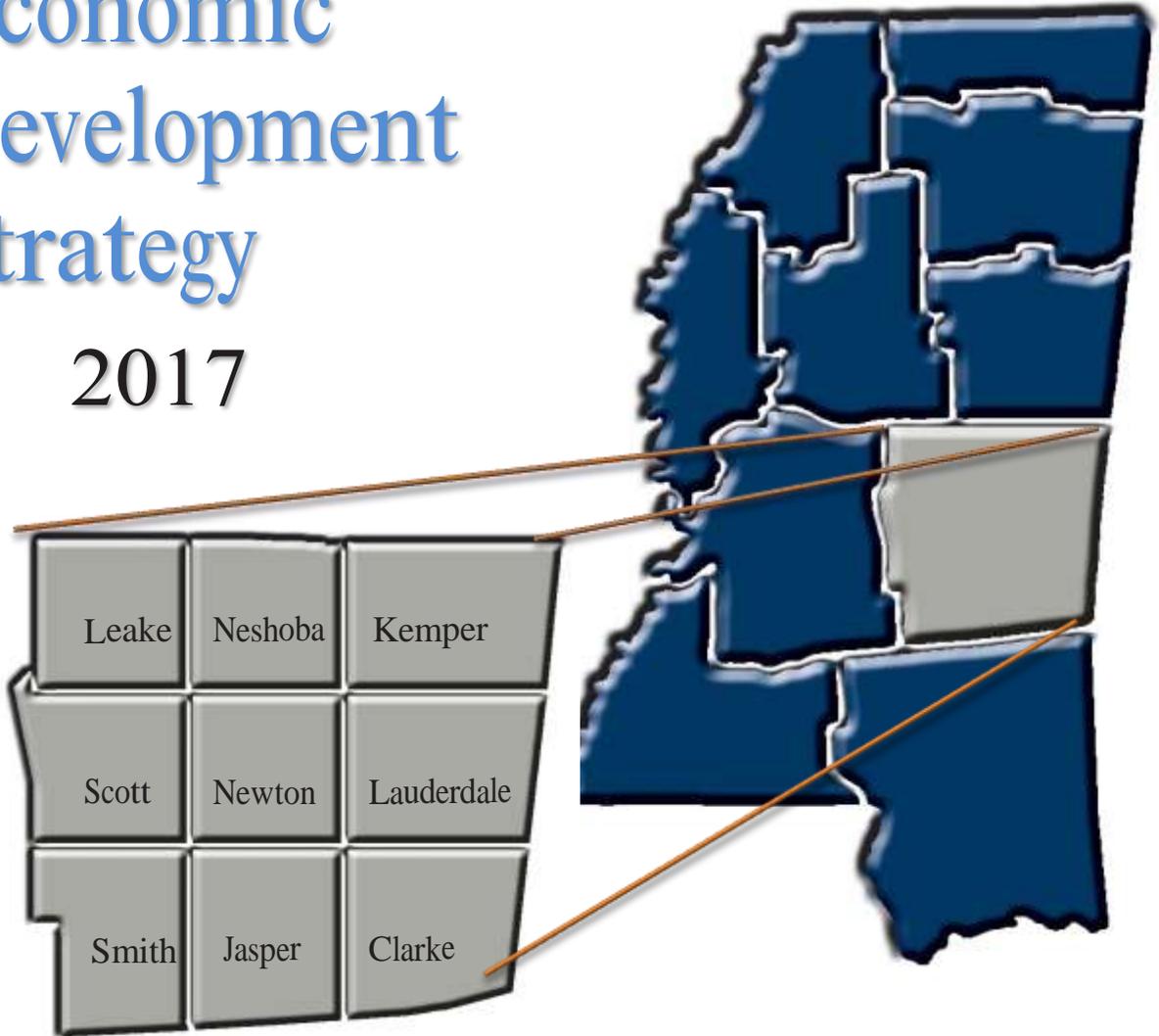


Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy

2017



East Central Planning & Development District

Table of Contents

| | |
|---|---------|
| I. Introduction/Foreword ----- | page 3 |
| II. Organization and Management ----- | page 5 |
| III. Regional Analysis----- | page 9 |
| IV. Strengths / Weaknesses / Opportunities / Threats (SWOT) ----- | page 29 |
| V. Goals and Objectives----- | page 33 |
| VI. Public/Private Partnerships ----- | page 40 |
| VII. Action Plan ----- | page 43 |
| VIII. Performance Measures ----- | page 46 |
| IX. Data Sources ----- | page 48 |

FOREWORD

This Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) has been researched and developed under the sponsorship of the East Central Planning and Development District and the Economic Development Administration of the U.S. Department of Commerce.

The East Central Planning and Development District was incorporated by the State of Mississippi on March 20, 1968. The Economic Development Administration approved the Articles of Incorporation and By-Laws on May 21, 1968. The organization is comprised of County Committee Members and a Board of Directors who represent a broad array of local interests including business, governmental agencies, minorities, and the poor.

The nine contiguous counties of the East Central Planning and Development District include thirty-one municipalities. The 2015 population of the District was 240,879 and approximately thirty-five percent (35%) of this total resides in incorporated towns.

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 government 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 has played a critical role in the area's industrial and economic development through the many services and operations it provides to local governments, such as technical assistance, planning, grant application, administration, and implementation of projects and programs.

These services allow for the coordination and non-duplication of federal and state programs and projects. 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 including MS Council on Aging. The District administers most area projects through the Mississippi Development Authority.

The District has worked closely with local units of governments in planning, developing, and administering industrial and economic development projects and programs in such areas as housing, public facilities, and human services, which also enhance opportunity for economic development.

The District's location and close ties with counties and municipalities in the area make it easier to stay attuned to local industry and their needs. In this position, the District is able to more adequately receive input from local industrial representatives who may have common problems, such as geographic constraints, transportation, inadequacy of the labor force and vocational training/education, housing availability, etc. The District is able to tie together the elements of a regional economic development policy and apply it to the local level. Such factors as utilization of area community and junior colleges for technical training, industrial park location, rail transportation, air carrier service, enterprise zone utilization, local marketing efforts, and other factors can be dealt with on a regional basis.

One purpose of the District's creation was to provide a pool of professionals to assist local governments with economic development efforts. This expertise was needed by these local units of government because many of the participating counties, cities and towns did not have the resources to hire and maintain a multi-discipline staff of their own.

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 Development 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.

Assistance from EDA to make improvements such as access roads, rail spurs, sewer and water systems, drainage and site preparation to develop industrial park infrastructure along with State Community Development Block Grant economic development projects, designed to help local units of government provide assistance to industry, helps create or retain jobs and further the economic process within the nine-county area.

II. Organization and Management

A. Administrative Organization

A. Participating Governments

All nine counties of East Central Planning and Development District are designated redevelopment areas and all nine counties actively participate in the District organization and program. Those counties by name are: Leake, Neshoba, Kemper, Scott, Newton, Lauderdale, Smith, Jasper and Clarke. (Also, included in the confines of the District are the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians whose headquarters are located at the Pearl River Community in Neshoba County, and they too are qualified for EDA projects and participate in the District.)

All nine counties in the District have elected to have the District's Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) document serve their planning needs and designation obligations.

B. District Organization

Following is a list of the Board members of the District with their occupations, places of residence, indications of the County they represent or any elected District Board of Directors as well as whether or not they represent minority groups. Fifty percent (50%) of the District's Board of Directors is made up of minority representatives and one half of the Executive Committee is composed of minorities. Furthermore, the District has submitted to the Economic Development Administration an affirmative action plan, which outlines the methodology for selection of minority representatives on the Board of Directors and also the staffing patterns of the District in regard to race.

C. Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) Committee

The East Central Planning and Development CEDS Committee was appointed by the District's Board of Directors. Each member was chosen because of his expertise in a particular area, with special care taken to ensure each of the District's counties were represented.

The committee had broad community membership, with representatives from the following areas: public officials; community leaders; workforce development boards; institutions of higher education; minority and labor groups; and private individuals. Of the 15 members on the committee, 52% were private sector representatives and 33% were minority.

The CEDS Committee held a series of meetings at ECPDD's offices in Newton, Mississippi. At these meetings, the committee members identified the District's strengths and weaknesses, as well as the area's opportunities and threats. These were categorized into several broad areas, including Economic Development, Community Development, Education, Quality of Life, and Natural Resources.

Between meetings, ECPDD staff summarized the ideas discussed and developed five goals, one for each of the five categories identified by the committee, and listed specific objectives for each.

These goals and objectives were then presented to the CEDS Committee. The committee members again discussed in depth the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats identified from the first meeting. They also discussed the goals and objectives and made suggestions for fine tuning these.

In addition to the CEDS Committee, these goals and objectives were also submitted to the ECPDD Board of Directors.

The following is a listing of the committee membership, along with information regarding their areas of expertise, as well as the listing of ECPDD Board of Directors.

