

Section 1.0: Introduction: Purpose, Process
and Organization

1.0 Introduction: Purpose, Process and Organization

1.1. CEDS Purpose

The Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) is the result of a regional economic planning process that brings together private and public interests for the purpose of creating a guide to economic development for the five-county region of Northwest Alabama. As its name implies, the CEDS is designed to be a regional comprehensive plan and, as such, it involves a variety of actors, agencies and initiatives in an attempt to encompass and define the range of economic development activities that are undertaken in Northwest Alabama. Through analysis of the region's unique characteristics, the preparation of a CEDS provides an opportunity to analyze the human and physical capital of the region and establish priorities for investment and funding leading to job creation and retention. The CEDS results from an on-going, diverse and inclusive planning process involving both private and public partners and an active public involvement component. This process allows the formation of policies representing the widest possible constituency and presenting the viewpoints of lay people and professionals as to the direction and character of economic growth in the region. This understanding of broader economic priorities allows for targeted investment into economic activities and generators with the broadest support and greatest likelihood of success.

In addition to the broad-based planning components of the CEDS, the document is required to qualify for federal investments under the Public Works and Economic Development Act of 1965. EDA investments are intended to promote and complement additional investments from private sources in areas suffering from economic dislocation due to changes in global competitiveness, acute historic economic hardship, or sudden and severe job loss. The document is prepared by a Planning Organization, which is responsible for appointing a strategy committee (in Northwest Alabama, the CEDS committee), submitting a compliant CEDS document (see 13 C.F.R. 303.7), updating or revising the CEDS, and reporting the CEDS to other entities. The Planning Organization charged with managing the CEDS process for Region I in Alabama is the Northwest Alabama Council of Local Governments.

1.2 The Planning Organization, CEDS Committee, and CEDS Content

The Northwest Alabama Council of Local Governments (NACOLG) represents the five counties and 35 municipalities of northwest Alabama. Founded in 1966, NACOLG houses numerous planning and governmental service functions, including Aging Services, Transit, Metropolitan and Rural Transportation Planning, and a full staff of grant-writers and community planners. Since 2001, the five-county NACOLG region has been an Economic Development District, the regional designation used by the Economic Development Administration to administer public works assistance, economic adjustment planning aid, and technical assistance. The NACOLG Board of Directors has also served as the Economic Development District Board.

Federal regulations require that the Board name a Strategy Committee (CEDS Committee) to oversee the development and review of the CEDS. This committee is composed of representatives of public and private organizations including major regional employers, governments, workforce development representatives, labor groups and minority groups. The broadly representative body must be constituted by a majority of private



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sector representatives chosen from the executive and managerial level employees of for-profit enterprises. Remaining members represent non-profit sectors, governments, and higher education.

2007-2008 CEDS Committee Members

**The Shoals- Colbert and Lauderdale
County**

Mayor Bobby Irons, City of Florence
Dr. Humphrey Lee, Northwest Shoals
Community College/Chamber of
Commerce of the Shoals
Gayle Littrell Rogersville Area Chamber of
Commerce
James Brown, Alabama Department of
Transportation
Forrest Wright, Shoals Economic
Development Authority
Carolyn Long, University of North Alabama
Small Business Development Center
James L. Farmer, International Brotherhood
of Electrical Workers
Wayman Pace, TVA
Bobby King, North American Lighting
Steve Pierce, Private Sector Representative
John Rusevlyan, Private Sector
Representative
Pam Doyle, Private Sector Representative
Steve Schecher, Private Sector
Representative
Phillip Forsythe, Private Sector
Representative

Franklin County

Mayor Jeff Reid, City of Red Bay
Jerry Groce, Franklin County Department of
Human Resources

Mitchell Mays, Franklin County Economic Development
Authority
Phyllis Thomas, Private Sector Representative
Mike Holway, Private Sector Representative
Lynn Causey, Private Sector Representative
Margaret Lovett, Private Sector Representative

