

**East Central Planning and Development District
Annual Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) Update
October 1, 2021 – September 30, 2022**

Introduction:

The primary function of East Central Planning and Development District (ECPDD) is to promote organized economic development on a multi-county basis. The District's role in economic development varies widely from planning, obtaining funding, and implementing basic infrastructure to actually working with industry and local units of governments to help determine and meet their common needs and goals. In essence, the District provides a wide array of professional services and technical assistance for local units of governments in working with existing and new companies, and in preparing for economic development.

The District administers projects and programs for several federal and state agencies, including the Economic Development Administration (EDA), the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC), the Delta Regional Authority (DRA) and the Department of Human Services (DHS), including the MS Council on Aging.

Analyzing problems and potentials of the multi-county area and outlining goals and strategy for attaining these goals is part of the District's economic development process. The District's Comprehensive Economic Strategy, approved by the Economic Development Administration, qualifies member counties for the full range of EDA programs. Identifying existing resources, assessing needs, and securing funds from federal and state levels to enhance the economic development of the areas is another role of the District.

It is important to highlight the various elements of the District that affects the growth potential and the elements that are critical for growth. The District area has had a decline in population, an increase in the per capita income, a significant change in the poverty level, increase in the labor force, high unemployment rates as a result of COVID-19 in 2020, but the unemployment rate decreased in 2021 because of the reduction in the number of persons seeking employment, job losses, and plant closures.

Regional Analysis:

The population for the East Central area declined 2.2% in a three (3) year period. The population decline was reported as follows:

**Population
(East Central Area 2016-2020)**

County	2016	2019	2020
Clarke	15,888	15,541	15,615
Jasper	16,578	16,383	16,637
Kemper	9,896	9,742	8,988
Lauderdale	77,755	74,125	72,984
Leake	22,620	22,786	21,275
Neshoba	29,403	29,118	29,087
Newton	21,588	21,081	21,291
Scott	28,207	28,124	27,990
Smith	15,909	15,916	14,209
ECPDD	237,844	232,753	227,806

Source: StatsAmerica, USA Counties in Profile
Data.census.gov/cedsci

The per capita income of the District increased from 2019 to 2020 by \$2,296.00 or 6.32%.
Per County, the per capita income increases were as follows:

**Per Capita Income
(East Central Area 2015-2020)**

	2015	2019	2020
Clarke County	\$35,778	\$38,735	\$42,826
Jasper County	\$34,409	\$39,699	\$41,967
Kemper County	\$27,575	\$30,021	\$33,841
Lauderdale County	\$34,964	\$39,359	\$42,673
Leake County	\$27,283	\$31,441	\$32,239
Neshoba County	\$34,051	\$36,785	\$38,507
Newton County	\$31,690	\$35,563	\$37,484
Scott County	\$29,133	\$31,585	\$32,840
Smith County	\$32,043	\$35,445	\$36,494
Mississippi	\$21,057	\$38,914	\$42,129
USA	\$28,930	\$54,490	\$59,510
ECPDD	\$31,880.66	\$36,303	\$38,599

Source: StatsAmerica, USA Counties in Profile

The poverty level for the District area is a distressed factor and all attempts should be made to increase the income and decrease the poverty level of the District.

**Poverty Level
(East Central Area 2015-2020)**

	2015	2019	2020
Clarke County	21.8	21.6	23.2
Jasper County	22.8	19.0	20.5
Kemper County	31.9	27.5	28.0
Lauderdale County	22.0	25.5	21.5
Leake County	24.3	24.4	23.8
Neshoba County	25.5	26.9	21.7
Newton County	22.7	21.2	20.3
Scott County	21.7	25.5	19.7
Smith County	19.5	16.8	18.9
ECPDD	23.6	24.4	21.9

Source: StatsAmerica, USA Counties in Profile

The above data represents the poverty level of the counties in the District area. The District has determined the need for jobs, increase in educational attainment of the area, and to provide training opportunities and programs to increase the livable wages for the District area. The labor force of the District area has decreased over the three-year period.

**Labor Force
(East Central Area 2016-2020)**

	2016	2019	2020
Clarke County	5,665	5,923	5,846
Jasper County	5,702	6,185	6,094
Kemper County	3,244	3,555	3,423
Lauderdale County	29,974	30,536	29,638
Leake County	7,318	7,968	8,058
Neshoba County	10,095	10,244	10,382
Newton County	8,152	8,856	8,010
Scott County	12,746	12,721	12,681
Smith County	6,428	6,822	6,631
ECPDD	89,324	92,810	90,763

Source: StatsAmerica, USA Counties in Profile

As a result of COVID-19, there was spike in unemployment in the area, the following represents the unemployment rates for 2015-2020. In 2021, from January to October, the unemployment rates decreased, indicating that persons are seeking jobs.

