

# 2022 COMPREHENSIVE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY UPDATE

Cumberland Plateau Planning District Commission

**TABLE OF CONTENTS**  
**CUMBERLAND PLATEAU PLANNING DISTRICT COMMISSION**  
**CEDS 2022 UPDATE**

	<b>PAGE</b>
<b>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY .....</b>	<b>i-iii</b>
<b>A. SUMMARY BACKGROUND – REGION’S ECONOMIC CONDITIONS .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>B. DISTRICT SWOT ANALYSIS .....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>C. STRATEGIC DIRECTION/ACTION PLAN.....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>1. Vision Statement and Goals/Objectives .....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>2. Action Plan/Implementation .....</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>D. EVALUATION MEASURES .....</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>E. ECONOMIC RESILIENCE .....</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>1. Planning for and Implementing Resilience.....</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>2. Establishing Information Networks .....</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>3. Pre-disaster Recovery Planning.....</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>4. Measuring Resilience .....</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>F. PANDEMIC RESPONSE .....</b>	<b>28</b>
 <b>APPENDICES</b>	
<b>I. SUMMARY BACKGROUND – Demographic Data</b>	
<b>II. Cumberland Plateau Hazard Mitigation Plan Update – Executive Summary</b>	
<b>III. CPPDC Roadmap to Economic Resiliency – Executive Summary</b>	
<b>IV. CEDS Endorsement Resolutions</b>	
<b>V. CEDS Committee Roster</b>	

# **2022 COMPREHENSIVE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY UPDATE CUMBERLAND PLATEAU PLANNING DISTRICT COMMISSION**

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The Cumberland Plateau Planning District Commission will celebrate its 54<sup>th</sup> year as an EDD in 2022. The District staff, Board of Directors and local and regional partners stand prepared to continue the District's economic diversification efforts.

The Cumberland Plateau Planning Commission has been working since 1968 with member governments, regional organizations, state and federal agencies and other public and private entities to diversify the regional economy which was based primarily on coal and agriculture. This effort began with the basics of providing public infrastructure to support economic growth. Then came efforts to develop industrial sites, parks and shell buildings to attract new jobs to the region. That effort resulted in some major new automotive related industries locating in the area in the late 1980's.

At the same time, efforts were being made to support the establishment of the Appalachian School of Law in Buchanan County. The success of this endeavor prompted the County to support the establishment of the Appalachian College of Pharmacy.

In the early 2000s, the PDC joined with Lenowisco PDC to initiate a regional fiber optic broadband deployment project with the financial support of EDA and the Virginia Tobacco Commission. With Sunset Fiber and Scott County Telephone Cooperative as partners, this project now provides state-of-the-art broadband services to thousands of businesses, industries, institutions and governments in the region.

A regional 4G wireless project in cooperation with Verizon Wireless, initiated in 2012, was completed in the Fall of 2016, making Southwest Virginia one of the few rural areas in the nation with 4G coverage. This project provides a transformational economic development tool for the Cumberland Plateau and Lenowisco Planning Districts. The District is committed to making this asset a major piece of local regional and state marketing plans.

With the availability of this robust twenty-first century telecommunications network, several major IT companies have located in the district, including CGI, Northrup Grumman, Sykes, AT&T and SAIC. Other companies, such as Pyott-Boone in Tazewell County, have been able to expand due to the availability of our broadband infrastructure. The district now hosts over 1,000 high-wage, high-skill IT jobs not here just ten years ago and serves over 1,000 business, industry and governmental customers. In addition, the PDC is working with its private ownership partner Point Broadband, to expand the system to serve residential customers. With two major state telecommunication grants awarded in 2021, the District will see universal coverage by the end of 2024.

On the negative side, the late 2000's also saw the loss in the District of several of our largest automotive manufacturers, including IAC and Alcoa Wheels. With these closings largely due to problems in the American auto industry, nearly 1,000 good-paying manufacturing jobs were lost. The end result has been that, despite great progress in diversification of the regional economy, the region is still losing jobs



and population. The District's four counties collectively saw a 10.62 percent population decline from 2010 to 2020, a trend that continues and is deepening. The region is supporting regional workforce programs as well as the creation of Centers of Excellence to provide better training for the advanced manufacturing and other industries being recruited to the District.

Despite success in attracting IT and higher education jobs to the area, the continued loss of population has made it apparent that more needs to be done to improve the quality of life in the district in support of creating more manufacturing jobs, jobs for which the District workforce is well suited. This realization has led to the initiation of several cultural heritage tourism efforts and a robust downtown revitalization program that is transforming Southwest Virginia and its small towns into a national and international tourism destination. Based on the unique music and craft traditions of the region and on the magnificent outdoor recreation assets of the area, Southwest Virginia has seen tremendous growth in tourism over the past fifteen plus years. This has resulted in increased small business entrepreneurship leading to at least three new motels in the district and many new restaurants, bed and breakfast operations, convenience stores, and other tourism-related businesses that greatly enhance the region's quality of life. A recent trend has been the creation of several breweries, distilleries and wineries in the District, greatly enhancing the region's quality of life. These new tourism-related businesses and jobs cannot be shipped to other states and other countries and do much to make the region more attractive to young people. Recent numbers show an increase in 25-34 year olds with college degrees. Coupled with the availability of state-of-the-art broadband, both fiber and wireless 4G, the region's quality of life is tremendously improved and the ability to attract new jobs is greatly enhanced. There is a need for a more robust marketing effort to highlight these assets which are rarely found in America's rural areas.

While the District has been at the forefront of these various economic diversification efforts, other partners, such as the Virginia Coalfield Economic Development Authority, the Virginia Economic Development Partnership, the Southwest Virginia Workforce Development Board and our local IDAs, are the primary entities that market the District to new businesses. These organizations, under the banner of the *e-Region*, are focusing on advanced manufacturing, electronic information technology, energy, agriculture, higher education, emerging technologies, existing businesses, and enterprise (Made in the USA and Opportunity SWVA). The industry clusters for IT, energy and higher education are already well established and the potential for growth is great. The Crooked Road, 'Round the Mountain, Southwest Virginia Outdoors, the Southwest Virginia Cultural Heritage Foundation, Southwest Virginia Culture Center and Market Place, Heart of Appalachia Tourism Authority, the Virginia Tourism Corporation and our local tourism offices, are marketing the region's cultural heritage and outdoor recreation assets to the world with great success. The Virginia Coal Heritage Trail, the Spearhead Multi-Use Trail System, the TransAmerica Bike Trail, the Back of The Dragon Motorcycle Trail, the Haysi to the Breaks Trail and other trails are attracting tourists and will bring more in years to come. A major proposed trail, the Clinch Mountain Trail, will be a world-class attraction. Southwest Virginia tourism revenue increases have led the state for the last few years.

New efforts in agriculture development and agritourism present significant opportunities to reinvigorate farming in the District, especially in the livestock arena. An Agricultural Strategic Plan for the Virginia Coalfield Economic Development Authority was completed in 2017 and is serving as the basis for new agriculture business development in the region. The demand for local, hormone-free and grass-finished

beef, sheep and goats is encouraging more young farmers to start new enterprises in the District and has sparked plans to build a livestock processing facility in Russell County. Along with a re-emphasis on agriculture education in the District's high schools, interest in farming as an occupation is growing.

Another new initiative led by the Thompson Foundation in Buchanan and Tazewell Counties is focusing on asset-based development in the areas of artisan and musicians, adventure and nature tourism and local agriculture and food. This effort to support economic diversification in these two coal counties is succeeding in bringing entrepreneurs and governmental leaders together. A recent initiative that originated out of this effort is the development of a major hiking trail linking the Appalachia Trail in Tazewell County to the Breaks Interstate Park in Buchanan County. Called the Burkes Garden to the Breaks Trail, it has the opportunity to add a significant link of the AT to the coalfields region. Another major trail project would link Pisgah in Tazewell County to the Channels in Russell County and on to the Brumley Mountain Trail. This 45-mile trail along Clinch Mountain will be a world-class destination for hiking tourists.

The PDC is participating in the newly – formed Southwest Virginia Solar Workgroup in efforts to develop both residential and utility-scale solar projects in Virginia's coalfields. The PDC Board has recently offered its support of state legislation to make shared solar programs available in Southwest Virginia. These programs can assist in industrial recruitment efforts in the District.

The District also partners with the Small Business Development Center (SBDC) and the Procurement Technical Assistance Center (PTAC) at Southwest Community College in the implementation of its Revolving Loan Fund (RLF). These programs support new business development as well as business expansion in the District.

All of these developments to promote economic development in the District and in Southwest Virginia have been supported by the CPPDC and its local governments. The growth in targeted business and industry clusters, especially in advanced manufacturing, is happening and the District's economy is more diversified. The challenge is to build on the successes and attract more IT, higher education, clean energy, advanced manufacturing and tourism jobs to the region, support a growing interest in agriculture and to further improve the economy and the quality of life in the District.

With the support of its many partners, the CPPDC will continue to provide leadership in promoting the economic development action plan set forth in this document that plots a path forward for economic resiliency that addresses the challenges and vulnerabilities of the District. By focusing on the current assets and opportunities identified in this CEDS Update, the region can overcome those challenges identified.

## **2022 COMPREHENSIVE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY UPDATE CUMBERLAND PLATEAU PLANNING DISTRICT COMMISSION**

### **A. SUMMARY BACKGROUND – REGION’S ECONOMIC CONDITIONS**

The Cumberland Plateau Planning District is in Southwest Virginia and encompasses the counties of Buchanan, Dickenson, Russell and Tazewell and the towns of Grundy, Clinchco, Clintwood, Haysi, Cleveland, Honaker, Lebanon, Bluefield, Cedar Bluff, Pocahontas, Richlands and Tazewell.

The District is divided into two physiographically distinct regions, both lying in the Appalachian Highlands. The counties of Buchanan and Dickenson, along with the northern portions of Russell and Tazewell Counties, lie in the Cumberland Plateau which is, in turn, a part of the Appalachian Plateau. This area lies in Virginia’s coalfields region and is dominated by coal and gas production. The remaining portion of the District, comprising the greater portion of Russell and Tazewell Counties, lies in the Valley and Ridge Province of the Appalachian Highlands where agriculture, specifically cattle farming, dominates the economy. It is also where the majority of the District’s major manufacturing and IT companies are located.

It should be emphasized here that the District’s mountainous terrain poses huge challenges for economic development. The coalfields region has little developable land and costs to create industrial and business sites of any size are extremely high. When developed, transportation challenges make marketing such sites very difficult. The ability to effectively diversify the District’s economy is challenged out of the gate even before dealing with demographic challenges.

Between 2010 and 2020, the population in the District decreased 13.20 percent, declining from 113,976 to 100,689. The lowest decline rates were recorded in Russell and Tazewell Counties (--12.09 and -11.05 percent, respectively), followed by Dickenson with -12.60 percent and Buchanan with -18.39 percent population decline.

From 2010 to 2020, the District saw -13.20 percent decrease in population. Buchanan County’s 18.39 percent population decline was still the largest experienced among the four counties. Projections by the Virginia Employment Commission indicate that the population decline has

bottomed out in Russell and Tazewell Counties and that they will see their population increase slightly through 2030. However, population will continue to decline in Buchanan and Dickenson Counties. The slight increases in Russell and Tazewell Counties are not sufficient to offset the losses in the District of the 2010's and 2020's period. It will take a much stronger economic recovery to reverse the economic trends of the past. In fact, based on the U.S. Census Bureau the District's population decreased 13.20 percent, from 2010 to 2020, continuing the dramatic population decline since 2010.

Age is a characteristic that differs significantly from the State's population statistics. The populations of all four counties appear to be slightly older on average than that of the State, with median ages of 46.8, 44.7, 45.7, and 45.2 for the four counties, in comparison to 38.2 for the State in the 2015-2019 Census Estimates. Efforts in the District to reverse the "brain drain" are ongoing and top the list of regional economic development efforts.