EAST CENTRAL PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT DISTRICT 2017 BOARD OF DIRECTORS

| | | |
|---|---|--|
| <p>***Wilson Hallman, President Smith County Director 5944 SCR 539 Raleigh, MS 39153</p> | <p>*James Granger Kemper County Director 3735 Binnsville Road Scooba, MS 39358</p> | <p>**Lola Parkerson Director at Large P. O. Box 6010 Choctaw, MS 39350</p> |
| <p>***Curtis Gray, Vice President *Jasper County Director 37 CR 317 Heidelberg, MS 39439</p> | <p>*Joe Norwood Lauderdale County Director 410 21st Ave., 11th Floor Annex Meridian, MS 39301</p> | <p>*Vernell Lofton Director At Large P. O. Box 62 Rose Hill, MS 39356</p> |
| <p>***Paul Mosley, Treasurer Clarke County Director P. O. Box 616 Quitman, MS 39355</p> | <p>Guy Nowell Neshoba County Director 401 Beacon Street, Suite 107 Philadelphia, MS 39350</p> | <p>*Annie Owens Director at Large P. O. Box 106 Morton, MS 39117</p> |
| <p>***Dot Merchant, Secretary Leake County Director Post Office Box 72 Carthage, MS 39051</p> | <p>Ricky Harrison Newton County Director 83 West Broad Street Decatur, MS 39327</p> | <p>Robert Miles Director at Large 6606 Highway 13 Morton, MS 39117</p> |
| <p>*Perry E. Duckworth ***Director at Large Post Office Box 729 Taylorsville, MS 39168</p> | <p>Billy Frank Alford Scott County Director 106 Meadow Hill Drive Forest, MS 39074</p> | <p>*Dorothy Redeemer Director at Large P. O. Box 555 Morton, MS 39117</p> |
| <p>**Troy Chickaway ***Director at Large P. O. Box 6010 Choctaw, MS 39350</p> | <p>Cindy Austin Smith County Director Post Office Box 39 Raleigh, MS 39153</p> | <p>J. E. Smith Director At Large P. O. Box 307 Bay Springs, MS 39422</p> |

***Executive Committee

**Minority Indian

*Minority Black

EAST CENTRAL PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT DISTRICT COMPREHENSIVE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY (CEDDS)

| NAME | INTEREST REPRESENTED |
|--------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Annie Owens* | Private Sector/Labor Group, Retired |
| Barbara Ravenhorst | Private Sector/Public Official |
| Bill Hannah | Industrial Development |
| Brian Gomillion | Private Sector/Public Official |
| David Stephens* | Private Sector/Workforce Board |
| David Vowell | Private Sector/Industrial Development |
| Doug Whittle | Private Sector/Banking |
| Gilbert Thompson* | MBCI/Economic Development |
| Johnny Whitsett* | Public Official |
| Joseph Knight | Workforce Development |
| Ken Sims | Private Sector/Banking |
| LeeAnn Livingston Palmer | Public Official |
| Mickey Vance | Workforce Development |
| Ned Rushing* | Private Individual |
| Newt Ishee | Economic Development |
| Paul Mosley | Public Official |
| Perry Duckworth* | Private Sector/Insurance |
| Robert Barnett* | Private Sector/Labor Union |
| Robert Miles | Public Official/Educator |
| Wayne Welch | Public Official |
| Wilson Hallman | Private Individual/PDD Board |

*Indicates Minority Representation

III. Regional Analysis

Population

The District's population in 2010 was reported as 244,467 compared to 240,879 in 2015, and 237,844 in 2016. This represents a loss of 3,588 persons or 1.50% decrease over a five-year period, compared to a 1.45% increase over a previous ten-year period (2000-2010). East Central PDD area population has not increased at the same rate as the State of Mississippi. From 2010 to 2016, there has been an outward migration from the District.

Percent Change in Population by County, District and State*

| Geography | Population 2016 | Percent Change in Population 2000-2010 | Percent Change in Population 2010-2016 |
|-------------------|-----------------|--|--|
| Clarke County | 15,888 | -7 % | -5 % |
| Jasper County | 16,578 | -6 % | -3 % |
| Kemper County | 9,896 | 0.41 % | -5.4% |
| Lauderdale County | 77,755 | 3 % | -3 % |
| Leake County | 22,620 | 12 % | -5 % |
| Neshoba County | 29,403 | 3 % | -1 % |
| Newton County | 21,588 | -0.3 % | -1 % |
| Scott County | 28,207 | -0.49 % | -0.2% |
| Smith County | 15,909 | -2 % | 3.5 % |
| ECPDD | 237,844 | -2.62 % | -2.24 % |
| Mississippi | 2,988,726 | 4% | 0.7% |

*Source: StatsAmerica.org

Of the nine counties in the District area, eight counties had a decrease in population from 2010 – 2015 (as shown in the tables below) with Clarke County (2.3%), Jasper County (9.9%), Kemper County (2.3%), Leake County 2.8%, and Smith County (1.4%) having the highest percentage. Lauderdale County, Neshoba County and Newton County had a less than 1% decrease in population. Scott County had a less than 1% increase.

County & District Population by Age 2010*

| | Total Population | Median Age | Under 18 Years | % | 18 and Over | % | 65 Years and Over | % |
|------------|---------------------|---------------|----------------------|------|----------------|------|----------------------------|------|
| Clarke | 16,732 | 40.5 | 4,128 | 24.7 | 12,604 | 75.3 | 2,741 | 16.4 |
| Jasper | 17,062 | 41.4 | 4,123 | 24.2 | 12,939 | 75.8 | 2,735 | 16.0 |
| Kemper | 10,456 | 38.5 | 2,441 | 23.3 | 8,015 | 76.7 | 1,635 | 15.6 |
| Lauderdale | 80,261 | 37.0 | 2,080 | 2.6 | 60,181 | 75.0 | 11,318 | 14.1 |
| Leake | 23,805 | 33.2 | 7,362 | 30.9 | 16,443 | 69.1 | 3,010 | 12.6 |
| Neshoba | 29,676 | 35.3 | 8,515 | 28.7 | 21,161 | 71.3 | 3,996 | 13.5 |
| Newton | 21,720 | 37.1 | 5,653 | 26.0 | 16,067 | 74.0 | 3,233 | 14.9 |
| Scott | 28,264 | 34.9 | 7,634 | 27.0 | 20,630 | 73.0 | 3,512 | 12.4 |
| Smith | 16,491 | 39.1 | 4,261 | 25.8 | 12,230 | 74.2 | 2,520 | 15.3 |
| ECPDD | 244,467 | 37.4 | 46,197 | 18.9 | 180,270 | 73.7 | 34,700 | 14.2 |

*Source: StatsAmerica.org

County & District Population by Age 2015*

| | Total Population | Median Age | 17 and Under | % | 18-24 | % | 25-44 | % | 45-64 | % | 65 and Over | % |
|------------|---------------------|---------------|-----------------|-------|--------|-------|--------|-------|--------|-------|----------------|-------|
| Clarke | 16,362 | 41 | 3,844 | 23.49 | 1,353 | 8.27 | 3,721 | 22.74 | 4,532 | 27.70 | 2,912 | 17.80 |
| Jasper | 15,519 | 42 | 2,800 | 18.04 | 1,445 | 9.31 | 3,701 | 23.85 | 4,653 | 29.98 | 2,920 | 18.82 |
| Kemper | 10,211 | 38 | 2,184 | 21.39 | 1,282 | 12.56 | 2,428 | 23.78 | 2,645 | 25.90 | 1,672 | 16.37 |
| Lauderdale | 79,868 | 38 | 19,236 | 24.08 | 8,028 | 10.05 | 20,136 | 25.21 | 20,684 | 25.90 | 11,748 | 14.71 |
| Leake | 23,153 | 35 | 6,590 | 28.46 | 2,060 | 8.90 | 5,648 | 24.39 | 5,638 | 24.35 | 3,217 | 13.89 |
| Neshoba | 29,553 | 36 | 8,390 | 28.39 | 2,545 | 8.61 | 7,114 | 24.07 | 7,305 | 24.72 | 4,199 | 14.21 |
| Newton | 21,663 | 38 | 5,532 | 25.54 | 2,243 | 10.35 | 5,118 | 23.63 | 5,345 | 24.67 | 3,425 | 15.81 |
| Scott | 28,293 | 36 | 7,521 | 26.58 | 2,461 | 8.70 | 7,497 | 26.50 | 7,093 | 25.07 | 3,721 | 13.15 |
| Smith | 16,257 | 40 | 3,988 | 24.53 | 1,532 | 9.42 | 3,478 | 21.39 | 4,526 | 27.84 | 2,733 | 16.81 |
| ECPDD | 240,879 | 38 | 60,085 | 24.94 | 22,949 | 9.53 | 58,841 | 24.43 | 62,421 | 25.91 | 36,547 | 15.17 |

*Source: StatsAmerica.org

The median age for the District's population has increased. In 1990, the median age for the District's population was 32.5 years. In 2000, the median age was 35.1; in 2010, the median age was 37.4, while in 2015, the median age was 38. In 1990, persons 0-18 represented 14.5% of the population; in 2000, persons 0-18 represented 13.0% of the population; in 2010, persons 0-18 represented 18.9%; and in 2015, persons 0-18 represented 24.94%. Persons between the age of 18 years to 65 years represented the following: 1990 – 71.2%; 2000 - 72.9%; 2010 – 73.74%; and in 2015 – 59.9%. Persons 65 years or older represented 14.4% in 1990, 14.1% in 2000, 14.19% in 2010 and 15.17% in 2015. There has not been a significant increase and decrease in the age population for persons under 18 and over 65, while persons between the age of 18 to 64 has drastically decreased.

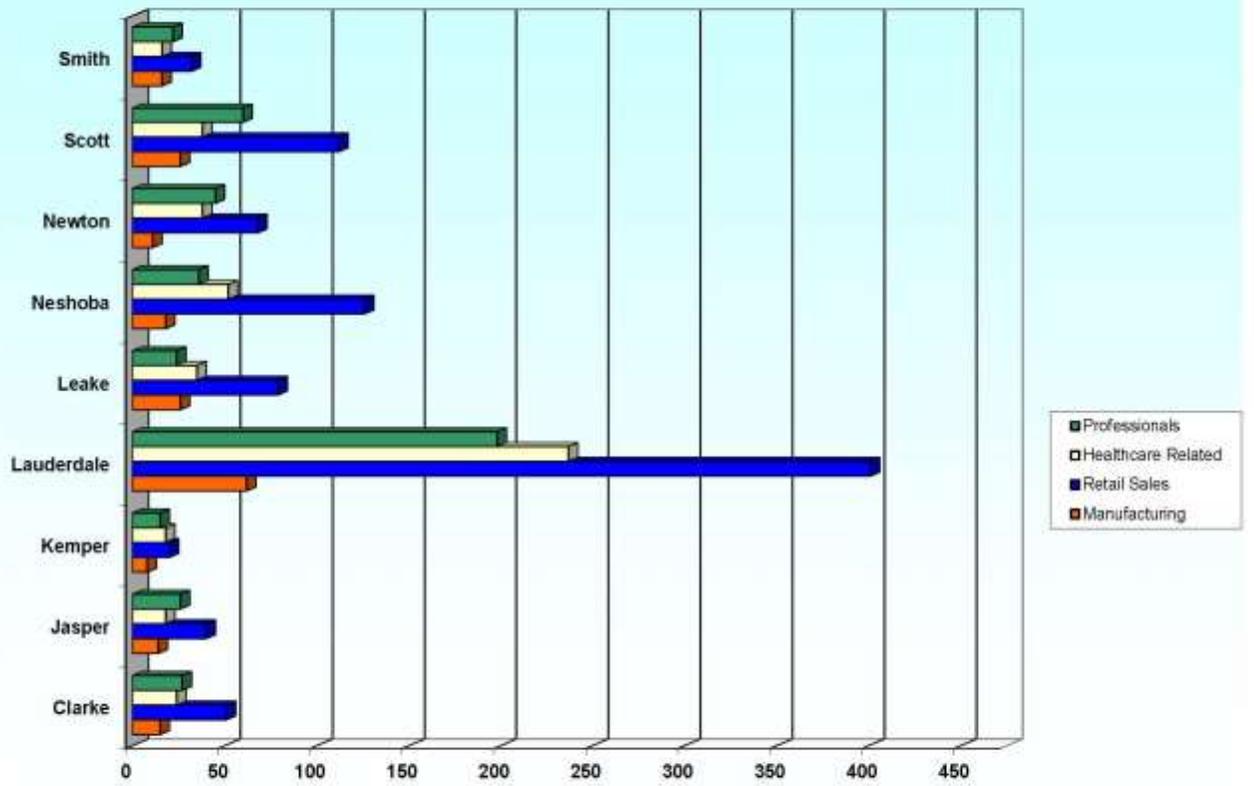
The District's racial composition has changed from 2000 to 2010. The District has had a decrease in white population from 1990 to 2010. Population count for white residents was 140,908 in 1990, 144,420 in 2000 and 135,287 in 2010. The white population increased by 2% from 2010 to 2016. The Black/African American population increased from 91,709 (2010) to 91,786 in 2016.