Marion County

Mayor Ray Harper, City of Hamilton
Mayor Phil Segraves, City of Guin
David Graham, Marion County Community Development
Foundation
Susan Burrow, Beville State Community College
Steve Foshee, Tombigbee Electric Cooperative
Dr. Margeurite Kelley, Private Sector Representative
Delmo Payne, Private Sector Representative
Kristy Hunt, Private Sector Representative
Warren Williford, Private Sector Representative
Phil Fowler, Private Sector Representative
Jason Post, Private Sector Representative

Winston County

Mayor Larry Albright, City of Haleyville
Frank Tidwell, Alabama Power Company
Grady Batchelor, Winston County Industrial Development
Authority
Roger Hayes, Private Sector Representative
Ken Sunseri, Private Sector Representative
Shane Cook, Private Sector Representative
Jon Bennett, Private Sector Representative
Bo Knight, Private Sector Representative

Regulations also mandate a portion of the content of the CEDS. An acceptable document must include an overview of the economic geography and economic conditions of the region, to include: economy, population, geography, workforce development and use, transportation access, resources, environment and other pertinent data. The document provides an in-depth analysis of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats in the economic development of the region and identifies the top most regional priorities for implementation.



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NACOLG and Economic Development District Board of Directors

Mayor Billy D. Hendrix, Chairman

Town of Anderson

Mayor John Berry, Vice Chairman

Town of Double Springs

Mayor Ed Crouch

Town of Hodges

Mayor Billy Don Anderson

City of Sheffield

Mayor Jerry Mays

Town of Phil Campbell

Judge Dewey Mitchell

Lauderdale County Commission

Mayor Harold Chandler

Town of Rogersville

Mayor Jerry McIntyre

Town of Waterloo

Mayor Sam Hudson

Town of St. Florian

Mr. Kenny Jackson

Marion County Commission

Mayor Brandon Webster

Town of Gu-Win

Mayor Drennon Veal

Town of Bear Creek

Mayor Douglas Guinin

Town of Hackleburg

Mayor Perry Franks

Town of Brilliant

Mayor Ray Harper

City of Hamilton

Mayor Phil Segraves

City of Guin

Mr. Jerry Mobley

Winston County Commission

Mayor Letus Atkinson

Town of Twin

Mayor Larry Albright

Town of Haleyville

Mayor William R. West

City of Winfield

Mayor Derreck Cagle

Town of Lynn

Mayor Ronald T. Wilson

Town of Addison

Mayor Pete Parrish

Town of Natural Bridge

Mr. James Bingham

Colbert County Commission

Hon. Barry Moore

Franklin County Commission

Mayor Tommy Nelson

City of Red Bay

Mayor Johnny Brown

City of Russellville

Mayor D.W. Franklin

Town of Vina

Mayor Bobby Irons

City of Florence

Mayor Jerry Mitchell

Town of Killen

Mayor Herman Jagers

Town of Lexington

Mayor William West

City of Winfield



NACOLG has invested additional commitment to the CEDS, embracing the document as a vital economic development and planning opportunity. As a Planning Organization with a number of additional functions, NACOLG encourages CEDS participation on the part of the public, private interests and individuals as a means of targeting project priorities for investment. Although inclusion in the CEDS is a requirement for certain federal funding opportunities with EDA, NACOLG strongly promotes the CEDS plan and planning process as an opportunity for coordinating additional efforts, such as Metropolitan and Rural Planning Organizations, Rural Action Commission, various workforce development initiatives, and other planning and implementation opportunities. The incorporation of wide regional projects (both short and long term) into one document and into a process of continuous review maintains awareness and increases leverage and opportunity for implementing these projects. The multi-jurisdictional nature of the CEDS includes in its planning process opportunities for implementation from a comprehensive variety of sources, including local, state and federal agencies and actors and representing private and public sources of investment and implementation resources.