In 2020, unemployment was higher in all counties compared to 2019. Buchanan County was at 9.5 percent, Dickenson County was at 8.0 percent, Russell County was at 6.6 percent and Tazewell County was at 7.6 percent. In comparison, Virginia's unemployment during 2020 was 6.2 percent and the Cumberland Plateau Planning District as a whole posted a rate of 7.9 percent. These numbers reflect the global pandemic and more recent declines in the district's coal economy.

Employment by industry data shows that the largest percentages of employment in the four county area are in retail trade and health care, educational services and social assistance sectors. Mining employment is the fourth largest sector. The percent of employment in mining was appreciably smaller in Russell County (5.65 percent) and Tazewell County (5.24 percent) than it was in Buchanan County (28.46 percent), or Dickenson County (32.71 percent) reiterating the relative diversity of the economies in Tazewell and Russell as opposed to the other two counties. The figures for mining employment in 2020 are considerably smaller than they were in 2010 in all four counties due to the continued downturn in coal production. These figures will most likely continue to decline in the future.

Median family income increased in all four counties between 2000 and the 2015-2019 average. The problem, however, is that all of the counties continue to lag behind the State. Between 2000

and 2015-2019, median family income in Buchanan, Dickenson, Russell and Tazewell Counties increased by 49.57, 52.30, 54.44, and 58.48 percent respectively. During this same period the State increased by 66.41 percent. Even though the counties increased in per capita income at a significant rate, there is still a great disparity with the State on the actual dollar amounts of the median family incomes. Average Median Family Income in the 2015-2019 period for the four counties of the planning district was \$46,397 compared to \$90,141 for Virginia. The same trend holds for per capita income. From 2000 to 2015-2019, average per capita income increased by 52.46% in Buchanan County, 94.81% in Dickenson County, 45.36% in Russell County and 55.33% in Tazewell County. State per capita income increased by 63.83% for the same period. The counties of the planning district have grown at a rate comparable to the state, but the per capita income differential between Virginia (\$39,278) and the District average of \$22,454 is still very large.

The District has one of the most robust telecommunications networks of any rural area in America. Built by the Cumberland Plateau Company in conjunction with Bristol Virginia Utilities Authority, the Virginia Coalfield Coalition and Scott County Telephone Cooperative, the broadband infrastructure and wireless 4G network now in place provides a critically important tool in the District's economic development toolbox. An aggressive effort with new operating partner, Point Broadband to grow residential services in the District is underway.

There is an amazing number of outdoor recreation and cultural heritage tourism assets throughout the four county-region. These assets are being aggressively marketed through several regional initiatives, the most prominent being the Southwest Virginia Cultural Heritage Foundation and the Friends of Southwest Virginia, as well as through Heart of Appalachia Tourism Authority and County Tourism Offices. As the umbrella organization for the Crooked Road: Virginia's Heritage Music Trail, 'Round the Mountain': Southwest Virginia's Artisan Network, and Southwest Virginia's Outdoor Recreation Initiative, the Friends of Southwest Virginia promotes the 19 counties and 4 cities of Southwest Virginia to national and international tourists. This effort has brought the region to near the top of Virginia's tourism destinations. Much work lies ahead on the region's outdoor recreation initiative, Appalachian Spring. The region has just received POWER grants from EDA and ARC to support ongoing initiatives at the Breaks Interstate Park, the High Knob Recreation area, the Clinch River and the New River.



A relatively new initiative, The Spearhead Trails, is focused on the development of a multi-use trail system in Virginia's Coalfield counties. Of special importance is the development of an ATV trail system similar to the Hatfield-McCoy Trail in West Virginia. This trail has recently prompted an increase in tourism and economic development in the region.

All of the District's counties have easy access to Breaks Interstate Park which is located on the Virginia-Kentucky border with most of the Park's 4,500 acres falling within Dickenson County. The Park boasts the largest canyon east of the Mississippi, carved out by the Russell Fork River, and nicknamed the "Grand Canyon of the South." While only a small portion of The Breaks Park is located in Buchanan County, there is major cooperative effort between the Park and Buchanan County supporting the management of the only elk herd in Virginia. The herd thrives on abandoned mine land in Buchanan County, and The Breaks sponsors bus tours to observe the elk. This effort is drawing tourists to the District in significant numbers.

Another significant outdoor recreation site in Dickenson County is the John W. Flannagan Dam and Reservoir which is located five miles from Haysi on the Pound River, a tributary of the Russell Fork River. Visitors to the Reservoir enjoy opportunities to participate in outdoor activities such as picnicking, hiking, camping, swimming, fishing, boating and water skiing. The lake is a well-known small-mouth bass and walleye fishing venue. White water rafting and kayaking are additional activities offered on a seasonal basis on the Russell Fork River below the Flannagan Dam. During October of each year, whitewater enthusiasts from all over the world come to Dickenson County to enjoy one of the best whitewater experiences in North America. Estimates of the regional economic impact of a 21-day rafting season on the Gauley River in West Virginia--\$16.8 million in total direct and indirect revenues-- provide strong incentive for pursuing the development of rafting and related tourist industries in the area around the Flannagan Dam. Efforts are being made to increase the number of releases from the Dam in the Fall to expand the length of the whitewater season. Another major effort is the development of a hiking/biking trail from the Town of Haysi along the Russell Fork and into the Breaks Gorge. The trail will have international appeal.

The four counties in the District share access to Jefferson National Forest, a 690,000 acre forest located in Southwest Virginia. Dickenson, Russell and Tazewell Counties claim small portions of this forest's huge acreage and its many recreational attractions. Jefferson National Forest has received media attention for becoming the nation's first forest to actively promote tourism rather than simply waiting for people to ask for information. This bodes well for the District and Southwest Virginia as many world-class outdoor recreation assets are located in the region. In the District, in addition to the aforementioned Breaks Park, John Flannagan Reservoir and Jefferson National Forest, The Channels State Forest, Brumley Mountain Trail, Laurel Bed Lake, the Clinch Mountain Wildlife Management Area, the Appalachian Trail and Burkes Garden are all located along Clinch Mountain on the District's southern border. In addition, many world-class assets, including the Pinnacle Natural Area Preserve and the Cleveland Barrens are associated with the Clinch River, North America's most biodiverse river, which runs through Russell and Tazewell Counties.

The District is also rich in historical sites, including the Historic Crab Orchard Museum and Pioneer Park located on 110 acres of land near Tazewell and designated as a pre-historic and historic site by the Virginia Division of Historic Landmarks and the National Register of Historic Places. The Museum presents the history of Tazewell County and Southwest Virginia from 570 million years ago to the present time. Other sites of historic interest in the District include: the Town of Pocahontas, which has been placed on the Virginia Register and the National Register as a historic preservation zone; the Old Russell County Courthouse, designated as a Virginia historic landmark and placed on the State Register; Honaker Historic Downtown District, and the Cedar Bluff Roller Mills, placed on both the State and National Registers for historic places. The Ralph Stanley Museum and Traditional Mountain Music Center in Clintwood is one of the major venues on "The Crooked Road" Music Trail that is attracting thousands of cultural heritage tourists to the Southwest Virginia region. 2017 saw the third Mountains of Music Homecoming, a nine-day celebration of the region's unique musical, cultural and outdoor recreation assets. Numerous affiliated venues of The Crooked Road are located throughout the District, and all four counties are on Artisan Trails sponsored by 'Round the Mountain'.

## **B. DISTRICT SWOT ANALYSIS**

As has been stated previously, the inherent economic development weakness in the Cumberland Plateau Planning District is the historic reliance on coal production and associated manufacturing, trucking and other support businesses. As coal production decreased over the past 70 years largely due to mechanization and more recently due to diminishing reserves, high costs of mining and competition from natural gas, the challenges to economic diversification efforts in the District have greatly increased. However, numerous promising regional initiatives in telecommunications, advanced manufacturing, clean energy, cyber security, agriculture, cultural and heritage tourism and outdoor recreation are already bringing new opportunities for economic growth to the District. Nothing accomplished in these arenas will probably ever replace the high-paying coal mining jobs we've lost, but in tandem they offer a promising future for the District and the larger Southwest Virginia region.

The CPPDC CEDS Committee has reviewed and revised our existing analysis of strengths and weaknesses, taking into consideration a number of other similar exercises by area organizations, interested groups and citizens. The CEDS Committee Analysis follows, and other similar analyses can be found in the Appendices.

### **STRENGTHS**

- Strong local support for alternative energy development, advanced manufacturing, agriculture initiatives and entrepreneurial programs in support of diversification
- Eligibility for numerous federal, state, regional and private grant and loan funding
- Regional Cooperation is strong
- Robust Broadband and Wireless 4G Network
- Natural Beauty and globally-significant natural assets, i.e. Clinch River, Breaks Canyon, Cleveland Barrens, Burkes Garden, etc.
- Work ethic/productivity
- Workforce training opportunities/Centers of Excellence/SBDC/PTAC
- Quality higher education
  - Southwest Virginia Community College
  - Bluefield University

- Appalachian School Law
  - University of Appalachia College of Pharmacy
  - UVA-Wise
- Quality of Life
- Low Cost of Living
- Exceptional State and Local Incentive Programs
  - VCEDA
  - Tobacco Commission
  - Enterprise Zones
  - Tourism Zones
  - HUB Zone
  - Technology Zones
  - Opportunity Zones
  - Commonwealth Opportunity Fund
  - County USDA RLFs
  - People Inc. 9<sup>th</sup> District Tourism Fund
  - CDFIs – Virginia Community Capital/People, Inc.
- Revitalized Downtowns
- Low power rates
- World-Class Music, Craft and Outdoor Recreation Assets to support tourism development

## **WEAKNESSES**

- Mountainous terrain
- Transportation challenges in coalfields
- Lack of large industrial sites
- Lack of sewer in some areas with development potential
- Lack of investment capital
- No Interstate Highway
- Demographic challenges
  - Population loss
  - Aging population



- Loss of young people
- Lack of quality market-rate housing/subdivisions
- Supply chain access
- Low labor participation rate
- Entrepreneurship challenges
- No major growth center
- Drug problem (Opioids)

While these are considered the most significant impediments and liabilities to economic recovery, some of these are directly related to our strengths listed previously. For instance, the lack of an interstate highway and the sometimes chaotic growth it brings may be a large reason that our region's natural beauty is somewhat unspoiled. Other liabilities may have another side to the coin as well. The region's labor force, for example, does have lower educational attainment levels, largely because many older persons quit school early to go to work in coal mines because the salaries and benefits were so good. Now, many are unemployed as a result of the boom and bust nature of the coal industry. But as new industries come in, especially manufacturing, they will find that many of these dislocated miners who worked in a highly mechanized industry have a multitude of skills that make them ideal employees and highly trainable. The district will look to redefine some of these perceptions and make positives where negatives once resided.

## **OPPORTUNITIES**

- Spirit of cooperation is strong in the District which opens the door for new and expanding regional efforts
  - Cumberland Plateau Industrial Facilities Authority
  - Agriculture Workgroup
  - Solar Workgroup
  - Water and Sewer Roundtable
  - Regional Broadband and Wireless Network
  - Various regional cultural and natural heritage initiatives to build on
- Adoption of a more aggressive and expansive marketing effort in the region to showcase our regional cultural, natural, manufacturing and workforce assets

- New and expanding workforce efforts relating to loss of coal mining and related jobs focusing more on advanced manufacturing, agriculture, alternative energy, cyber security, and tourism
- Take advantage of recent interest in the region from our federal and state funders, i.e., POWER funding, Build Back Better, GO Virginia, EDA, VDH Safe Drinking Water Programs, etc. to attract new investment in the region
- Take advantage of VEDP, SBDC and PTAC programs in support of export products and government contracting.
- Support of small business development through VCEDA's Seed Capital Program and Opportunity SWVA to attract new and expanding business development, especially in the District's downtowns
- Renewed efforts to complete the Coalfield Expressway in a reasonable time frame through the efforts of the CFX Authority.