The American Indian population increased by 26.50% from 2000 to 2010, and the population count District-wide in 2010 was 7,851 and in 2016, 7,845. The other reported racial/ethnic population counts for the District area was Hispanic and Asian. The Hispanic population was reported to be 6,742 in 2016, a 356.72% increase. The other major ethnic group in the District area is Asian, and that count was approximately 3,461 persons.

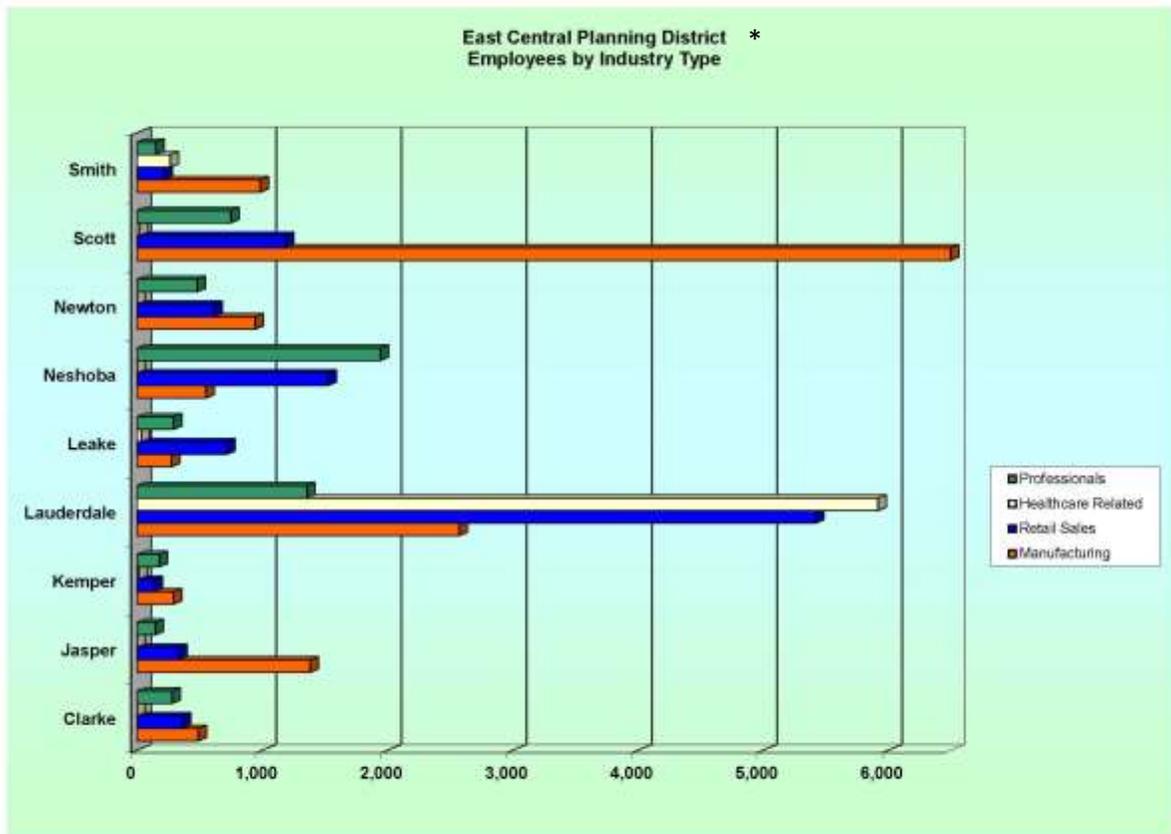
Clusters

Employers and employees in the East Central Planning and Development District area can be divided into four main clusters – Manufacturing, Healthcare, Retail Sales, and Professionals. Industry clusters are geographic concentrations of competing, complementary, or interdependent firms and industries that do business with each other and/or have common needs for talent, technology, and infrastructure. Clusters in the East Central area are represented by the following diagrams:

East Central Planning District *
Employers by Type



*Source: StatsAmerica.org



*Source: StatsAmerica.org

Manufacturing is the largest industry cluster in the East Central area, accounting for approximately 24% of the jobs in the area. Scott County has the largest number of manufacturing jobs with 6,551. This is most likely due to the numerous poultry processing facilities in the county. Kemper County has the lowest number of manufacturing jobs, with only 293 such jobs in the county. Since Kemper has the lowest population out of the nine East Central counties, it only follows that they would have the smallest number of jobs in this cluster. The average wage in manufacturing in the East Central area is \$756 weekly or \$39,330 annually.

Retail sales is the second largest cluster in the East Central area, accounting for approximately 18% of the jobs in the district. Lauderdale County has approximately 5,422 jobs in retail sales, the largest concentration of retail jobs in the district. The City of Meridian, located in Lauderdale County, is a regional shopping destination, which accounts for the higher number of retail sales jobs in this area. Again, Kemper County has the lowest number of retail sales jobs, with only 139 such jobs in the county. The average wage paid in retail sales is \$426 weekly, for an annual wage of \$22,176.

The third largest industry cluster in the East Central area is the healthcare industry. Approximately 12% of the jobs in the area are healthcare related. Lauderdale County, which has four hospitals, accounts for the largest number of these healthcare jobs, with approximately 5,920 persons employed in the healthcare field. Clarke, Jasper, Newton and Smith counties have the lowest number of healthcare-related jobs in the area, most likely due to the fact that there are currently no hospitals located in these counties.

A fourth industry cluster in the East Central area is professional jobs, which account for approximately 8% of the jobs in the area. These include engineers, computer technicians, attorneys, and accountants. Again, Lauderdale County has largest number of these jobs with 632, while Kemper has the lowest with only eight (8). The average weekly wage in the professional cluster is \$658, or \$34,225 annually.

Education

The following Tables represents the Educational Attainment of persons 25+ in the District and Counties.

Educational Attainment in 2010*

| | Persons 25+ | High School Graduates | % | Some College Associate Degree | % | Bachelor Degree | % | Graduate Professional | % |
|------------|-------------|-----------------------|-------|-------------------------------|-------|-----------------|-------|-----------------------|------|
| Clarke | 11,156 | 4,284 | 38.40 | 3,171 | 28.42 | 710 | 6.36 | 215 | 1.93 |
| Jasper | 11,165 | 3,845 | 34.44 | 2,506 | 22.45 | 1,105 | 9.90 | 450 | 4.03 |
| Kemper | 6,745 | 2,097 | 31.09 | 2,309 | 34.23 | 534 | 7.92 | 243 | 3.60 |
| Lauderdale | 51,273 | 15,590 | 30.41 | 16,569 | 32.32 | 6,235 | 12.16 | 3,422 | 6.67 |
| Leake | 14,035 | 5,273 | 37.57 | 3,763 | 26.81 | 964 | 6.87 | 376 | 2.68 |
| Neshoba | 18,458 | 5,845 | 31.67 | 5,483 | 29.71 | 1,399 | 7.58 | 894 | 4.84 |
| Newton | 13,882 | 4,794 | 34.53 | 4,696 | 33.83 | 1,413 | 10.18 | 1,175 | 8.46 |
| Scott | 17,333 | 6,524 | 37.64 | 4,194 | 24.20 | 1,170 | 6.75 | 662 | 3.82 |
| Smith | 16,712 | 4,123 | 24.67 | 2,560 | 15.32 | 933 | 5.58 | 655 | 3.92 |
| ECPDD | 160,759 | 52,375 | 32.58 | 45,251 | 28.15 | 14,463 | 9.00 | 8,092 | 5.03 |

*Source: StatsAmerica.org

Educational Attainment in 2015*

| | Persons 25+ | High School | % | Some College Associate Degree | % | Bachelor Degree | % | Graduate Professional | % |
|------------|----------------|----------------|-------|--|-------|--------------------|-------|--------------------------|------|
| Clarke | 11,165 | 3,845 | 34.44 | 3,506 | 31.40 | 1,105 | 9.90 | 450 | 4.03 |
| Jasper | 11,274 | 4,100 | 36.37 | 3,391 | 30.08 | 1,011 | 8.97 | 496 | 4.40 |
| Kemper | 6,745 | 2,097 | 31.09 | 2,309 | 34.23 | 534 | 7.92 | 234 | 3.47 |
| Lauderdale | 52,568 | 16,219 | 30.85 | 18,996 | 36.14 | 6,366 | 12.11 | 3,469 | 6.60 |
| Leake | 14,503 | 5,089 | 35.09 | 4,137 | 28.53 | 1,222 | 8.43 | 490 | 3.38 |
| Neshoba | 18,618 | 6,080 | 32.66 | 5,872 | 31.54 | 1,676 | 9.00 | 844 | 4.53 |
| Newton | 13,888 | 4,177 | 30.08 | 5,082 | 36.59 | 1,469 | 10.58 | 727 | 5.23 |
| Scott | 18,311 | 6,296 | 34.38 | 4,640 | 25.34 | 1,418 | 7.74 | 640 | 3.50 |
| Smith | 10,737 | 4,529 | 42.18 | 2,828 | 26.34 | 881 | 8.21 | 515 | 4.80 |
| ECPDD | 157,809 | 52,432 | 33.22 | 50,761 | 32.17 | 15,682 | 9.94 | 7,865 | 4.98 |
| State | 1,940,365 | 587,586 | 30.28 | 609,203 | 31.40 | 251,230 | 12.95 | 149,770 | 7.72 |

*Source: StatsAmerica.org

Reviewing the District’s population data and comparing the educational levels for persons 25 years and over, it was determined that approximately 32.6% of that age population were high school graduates, 28.1% have some college, post-secondary education/training or an Associate degree, while 9% of the 25+ population had Bachelor degrees in 2010. According to the 2015 Census, 33.2% of persons 25+ were high school graduates, 32.2% have some college or an Associate degree; and 9.9% were Bachelor degree graduates. The District’s percent of high school graduates is higher than the State of Mississippi, while the percent of persons with Bachelor degrees in the District area is lower than the State percentage.