**Unemployment Rates
(East Central Area 2015-2021)**

	2015	2019	2020	2021
Clarke County	5.3	6.2	13.5	6.61
Jasper County	5.4	6.8	11.4	7.53
Kemper County	7.0	8.0	14.2	7.93
Lauderdale County	4.5	5.5	12.5	5.7
Leake County	4.5	5.5	14.0	5.85
Neshoba County	4.5	5.9	17.9	5.95
Newton County	4.4	5.5	13.4	6.0
Scott County	3.8	4.5	9.9	4.74
Smith County	4.0	5.2	7.8	4.70

Source: Mississippi Department of Employment Security, 2020

The District had five (5) companies to have layoffs or closure during 2020. There have been no closures in 2021. The listing is below:

**Business Layoffs/Closures in the East Central PDD Area*
October 2019 – September 2020**

Date	County	Company	Industry Type	Layoff/Closure	# Employees	Reason
4/17/2020	Neshoba	MBCI-Chahta Enterprises	Non-Current Carrying Wiring Device Manufacturing	Layoff	14	Temporary layoff due to COVID-19
4/17/2020	Lauderdale	Aslane’s Mission	Thrift Shop, Used Merchandise	Layoff	4	Temporary layoff due to COVID-19
4/21/2020	Neshoba	Neshoba County Animal Hospital	Veterinary Services	Layoff	9	Temporary layoff due to COVID-19
4/24/2020	Lauderdale	J&C Auto & Towing	Motor Vehicle Towing	Layoff	3	Temporary layoff due to COVID-19
6/04/2020	Newton	La-Z-Boy South Newton	Furniture Manufacturing	Closure	300	Permanent layoff due to COVID-19

*Source: Twin District Workforce Development Area, 2020

The following are a listing by goals and objectives that reflects the summary of funded projects received in the year (October 1, 2020 – September 30, 2021) toward implementing the 2020-2021 CEDS Annual Update:

Goal #1: Develop and maintain infrastructure to support long-term economic and community development.

Objective: Improve rural water and sewer systems, build access roads, industrial parks, air access, rail access, roads and bridges.

Projects were approved in FY 2021 related to the above objective, totaled \$4,978,301.00. Major economic projects were:

- Smith County application approved for two access roads in the Smith County Industrial Park, Taylorsville
- Kemper County for installation of water and sewer services to an industrial site
- Town of Union for paved road in the Union Industrial Park
- City of Forest for repaving of four inner City streets

Objective: Enhance rural fire protection by working with county fire departments to create fire districts and provide equipment, training, and facilities to obtain lower fire ratings for as many areas as possible.

Applications were prepared to present to the Assistance to Firefighters Grant (AFG) program for volunteer fire departments to purchase extrication equipment, turnout gear, SCBA and brush truck.

Objective: Establish rural access to Technology – Geographical Information System, Global Positioning Systems and State Fiber Network.

TEC communications begin developing broadband communication systems in two counties, Jasper and Smith, to benefit persons in the rural counties.

Goal #2: Create effective partnerships for economic growth and expansion.

Objective: Identify, assess, and cleanup defined brownfields in the District area.

District staff completed the implementation of the EDA Brownfield grant, which identify properties that were accessed for hazardous substances and petroleum

substances. As a result of the assessment, several properties are being redeveloped and private and public dollars are being invested in the District area.

Objective: Promotion of the revolving loan fund programs, workforce programs, and other funding programs to assist with the implementation of the above goals.

Revolving loan projects were approved totaling approximately \$940,500.00 which resulted in the creation of 28 jobs and increase in tax revenue for the District area.

Objective: Work with counties and municipalities to build partnerships and strategies to strengthen local and regional development efforts.

The District will coordinate the implementation of an \$850,091.00 project to provide homebuyers assistance to approximately 48 families with emphasis on providing services to persons with disabilities.

Goal #3: Emphasize workforce development and education to help qualify for and attract higher skilled, better paying employment opportunities.

Objective: Continue to work with employers to determine manpower needs for businesses and industries and to provide training for potential employees.