## **THREATS**

- Reduction in critical federal and state funding for community and economic development needs, especially infrastructure needs
- Continued stress in the critical coal-related sector
- Poor transportation and access to the District's coalfields communities
- Lack of land to support large industrial sites
- Population loss and other demographic hurdles (i.e., aging population, loss of young people) that negatively impact local government budgets and K-12 resources
- Opioid issue as it relates to workforce availability for existing and growing businesses

## **C. STRATEGIC DIRECTION / ACTION PLAN**

### **1. Strategic Direction - Vision Statement and Goals / Objectives**

The vision statement developed by the CPDDC takes into consideration the strategic direction of where the District wants to go. The goals and objectives plot the course of how to get there.

**The Cumberland Plateau Planning District Commission envisions:**

**A future in which all units of government and other public and private institutions work together toward the creation of a vibrant regional economy which will attract and support a wide diversity of economic and community development opportunities, providing meaningful jobs and a high quality of life to benefit the district's citizen.**

The goals and objectives defining regional expectations were developed by the EDD staff in cooperation with the CEDS Committee and based on other regional organizations' economic development plans. The 2022 CEDS incorporates initial findings contained within draft executive summaries of the upcoming CPPDC Roadmap to Economic Resiliency and Cumberland Plateau Outdoor Recreation Master Plan documents, as well as preliminary information presented within the Reenergize Southwest report commissioned by the Commonwealth of Virginia. These important studies will play a much greater role in the 2023 CEDS update. The CEDS Committee reviewed information submitted by the staff and discussed it in committee meetings. The CEDS Committee set priorities for goals and objectives based on activities already underway, the new opportunities available to meet the goals and objectives, as well as the impact each goal and objective would have on addressing economic development needs in the District.

#### **Goal No. 1 -- Economic Development**

Diversify the District's economic base in order to reduce dependence on coal mining and improve the ability of local governments to foster new or expanding business, especially in the target industries of information technology (cyber

security, etc.), clean and alternative energy (pump storage, solar, wind, etc.), advanced manufacturing, (Unmanned Aerial Vehicles, battery production etc.), agriculture and aquaculture and in the field of asset – based development. Work to support energy storage and electrification manufacturing initiatives and utility-scale solar projects.

### **Goal No. 2 -- Tourism**

Attract more tourists through the development of more and better park and recreation facilities, especially trails, and through partnerships with state and regional cultural heritage initiatives. Promote outdoor recreation, such as white water rafting, hiking, ATV trail riding and rock climbing in the region. Support current state and regional tourism marketing programs for the District. Work with local communities in support of tourism infrastructure facilities, such as hotels, breweries, distilleries, wineries, restaurants, campgrounds, shooting complexes, etc., as well as the hospitality industry, to better serve the local and traveling public.

### **Goal No. 3 – Telecommunications**

Work to meet the challenges of providing state-of-the-art broadband and wireless services to all businesses, industries, institutions and residences in the District through the regionally-owned CPC/Point Broadband Network and the Virginia Coalfield Coalition/Scott County Telephone Cooperative Wireless Network.

### **Goal No. 4 -- Workforce Development/Education**

Provide a highly trained workforce by leveraging regional resources including the K-12 public school system, Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, and SWCC's Fast Track Training programs, as well as other workforce programs offered through regional training providers including UVa-Wise and Bluefield University. Support the Southwest Virginia Advanced Manufacturing Center of Excellence in the District and Southwest Virginia to meet the workforce needs of advanced manufacturers and other emerging industries. Encourage the continued development of graduate schools in the District in partnership with area 4-year



colleges and other institutions. Promote industry-recognized credential attainment in workforce programs and employers across the District. Address regional opportunities to improve K-12 public education and expand career and technical education opportunities in the District to better prepare its young people for 21<sup>st</sup> century jobs, focusing on better counseling programs directed at college and career opportunities. Address childcare needs and facilities to support the District's workforce.

#### **Goal No. 5 -- Infrastructure Development**

Work to provide public water and sewer service, broadband and wireless infrastructure and natural gas service in existing areas of population concentration and in areas targeted for industrial, commercial and residential development. Work to support the creation of new industrial sites in the District, especially mega sites, as well as shell buildings to provide more industrial product to local, regional and state marketing entities.

#### **Goal No. 6 --Transportation**

Encourage the continued development of a transportation network, especially the Coalfields Expressway and Rt. 80, as well as public transportation that will enhance highway safety and provide better access to District industrial sites and to major trade markets and to the District's unique cultural heritage and outdoor recreation assets. Work with local community airports to develop industrial/commercial sites adjacent to those airports.

#### **Goal No. 7 -- Asset-based Development**

Create quality jobs to build sustainable local economies through the support of value-added businesses and asset-based development strategies, especially in the areas of cultural and natural heritage tourism (music, history and craft) and outdoor recreation (trails, campgrounds, etc.).

### **Goal No. 8 -- Natural Resources**

Promote the appropriate use of natural resources, such as coal, natural gas and timber. Encourage natural resource development using clean coal technology, alternative energy and hydro-electric technologies that will create the most jobs while protecting the natural environment. Support the use of natural gas locally as an economic development incentive. Support the development of pump storage, aviation biofuel, wind and solar energy projects.

### **Goal No. 9 -- Physical Environment**

Encourage the achievement of a healthful, pleasing and efficient physical environment which encompasses a diversity of living patterns and provides for a broad range of choice for each citizen. Promote the revitalization of the District's downtowns.

### **Goal No. 10 -- Entrepreneurship**

Support the development of entrepreneurship initiatives in the District, especially for the development of small businesses in the District's downtowns, through the Cumberland Plateau Revolving Loan Fund, the VCEDA Seed Capital Fund, Opportunity Southwest Virginia, the technical assistance programs of the SBDC and PTAC and other business development programs.

### **Goal No. 11 -- Housing**

Support the expansion of the range of housing opportunities for all District citizens, especially market-rate housing and housing for retirees.

### **Goal No. 12 -- Health & Substance Abuse**

Support the development and expansion of medical facilities and programs to address the needs of veterans and the unique health and substance abuse needs of the region's citizens and its workforce. Support the establishment of residential drug treatment facilities in the District in support of local drug court efforts, as well as Veterans Clinics to support the health needs of the veterans community.

### **Goal No. 13 – Regional Collaboration/Governmental Efficiency**

Continue the District’s long-standing commitment to regional cooperation while expanding that commitment through the GO Virginia program (Virginia Initiative for Growth and Opportunity) and through the SWVA Regional Economic Development Forum.

### **Goal No. 14 – Agriculture & Non-Timber Forest Products**

Support and work to enhance and grow the local agriculture and non-timber products industries, especially in the areas of wood products (alternative fuels from wood chips), agri-technology (aquaculture) and agriculture (produce and livestock), as well as the hemp production, carbon capture and storage, greenhouse, barley production and large-scale composting sectors.

#### **Objectives**

1. Work with regional and local entities to create one large mega-site (200+ acres) for industrial growth in the District’s Coalfields region, and support local, regional and state investments into site development and industrial shell building construction throughout the District
2. Work with regional and local partners to create and/or maintain a minimum of one thousand (1,000) jobs over the next five (5) year period.
3. Develop new and/or promote existing business and technology parks of at least one hundred acres in Buchanan, Dickenson, Russell, and Tazewell Counties.
4. Continue to work with Federal and State Agencies to plan and develop water and sewer projects that are essential to future economic growth. The availability of sewer should increase by a minimum of ten percent over the next five (5) years.

5. Work with local governments, school boards, Appalachian Sustainable Development, Virginia Coalfield Economic Development Authority and other organizations to develop sustainable development programs in the areas of agriculture (produce and livestock), aquaculture and nature tourism.
6. Encourage the completion of the Coalfields Expressway, which links the District to I-77 and U.S. 23, U.S. R. 460 and other Smart Scale projects. Work to improve State Route 80 to the Breaks Interstate Park, as well as Rt. 83 at Lover's Gap and Rt. 460. Also, other secondary highways in the Highway Safety Improvement Program. These projects will substantially improve the District's ability to foster tourism and industrial development growth.
7. Work to support the efforts of the Southwest Virginia Cultural Heritage Foundation, The Crooked Road, 'Round the Mountain, Southwest Virginia Outdoors, the Spearhead Trails, Coal Heritage Trail, and other outdoor recreation organizations to make Southwest Virginia a world-class destination for cultural heritage and outdoor recreational tourism. Work hard to support the continued development of the Haysi to Breaks Trail, and the development of the Burkes to Breaks Trail and the Clinch Mountain Trail as world-class tourism destinations.
8. Effectively use the WIOA and other training programs to upgrade and expand the work-force available to industry by providing customized training to meet the needs of individual industries. Support the development of workforce training facilities in the District and Southwest Virginia as part of the Centers of Excellence effort in advanced manufacturing.
9. Develop expanded business and industrial marketing programs targeted to the District and the Virginia Coalfields region. This will be accomplished in association with the Virginia Coalfield Economic Development



Authority, the Virginia Tobacco Commission, Southwest Virginia Alliance for Manufacturing, local IDA's and other development partners.

10. Expand the Southwest Virginia Regional Broadband and Wireless Networks to bring universal Broadband infrastructure to the District using fiber and wireless technologies.
11. Support ongoing downtown revitalization projects in the District's 12 towns, especially in Haysi, Clinchco, Lebanon, Cleveland, Honaker, Richlands and Pocahontas.
12. Work with GO Virginia and other agencies to address targeted economic and community development initiatives.
13. Work to support the development of the Clinch River State Park and a collaborative community development strategy for the towns and communities along the Clinch River through participation in the Clinch River Valley Initiative (CRVI).
14. Work to support the Towns of Richlands and Tazewell and Tazewell County, and the entire region in the extension of natural gas transmission lines to existing and proposed industrial sites in the District.
15. Support continued improvements at the Breaks Interstate Park, The Pinnacle and The Channels Parks, as well as outdoor recreation infrastructure for future projects such as the Clinch Mountain Trail in all District communities.

## **2. Action Plan/Implementation**

The Cumberland Plateau Planning District is a victim of economic dislocations in the coal mining industry. Since the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the District economy has relied on the coal industry to provide jobs for its people. The nature of the coal industry has always been one of "boom" or "bust", thus, creating an unstable economic base. Now that global market changes, regulatory issues and competition from natural gas and renewables have

dramatically impacted the coal industry in the district in an adverse way, it is essential that the CEDS Committee and the Planning District staff understand the changing structure of the District economy and identify the opportunities which are available if the District is to develop and implement an effective action plan for the future.

In looking at the goals and objectives derived from the SWOT analysis, the following projects are planned for the District in the coming year as projects that have the greater potential to contribute to diversification of the District's economy. Many other projects that relate to ongoing maintenance and operation are not included here.