The District area continues to have a high dropout rate. Forty-three percent of the school system’s dropout rates are lower than the State of Mississippi’s dropout rates. All counties have GED programs either in the local schools, community colleges or neighborhood centers.

Education Attainment, Graduation and Dropout Rates by School Districts*
June 2016

| District Name | **N-Count | Graduation Rate | Dropout Rate |
|-------------------------------------|------------------|------------------------|---------------------|
| <i>Clarke County</i> | | | |
| Enterprise School District | 62 | 98.0% | 2.0% |
| Quitman School District | 135 | 77.0% | 9.7% |
| <i>Jasper County</i> | | | |
| East Jasper School District | 73 | 93.1% | 2.3% |
| West Jasper School District | 105 | 88.6% | 15.2% |
| <i>Kemper County</i> | | | |
| Kemper Co. School District | 84 | 68.3% | 20.9% |
| <i>Lauderdale County</i> | | | |
| Lauderdale Co. School District | 470 | 79.4% | 13.9% |
| Meridian Public School District | 345 | 72.9% | 23.0% |
| <i>Leake County</i> | | | |
| Leake Co. School District | 181 | 78.6% | 12.6% |
| <i>Neshoba County</i> | | | |
| Neshoba County School District | 199 | 87.0% | 5.9% |
| Philadelphia Public School District | 86 | 78.1% | 14.1% |
| <i>Newton County</i> | | | |
| Newton Co. School District | 122 | 88.6% | 5.2% |
| Newton Municipal School District | 71 | 78.6% | 14.2% |
| Union Public School District | 65 | 73.8% | 15.2% |
| <i>Scott County</i> | | | |
| Scott Co. School District | 239 | 85.9% | 10.6% |
| Forest Municipal School District | 88 | 78.9% | 7.0% |
| <i>Smith County</i> | | | |
| Smith Co. School District | 200 | 76.9% | 13.5% |
| State of Mississippi | 33,467 | 80.8% | 11.8% |

*Mississippi Department of Education

**N-Count- Number Count

The East Central area has two senior college branches, Mississippi State University and the University of Southern Mississippi; four community colleges, East Central Community College, East Mississippi Community College, Jones County Community College and Meridian Community College; and three post-secondary area vocational schools. Each of the nine counties have secondary area vocational schools which will be available to provide training for workers in the area.

The District has educational and training facilities to meet the needs of residents of the area. In all cases the training facilities are a part of either the public school or community college system. There should exist a facility for training and retaining of employees that will not be associated with the school systems. The concept of a technology system should be utilized, one that will be user friendly to unemployed adults for re-training. The educational system should also recruit school dropouts to train them to become productive workers as well as to aid the unemployed and the underemployed.

Income

The chart below reflects Per Capita Income (PCI) by counties (2005/2015) for the east central area. When comparing the PCI statistic for a ten-year period, there has been an overall 25% increase in per capita income for the District area. In comparison, the counties in the District area exceeded the per capita income of the State of Mississippi and the United States for 2015.

| Per Capita Income * | | | | |
|----------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------|
| Area | Per Capita Income 2005 | Per Capita Income 2015 | Increase/Decrease | Percent Change |
| United States | | \$28,930.00 | | |
| Mississippi | | \$21,057.00 | | |
| ECPDD | | | | |
| Clarke | \$21,550.00 | \$35,778.00 | \$14,228.00 | 39.77% |
| Jasper | \$22,753.00 | \$34,409.00 | \$11,656.00 | 33.87% |
| Kemper | \$19,022.00 | \$27,575.00 | \$8,553.00 | 31.02% |
| Lauderdale | \$27,429.00 | \$34,964.00 | \$7,535.00 | 21.55% |
| Leake | \$21,376.00 | \$27,283.00 | \$5,907.00 | 21.65% |
| Neshoba | \$28,938.00 | \$34,051.00 | \$5,113.00 | 15.02% |
| Newton | \$24,140.00 | \$31,690.00 | \$7,550.00 | 23.82% |
| Scott | \$22,506.00 | \$29,133.00 | \$6,627.00 | 22.75% |
| Smith | \$26,615.00 | \$32,043.00 | \$5,428.00 | 16.94% |
| ECPDD Average | \$23,815.00 | \$31,880.66 | \$8,065.66 | 25.30% |

* Source: StatsAmerica.org.

In reference to poverty levels by counties in the District area, there has been a constant increase from 2005 to 2015. The poverty level for the State of Mississippi has increased by 4%, while in the East Central area, the poverty level has increased by 22.03%. Kemper County, the number one disadvantaged county, has a poverty rate of 31.9% and has increased by 32.60% over a ten-year period.

| Poverty * | | | | |
|----------------------|--|--|--------------------------|-----------------------|
| Area | Percent Below Poverty (2005 Estimate) | Percent Below Poverty (2015 Estimate) | Increase/Decrease | Percent Change |
| United States | 12.4 | 15.5 | 3.1 | 20.00% |
| Mississippi | 21.6 | 22.5 | 0.9 | 4.00% |
| ECPDD | | | | |
| Clarke | 16.9 | 21.8 | 4.9 | 22.48% |
| Jasper | 18.7 | 22.8 | 4.1 | 17.98% |
| Kemper | 21.5 | 31.9 | 10.4 | 32.60% |
| Lauderdale | 18.1 | 22.0 | 3.9 | 17.73% |
| Leake | 20.7 | 24.3 | 3.6 | 14.81% |
| Neshoba | 18.7 | 25.5 | 6.8 | 26.67% |
| Newton | 16.4 | 22.7 | 6.3 | 27.75% |
| Scott | 18.6 | 21.7 | 3.1 | 14.29% |
| Smith | 15.7 | 19.5 | 3.8 | 19.49% |
| ECPDD AVERAGE | 18.4 | 23.6 | 5.2 | 22.03% |

* Source: StatsAmerica.org.

Unemployment

The average unemployment rate for the District area as of 2016, was 6.3% compared to 10.9% in 2010. Kemper County, Jasper County and Clarke County continue to have the highest unemployment rates. Lack of jobs in these counties is a severe problem for the east central area. Noted is that unemployment rates continue to decline while workforce in these areas declines. The population for the east central area is declining, which accounts for the continued decrease of available educated workforce, continual poverty and low educational attainment.

| Unemployment * | | | | |
|-----------------------|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------|
| Area | Average Unemployment (2010) | Average Unemployment (2016) | Increase/ Decrease | Percent Change |
| United States | 6.0 | 6.3 | 0.3 | 4.76% |
| Mississippi | 7.1 | 7.2 | 0.1 | 1.39% |
| ECPDD | | | | |
| Clarke | 12.6 | 6.9 | -5.7 | -82.61% |
| Jasper | 12.3 | 7.8 | -4.5 | -57.69% |
| Kemper | 14.8 | 8.7 | -6.1 | -70.11% |
| Lauderdale | 10.6 | 5.9 | -4.7 | -79.66% |
| Leake | 9.7 | 6.0 | -3.7 | -61.67% |
| Neshoba | 10.4 | 5.8 | -4.6 | -79.31% |
| Newton | 10.1 | 6.0 | -4.1 | -68.33% |
| Scott | 8.0 | 4.6 | -3.4 | -73.91% |
| Smith | 9.2 | 5.3 | -3.9 | -73.58% |
| ECPDD AVERAGE | 10.9 | 6.3 | -4.6 | -73.02% |

* Source: StatsAmerica.org.

| Workforce Laborforce Estimates * | | | | |
|---|-------------------------------|----------------------|---------------------------------|------------------|
| Area | 2016 | | | Rate 2016 |
| | Total Labor Force 2016 | Employed 2016 | Unemployment Number 2016 | |
| United States | 161,911,000 | 154,470,000 | 7,441,000 | 4.6% |
| Mississippi | 1,303,800 | 1,224,700 | 79,100 | 6.1% |
| ECPDD | | | | |
| Clarke | 6,080 | 5,665 | 415 | 6.8% |
| Jasper | 6,179 | 5,702 | 477 | 7.7% |
| Kemper | 3,555 | 3,244 | 311 | 8.7% |
| Lauderdale | 31,861 | 29,974 | 1,887 | 5.9% |
| Leake | 7,792 | 7,318 | 474 | 6.1% |
| Neshoba | 10,711 | 10,095 | 616 | 5.8% |
| Newton | 8,668 | 8,152 | 516 | 6.0% |
| Scott | 13,361 | 12,746 | 615 | 4.6% |
| Smith | 6,787 | 6,428 | 359 | 5.3% |
| ECPDD TOTAL | 94,994 | 89,324 | | |
| ECPDD AVERAGE | 10,555 | 9,925 | 630 | 6.0% |

* Source: StatsAmerica.org.