1.3 The CEDS Planning Process: Planning for Partnership

In the framework of this plan, a broad understanding of the direction and long-term goals of economic development activities are considered necessary for effective strategies to develop into the functional building blocks of economic and community development. Under the endorsed planning framework for the Northwest Alabama CEDS, the successful implementation of one or several strategies accomplishes an objective; several related objectives realize a particular goal. From this perspective, the process of developing the CEDS takes on both short- and long-range significance as the centerpiece economic planning and as the central economic priority-setting mechanism for the activities of the region's economic development district. Whether resulting from private or public sources or located within a local, regional or statewide scale, the CEDS' comprehensive nature is designed to coordinate investment and implementation opportunities and direct these toward the implementation of the region's highest identified priorities to achieve sustainable economic growth. Foremost, the CEDS process was meant to be a private-public partnership with the goal of creating a viable short-, intermediate- and long-range economic development plan. To this end, the CEDS Committee met in June, July, and August 2007.

A second essential element of the CEDS review process involved public participation, discussion and feedback. To accomplish this, local level public meetings were held in June and July 2007 in the five counties of the NACOLG region. Finally, to foster the involvement of a variety of private and public interests, a partnership list was constructed and each of the organizations on that list was contacted to inform them of the meetings, encourage their attendance, and also to obtain any existing strategic plans. Where provided, these plans were reviewed for consistency and incorporation into the document with the CEDS planning process and the resulting policies.

1.3.1 Development Partners

Economic development in a region as diverse as Northwest Alabama is conducted by a variety of agencies, actors and individuals. Often, geography and agency focus create division between actors and agencies with similar, and in many cases the same, economic development goals. Individuals and efforts are



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sometimes fragmented and duplicative, which leads to inefficiency in communication and the allocation of resources. A community with a large number of economic developers is a blessing insofar as there is social and economic capital devoted to problem-solving but it can be problematic when attempting to assess various programs and coordinate planning and investment priorities. The CEDS planning process attempted to overcome this difficulty by engaging the economic development community throughout the development of the plan.

First, a list of economic partners was developed based on past agency interaction with others involved in economic development. Second, these partners were contacted to ensure that they were aware of the CEDS process, what the CEDS was, and that NACOLG encouraged their participation in the plan. Third, partners were asked to share existing strategic plans, and these were reviewed and incorporated where they were available. Additionally, development partners were contacted prior to each public meeting and encouraged to attend in order to add their feedback. In this fashion, the CEDS was coordinated with other agencies, with

2008-2007 CEDS Development Partners

Regional Partners

Northwest Alabama Rural Planning Organization
Municipal and county elected officials and boards, committees and commissions
Tennessee Valley Authority
The University of North Alabama
Northwest Shoals Community College
USDA Farm Service Agency
USDA Rural Economic and Community Development
USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service
Alabama Power
Alabama Mountain Lakes Association
East Lauderdale News
Bevill State Community College
Shoals Entrepreneurial Center
UNA Small Business Development Center

(The Shoals) Colbert & Lauderdale County:

Shoals Economic Development Authority (SEDA)
Shoals Chamber of Commerce
Rogersville Area Chamber of Commerce
The Times Daily
The Courier Journal
Shoals Manufacturer's Association (SEDA)

Shoals Industry-Education Training Alliance (SEDA)
Lauderdale County Tourism Department
Colbert County Tourism and Convention Bureau
Florence Main Street, Inc.
Alabama Cooperative Extension System- Lauderdale County Office
Alabama Cooperative Extension System- Colbert County Office
Shoals Resource Conservation and Development Council
Sheffield Historical Commission
Sheffield Redevelopment Authority
Shoals Metropolitan Planning Organization

Franklin County

Franklin County Chamber of Commerce
Franklin County Free Press
Franklin County Economic Development Authority
Bear Creek Development Authority
Alabama Cooperative Extension System- Franklin County Office
Franklin County Historical Society



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Marion County

Marion County Journal Record
Bear Creek Development Authority
Alabama Cooperative Extension System- Marion
County Office
Winfield Main Street, Inc.
Guin Industrial Development Board
Community Development Foundation of Marion
County

Winston County

Industrial Development Authority of Winston
County
Bankhead National Forest, U.S. Forestry Service
The Northwest Alabamian
Haleyville Chamber of Commerce
Alabama Cooperative Extension System- Winston
County Office
Houston Historical Society

the goal being consistency in the planning process and broad involvement by other agencies and individuals concerned with economic and community development.