### **CPPDC 2022 Proposed Projects**

<u>PROJECT</u>	<u>DESCRIPTION</u>	<u>FUNDING SOURCES</u>
Energy Storage and Electrification Manufacturing for Jobs (Buchanan/Tazewell)	Advanced manufacturing project to promote battery manufacturing in the District	EDA GO Virginia VCEDA ARC Va. Tech UVA App. Voices
Regional Broad-band Project (District)	Expansion of a regional Broadband & Wireless network project to achieve universal coverage	VATI Point Broadband CPC ARC POWER CDBG RD GO Virginia
Project Jonah Infrastructure (Tazewell/Russell/Buchanan)	Water and Sewer to large aquaculture project adjacent to Southwest Virginia Community College	EDA Private VCEDA Go Virginia Other
Red Onion/Chip Mill Industrial Park (Dickenson County)	Development of large regional industrial park on Dickenson/Wise Co. Border	ARC DMME VCEDA EDA

<u>PROJECT</u>	<u>DESCRIPTION</u>	<u>FUNDING SOURCES</u>
Southern Gap Industrial Park (Buchanan)	Development of 3200-acre Industrial/Commercial;	ARC CDBG EDA POWER GO VA DMME
Pocahontas Exhibition Mine & Museum Renovation – Phase 2 (Tazewell)	Improvements to nation's oldest Exhibition Coal Mine & Museum	AML ARC CDBG Private Foundations
Breaks Regional Airport Infrastructure Project (Buchanan)	Provide infrastructure to expand airport and new business sites	DMME EDA ARC CDBG Other
Clinch Mountain Trail (Russell, Tazewell)	Development of a 30-mile hiking trail With connectivity to The Channels	EDA ARC Ratcliffe Foundation Private Friends of SWVA Local
Burkes to Breaks Trail (Buchanan/Tazewell)	Dev. of a hiking trail linking the AT to the Breaks Interstate Park	Thompson Found. ARC Tob. Comm. CDBG
Haysi Trail Center And Riverwalk	Completion of DT Revitalization	ARC DCR CProp CDBG
Dante Regional Sewer (Russell)	Sewerline extension from Dante to St. Paul STP	CDBG ARC Local
Russell Theater (Russell)	Project aiming to restore historic downtown theater for community revitalization	CProp VCEDA Tob. Comm. ARC Local

<u>PROJECT</u>	<u>DESCRIPTION</u>	<u>FUNDING SOURCES</u>
Southern Gap Amphitheater (Buchanan)	Development of a proposed 4,000-seat music and performance venue	Local DMME ARC
Honaker Welcome Center (Russell)	Development of a Welcome Center for the TransAmerica Bicycle Trail	CProp Local
Project Jewell (Buchanan)	Conversion of SunCoke plant operations to retain approx. 90 jobs	EDA CProp VCEDA VEDP Local
Project Hemp (District)	Continued support of Clinch River Hemp Co.'s effort to create jobs in hemp processing	CProp VCEDA Local DMME
Southwest VA Regional Agriculture Ind. Park Facility (Region)	Development of in Ag Park to house a Meat Processing Facility and other Ag Businesses	VCEDA Tob. Comm. GO VA ARC CDBG RD AML
Cranes Nest Trail (Dickenson)	Continued development of Hiking/Biking Trail	DMME ARC DCR
Project Reclaim (Russell)	Development of a 232 acre megasite on a reclaimed coal property	AML Tob. Comm. Private DMME ARC
Coalfields Pump Storage and Solar Project (Tazewell/Dickenson Russell/Buchanan)	Development of One Pump Storage Facility with Solar Arrays on AML Lands	Dominion Energy DMME Tob. Comm. ARC VCEDA



<u>PROJECT</u>	<u>DESCRIPTION</u>	<u>FUNDING SOURCES</u>
Bluestone Business and Technology Center (Tazewell Co.)	Development of sites and infrastructure in Bus Tech Center	EDA ARC CDBG RD Tob. Comm. VCEDA Local
Spearhead Trails (Region)	Multi-Use Trail System	TC VCEDA GO VA ARC POWER ARC
Russell Co. Regional Business and Technology Park-Phase 2 (Russell Co.)	Development of 150-acre business and technology park	EDA Tob. Comm. Local
Friends of SWVA Outdoor Recreation (Region)	Regional outdoor recreation initiatives	TC CDBG ARC POWER Local
US 19 EB Super Elevation Improvements Project (Russell County)	Increase super elevation of the eastbound direction	Smart Scale
US 58 Alt Turn Lane Improvements At Sundown Dr. Project (Russell County)	Extending turn lanes	Smart Scale
US 460 at Leather-Wood Lane Offset Left-Turn Lanes Project (Town of Bluefield)	Construct offset left-turn lanes at two intersections	Smart Scale

College Avenue Access Management & Sidewalks Project (Town of Bluefield)	Construct access management & pedestrian improvements	Smart Scale
US 460 Intersection Project (Town of Richlands)	Improve access management and traffic signals	Smart Scale
Realignment of 2 <sup>nd</sup> Street Approach Project (Town of Richlands)	Improve intersection with intersection modifications	Smart Scale
BUS 19 TWLTL Project (Town of Tazewell)	Widen to a three-lane typical roadway	Smart Scale
US 460 & US 19 Intersection Improvements Project laneage and signal (Tazewell County) operations	Improve intersection conditions with new	Smart Scale
US 460 at SR 610 Intersection Improvements Project (Tazewell County)	Improve the geo- metric conditions at intersection	Smart Scale

These projects are currently in various stages of planning and development and have a good chance to be implemented and/or completed within the coming year or so. They are infrastructure projects with which District staff is and can be actively involved. Many other critical efforts, such as workforce programs, industry and business marketing efforts, housing, entrepreneurship programs, access to capital initiatives and drug abuse intervention, will require continued long-term partnerships with organizations and agencies that the District has developed over its 50 years. The achievements that the Cumberland Plateau Planning District Commission has realized over the years in meeting its challenges and opportunities are a direct result of our active participation with local, regional, state and federal partners, as well as the private sector.

## **D. EVALUATION MEASURES**

The Cumberland Plateau Planning District Commission staff, in collaboration with the CEDS Committee, local governments and other partners, will evaluate progress towards economic diversification as it relates to the CEDS Action Plan on an annual basis. This evaluation will quantify progress toward achieving the goals outlined in the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy based on number of jobs created, number of business locations and investments, number of jobs retained, amount of private sector investment, and significant changes in the region's economy. Such changes might include employment shifts from coal mining and related industries to advanced manufacturing and tourism, for example. Much is being done to lay the groundwork for such change, but progress will take years to realize.

This process will rely on the Virginia Coalfield Economic Development Authority, the Virginia Economic Development Partnership, the Virginia Coalfield Coalition, the Virginia Tobacco Commission, the Virginia Employment Commission, our local governments and IDA's and other agencies and organizations that track the effects of existing as well as new economic activities in determining which areas of our economic and development program might require additional attention.

Updates on progress being made on the Action Plan's top priority projects will be given at CEDS Committee meetings and PDC Board of Directors by staff. Should progress on any project be behind schedule, staff assignments will be given to identify problems and determine any alternative actions required to get the project back on schedule.

Evaluation will also include progress made on the CEDS goals and objective set forth in this Update. Success will depend greatly on the effectiveness of the various partners the District has engaged to address its strengths and weaknesses.

## **E. ECONOMIC RESILIENCE**

The economy of the Cumberland Plateau Planning District has historically been largely a resource-based economy – timber, coal and agriculture. All of these sectors are subject to boom or bust cycles, resource depletion and/or market conditions. Having been tasked with addressing the need

for economic diversification, the CPPDC staff has worked with its local, regional, state and federal partners to support numerous economic diversification efforts that fall into the category of **steady-state initiatives**. The impacts of these initiatives, which have included partnerships in alternative energy projects, deployment of a robust broadband and wireless 4G infrastructure network, as well as several asset-based initiatives in cultural heritage and outdoor recreation tourism and sustainable agriculture, have somewhat mitigated the recent dramatic losses in coal and coal-related employment in the District.

These positive diversification initiatives are a result of planning efforts with a multitude of partners, including local, regional, state and federal agencies and organizations as well as many non-profit and private entities. No stone is left unturned in efforts to fund such transformative initiatives. Most recently, the PDC is partnering with the Thompson Foundation in an economic diversification initiative in Buchanan and Tazewell Counties that is focusing on local assets, particularly trail development. All of the asset-based initiatives in the region have built on unique local and regional cultural and natural assets that can't be shipped overseas. And the broadband and wireless network was funded through federal funding partners (EDA and NTIA), state partners, (the Virginia Tobacco Commission and the Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development), regional partners (Virginia Coalfield Economic Development Authority) and private carrier partners. This robust telecommunications network provides the redundancy that network customers such as Northrup Grumman and CGI require in support of their business needs and employment of over 600 people in the District. Significant efforts are being made to expand broadband deployment focusing on residential connections. Major progress was made in 2020 with over 2,000 new connections made in partnership with Point Broadband, the private company that operates the Cumberland Plateau Broadband System. Two major VATI applications for state funding were approved in 2021 that will serve nearly 20,000 passings.

The CPPDC has spent and continues to spend significant staff time in support of business retention and expansion programs targeted at downtown revitalization and entrepreneurship. These efforts are part of a huge regional effort in Southwest Virginia involving 19 counties, 54 towns and four cities to promote cultural heritage and outdoor recreation as economic drivers. At least 9 of the District's 12 towns, as well as about 20 others in the region, have completed or are engaged in

downtown revitalization construction projects. These projects are creating vibrant downtowns as attractive locations for new and expanding business development. From 2004 to 2020, dramatic increases in tourism and tourism-related tax revenues in the District and region prove that this strategy is working. Even more dramatic is the fact that for the first time in decades the population of the 25-34 year old age group is growing. Together with the broadband and outdoor recreation efforts, the region has a very real opportunity to reverse the “brain drain” so typical of our past.

The staff of the District is working in support of recent efforts to build a resilient workforce, a difficult challenge in light of the large numbers of dislocated miners and other coal industry related employees looking for meaningful employment in the region. Several workforce initiatives hold promise, including at least two POWER-funded programs run through the Virginia Community College system and regional workforce agencies. Another effort, the Centers of Excellence, which is funded by the Virginia Tobacco Commission, is focusing on transferrable skill sets from mining employment to advanced manufacturing. A satellite training facility in Tazewell County is targeting credentialing in advanced welding, for example. And SWCC is partnering with Buchanan County on a culinary arts workforce initiative that will serve the entire District and support new restaurant growth in our revitalized downtowns.

In addition, the CPPDC staff recently completed its District Hazard Mitigation Plan Update which identified and prioritized potential hazards that can likely impact District localities and developed a risk assessment targeted to the high and medium-high hazard classifications. This plan identifies and builds support for mitigation activities and incorporates them into post-disaster recovery activities. In response, some District localities have initiated pre-disaster planning activities. All District counties and towns have approved the latest update.

## **1. Planning For and Implementing Resilience**

The Cumberland Plateau CEDS Committee in conjunction with PDC staff, local, regional, state and federal economic development agencies, as well as community development professionals, has plotted a course to economic resiliency through a robust economic diversification effort. With the sobering realization that the coal, timber and tobacco industries were in decline, this effort

began years ago and has evolved through a thoughtful progression of infrastructure development and asset-based strategies.

The CEDS Committee has identified the major economic challenges of the District in the previous SWOT analysis section and developed Goals and Objectives and actions to address vulnerabilities in support of the District's long-term recovery. The mountainous terrain and high costs of infrastructure, transportation and site development steered the PDC staff about 15 years ago to take an active role in broadband deployment and cultural heritage and outdoor recreation tourism development. These initiatives support the significant downtown revitalization projects in the District which provide attractive, low-cost alternatives for small businesses to locate and expand. A robust entrepreneurship initiative, Opportunity SWVA, of which the CPPDC is a Steering Team member, is providing training and challenge incentives for new business development. Additional emphasis on advanced manufacturing through training and marketing initiatives led by our WIOA and marketing entities is being supported by the PDC staff as well.

These initiatives have led to a broader regional approach to economic development in the 19-county, 54-town, four-city region of Southwest Virginia which includes four EDDs. A branding initiative was recently completed, and, for the first time, Southwest Virginia has a unified presence in the Virginia Travel Guide issued each year by the Virginia Tourism Corporation. This collaborative approach to marketing Southwest Virginia's unique music, craft and outdoor recreation assets to the world is paying significant dividends. Visitation and tax revenues are up in all counties in the region. And for the first time in decades, the population of the age group 25 to 34 is on the rise. By making the region and its communities more attractive to younger people who are more and more able to tele-work because of our world-class broadband and wireless network, we are reversing the brain drain and improving the demographics of our workforce. All of this is building economic resilience in the District and in Southwest Virginia and supports job creation opportunities in all economic sectors.