Infrastructure

The District area is served by numerous rural water associations and municipal water systems. Many of these rural systems lack sufficient financial means to supply and maintain adequate supplies of water for expansion. Many of these systems have one source of water supply and lack sufficient water storage capacity. Rural water systems receive the majority of their funds for improvement and expansion from USDA Rural Development in the form of loans and limited grants. Over the years, Rural Water Associations have been redesigning their systems to comply with new state and federal regulations. Also with the Rural Water Associations, the sizes of the water lines vary from 2" to 4" wide clay pipes and lack fire hydrants. The water storage capacity is limited in rural areas. As the population concentration increases in rural areas, the demand exists to update and to increase the size of water lines and into increase water storage capacity for consumption and fire protection.

Municipal water systems have some of the same problems associated with rural systems. But the nature of municipalities allows for better financing. Each municipality within the District has a public water supply. Major cities such as those located along I-20/I-59 Corridor and other major highways have installed 8" and 10" water distribution lines to their industrial parks.

The major sources of water in the East Central area are groundwater, and currently a large supply is available. Kemper County is the only area with limited water resources.

Suggested improvements to prepare for future industrial development (water)

If the potential "Super Site" industrial park is developed at the Mississippi/Alabama state line, water service will need to be extended to this area of Lauderdale County. The Town of Marion should also consider constructing another water well to serve its industrial area. In Clarke and Jasper counties, the local municipalities and water systems should consider upgrading the water lines serving the interstate interchanges to at least 8" lines, making the areas more attractive to prospective industrial clients. Extending water service along Highway 80 east of Lake to the Exit 100 area in Newton County should also be considered in order to improve industrial prospects. The City of Forest should consider upgrading its water lines to its industrial area and installing an additional water well. The City of Morton should also consider upgrading its water lines along Highway 481 to Exit 80. The City of Bay Springs needs to upgrade their water system, water well/water storage tanks, and the Town of Heidelberg needs to provide water lines west of Interstate 59. Kemper County has determined a need to expand their water system to serve the residents as well as industrial areas along Highway 16 and Highway 45.

Public Sewer Services:

Of the 31 municipalities in the District area, only 13% do not have sewer systems in operation.

Public sewer systems do not exist in any form in the majority of the unincorporated areas of the District. Several of the municipalities along I-20/59 Corridor are currently upgrading their sewer systems.

Suggested improvements to prepare for future industrial development (Sewer)

Other sewer infrastructure improvements that would be considered in the Corridor Study area include the extension of sewer service and the construction of a wastewater treatment facility at the potential “Super Site” industrial area at the Mississippi/Alabama state line. In Clarke and Jasper counties, local systems should consider extending sewer service to the areas near the rural interstate exits. Sewer service extension should also be considered from the town limits of Chunky and Hickory to the area near their respective interstate exits. The Town of Lake have considered extended sewer service east of town along Highway 80 to the I-20/Exit 100 area. The City of Forest should consider extending service to the area south of the Interstate 20 along Highway 35 and the City of Morton should consider extending sewer service along the city limits on Highway 481 to Exit 80 of Interstate 20. The Town of DeKalb should extend sewer services to the proposed Kemper County industrial site along Highway 16 West. The Town of Scooba, in addition to upgrading the sewer lines that serves the town and East Mississippi Community College, should provide sewer services along Highway 45 South and North to attract industrial businesses.

Port Systems

While there are no ports located within the East Central PDD study area, the area is served by six (6) ports representing (3) waterways. The Port of Vicksburg, located on the Mississippi River, is approximately 144 miles west of Meridian along Interstate 20. The mean depth of the channel at Vicksburg is 12 feet, and the port can accommodate vessels such as tow boats, small oceangoing vessels and river barges. The port has a hard surface load area of four acres with a rail spur on site. The Port of New Orleans, also located on the Mississippi River, is located approximately 200 miles south of Meridian. This port’s facilities include 22 million square feet of cargo handling area and more than 6 million square feet of covered storage area. New Orleans is also the nation’s only deepwater port served by six Class I rail lines, including Kansas City Southern and Norfolk Southern, which both serve the Corridor Study area. The Mississippi State Port at Gulfport is located approximately 150 miles south of Meridian on the Gulf of Mexico. As the State’s largest port, Gulfport is capable of handling very large vessels up to 950 feet. The mean depth of the channel is 36 feet. The port has a large loading area with numerous cranes and a truck scale for loading and unloading various cargo. Gulfport has rail spurs on site, with multiple tracks and lengths. The Port of Mobile, also located on the Gulf of Mexico, is 130 miles south of Meridian. The Demopolis (Alabama) Port, on the Tennessee-Tombigbee Waterway, is located approximately 50 miles east of Meridian. The port has a depth of nine feet and a width of 300 feet. The Columbus Port, also located along the Tennessee-Tombigbee, is approximately 90 miles north of Meridian. The port has a concrete dock and 100-ton mobile crane.

Transportation:

The highway transportation facilities of the East Central PDD area are generally adequate. Portions of State Highways 19, 16 and all of U.S. Highway 45 are four-lane and serve the major industrial parks in the area. The Mississippi Department of Transportation maintains an inventory of State and Federal highway and classifies roads in four categories: principal arterials, minor arterials, major collectors and minor collectors. Principal arterials are generally characterized as four-lane (or more) divided highways with partial access control and higher rates of speed. Minor arterials are similar to principals but have less traffic and lower speeds. Major collectors have an approximately even distribution of access points and a lower speed and serve as intermediate links between arterials. Minor collectors feed traffic into major collectors and generally have less traffic and low speeds such as county roads and minor city streets.

The Mississippi Department of Transportation maintains an inventory of state and federal highway bridges that have a posted weight limit less than that of the highway. Detail data on weight limits can be obtained from the Mississippi Department of Transportation field offices.

Rail services within the District adequately serve the major manufacturing areas. The Kansas City Southern, Illinois Central Railroad, the Gulf, Mobile and Ohio, and Meridian and Bigbee railroads are the three that serve the East Central area.

Several of the nine counties have airports. The only commercial airport is in Meridian. There are two military training airfields in the District Area: NAS Meridian and NAS Bravo Field (Kemper County), and the Air Guard utilizes the Meridian Airport.

Gas Line Infrastructure

All areas west of Newton to the Scott/Rankin County line are served by gas transmission lines. Transmission lines also extend from Meridian south through Clarke and Jasper County. Jasper County, which has numerous natural gas production wells, is also crisscrossed by transmission lines east and west.

In order to aid in future industrial development, local entities should consider extending gas service areas east of Meridian to the Alabama state line and west of Meridian to Hickory, east of DeKalb to Scooba and west to Philadelphia.

Electric Infrastructure

The availability of electric power is key to attracting new industries. All areas of the District are currently served by electric power. Three companies are the major power manufacturers for the study area – Mississippi Power Company, Tennessee Valley Authority and Entergy.

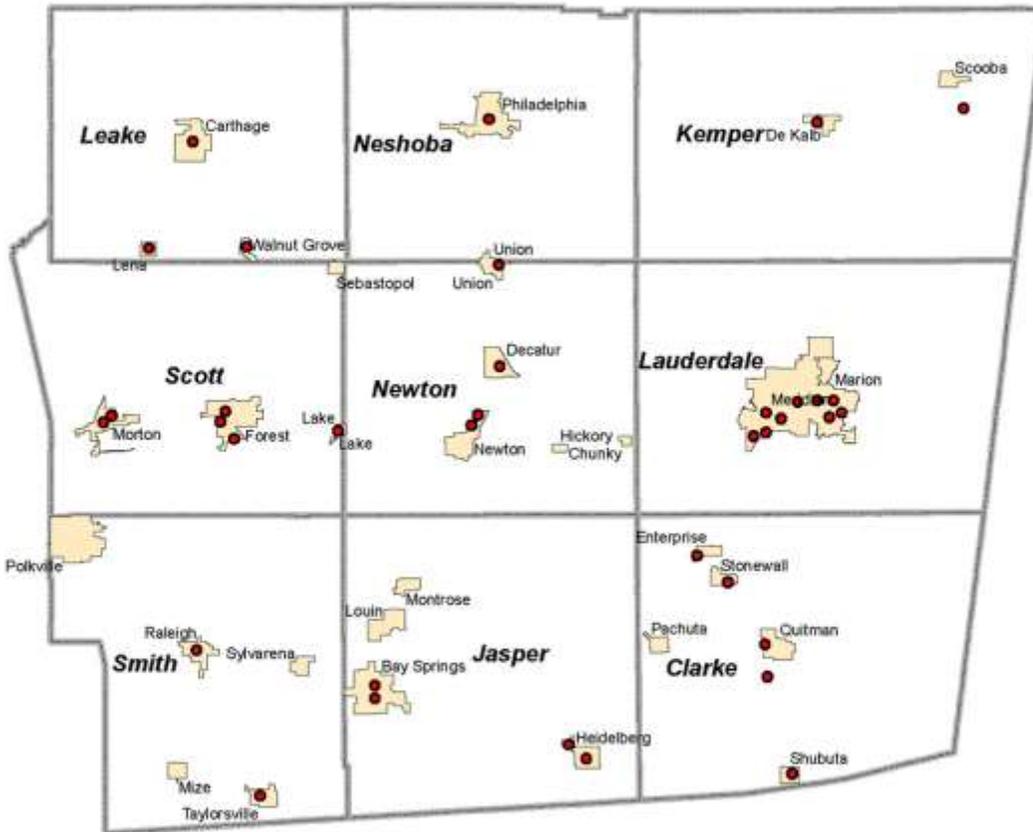
Six electric power associations serve the District area along the I-20/I-59 Corridor - Mississippi Power, East Mississippi Electric Power Association (EMEPA), Entergy Mississippi, Inc., Southern Pine Electric Power Association, Central Electric Power Association and Dixie Electric Power Association. The Meridian and Marion areas are served by Mississippi Power and EMEPA. In Clarke County, Mississippi Power serves both the towns of Enterprise and Pachuta, while EMEPA and Southern Pine serve the unincorporated areas. Mississippi Power also serves the Town of Heidelberg, and EMEPA, Southern Pine and Dixie serve the unincorporated areas of Jasper County. The towns of Hickory and Chunky, as well as portions of the City of Newton, are served by Mississippi Power. Southern Pine also serves Smith County and portions of the City of Newton. EMEPA serves the area in Newton County east of Chunky and rural Lauderdale County. The Town of Lake is served by Mississippi Power, while the areas east and west of the Town are served by Central Electric. Three associations serve the City of Forest, including Mississippi Power to the north, Central Electric to the east and Southern Pine into the south and west. The City of Morton is served by Entergy and Southern Pine. In the southern part of the District, Mississippi Power Company serves Jasper and Smith County. Clarke County is served by EMEPA and Mississippi Power Company. In the northern counties, EMEPA, Mississippi Power Company and Entergy are the providers.