District staff, through the Twin Districts Workforce Development Area (TDWDA), continues to work with local industries to provide information about On-The-Job Training Programs that are available. Additionally, assistance and programs that are available through the local WIN Job Center are provided.

Goal #4: Strengthen our communities through a network of services, amenities, and institutions to provide for essential human needs and to support the quality of life.

Objective: Improve law enforcement, crime prevention, highway safety, and drug abuse education and prevention programs.

Funds were provided to local law enforcement agencies for the above objective. Additionally CARES funds were made available to the local units of government.

District staff assisted local units of governments in applying for police cars, bulletproof vests, police radios, taskers, uniforms, computers and printers and other equipment for the police departments. Assistance was provided to three (3) counties, four (4) cities, eight (8) towns and one (1) community college.

Objective: Establish cultural centers and recreational parks throughout the District.

Funds from the Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries and Parks in the amount of \$270,000.00 were provided to the District area.

Objective: Promote adequate non-emergency transportation for rural poor and elderly.

East Central Area Agency on Aging provides transportation services to the elderly/disabled persons who live within the nine-county area. The purpose of this program is to maintain the independence of the elderly/disabled persons for as long as possible by promoting access to available services in the community. Service activities include providing transportation for the following purposes: medical and/or dental treatment, social service and other related agencies/functions, personal care needs, nutrition sites, grocery shopping, etc.

Vital projects completed from the 2017 CEDS (completed in 2020-2021).

Objective: Improve access to broadband and fiber optic services to enhance tele-medicine and distance learning opportunities in rural areas.

USDA awarded TEC, a Bay Springs home-based company over \$4.6 million to help provide dependable high-speed internet to rural areas in east central Mississippi. The USDA grant was for \$4692,817.00 and TEC provided \$2,603,098 for an overall investment of \$7,295,915.00. The project will involve TEC running approximately 200 miles of “fiber” and is expected to bring dependable high-speed internet services to over 1,500 homes and businesses in the project area.

East Mississippi Electrical Power Association (EMEPA) was awarded a \$5.4 million grant to fund high-speed internet access to Southeast Lauderdale, Northeast Clarke, and West Kemper County area (east central Mississippi). EMEPA will match the project with \$8.3 million for a total cost of \$13.7 million.

Objective: Identify, assess, and cleanup defined brownfields in the District area.

East Central PDD received a U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) grant in the amount of \$299,700.00 to complete an assessment of Hazardous Substances and Petroleum Substance. The project was completed in September of 2020. Nine (9) Phase 1 Environmental Site Assessments, eight (8) Phase II Environmental Site Assessments, and one (1) Phase III Environmental Assessments were completed.

Objective: Coordinate partnerships between community-based organizations and local communities to improve the quality of life of all local residents.

The goal of the District's participation was to increase and obtain a better population count and increase participation in the Census 2020, which impacts federal and local funding and formulas.

Vital Projects (FY 2021):

The following are additions to the ECPDD CEDS Update and is added under Vital Projects:

- Industrial Development Sites (development improvements and expansion):
 - Clarke County – Site work at the existing industrial park
 - Smith County – Purchase and develop land for industrial sites in Polkville, Raleigh and Taylorsville
- Building Renovation and Improvements:
 - Jasper County – Renovation of vacant industrial building to be used for the expansion of an existing industry.
 - Jasper County – Construction of a new, modern headquarter for an existing industry
 - Kemper County – Renovation of an existing industrial building for industry development and job creation

- Meridian Community College (Lauderdale County) – Renovation of existing building to be used as a Transportation Training Center for automotive, diesel, and aviation repair
- Renovation of historical building, coliseum, and existing public building
- Construction of workforce training centers, public safety complexes
- Construction of convention centers and multi-purpose building
- Neshoba County – Renovation of an existing building for a prospective industry
- Newton County – Renovation of closed hospital to be used as a medical facility
- Development of a Study to determine feasibility of an industry expanding to Kemper County
- Development of a Master Plan for Meridian Community College

Possible Funding Sources:

The following have been identified as funding sources for the above projects:

- Mississippi Development Authority's Small Municipality and Limited Population Counties (SMLPC)
- Mississippi Development Infrastructure (DIP)
- Mississippi Development Authority's Community Development Block Grant (CDBG)
- Economic Development Administration (EDA)
- Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC)
- Delta Regional Authority (DRA)
- Mississippi Capital Improvements (CAP), and other state and local Bond programs