## **2. Establishing Information Networks**

The CPPDC serves as a source of information to deal with economic challenges through its website and the inclusion of our CEDS and a wealth of Census data on the website. The CPPDC, along

with its sister PDCs in the region and state, acts as a convener of the region's stakeholders to discuss and react to economic and community development challenges.

A good example is the role that the CPPDC is taking to expand the dialogue about alternative energy opportunities in solar and pump storage. The CPPDC is initiating a collaborative effort with the Northern Virginia Regional Council and the Republic of Germany to investigate opportunities to collectively support alternative energy initiative in the district. Another example is the role of the states' PDCs in convening numerous stakeholders, public and private, in implementing GO Virginia, the state's newest initiative to address Virginia's loss of defense-related jobs and jobs in other sectors. A state council headed by private sector representatives, as well as legislative and Administration appointees, has designated nine regions across the state and has tasked each region to form a council to implement the program. The goal is to incentivize collaboration in job creation and governmental efficiency activities to bring back Virginia's status as the number one state for business in the country. The Cumberland Plateau, Lenowisco and Mt. Rogers PDCs are very involved in this effort in our three Planning Districts which make up Region One in the GO Virginia structure. The Cumberland Plateau Executive Director is a member of the GO VA Region Board.

The coalfields region of Virginia has faced many economic challenges since the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, but most especially since mechanization allowed coal companies to mine coal with far fewer coal miners. This led to mass outmigration in the 1950's to the industrialized cities of the North and Mid-West. Overcoming the topographic and access challenges that our remote, mountainous location poses has not been easy. But we now have effective strategies that can provide for a prosperous way forward.

### **3. Pre-Disaster Recovery Planning**

Pre-disaster recovery planning is not a high priority in the Cumberland Plateau Planning District because the region is not prone to natural disasters. The District's Hazard Mitigation Plan identifies the main natural threats as flooding, winter storms, wildfires and landslides, with flooding the only one with a high hazard level. The District's counties and towns support the relocation of businesses, governmental structures and residences out of the floodplain and the creation of green



space when relocation takes place. Significant efforts in relocation include the relocation of the entire downtown district of the Town of Grundy in Buchanan County to a new site out of the floodplain. Since the completion of that project, Buchanan County has continued to advance additional Army Corps of Engineers floodproofing efforts, including an in-progress initiative to replace or relocate Hurley High School and the Buchanan County Technology and Career Center, both of which exist in the floodplain. In the same project, a number of Vansant-area structures are eligible for elevation or removal. Other significant relocation and mitigation activities have been implemented in the Town of Bluefield in Tazewell County and the Town of Cleveland in Russell County. A major Army Corps of Engineers project in Dickenson County closed two high schools and two elementary schools located in the floodplain and moved the high schools to a new location out of the floodplain. The Executive Summary of the District's Hazard Mitigation Plan is included in the Appendices.

This CEDS document, then, focuses primarily on the broader economic resilience of the District. In this section of the CEDS, both steady-state and responsive initiatives have been identified. These on-going and up-coming initiatives are leading the way to a more diversified regional economy that are attempting to meet the needs of our coalfields region. While the coal industry will continue to rise and fall as coal reserves are eventually depleted, the District has several promising economic transitions occurring which can somewhat mitigate disruption in the coal industry.

#### **4. Measuring Resilience**

The PDC staff maintains data that measures population income and employment by industry data compared with state and national statistics as a means of determining progress toward diversification. And staff also attempts to align changes in this data with the several initiatives identified in the CEDS. A good example is the growth in the 25-34 age group in the region since 2004. This growth corresponds with the cultural heritage initiative, The Crooked Road, the outdoor recreation initiative, Southwest Virginia Outdoors, and the deployment of the regional broadband and wireless 4G projects. All are critical components of our downtown revitalization efforts and the creation of more amenities such as nicer restaurants, craft-breweries and performance venues

that the Millennial generation expects. Staff will continue to monitor the data and measure progress toward economic resilience.

## **F. PANDEMIC RESPONSE**

Pandemic conditions brought about by COVID-19 have necessitated a retooling of the economic development strategy within the District. The District staff, in conjunction with community leaders throughout Cumberland Plateau counties and towns, will continue to implement direct pandemic response measures triggered by future widespread health events, as well as long-term strategical approaches to soften the economic impact of a future pandemic within the District.

### **1. Direct Pandemic Response (DPR) Measures**

To quickly and effectively implement any and all necessary DPR measures in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as in the event of new pandemic conditions, **the District will work to facilitate the formation of a local Pandemic Response Task Force** whose membership will ideally consist of the current economic development directors, tourism directors and chamber of commerce directors in the counties of Buchanan, Dickenson, Russell and Tazewell, in addition to other community stakeholders.

The planning district will also work to facilitate the development of an online information-sharing portal that consolidates resource pertaining to the pandemic as well as future economic disruptions. Ideally, the portal will contain all known economic recovery resources available to the local business community. This web portal will also ideally provide the general public with information on best practices for supporting businesses in our communities by means other than traditional patronage, including options for home deliveries and revised services that adhere to evolving pandemic response guidelines.

While many aspects of the COVID-19 response in 2020 created greater challenges for our region, other effects of the pandemic created new opportunities. The District will work with state, regional and local groups to advance the development of programs that promote the **Cumberland Plateau counties and towns as ideal landing spots for tech employees who seek to take advantage of the remote working boom** that has resulted from the nationwide COVID-19 response. This relocation or, in some cases, “repatriation,” initiative will aim to appeal to workers in tech sectors who are permitted by their employers to work from any location of their choosing. Summer 2020 reports indicated tech giants – such as Google and Facebook, among others – are now open to allowing a certain percentage of their workforce to perform their duties from anywhere. Business surveys also indicate two-thirds of tech workers in San Francisco would live and work from other areas if given the option. The District recognizes this movement

as an opportunity to reinvigorate its workforce and population levels within its respective counties and towns where infrastructure exists to support such an initiative. With the District's high quality of life, low cost of living and considerable access to outdoor recreation opportunities available as marketing assets, the Cumberland Plateau region appears as poised as any comparable locality to advance such initiatives alongside community development partners.

Vacant and accessible structures throughout the PDC, especially in our downtowns, will be evaluated for potential use as **Public Workspace Centers** in an effort to address gaps in the ability of some residents to work remotely from home (or their desire to do so).

## **2. New Normal Response (NNR) Measures**

In light of negative economic impacts related to COVID-19 within our region, the District will double-down on efforts to **develop and support an Outdoor Economy in the four Cumberland Plateau counties**, which has been identified as a key New Normal Response priority for the District. The pursuit of a successful Outdoor Economy will:

- Result in the fostering and support of job growth initiatives within the outdoor environment, outdoor adventure, wildlife management and tourism entrepreneurship sectors where, in many cases, employment is **less-likely to be severely impacted by future pandemic conditions**
- Support new investments in agriculture, aquaculture, livestock, forestry, farming and other **initiatives that specifically enhance and bolster the region's food supply chain** and access to family-sustaining commodities
- When and where possible, **preserve the natural environment**, which will support the overall objective of building a successful Outdoor Economy around the region's unique natural assets
- Result in the District staff, in conjunction with tourism and economic development professionals within Buchanan, Dickenson, Russell and Tazewell counties, working to **aggressively implement the forthcoming Cumberland Plateau Outdoor Recreation Master Plan**, which will in turn support the overall objective
- **Prop up the aforementioned CEDS DPR related to creating a desirable living environment** within the Cumberland Plateau counties in an effort to attract and lure potential workforce talent who desire to relocate from more densely-populated regions of the U.S.

The development and **retention of other industry sectors projected to boast varying degrees of insulation from future pandemic conditions** will also receive underscored support from the District, including, but not limited to, the following sectors:

- Tech and data
- Healthcare

- Shared Services and IT
- Warehousing and delivery
- Construction
- Meat preparation and processing
- Machinery and equipment manufacturing
- Fabricated metal manufacturing
- Tourism

While work is active and constant between the District and Point Broadband to achieve universal fiber broadband coverage within the region, COVID-19 very effectively exposed the most glaring holes within the region's high-speed internet infrastructure grid, particularly as it pertained to broadband access for school-age children and working adults who desire -- or are required to -- telework within the District. In an effort to shore up these deficiencies, District staff will:

- Strive to **more accurately identify potential project zones for future fiber broadband deployment** beyond areas already targeted in two large Virginia Telecommunications Initiative projects, both of which are underway following funding approvals at the state level
- Conduct an assessment of proposed **publicly-accessible Wi-Fi hotspot locations** to supplement hotspot projects already completed or underway by the PDC, where quick deployment of fiber is neither feasible nor practical
- Work to identify and **solve gaps in Wi-Fi and cellular connectivity** at recreational locations, including trails, parks and conservation areas
- Work to identify and **solve gaps in Wi-Fi and cellular connectivity** in residential areas not already served by the local wireless network

Through targeted partnerships, the District will assist in the development and support of **Community Solutions Centers** in each of the four CPPDC counties. The Centers will ideally act as information hubs for local business operators and the general public, providing up-to-date information on local, state and federal pandemic guidelines and recommendations as well as economic recovery resources.

# APPENDICES

Table 6

### Population Counts and Percentages of Change Census 1990, Census 2000, Census 2010 and Census 2020

	2020	2010	2000	1990	2010-2020	2000-2010	1990-2000	1990-2010
Locality					% Change	% Change	% Change	% Change
Buchanan County	20,355	24,098	26,978	31,333	-18.39%	-10.68%	-13.90%	-23.09%
Grundy Town	875	1,021	1,105	1,305	-16.69%	-7.60%	-15.33%	-21.76%
Dickenson County	14,124	15,903	16,395	17,620	-12.60%	-3.00%	-6.95%	-9.75%
Clintwood Town	1,377	1,414	1,549	1,542	-2.69%	-8.72%	0.45%	-8.30%
Haysi Town	484	498	186	222	-2.89%	167.70%	-16.22%	124.32%
Clinchco Town	244	337	424	N/A	-38.11%	-20.50%	N/A	N/A
Russell County	25,781	28,897	30,308	28,667	-12.09%	-4.66%	5.72%	0.80%
Cleveland Town	136	202	148	214	-48.53%	36.48%	-30.84%	-5.61%
Lebanon Town	3,159	3,424	3,273	3,386	-8.39%	4.60%	-3.34%	1.12%
Honaker Town	1,217	1,449	945	950	-19.06%	53.30%	-0.53%	52.53%
Tazewell County	40,429	45,078	44,598	45,960	-11.50%	1.07%	-2.96%	-1.92%
Bluefield Town	5,096	5,444	5,078	5,363	-6.83%	7.20%	-5.31%	1.51%
Pocahontas Town	268	389	441	513	-45.15%	-11.79%	-14.04%	-24.17%
Richlands Town	5,261	5,823	4,144	4,456	-10.68%	40.56%	-7.00%	30.68%
Tazewell Town	4,486	4,627	4,206	4,176	-3.14%	10.00%	0.72%	10.80%
Cedar Bluff Town	1,069	1,137	1,085	1,290	-6.36%	4.79%	-15.89%	-11.86%
CPPDC	100,689	113,976	118,279	123,580	-13.20%	3.63%	-4.29%	-7.77%
Virginia	8,631,393	8,001,024	7,078,515	6,187,358	7.30%	13.00%	14.40%	29.31%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 1990 - 2000 - 2010  
and U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey 2014 - 2018