Industrial Parks

The District area maintains data on available existing industrial sites (see attached map) and their deficiencies. Many of these deficiencies include infrastructure not available in the area such as gas lines and railroad lines. Other industrial sites need additional acreage. In addition to the developed industrial parks and sites, there are numerous other tracts of land suitable for industrial development in the District area. Industrial development organizations such as the Neshoba County Industrial Development Authority (NCIDA), Mid-Mississippi Development District (MMDD) and the Kemper County Economic Development Authority (KCEDA) are meeting to form a regional industrial park to be located in the Neshoba, Newton and Kemper County area. The Leake County Industrial Development Association is working with Attala County Economic Development Authority to form a regional industrial park for the two counties.

East Central Planning & Development District *

Industrial Parks



*East Central Planning and Development District Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy 2010

Financial Resources

The financial health of local governments is key to attracting new business and industry into the East Central Planning and Development District area. Companies want local governments to be able to provide them with the infrastructure and financial assistance to assist them in locating in this area.

The counties use general obligation bonds to fund projects. General obligation bonds are debt instruments issued by local government to finance public works projects. The government pledge to use legally available resources, including tax levies, to repay the bonds.

The current general obligation bond debt varies among the counties of the East Central area. Lauderdale County currently has the highest debt, with \$37,585,000 in outstanding general obligation bonds, while Clarke County has the lowest at \$1,360,000.

East Central Planning and Development District

County General Obligation Debt Outstanding (as of September 30, 2014)

| County | Amount |
|---------------|-----------------|
| Clarke | \$1,360,000.00 |
| Jasper | \$4,845,000.00 |
| Kemper | \$2,860,742.00 |
| Lauderdale | \$37,585,000.00 |
| Leake | \$3,897,000.00 |
| Neshoba | \$8,750,000.00 |
| Newton | \$2,526,500.00 |
| Scott | \$8,322,500.00 |
| Smith | \$3,705,000.00 |

Source: MS State Auditor's Office website

Prospective companies are also interested in the mileage rate of local governments. Mileage is a tax rate on property and is expressed in mils per dollar of the value of the property. The more mils a government levies, the higher property taxes local residents and businesses must pay each year.

Milage rates vary among the counties of East Central Planning and Development District, with Newton County having the highest mileage rate at 124.67 mils and Kemper County having the lowest at 90.00 mils.

The mileage rates listed below are the highest possible mileage rate for each County. The actual mileage rate may vary depending on: 1) the school district in which the property is located; or 2) if any special mils have been added for specific projects in various supervisors' districts. In addition, all of the municipalities, with the exception of the Towns of Polkville and Sylvarena, also levy municipal mils on properties within their incorporated limits.

East Central Planning and Development District

Milage 2015-2106

| Local Government | Mils | Local Government | Mils | Local Government | Mils |
|-------------------------|-------------|--------------------------|-------------|-------------------------|-------------|
| Clarke County | 101.51 | Lauderdale County | 109.74 | Newton County | 124.67 |
| Enterprise | 48.00 | Marion | 33.05 | Chunky | 20.25 |
| Pachuta | 44.00 | Meridian | 50.84 | Decatur | 38.00 |
| Quitman | 33.27 | | | Hickory | 20.00 |
| Shubuta | 50.96 | | | Newton | 35.00 |
| Stonewall | 48.15 | | | Union | 34.00 |
| Jasper County | 115.26 | Leake County | 107.95 | Scott County | 112.77 |
| Bay Springs | 23.10 | Carthage | 24.59 | Forest | 13.00 |
| Heidelberg | 16.94 | Lena | 9.65 | Lake | 18.00 |
| Louin | 6.50 | Walnut Grove | 13.25 | Morton | 42.5 |
| Montrose | 9.60 | | | Sebastopol | 18.25 |
| Kemper County | 90.00 | Neshoba County | 117.68 | Smith County | 98.34 |
| DeKalb | 33.00 | Philadelphia | 18.00 | Mize | 28.00 |
| Scooba | 36.00 | | | Polkville | N/A |
| | | | | Raleigh | 20.00 |
| | | | | Sylvarena | N/A |
| | | | | Taylorsville | 38.00 |

Source: Mississippi Department of Revenue website

External Forces

Natural Environment

East Central Planning and Development District is located in an area prone to tornadoes, high winds, severe weather, flooding, hurricanes and wildfires. The identified natural hazards are considered high priority because the area has received damage from these events in the past and because they are weather-related events, they will continue to occur. Tornadoes/high winds/severe weather has always been a threat to the District and have historically caused the most damage. Flooding, often associated with heavy rain due to severe weather, has also caused significant damage, especially in the spring months. Because the District area is located at least 100 miles from the Mississippi Gulf Coast, most of the damage associated with hurricanes come not from a direct hit from a storm, but from the tornadoes, severe thunderstorm and flooding that occur as the storm makes its way inland. Because the area contains many pine plantations, wildfires have also been identified as a natural hazard.

The mineral resources of the District area include clays, petroleum, natural gas, liquid natural gas, sand and gravel. Clarke County leads in mineral production. The majority of the east-central area is covered with Loblolly and short leaf pine forest, except for western Kemper County, Neshoba County and Leake County, which has mostly oak and pine. Oak, Gum and Cypress forest types are also prevalent along the Pearl River in Leake and Neshoba Counties.

Each County in the East Central District has over 50% of its land in commercial forests. Clarke County has as much as 86% of its land in commercial forests.

These mineral and timber resources are sources of continued economic benefit to the East Central District and, with proper management, provide a greater potential benefit.

The entire District, except for the northeastern portion of Kemper County, is provided with large water reserves.

The State of Mississippi provides for much of its own energy supplies as it produces oil and natural gas. The in-state availability of these products depends on the regulations of the Federal Energy Commission at a given time. Also, refining capacities, conservation measures, and national and international supplies will affect future supplies. Some major problems have occurred in the past, especially for farmers needing liquid petroleum.

Political Environment

The District region's political forces have always been pro-industry and pro-business. The county and municipal governments have participated in the creation and funding of the Regional Economic Development District. State Senators and Representatives from the east central area have supported bills that enhance the expansion, creation and recruitment of businesses for the area.

Economic Environment

Members of the private sector serve on local industrial boards, regional boards and economic development committees. In manufacturing, private companies make recommendations of the skill level and educational level that workers need to have in order to compete for jobs available. Because of the number of jobs available in the east central area, a push is on to encourage persons to enter the welding field.

Healthcare administrators work with the community colleges to encourage the training of future workers and provide funds for hospital staff and other medical staff to upgrade their education. Examples are the hospitals in Lauderdale County who encourage the Licensed Practical Nurses to upgrade to Registered Nurses by providing financial assistance to those who return to college.

In the food production area, the poultry industries have been expanding and constructing new facilities such as in Scott County (Morton and Forest). These industries are providing millions of dollars in private investment to create new and modern facilities as well as providing job opportunities to the area.

Tourism is a growing industry in the east central region. The Pearl River Resort has created more than 800 jobs (correct data is not available) and contributes dollars to the Neshoba County area for economic and community investment. The economic impact of the Pearl River Resort has resulted in increased tax revenue for Neshoba County and Philadelphia. New businesses, including shops and restaurants, are locating in the area and/or are expanding.

Social Environment

The most growth was in the Hispanic population. The growth of the Hispanic population can most likely be attributed to the poultry industry, which has brought in Hispanic workers to fill vacant jobs in their processing plants. The largest increase in Hispanic population was in Scott County (which is the center of the poultry industry in this area).

The increase in the minority population in the East Central area has social implications for the District. As more and more minority persons move into the area, local agencies and businesses must adapt to serve these customers, especially those for whom English is not their first language. Many of the Hispanic persons moving into this area to work in the poultry industry have a very limited understanding of English. Local agencies and businesses have begun to post signs in both English and Spanish and it is not uncommon for these groups to now employ at least one person who speaks Spanish so that they can communicate with their clients/customers. The number of specialty businesses that cater to these groups has also grown. For instance, Hispanic residents can now shop in Hispanic stores that carry products and brands they are familiar with from their native countries. Even many mainstream stores now have special sections to cater Hispanic customers.

IV. Strengths/Weaknesses/ Opportunities/ Threats (SWOT)

SWOT ANALYSIS

(Strengths/Weaknesses/Opportunities/Threats)

Responding to the trends outlined in the previous section requires an organizational framework that categorizes those trends and leads to development responses. This CEDS utilizes a SWOT Analysis (Strengths/Weaknesses/Opportunities/Threats) to do that. The CEDS Committee conducted a SWOT analysis and developed new measurable goals and objectives for the region. The SWOT framework is presented below. The goals, objectives, and actions are presented as “Themes”. Each theme and component is analyzed in the subsection that follows.

| | |
|--|--|
| <p style="text-align: center;">Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Location - interstates, highways, rail, airports, access to ports • Infrastructure • Workforce Training • Post-Secondary Educational Opportunities • Agricultural Opportunities • Abundant Natural Resources • Available Industrial Sites • Medical Facilities • Military Facilities | <p style="text-align: center;">Weaknesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Millennial “Brain Drain” • Shortage of Skilled Labor • Lack of Worker Soft Skills • Lack of Living Wage Jobs • Attitude Toward the Value of Education • Lack of Regional Political Cooperation • Higher Than Average High School Dropout Rate |
| <p style="text-align: center;">Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Post-Secondary Education Availability • Workforce Training Availability • Medical Facilities • Promote Vocational/Technical Job Opportunities • Advocate for Middle-Skills Job Development • Develop Regional, National, and Global Brand Appeal Messages About the Value of This Region to Overcome Negative Perceptions • Retired Military Personnel | <p style="text-align: center;">Threats</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Migration Patterns • Lack of Diversity of Industries • Lack of State Funding to Maintain Infrastructure • Lack of Living Wage Jobs • Aging Population *Base Realignment and Closures (BRAC) |

