brownfield-redevelopment
 - g. Heritage Tourism
 - i. www.eapdd.com/heritage-tourism



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