Table 8

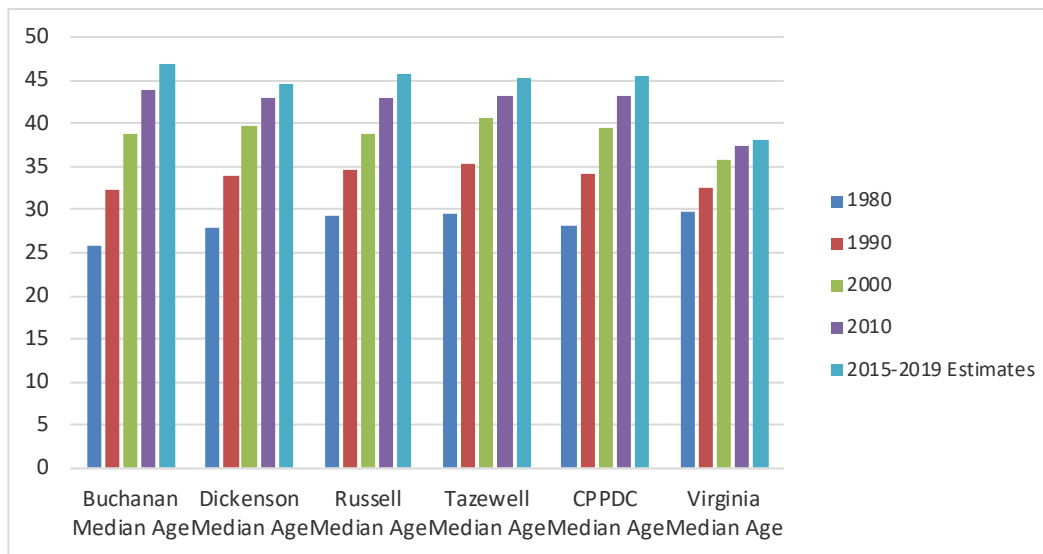
Median Age

	1980	1990	2000	2010	2015-2019 Estimates
Buchanan Median Age	25.9	32.2	38.8	43.8	46.8
Dickenson Median Age	28	34	39.7	43	44.7
Russell Median Age	29.3	34.6	38.7	43	45.7
Tazewell Median Age	29.6	35.4	40.7	43.2	45.2
CPPDC Median Age	28.2	34.1	39.5	43.2	45.6
Virginia Median Age	29.8	32.6	35.7	37.5	38.2

Source: US Census Bureau & 2012 - 2016 American Community Survey Estimates

Figure 8

Median Age Years



Source: US Census Bureau & 2012 - 2016 American Community Survey Estimates

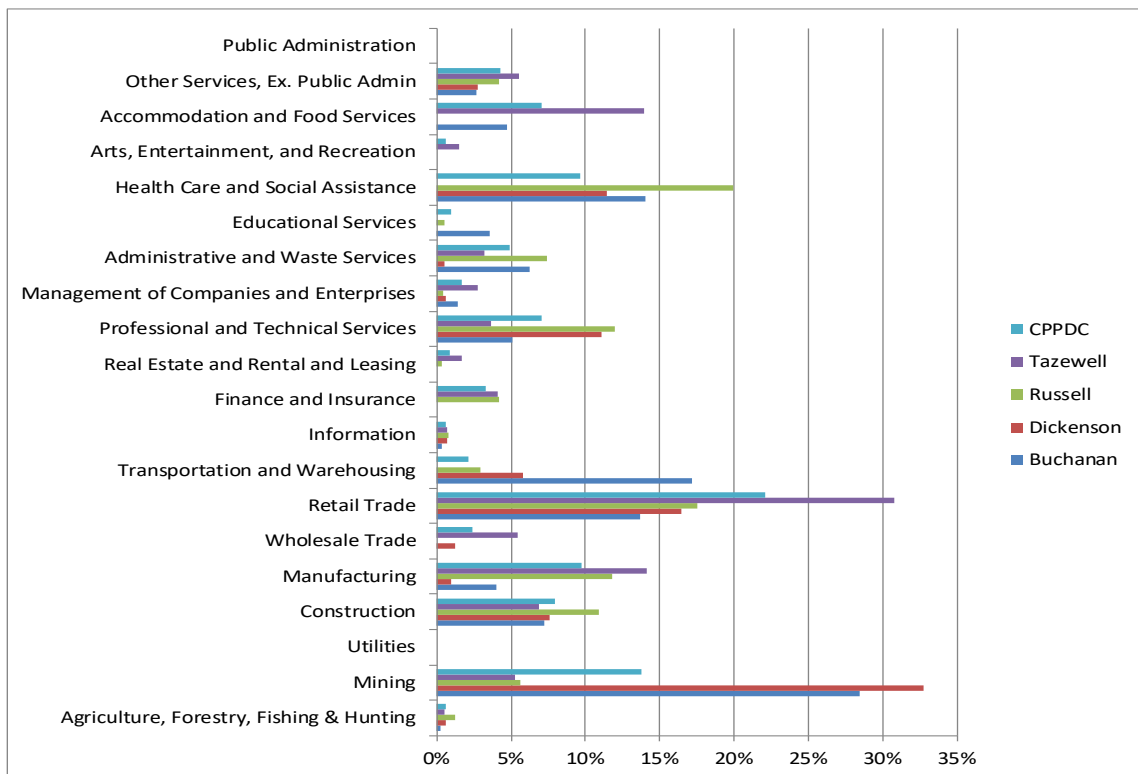


Table 11  
Distribution of Employment 2019

Industry	Buchanan %	Dickenson %	Russell %	Tazewell %	CPPDC %
Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing & Hunting	0.27%	0.58%	1.24%	0.48%	0.62%
Mining	28.46%	32.71%	5.65%	5.24%	13.78%
Utilities	***	***	***	***	***
Construction	7.25%	7.60%	10.93%	6.87%	7.97%
Manufacturing	4.01%	0.99%	11.79%	14.11%	9.78%
Wholesale Trade	***	1.27%	***	5.41%	2.44%
Retail Trade	13.65%	16.42%	17.55%	30.74%	22.13%
Transportation and Warehousing	17.17%	5.80%	2.95%	***	2.13%
Information	0.33%	0.72%	0.79%	0.73%	0.64%
Finance and Insurance	***	***	4.15%	4.07%	3.32%
Real Estate and Rental and Leasing	***	***	0.34%	1.65%	0.91%
Professional and Technical Services	5.10%	11.07%	11.96%	3.64%	7.04%
Management of Companies and Enterprises	1.44%	0.58%	0.44%	2.74%	1.67%
Administrative and Waste Services	6.21%	0.49%	7.40%	3.22%	4.91%
Educational Services	3.57%	***	0.55%	***	0.96%
Health Care and Social Assistance	14.07%	11.47%	19.99%	***	9.64%
Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation	***	***	***	1.53%	0.65%
Accommodation and Food Services	4.74%	***	***	13.91%	7.04%
Other Services, Ex. Public Admin	2.67%	2.72%	4.19%	5.57%	4.26%
Public Administration	***	***	***	***	***

Source: Virginia Employment Commission

Distribution of Employment 2019  
Figure 11

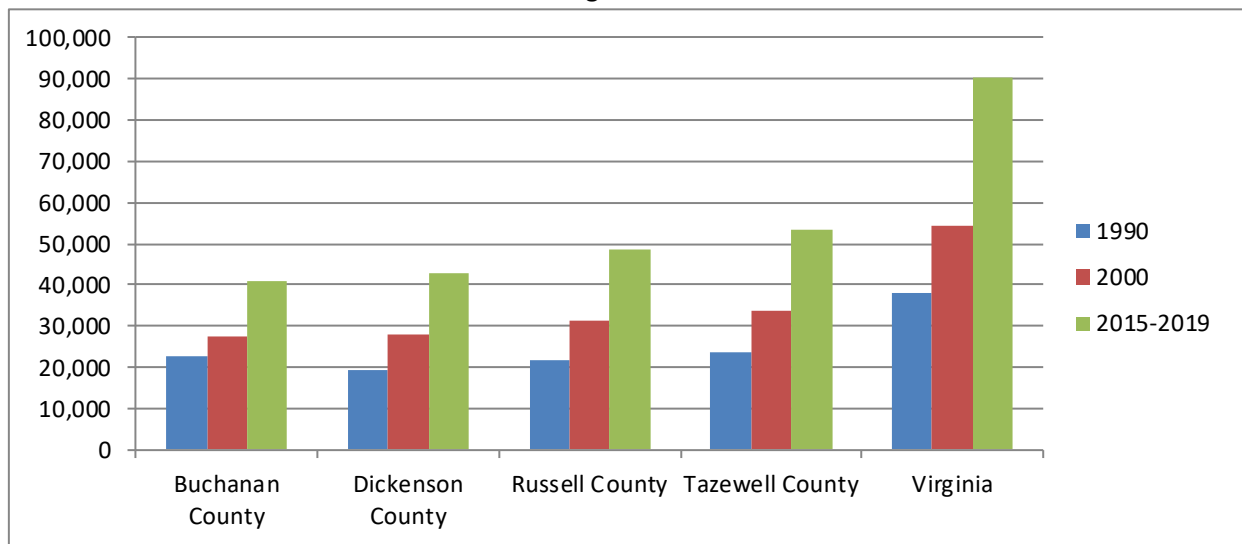


Source: Virginia Employment Commission

Table 15  
Median Family Income

Median Family Income	1990	2000	2015-2019
Buchanan County	22,464	27,328	40,874
Dickenson County	19,498	27,986	42,622
Russell County	21,777	31,491	48,634
Tazewell County	23,535	33,732	53,458
Virginia	38,213	54,169	90,141

Figure 15

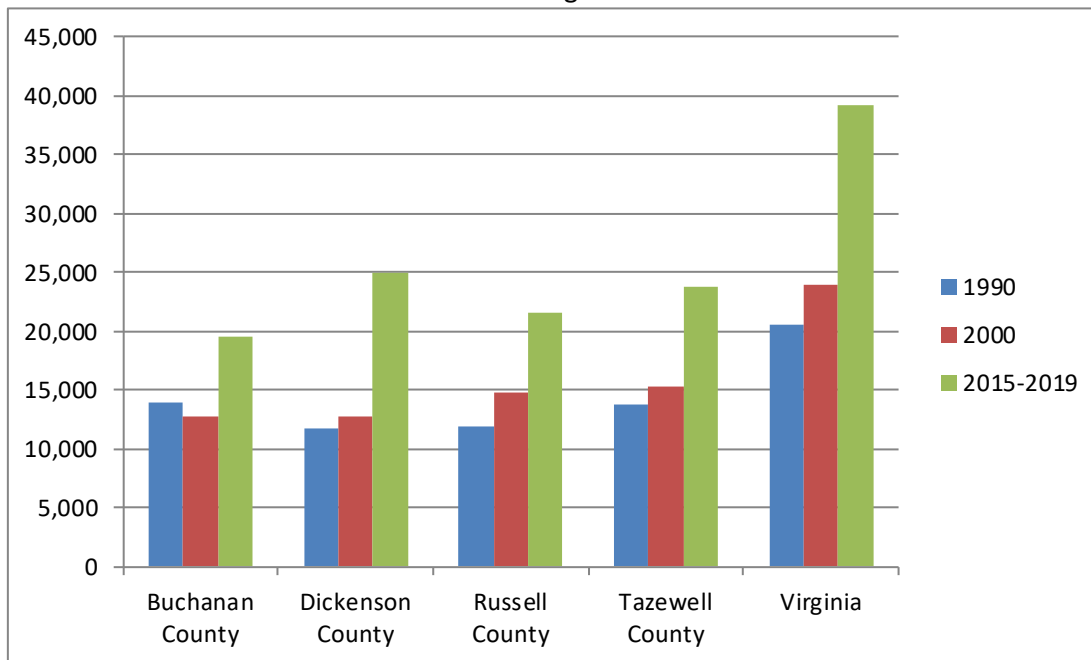


Source: U.S. Census Bureau 2000 data and 20015-2019 American Community Survey data