Strengths

- Location - access to two interstates (Interstates 20 and 59), state and federal highways (U.S. Highways 80 and 45/State Highways 39 and 35), railways, airports, and ports (Tombigbee).
- Infrastructure - existing water, sewer, natural gas infrastructure for future development
- Workforce Training - East Central, East Mississippi, Jones, and Meridian Community Colleges have Workforce Training Centers in the ECPDD area.
- Post-Secondary Educational Opportunities- Four community colleges (East Central, East Mississippi, Meridian, and Jones Junior) and one university (Mississippi State University-Meridian) have campuses in the ECPDD area.
- Agricultural Opportunities - The Poultry Industry is a major employer for the region.
- Abundant Natural Resources - The Timber Industry thrives due to plentiful supply of trees in the area.
- Available Industrial Sites - There are numerous available vacant industrial sites/buildings in the area with existing necessary infrastructure or close availability of that infrastructure.
- Medical Facilities - Rush Foundation Hospital (Meridian), Jeff Anderson Regional Medical Center (Meridian), and Baptist Hospital (Carthage) provide state-of-the art medical care and numerous, well-paying jobs.
- Military Facilities - Naval Air Station-Meridian and G.V. “Sonny” Montgomery National Guard Complex are both location in Meridian. NAS-Meridian trains fighter pilots from around the world, while the National Guard Complex houses the 186th Air Refueling Wing, which provides mid-air refueling for many of the nation’s military aircraft.

Weaknesses

- Millennial “Brain Drain” - according to the U.S. Census, half of the graduates from Mississippi’s public universities move to other states within five years of gradation (highest rate in the nation);
- Shortage of Skilled Labor - there are currently more middle-skills jobs available than people with middle-skills level training/certification.
- Lack of Worker Soft Skills - local employers consistently name soft skills - appropriate workplace conduct, attendance, accountability - among the top skills needed in employees.
- Lack of Living Wage Jobs - many available jobs do not pay a “living wage”, which is currently defined as paying \$12/hour or more.
- Attitude Toward the Value of Education - in the past, there were good-paying jobs that didn’t require any post-secondary education (or even a high school diploma), so older generations tended to not value education. This generational attitude has been passed down to younger generations, who now live in a world where the majority of jobs require some level of post-secondary education or training.
- Lack of Regional Political Cooperation– each individual political subdivision tends to look out for itself instead of realizing that collaborating with one another will benefit everyone.
- Higher Than Average High School Dropout Rate - 53% of the school districts in the ECPDD area have a high school dropout rate higher than the Mississippi state average.

Opportunities

- Post-Secondary Education Availability - with four community colleges and one university, the East Central area residents have numerous options for pursuing post-secondary education. Tuition Guarantee programs at the community colleges can help remove the financial burden on students in obtaining a 2-year degree or trade/skill certification.
- Workforce Training Availability - every ECPDD county has a workforce training facility operated by the community colleges.
- Medical Facilities - the existing medical facilities offer opportunity for continued growth and specialization in medical fields, which will result in good-paying jobs.
- Promote Vocational/Technical Job Opportunities - working to remove the “stigma” of vocational/technical training by educating youth and their families on the availability of good-paying jobs that do not require a four-year degree.
- Advocate for Middle-Skills Job Development - focusing efforts and funds on middle-skills job development will help attract new businesses and jobs to the area.
- Develop Regional, National, and Global Brand Appeal Messages About the Value of This Region to Overcome Negative Perceptions - groups and organizations need to work together to promote the unique brand of the area to help overcome negative stereotypes of Mississippi by other areas of the country. The area has a rich history and a growing number of world-class museums and facilities that should be highlighted to show the significance of the region.
- Retired Military Personnel - with two military bases, the area has an available talent pool of retired military members who have skills that can be used to attract new industries and jobs or who have returned to the area and possess skills to seek employment at the local military bases.

Threats

- Migration Patterns - Census figures show the East Central’s population has declined by nearly 4000 persons in the past five years. This trend could continue if efforts are not made to retain and attract residents to the area.
- Lack of Diversity of Industries - most industries can be classified as agricultural (poultry, timber) or medical (hospitals, clinics). The need exists to diversify the local industrial base to help the area withstand changes to the economy.
- Lack of State Funding to Maintain Infrastructure - while infrastructure is in place, there is little State funding to maintain it. As the infrastructure continues to age, it could have a negative impact on local economies.
- Lack of Living Wage Jobs - many of the available jobs don’t pay a living wage (\$12/hour or more), making it very difficult for many residents to break the cycle of poverty and dependence on public assistance.
- Aging Population - with the outflow of younger residents, the District’s population continues to trend older. Older citizens pay fewer taxes, causing local tax revenues to shrink, which impacts the budgets of local units of government.

V. Goals and Objectives

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The following text indicates general goals of the District. The general goals are broken down by priority with the development strategy outline beneath each goal. All of these goals are felt to be high priority, but some must be labeled as having a higher priority than others in order to expedite and coordinate efforts behind those, which are considered most important and most amenable to practical, early implementation.

Priority will be designated as either A (higher) or B (high)

1. Develop and maintain infrastructure to support long-term economic and community development. (Priority A)
 - Improve water and sewer systems, build access roads, industrial parks, air access, rail access, surface and bridges.
 - Establish rural access to Technology – Geographical Information Systems, Global Positioning Systems and State Fiber Network.
 - Improve school systems including infrastructure.
 - Improve natural gas service throughout District as needed for residential, commercial, and industrial development.
 - Study, upgrade, and maintain primary District transportation corridors.
 - Enhance and expand telecommunications service.
 - 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.
 - Work with counties and municipalities to find creative and cost-saving ways to preserve valuable landfill space through the development of solid waste plans.
 - Enhance downtown revitalization efforts to recreate viable downtown business districts.
 - Work with local governments and economic development directors to attract new industries which will diversify the local economy.

2. Create effective partnerships for economic growth and expansion. (Priority B)
 - Work with counties and municipalities to build partnerships and strategies to strengthen local and regional development efforts.
 - Targeting businesses and industries to inform and enhance their understanding of the availability of workforce services, that, if utilized, will benefit their expansion and growth.
 - Enhance business assistance programs to assist both new and existing entrepreneurs and small businesses in obtaining the necessary financing required to operate, modernize, and grow.
 - Work with local and state officials to assist struggling local businesses in identifying and solving problems, and providing early warning against possible plant closures.
 - Identify, assess, and cleanup defined brownfields in the District area.
 - Promotion of the revolving loan fund programs, workforce programs, and other funding programs to assist with the implementation of the above goals.

3. Emphasize workforce development and education to help qualify for and attract higher skilled, better paying employment opportunities. (Priority A)
 - Expand workforce education and training to fill the middle skills gap, which will attract better paying employment opportunities.
 - Train the labor force to meet middle/higher skill requirements by enrolling the unemployed and underemployed in approved training programs.
 - Link education and training with supportive services to successfully integrate the least skilled into the workplace.
 - Continue to work with employers to determine manpower needs for businesses and industries and to provide training for potential employees.
 - Continue to promote, improve and expand educational and vocational training programs at the high school and junior/community college levels.
 - Develop a partnership with county and regional economic development representatives to attract enterprises which provide middle/higher skilled jobs and living wages.
 - Provide assistance for new and expanding businesses with capital to create jobs and increase profits.

- Encourage improved access to early childhood education for preschoolers.
 - Utilize the services and expertise of the junior/community college system to implement the above goals.
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. (Priority B)
- Improve housing conditions.
 - Improve health services by working with local governments to develop strategies to attract and retain quality doctors and facilities in rural areas.
 - Establish more community health centers, especially in rural areas
 - Improve law enforcement, crime prevention, highway safety, and drug abuse education and prevention programs.
 - Strengthen rural fire protection.
 - Establish cultural centers and recreational parks throughout the District.
 - Promote Adult Day Care and 24-Hour In-Home Care.
 - Determine the economic feasibility of on-site children’s Day Care (in Industry).
 - Promote adequate non-emergency transportation for rural poor and elderly.
 - Coordinate partnerships among between community-based organizations and local communities to improve the quality of life of all local residents.
 - Promote the development of Hazard Mitigation Plans for local units of government, schools and other public entities.
 - Encourage Chambers of Commerce to develop partnerships for the purpose of networking to increase tourism in the East Central area, which should result in increased revenues.
 - Improve access to broadband and fiber optic services to enhance telemedicine and distance learning opportunities in rural areas.
 - Encourage local school districts to increase drug awareness/education programs to help combat growing drug addiction, especially opioid abuse.

- Encourage additional funding for mental health services.
 - Acquire funds for implementing and maintaining the above goals.
5. Enhance local agricultural production and markets in order to take full use of natural resources. (Priority B)
- Work with local governments to provide infrastructure to encourage expansion of agriculture processing plants in District's industrial parks.
 - Provide low-interest, long-term financing for establishment and expansion of small, family-owned farming operations.
 - Identify natural resources in the District and develop ways to take advantage of these resources to create jobs and improve economic development.
 - Encourage the creation of new and emerging markets for agricultural products and byproducts.
 - Acquire funds for implementing and maintaining the above goals.

Vital Projects

➤ **Fiber Optic Networks** – District wide, as needed and available

Purpose: To benefit to schools, medical facilities, and community colleges.

Possible funding sources: Economic Development Administration, Rural Development, Appalachian Regional Commission, and Delta Regional Authority.

Outcome: Increased accessibility to services, programs, and classes not available locally.

➤ **Study of the Economic Impact of Tourism and Related Project Activities** – District wide, based on participation

Purpose: To benefit local units of government by determining the financial impact of regional, state, and local festivals and parks on local revenue.

Possible funding sources: Economic Development Administration, Mississippi Development Authority, Delta Regional Authority, Appalachian Regional Commission, and Rural Development.

Outcome: Increased tourism, revenue, and improved quality of life and community pride

➤ **Assessment, Cleanup, and Revolving Loan Funds for Brownfield Properties** –

Purpose: Limited study of properties affected by hazardous materials and petroleum disposal.

