

**Upper Savannah Council of Governments
Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy
Annual Report Overview 2021**

During the summer of 2017, 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 development conditions have changed significantly in the past year due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The unemployment rate for the region has fluctuated in response to Covid-19, jumping from 11.4% in May 2020 to 5.9% in December 2020. By September of 2021, the regional unemployment rate was 3.3%, equal to the state average of 3.3% for the same period. Job openings are most often in categories as varied as financial managers and registered nurses. There are currently 1.79 candidates available for each open position in the region.

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 Edgefield, Greenwood, and Laurens counties. Local governments and economic development agencies have constructed speculative buildings in McCormick, Laurens, and Greenwood counties. The Piedmont Technical College Upstate Center for Manufacturing Excellence is complete and in operation.

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

The SWOT analysis completed in late 2017 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 GrantsOnline
- Implementation of EDA grant awards in the City of Abbeville, Greenwood County and Laurens County
- Submitted two EDA grant applications for projects in Laurens County

- Facilitated Planning Commissioner training. Economic development is a component of each county and municipality Comprehensive Plan
- Assisted with grant writing activities in several communities
- Continued comprehensive plan updates
- Assisted with a County Council retreat including discussions of economic development planning
- Workforce Development Division partnered with Piedmont Technical College to host a regional job fair
- Maintained and updated the regional Long Range Transportation Plan

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 decreased from 4.5% in September 2017 to 3.3% in September 2021
- Regional total number of unemployed people decreased from 5,304 in September 2017 to 3,190 in September 2021
- Total regional job openings increased from 1,686 in September 2017 to 1,779 in September 2021

Number and Types of Public Sector Investments Undertaken in the Region

- City of Abbeville Wastewater Treatment Plant upgrades with \$2,554,000 in EDA funding and \$638,500 in local funding. This project was closed out during the year.
- Laurens County Water System Upgrades with \$3,100,000 in EDA funding and \$775,000 in local funding
- Greenwood East Rail Park Planning Study with \$208,000 in EDA funding and \$52,000 in local funding

E. Economic Resilience: Planning for and Implementing Resilience

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

Attended the statewide Rural Infrastructure Act training workshop to better help local governments and utilities with project development needs

F. CARES Act Implementation: Assisting the region to access to federal funding in response to Covid-19

- Attended various webinars on CARES Act funding and grant processes
- Assisted small businesses and nonprofit organizations across the region with grant applications for CARES Act funding
- Site visits to businesses to determine eligibility for CARES Act Revolving Loan Fund
- Closed loans for CARES Act Revolving Loan Fund, with more being reviewed by the Loan Review Committee