Table 16  
PerCapita Income

PerCapita Income	1990	2000	2015-2019
Buchanan County	13,875	12,788	19,496
Dickenson County	11,793	12,822	24,978
Russell County	11,972	14,863	21,605
Tazewell County	13,797	15,282	23,738
Virginia	20,527	23,975	39,278

Figure 16

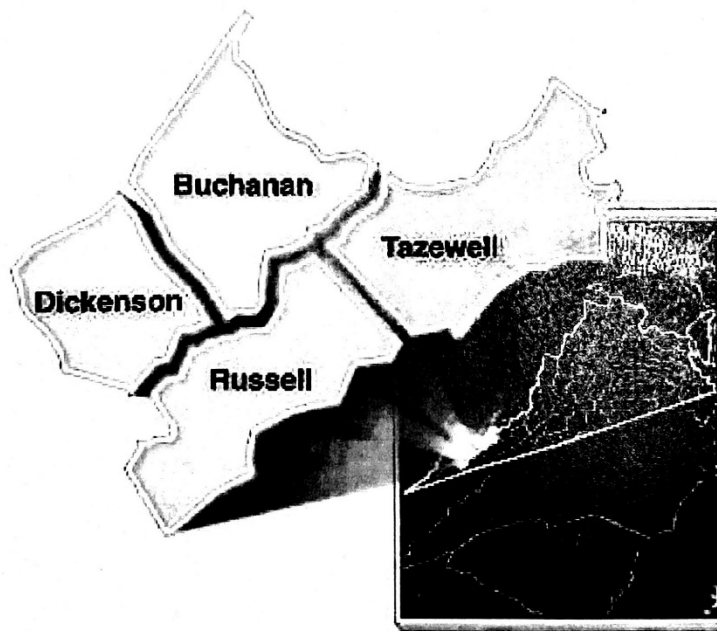


Source: U.S. Census Bureau 2000 data and 2014-2018 American Community Survey data

# **Cumberland Plateau Planning District Commission**

## **Hazard Mitigation Plan Update**

**September, 2018**



**Cumberland Plateau Planning District Commission  
Hazard Mitigation Plan**

## **SECTION I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

For the purposes of this Hazard Mitigation Plan, the Cumberland Plateau Planning District is comprised of the counties of Buchanan, Dickenson, Russell and Tazewell and the towns of Grundy, Clinchco, Clintwood, Haysi, Cleveland, Honaker, Lebanon, Bluefield, Cedar Bluff, Pocahontas, Richlands and Tazewell. Hereinafter and throughout the document, the area will be referred to as the Cumberland Plateau Planning District. The area is vulnerable to many types of natural hazards — including floods, tornadoes, winter storms, earthquakes, and severe thunderstorms — and has experienced the effects of each of these at some point in its history.

The last few decades of growth within the Cumberland Plateau Planning District have placed more development than ever in harm's way, increasing the potential for severe economic and social consequences if a major disaster or other catastrophic event were to occur today. Such an event could have the potential to cost the local governments, residents, and businesses millions of dollars in damages to public buildings and infrastructure, lost tax revenues, unemployment, homelessness, and emotional and physical suffering for many years to come.

A multi-hazard mitigation plan has been prepared for the Cumberland Plateau Planning District in accordance with the requirements of the Disaster Mitigation Act of 2000. Having the mitigation plan in place will help the area to:

- Better understand local hazards and risks;
- Build support for mitigation activities;
- Develop more effective community hazard-reduction policies and integrate mitigation concepts into other community processes;
- Incorporate mitigation into post-disaster recovery activities; and
- Obtain disaster-related grants in the aftermath of a disaster.

### **Hazard Identification and Risk Assessment**

Prioritizing the potential hazards that can impact the Cumberland Plateau Planning District was based on the probability that a potential hazard will affect the area and the potential impacts on it for a given disaster event. Values were assigned to each hazard type, based on the hazard's highest potential hazard level. These hazard level categories represent the likelihood of a hazard event, which could significantly affect the Cumberland Plateau Planning District. These categories are based on the classifications used in the Hazard Identification portion of this document and are **High**, **Medium-High**, **Medium**, and **Low**. In order to focus on the most significant hazards, only those assigned a level of **High** or **Medium-High** have been included for analysis in the risk assessment.

**Cumberland Plateau Planning District Commission  
Hazard Mitigation Plan**

Table I-1 summarizes the results of this analysis, which is explained more fully in Section V of this plan.

Table I-1 — Hazard Identification Results	
Hazard Type	Hazard Level
Flooding	High
Severe Winter Storms	Medium-High
Wildfire	Medium-High
Landslides	Medium-High
Severe Wind	Medium-High
Severe Thunderstorms/Hail Storms	Medium
Earthquake	Medium
Dam/Levee Failure	Medium
Drought	Medium
Domestic Fire	Medium
Algae Bloom	Medium
Abandoned Mine Fire	Medium
Tornado	Low
Extreme Heat	Low
Karst	Low

### **The Mitigation Strategy**

During the presentation of findings for the Hazard Identification and Risk Assessment workshop, the Mitigation Advisory Committee (MAC) was asked to provide comments and suggestions on actions and policies, which could lessen the area's vulnerability to the identified hazards. The MAC supported the following preliminary comments below:

- Top priorities for the area were public safety, public education, and reduction of potential economic impacts of disasters.
- Alternatives should consider the impacts on the Cumberland Plateau Planning District as a whole.
- Alternatives must not conflict with other local government programs.
- Outreach and other efforts should be attempted to repetitive loss properties, including those designated by FEMA.
- Past experiences from disasters should be built upon.
- The success of past mitigation projects should be considered in developing alternatives.

The following overarching goal and six specific goals were developed by the MAC to guide the area's future hazard mitigation activities.

#### **OVERARCHING COMMUNITY GOAL:**

"To develop and maintain disaster resistant communities that are less vulnerable to the economic and physical devastation associated with natural hazard events."

## **Cumberland Plateau Planning District Commission Hazard Mitigation Plan**

- ♦ **GOAL 1:**  
Enhance the safety of residents and businesses by protecting new and existing development from the effects of hazards.
- ♦ **GOAL 2:**  
Protect new and existing public and private infrastructure and facilities from the effects of hazards.
- ♦ **GOAL 3:**  
Increase the area's floodplain management activities and participation in the National Flood Insurance Program.
- ♦ **GOAL 4:**  
Ensure hazard awareness and risk reduction principles are institutionalized into each local jurisdiction's daily activities, processes, and functions by incorporating them into policy documents and initiatives.
- ♦ **GOAL 5:**  
Enhance community-wide understanding and awareness of Cumberland Plateau Planning District hazards.
- ♦ **GOAL 6:**  
Publicize mitigation activities to reduce the area's vulnerability to the identified hazards.

The MAC reviewed the STAPLE/E Criteria (Social, Technical, Administrative, Political, Legal, Economic, and Environmental) process to assist in selecting and prioritizing the most appropriate mitigation actions for the Cumberland Plateau Planning District. This methodology required that social, technical, administrative, political, legal, economic, and environmental considerations be taken into account when reviewing potential projects and policies. This process was used to help ensure that the most equitable and feasible actions would be undertaken based on local jurisdiction's capabilities. These actions are laid out with an implementation strategy and timeframes in Section VII of this plan.

### **Conclusion**

This plan symbolizes the Cumberland Plateau Planning District's continued commitment and dedication to enhance the safety of its residents and businesses by taking actions before a disaster strikes. While each jurisdiction cannot necessarily prevent natural hazard events from occurring, they can minimize the disruption and devastation that so often accompanies these disasters.



## **CPPDC Roadmap to Economic Resiliency**

### *Executive Summary*

The Cumberland Plateau Planning District Commission engaged the help of Hickey Global in researching and analyzing economic opportunities and concerns for business resiliency and recovery from economic shocks including the COVID-19 pandemic. In order to make these recommendations, Hickey Global conducted stakeholder surveying, asset mapping, and cluster analysis within the region and combined these results with prevailing industry research and thought.

This analysis revealed an image of a region with reliable legacy industries, cutting edge technological positioning, and rich natural beauty on which to continue to capitalize. Also uncovered were opportunities in developing education, transportation infrastructure, and workforce engagement which could lead to resiliency difficulties in the future if not adequately addressed. Overall, the Cumberland Plateau region is better situated than many similar regions to maintain economic vibrancy in the face of economic shocks and possibly utilize current market conditions to grow into the future with remote worker recruitment and strategic engagement with the current workforce.

Stakeholder surveying was conducted in person and online over the course of two weeks and included representatives of small and large business owners, local and regional officials, park staff, food and beverage industry, information technology sector, manufacturing and industrial sector, accommodations and lodging, and economic development groups. 52% of those surveyed were in the private industry and tourism sector with 48% in the government and non-profit sector. Stakeholders were evenly distributed across the region with 24% from Buchanan County, 29% from Dickenson County, 35% from Tazewell County, and 18% from Russel County.

Surveying revealed that many groups had taken at least some amount of pandemic assistance funding with the most popular being PPP loans followed by County and Town IDA Grants and Town Cares Act Grants at an even split for the second most popular. While the funding made available was listed as a highlight of pandemic response in both the private industry and tourism sectors, stakeholders also noted the need for better community engagement and flow of information in helping these industries learn about available programs and application and eligibility requirements. Notably, government and non-profit entities also agreed that clarity of information flow would have made regional pandemic response more affective. Overall, government and non-profit entities felt better informed about pandemic information and were gaining that information through official and more reliable sources. This lead Hickey Global to suggest the structure of a pandemic response board for the region which could assess and appropriately disseminate information from better informed local authorities to private and tourism industry stakeholders within the region.

There was also agreement across stakeholder groups about workforce concerns and remote worker recruitment potential. All stakeholder groups identified job opportunities and wages as primary reasons why workers may leave the region. There were also varying levels of causal weight given to recreation opportunities in the area across stakeholder groups. While a very small percentage of jobs currently in the region were able to be transitioned to remote work during the pandemic and an even smaller percentage are anticipated to remain remote, there is nearly universal support and belief across stakeholder groups for a remote worker recruitment campaign to bring workers made permanently remote into the region. Hickey Global recommends that this campaign be crafted to not only recruit workers but also to leverage best-in-class broadband capabilities to create IT pipelines for remote work between the Cumberland Plateau region and companies in areas like Northern Virginia and Washington DC which could be attracted to the regions lower labor costs.

Asset mapping revealed three primary assets which distinguish the region for workers and business recruitment—exceptional broadband capacity, low cost of living and labor, and availability of outdoor recreation and natural beauty. These three key assets have also proven critical in the pandemic recovery environment and can be immediately leveraged for growth as workers and companies are placing a higher value than ever on these assets. The tourism industry can be particularly leveraged in regional recovery and resiliency efforts by making the region more attractive to a migrating workforce and in helping to improve community services by becoming a catalyst for eliminating blight and advertising the community for potential relocation. This would assist in mitigating two of the key regional deficiencies revealed by asset mapping—lower technology usage among households and lack of human capital.

Two additional key deficiencies were identified through asset mapping which should become a key focus of the region when planning for future resiliency—transportation infrastructure and education including elementary school performance and low graduation rates from high-demand post-secondary programs. Transportation infrastructure was identified as an essential resiliency area in both private industry and tourism sector assessment. Current transportation infrastructure limits shipping access for materials and manufactured goods and limits tourist access to standout natural assets. Investment in education would serve to propel the region's investment in technology-based jobs. Additionally, high quality entrepreneurial education was seen as a key need by private and tourism industry in ensuring the successful establishment and staying power of business in the region. Investment in education within the region could serve to limit 'brain-drain' while also attracting new jobs to the region.