Possible funding sources: Mississippi Department of Environmental Quality, Environmental Protection Agency, and Economic Development Administration (project specific).

Outcome: Assessment and clean-up of abandoned properties to be utilized for possible economic development.

➤ **Regional Industrial Site –**

Purpose: The District will address the need to develop mega industrial sites that will attract larger industries, including automotive, to employ a larger number of persons to maintain and retain the population and to recruit new residents

Possible funding sources: Mississippi Development Authority, Economic Development Administration, Rural Impact Fund, and local bond issues.

Outcome: To develop a 1000-acre Industrial Park that will result in the creation of 800 middle/higher skilled jobs that will provide living wages.

➤ **Distribution Center –**

Purpose: To establish a regional distribution center to capitalize on the availability of existing industrial buildings, the highway system, the existing railway system, the airport system, and the area's proximity to major ports.

Possible funding sources: Mississippi Development Authority, Economic Development Administration, Tennessee Valley Authority, Appalachian Regional Commission, and Rural Impact Fund.

Outcome: To retrofit existing vacant industrial buildings for use by new and expanded industries.

➤ **Increase participation in the Decennial Census –**

Purpose: Encourage local units of government to participate in the Local Update of Census Addresses (LUCA) Operation. The District's population has decreased by approximately 4000 persons in the last five-year period. Increased community support for and participation in 2020 Census will achieve a more accurate population count.

Possible funding sources: Local units of government.

Outcome: Increased/better population count and increased participation in Census 2020, which impacts federal and local funding and formulas.

VI. Public/Private Partnerships

Private and Public Partnerships

The East Central Planning and Development District has developed numerous private and public partnerships. Working closely with these partners, the District is able to address the needs and goals of local units of government in the area through various grant and loan programs.

The District has a long working relationship with several federal and state agencies. It is through this relationship that the District is able to better serve local units of governments. The District administers projects and programs for several federal and state agencies, including:

- Economic Development Administration (EDA) – for such projects as the EDA Revolving Loan Fund, industrial park expansion, and special studies and plans;
- Delta Regional Authority (DRA) – for basic infrastructure development and transportation improvements, business development and job training services. Jasper and Smith counties are designated as DRA counties in the ECPDD area;
- U.S. Census Bureau – for programs such as reapportionment, State Data Affiliate, and Census training for local units of government;
- Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) – for projects such as the ARC Revolving Loan Fund and ARC public improvement projects;
- Mississippi Department of Human Services/Division of Aging and Adult Services – Medicaid Waiver Services, Ombudsman, Transportation, Congregate and Home Delivered Meals, Information and Referral, and Mississippi Access to Care (MAC);
- Mississippi Development Authority (MDA) – for projects such as Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Public Facilities and Economic Development, Capital Improvements (CAP) Revolving Loan Program, Small Municipalities and Limited Population Counties (SMLPC), Rural Impact Fund (RIF) Program, and other revolving loan programs, including the Mississippi Job Protection Act Loan Program and the Mississippi Existing Industry Loan Program;
- Mississippi Home Corporation -- Home Investments Partnerships Program (HOME) for such projects as Homeowner Rehabilitation/Reconstruction;
- USDA Rural Development – for such projects such as Community Facilities, Natural Resources Conservation Service, RBEG, and RBOG;
- Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and Mississippi Emergency Management Agency (MEMA)– for projects such as Assistance to Firefighters Grant Program and Hazard Mitigation planning and grant programs;
- Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries, and Parks – for programs such as Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) and Recreational Trails Program (RTP);
- Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) – for Special Appropriations projects and Brownfields;
- Mississippi Department of Environmental Quality – for projects such as Solid Waste Assistance Grants, Waste Tire Grants, and the State Revolving Fund (SRF) Loan Program; and
- Mississippi Department of Public Safety – for projects such as Justice Assistance Grants (JAG), DUI Enforcement Grants, Occupant Protection Grants, TRIAD grants, and Special Wave Grants.

The District has partnered with many community agencies and groups to help achieve the goals set by local units of government. The District works with local chambers of commerce and economic development agencies to help develop local projects that will benefit area residents, including Mid-Mississippi Development District (serving Clarke, Jasper, Lauderdale, Newton, Scott and Smith counties), East Mississippi Business Development Corporation (serving Lauderdale County), Kemper

County Industrial Authority, Industrial Authority of Neshoba County, Clarke County Industrial Development Authority, Leake County Industrial Authority, and Smith County Economic Development District. The District also partners with other local agencies that provide assistance to persons, including Multi County Community Service Action Agency, the American Red Cross, and the Salvation Army.

The District also works with local electric cooperatives to determine and meet the needs of local industry and residents. These include the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA), Mississippi Power, Central Electric Power Association, and Southern Pine Electric Power Association. These groups have grant and loan funds to assist local businesses to expand and to help local units of government attract new industry.

The District has partnerships with local workforce and training agencies. East Central PDD partners with Southern Mississippi Planning and Development District to make up the Twin Districts Workforce Development District (TDWDA), which covers 24 counties in the southeastern area of the state. The Workforce Development Area operates numerous WIN Job Centers, including five full-service sites in the East Central Area. The District assists the Mississippi Department of Employment Security in responding to layoffs and closures in the area by participating in Rapid Response activities. District staff also works with the TDWDA Local Workforce Development Board and the Local Elected Officials (LEO) Board, which oversee all activities of TDWDA.

The District also partners with the local community and junior colleges to better meet the needs of local residents. Four community/junior colleges currently serve the East Central area – East Central Community College in Decatur, East Mississippi Community College in Scooba, Meridian Community College in Meridian, and Jones County Junior College in Ellisville. District staff works with the Workforce Development Centers at these colleges to help secure financing for small business owners through the District's revolving loan funds. Workforce Development Center staff also participates in Rapid Response activities along with the TDWDA staff. The District also works with these colleges to secure grant funding for special projects when applicable.

The District's location and ties with counties and municipalities in the area make it easier to stay attuned to local private industry and their needs. The District is able to work with local industry to determine common goals and objectives and to seek out funding to realize these goals and objectives. The District is also able to receive input from these groups in determining common problems, which can then be used to shape local economic development policy by determining what local resources exist (i.e. community/junior colleges, vocational/technical training, etc.), are available, or need to be developed to solve these problems.

The District's Revolving Loan staff works with local banks to assist small business owners in obtaining financing for their businesses. Through the East Central Area of Aging, the district works closely with local hospices and home health agencies to meet the needs of the District's elderly residents. The District also works with local hospitals to find financing for new or expanded facilities to better the health needs of local residents.

VII. Action Plan

Plan of Action

The District's Plan of Action for the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) will guide the implementation of the Goals and Objectives of the CEDS in a manner that:

- Promotes economic development and opportunity;
- Enhances and protects the environment;
- Maximizes effective development and use of the workforce consistent with any applicable State and local workforce investment strategy;
- Promotes the use of technology in economic development;
- Obtains and utilizes adequate funds and other resources.

To do this, the District will continue to work closely with committee members and economic development partners to: develop and implement the CEDS; use economic development programs to develop the strategic projects listed in the CEDS with emphasis on vital projects; will make the CEDS available to public and private partners; and will work with the State to ensure the integration of the CEDS projects with the State's economic priorities.

Current economic development programs will be utilized where possible to develop the listed projects. Potential funding programs include, but are not limited to:

- Economic Development Planning Grants
- Economic Development Infrastructure Grants
- Community Development Block Grants
- Small Municipalities and Limited Population Counties Grants
- Economic Development Marketing Grant Program
- Rural Impact Fund Grants
- Rural Development Community Programs
- Homeland Security Department of Justice, Justice Assistance Grant (JAG)
- Federal and State Loan Programs
- Delta Regional Authority

- Appalachian Regional Authority
- Capital Improvements Revolving Loan Program
- Archives and History Preservation Grants
- Federal and State Legislative Special Appropriations
- Workforce Development Programs
- Home Investment Partnership Program

The Public Information Program, already in place at the District, is utilized as the formal citizen participation mechanism and to make the CEDS available to public and private partners. The District will make the CEDS available to the public by publishing notices in the local newspapers, by meeting with local elected officials, and by meeting with local civic clubs and other interested parties. Prior to the release of the CEDS, or before any changes can be made, it is made available at the District's office for a thirty-day comment period.

Finally, the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy is provided to the State of Mississippi and Institutions of Higher Learning for integrating the CEDS and the State's economic priorities. District staff and committee members will continue to work with State agencies to coordinate this effort.

VIII. Performance Measures

Performance Measures

The District will submit the annual CEDS performance report each year after submission of the CEDS and will report outcomes from the established performance measures.

The performance measures will be based on quantified goals. A listing of projects and their economic impact on the region will be measures. Measurements will include, but not be limited to, the following:

1. Number of new or expanded industries;
2. Number of new jobs created;
3. Increase in annual and weekly wages;
4. Amount and ratio of public and private investment;
5. Increase in new and expanded educational training programs for persons underemployed or unemployed;
6. Increase or decrease in public and private dollars spent on education;
7. Increase in numbers of persons receiving job placement with comparisons of the increased income;
8. Increase or decrease in area population and assessment of the out migration/in migration; and
9. Increase or decrease in per capita and median income in the region.

The District will continue to submit the amended CEDS to the chairmen of the County CEDS Committees and the overall CEDS Committee and will discuss projects with the City and County bodies. This information will be disseminated at the annual County Committee meetings. The County Committee members are a broad representation of the District's population.

The District will revise the CEDS at least every five years. If it becomes necessary for the CEDS to be changed more frequently because it is inadequate due to changed circumstances, the District will revise the CEDS with the assistance of the CEDS Committee. Demographic data, economic data, and other relative data will be reviewed.

IX: Data Sources

Data Sources

U.S. Census Bureau (census.gov)

American Fact Finder

Mississippi Department of Employment Security

Mississippi State Auditor's Office

Mississippi Department of Revenue

StatsAmerica.org

State Data Center of Mississippi

American Community Survey

Mississippi Department of Education

Twin Districts Local Workforce Development Board 2016-2020 Strategic Plan

Twin Districts Local Workforce Development Area Sector Strategy 2017

MississippiToday.org

East Central Planning and Development District (ECPDD) Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS), 2010