

**Upper Savannah Council of Governments
Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy
Annual Report Overview 2025**

During the summer of 2022, Upper Savannah released a Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) document for our six-county region in western South Carolina. The revised CEDS provided information generated and gathered from economic development and community representatives from across the region. The document, accessible online at www.uppersavannah.com, provided content and discussion regarding the background of the region, a SWOT analysis, strategic direction, an action plan, information on disaster resilience, as well as a framework for evaluating progress toward the goals formed by the CEDS committee. This annual report will provide updates for all those areas, as well as a general discussion of conditions and circumstances encountered in the Upper Savannah region over the past year, as well as an outlook for the immediate future.

A. Summary Background: A summary background of the economic development conditions of the region

Economic conditions continue to generally improve and stabilize. Over the past five years, shocks such as the Covid-19 pandemic beginning in 2020 and Hurricane Helene in September 2024 have caused spikes of unemployment rates that have subsequently returned to more normal rates. The unemployment rate for the region fluctuated in response to Covid-19, falling from 11.4% in May 2020 to 5.9% in December 2020. By August of 2025, the regional unemployment rate was 5.3%, higher than the state average of 4.9% for the same period. Job openings are most often in categories as varied as manufacturing, health care, and education.

New industry announcements or existing industry job expansions of various levels have been announced in some counties of the region. Construction for manufacturing plants is underway in Greenwood and Laurens counties. Local governments and economic development agencies have constructed speculative buildings in McCormick, Laurens, and Greenwood counties. An EDA grant to fund a Health Sciences Building at Piedmont Technical College is underway.

B. SWOT Analysis: An in-depth analysis of regional strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats

The SWOT analysis completed in late 2022 has been reviewed by district staff and remains relevant and consistent with the needs and challenges of the region today.

C. Strategic Direction/Action Plan: Actions supporting the implementation of the CEDS include the following:

- Staff is implementing grant management activities through EDGE
- Implementation of EDA grant awards in Greenwood County and Laurens County
- Currently working on two EDA applications.
- Facilitated Planning Commissioner training. Economic development is a component of each county and municipal Comprehensive Plan

- Assisted with grant writing activities in several communities
- Continued comprehensive plan updates
- Workforce Development Division partnered with Piedmont Technical College to host regional job fairs
- Maintained and updated the regional Long Range Transportation Plan
- Began public transit feasibility studies for the counties in the region currently without access to public transit
- Continued administering nine Rural Infrastructure Authority grants

D. Evaluation Framework: Performance measures used to evaluate the organization's implementation of the CEDS and its impact on the regional economy

Number of Jobs Created After Implementation of the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy

- Regional unemployment rate increased from 4.5% in September 2017 to 5.3% in August 2025
- Regional total number of unemployed people decreased from 5,304 in September 2017 to 5,045 in August 2024
- Total regional labor force increased from 106,070 in August 2023 to 107,353 in August 2024

Number and Types of Public Sector Investments Undertaken in the Region

- Laurens County Metric Road Water System Upgrades is \$5,422,800 in EDA funding and \$1,355,700 in local funding
- Laurens County Fibertex Sewer Upgrades with \$2,000,000 in EDA funding and \$735,000 in local funding (recently closed out)
- Piedmont Technical College Health Sciences Building is \$11,271,697 in EDA funding and \$2,817,924 in local funding
- Greenwood East Rail Park Planning Study with \$208,000 in EDA funding and \$52,000 in local funding
- City of Abbeville Upper Long Cane Waterline Connection \$3,450,000 in SC Infrastructure Investment Program (SCIIP) funding through the SC Rural Investment Authority (RIA) and federal American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding
- Town of Due West Wastewater Treatment Plant Upgrades \$1,950,000 in SC Infrastructure Investment Program (SCIIP) funding through the SC Rural Investment Authority (RIA) and federal American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding
- Town of Edgefield Gymnasium Stormwater Improvements \$790,000 in SC Infrastructure Investment Program (SCIIP) funding through the SC Rural Investment Authority (RIA) and federal American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding

- Ninety Six Commission of Public Works Water and Sewer System Viability Study \$930,500 in SC Infrastructure Investment Program (SCIIP) funding through the SC Rural Investment Authority (RIA) and federal American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding
- Town of Ware Shoals Water and Sewer System Viability Study \$600,000 in SC Infrastructure Investment Program (SCIIP) funding through the SC Rural Investment Authority (RIA) and federal American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding
- City of Clinton Miller's Fork Basin Sewer Rehabilitation \$4,250,000 in SC Infrastructure Investment Program (SCIIP) funding through the SC Rural Investment Authority (RIA) and federal American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding
- Laurens Commission of Public Works Water System Improvements \$10,000,000 in SC Infrastructure Investment Program (SCIIP) funding through the SC Rural Investment Authority (RIA) and federal American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding
- McCormick Commission of Public Works Mechanical Bar Screen and Raw Water Pump Improvements \$4,128,219 in SC Infrastructure Investment Program (SCIIP) funding through the SC Rural Investment Authority (RIA) and federal American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding
- Town of Ridge Spring Water System and Storm Drainage Evaluation \$500,000 in SC Infrastructure Investment Program (SCIIP) funding through the SC Rural Investment Authority (RIA) and federal American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding
- City of Abbeville Harry's Plaza Southeast Crescent Regional Commission Funding of \$250,000

E. Economic Resilience: Planning for and Implementing Resilience

Implementing EDA, RIA, and CDBG funded projects to make local water and sewer providers more resilient in the event of natural hazards

Continued meeting with state Resilience Office staff to discuss partnering and working together on future projects