Asset mapping done on industrial parks in the region has shown good development and growth of industrial parks while noting some considerations for future resiliency. Current industrial parks have good utility infrastructure planning and implementation with good strategy around reuse of existing "shell" buildings. Key deficiencies are the size of available sites limiting larger scale projects and distance of existing parks from a major highway for efficient transportation and general difficulty of road access.

Cluster studies identified six key clusters for regional growth. These clusters were also assessed against industry data from prior economic shocks and shown to be acceptably diversified to work in combination to propel growth in the region without placing it in a precarious position for future resiliency. The six key development clusters are mining, fabricated metal manufacturing, machinery and equipment manufacturing, shared services and IT, tourism, and healthcare. Mining strategy should focus on growing demand for metal commodities, addressing pressing challenges within the industry growing the area as a thought leader, and promoting current capabilities via an online database to advertising these capacities outside the region. Fabricated metal manufacturing strategies should focus on expanding and marketing specialized knowledge within the region, investigate prototyping and product customization, and piloting new technology in Industry 4.0 components. Machinery and equipment manufacturing strategy should center diversification of mining manufacturers into new markets, developing this cluster portfolio by promoting key skills and inputs, and taking advantage of existing inputs to reinforce the value chain. Shared services and IT should pursue growth by capitalizing on best-in-class broadband capabilities to recruit remote workers, developing a shared services program supporting Northern Virginia and DC, and training and supporting residents working from or wishing to work from home. Tourism strategy should be centered around expanding infrastructure to increase access to natural and outdoor recreation assets, developing a mixed accommodations industry with equal representation of RV parks, campgrounds, and traditional accommodations to improve resiliency, and tying tourism offerings to more resilient regional enterprises such as agriculture and mining. Healthcare strategy should follow its current trajectory to cater to an aging populace while leveraging the Appalachian College of Pharmacy to recruit on-line pharmacy operations such as shared services and distribution. A healthcare leakage study is also recommended to determine needed or improved services within the region to ensure income created within the region remains local.

Tourism strategy for the region was requested as a breakout industry with planning and suggestions made in support of this industry. Analysis revealed that tourism in the region may be best thought of at present as aligned with resident needs. Larger tourism events can be leveraged to bring areas up to a standard of readiness by mitigating blight and developing needed visitor services for the region. Resident support and patronage of new and existing tourism ventures is critical within the region currently and is made more pressing during economic downturns. Tourism development should therefore seek to benefit both groups equally. Outdoor recreation tourism should remain the focus of regional tourism development efforts as it has been shown to be more resilient in a pandemic environment than other types of tourism and has been shown to increase area appeal for remote worker relocation. Tourism development should be considered based on which key activity the area is question is best suited for. Visitor services can then be built out around the central activity to ensure a tourism ecosystem which reduces leakage.

Additionally, it was requested that Hickey Global propose a large-scale tourism asset for the region. To this end Hickey Global has laid out the foundations and required support mechanisms

to suggest the region capitalize on its preexisting assets by hosting a cycling rally. This rally would incorporate heritage and agritourism stops with nights spent in each county to ensure full regional activation in planning and in economic benefit. Additional, proposed event details and necessary support infrastructure aligns tourism needs with identified opportunities in other areas of the report as well as addressing identified improvement areas. Tourism is most resilient when thoroughly supported by the host community and tied to key regional industries which are also proven to be resilient.

These three key analysis exercises led to the creation of a private industry and tourism resiliency strategy which addresses historic and current market disruptions and seeks to envision the Cumberland Plateau's fiscally sustainable future. Information was used from the International Economic Development Council's work on disaster recovery, the US Travel Association's work on mitigating pandemic impacts in tourism, and current research in recovery and value shifts as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. The visions of the future of the region revealed in stakeholder surveying were highly aligned between business and community leaders. Business leaders envisioned increased livability, a strong industrial base, more people and jobs, and a strong tourism economy. Community leaders envisioned new industry, more jobs, more people, and an expanded tourism industry. The furtherance of these visions is found in recommendations presented in each section of this report based on stakeholder engagement, cluster analysis, asset mapping, and tourism planning. These findings should be incorporated into regional and more localized preparedness plans which should be created to support businesses during an economic crisis and during the recovery process.

Greater detail on all of the assessment and recommendations made within this summary can be found in the sections of the report below which have been divided out to show results and associated recommendations from each analytical assessment and recommended planning initiatives from business and tourism resiliency.

## DICKENSON COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

Board of Supervisors

JOSH EVANS, CHAIRMAN  
WILLIS DISTRICT

PEGGY KISER, VICE-CHAIRWOMAN  
ERVINTON DISTRICT

RON PETERS  
SANDLICK DISTRICT

SHELBY WILLIS  
KENADY DISTRICT

RHONDA SLUSS  
CLINTWOOD DISTRICT



County Administrator  
LARRY BARTON

County Attorney  
WILLIAM J. STURGILL

P.O. BOX 1098  
Clintwood, Virginia 24228  
Telephone: 276/928-1676  
Fax: 276/928-1649

December 15, 2021

U.S. Department of Commerce  
Curtis Center  
Independence Square West  
Suite 1405  
Philadelphia, PA 19106

RE: Continued Coverage Under the Cumberland Plateau Planning District's CEDS

Dear Sir:

It is the intent of Dickenson County to continue participating under the Planning District's Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy. This letter represents a formal acknowledgment for Dickenson County to be covered under the Cumberland Plateau Planning District's CEDS 2022 update.

If I can be of any further assistance, please contact me.

Sincerely,

Larry Barton  
Dickenson County Administrator

c: Dickenson County Board of Supervisors  
William J. Sturgill, Jr., Dickenson County Attorney  
James A. Baldwin, Executive Director, Cumberland Plateau Planning District

LB/tll

## Russell County Virginia

"The Heart of Southwest Virginia"

Oris Christian  
At-Large

Lou Ann Wallace  
District 2

Carl Rhea  
District 3

Rebecca Dye, Chairperson  
District 6

Tim Lovelace, Vice Chairman  
District 1

David Eaton  
District 4

Steve Breeding  
District 5

Lonzo Lester  
County Administrator

December 15, 2021

U. S. Department of Commerce  
Economic Development Administration  
Philadelphia Regional Office, Curtis Center  
Independence Square West, Suite 140S  
Philadelphia, PA 19160

Dear Madam/Sir:

The Board of Supervisors of Russell County, Virginia, does hereby elect to be covered under the Cumberland Plateau Planning District Commission's Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy.

Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions.

Sincerely,



Lonzo Lester, County Administrator

Russell County Government Center  
137 Highland Drive, Suite A · Lebanon, Virginia 24266 · (276) 889-8000 · Fax (276) 889-8011  
[www.russellcountyva.us](http://www.russellcountyva.us)

## BUCHANAN COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

Jeff Cooper, Chairman  
Garden District  
Tim Hess, Vice-Chairman  
Hurricane District  
Drew Keene  
Prater District  
G. Roger Rife  
South Grundy District  
James Carroll Branham  
North Grundy District  
Craig Stiltner  
Rocklick District  
Trey Adkins  
Knox District



Robert Craig Horn  
County Administrator

Lawrence L. Moise, III Esq.  
County Attorney

January 4, 2022

U.S. Department of Commerce  
Economic Development Administrator  
Philadelphia Regional Office  
Curtis Center  
Independence Square West, Suite 140S  
Philadelphia, PA 19106

Dear Madam/Sir:

In reference to the letter from the Cumberland Plateau Planning District dated December, 15<sup>th</sup>, 2021 concerning the 2022 Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) Update, the Board of Supervisors in Buchanan County, Virginia does elect to be covered under the Cumberland Plateau Planning District's CEDS.

If I can be of any assistance in this decision, please feel free to contact me. Thank you.

Sincerely yours,

Robert Craig Horn, County Administrator

cc: Jim Baldwin, Executive Director  
Cumberland Plateau Planning District  
P. O. Box 548  
Lebanon, VA 24266

Administrative Office, 4447, Suite 310, Slate Creek Road, GRUNDY, VIRGINIA 24614  
[www.buchanancountyonline.com](http://www.buchanancountyonline.com)  
Telephone (276) 935-6503  
Fax: (276) 935-4479



# TAZEWELL COUNTY VIRGINIA

"Bound For Progress"

Shanna E. Plaster, Vice Chair  
Northwestern District



Andy Hrovatic, Member  
Western District

Margaret A. "Maggie" Asbury, Member  
Northern District

Charles A. Stacy, Member  
Eastern District

Aaron M. Gillespie, Chair  
Southern District

C. Eric Young  
County Administrator

February 9, 2022

U.S. Department of Commerce  
Economic Development Administration  
Philadelphia Regional Office, Curtis Center  
Independence Square West, Suite 140S  
Philadelphia, PA 19106

Dear Sir or Madam:

It is the intent of Tazewell County, Virginia to continue participating under the Planning District's Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy. This letter represents a formal acknowledgement for Tazewell County to be covered under the CEDS 2022 of the Cumberland Plateau Planning District.

Please let me know if any further action or information is needed.

Sincerely,

C. Eric Young  
County Administrator

**RESOLUTION**

**CUMBERLAND PLATEAU PLANNING DISTRICT COMMISSION**

**RESOLUTION OF THE CUMBERLAND PLATEAU BOARD OF  
DIRECTORS ENDORSING THE 2022 COMPREHENSIVE ECONOMIC  
DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY UPDATE**

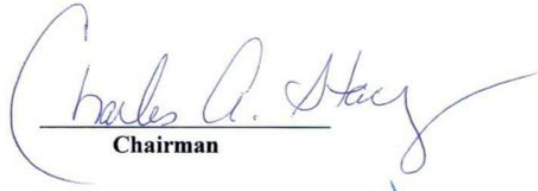
**WHEREAS**, the Cumberland Plateau Planning District Commission, an Economic Development District representing the Virginia Counties of Buchanan, Dickenson, Russell and Tazewell, is required by the Economic Development Administration to review and revise, as appropriate, the Cumberland Plateau Economic Development Strategy (CEDS), and

**WHEREAS**, the Cumberland Plateau CEDS Committee and staff have prepared the 2022 CEDS Update to reflect changes in the District.

**NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED**, that the Board of Directors of the Cumberland Plateau Economic Development District does hereby adopt its 2022 Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy and submits it for consideration by the Economic Development Administration.

January 27, 2022

**Date**

  
**Chairman**

January 27, 2022

**Date**

  
**Executive Director**

**2022 CEDS COMMITTEE**

**CUMBERLAND PLATEAU PLANNING DISTRICT COMMISSION**

<u>Locality</u>	<u>Name</u>	<u>Representing</u>	<u>Race</u>	<u>Sex</u>
Buchanan County	Matt Fields	Economic Development Org.	White	M
	Alisha O'Quin	Business	White	F
	David Thompson	Business	White	M
	James Keen	Retired Coal Industry	White	M
	Dennis Ramey	Local Government	White	M
Dickenson County	Mitzi Sykes	Economic Development Org.	White	F
	Ron Peters	Local Government	White	M
	Larry Yates	Local Government	White	M
	Roger Stanley	Retired Educator	White	M
Russell County	Rachel Patton	Workforce Organization	White	F
	Larry Carr	Retired Planner	White	M
	Frank Horton	Retired Educator	White	M
	Ernie McFaddin	Economic Development Org.	White	M
Tazewell County	AJ Robinson	Tourism Org.	Black	F
	Matt Simmons	Industry	White	M
	Ricky Barton	Business	White	M
	Margie Douglass	Community College	White	F
Ex Officio:		Jonathan Belcher, VCEDA		
		Joey Gillespie, VDBA		
		David Woodard, Heart of Appalachia		
		Ida Walker, Friends of Southwest VA		
		Randy Rose, SWCC		