1.3.2 Plan Development

The process of developing the plan, which is interactive, exploratory, and informative, is the heart of any plan. The final document plays an important role, encapsulating the discoveries made along the way, but never fully encompasses the significance of planning in terms of capacity-building and networking. To facilitate this process, NACOLG engaged the development community at four distinct levels: the executive-level elected officials of the region, represented on the NACOLG/EDD Board; the CEDS Committee, made up of public- and private-sector representatives; development partners identified from the regional community; and the general public. Of these groups, the CEDS Committee, development partners, and the highest elected officials of the various local governments were specifically targeted to encourage the greatest input and feedback. The CEDS Committee reviewed and adopted the content of the document. The NACOLG/EDD Board was involved through participation in local level public meetings, particularly in the latter discussions related to specific strategies, and through endorsement of the final CEDS document. Throughout the process, the general public was kept informed through media coverage and Internet publications found at the NACOLG web site.

The development of the plan began in earnest in January 2007 when a strategy was adopted for producing an economic audit, reviewing existing development efforts (strategies from previous CEDS and the strategic plans of partners and multi-jurisdictional agencies), and garnering feedback. Data-gathering began for the conduct of the economic audit portion of the plan (See Section 3) as did the development of the CEDS Committee and partnership structures. Two phases of public meetings and discussions were agreed upon, with the first encompassing the visioning and goal-setting portion of the plan and the latter to provide an opportunity to review and comment upon specific project proposals to be included as strategies for implementing the plan. The meetings were divided between local-level public meetings meant to obtain input and review of the plan at the county level and meetings of the CEDS Committee, which was intended to represent the region as a whole and to incorporate local initiatives into a broader framework for economic development.

1.3.3 Planning Priorities: Vision, Goals, Objectives and Strategies

Although the CEDS is primarily a short-range (3-5 year) plan, tremendous foresight and long-range planning must be accomplished before effective strategies can be undertaken to improve economic conditions.



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Phase I of CEDS development involved visioning for economic development at the local and regional level throughout the five-county NACOLG region. A series of six meetings were conducted for the purpose of discussing assets and weaknesses, goals and objectives across the region. The CEDS Committee represented a region-wide perspective, while local level public meetings were held in Franklin, Marion and Winston Counties. Colbert and Lauderdale County were treated together due to a high degree of integration. An overview of the comprehensive visioning process and its outcomes is presented below.

Visioning Process

The format of each meeting was relatively similar, beginning with an overview of the CEDS process and its importance, followed by the question “What is the top economic issue facing Northwest Alabama?” This question led to a discussion of assets and weaknesses; following a short break, the results of the economic audit (Section 2.0) were presented. The meetings closed with a questionnaire addressing strengths and weaknesses at the county and regional level. Participants were asked to write an economic vision and a specific strategy for obtaining this vision. A summary of discussions is presented below (see Appendix A for meeting materials).

CEDS Committee Meeting, June 5, 2007:

Quick Poll Question: What is the Top Economic Issue facing Northwest Alabama? *an educated workforce, transportation, quality jobs and higher paying jobs, infrastructure, and jobs and industrial jobs.*

Discussion: The representatives of the various geographic areas (counties) of the region shared similar concerns but prioritized concerns differently- depending on local needs. The statement *higher paying jobs* was discussed and expressed as a statement that was often used as shorthand for *quality jobs*, with significant variance in the importance of pay, benefits, and job security to the overall *quality of jobs* calculus. The quality of jobs in the local economy was, universally, lower than desired. The skills encouraged as leading to high quality jobs were not encouraged strongly enough, nor were “high quality jobs” recruited to the area with sufficient frequency. Jobs, such as skilled craftsmen (carpenters, masons, etc.) were represented as “low quality” when their earnings potential was viewed as higher in many cases than other “high quality” jobs. The choice for many with highly valued skills (e.g. higher education) was to leave the area or be underemployed relative to qualifications- i.e. there weren’t enough jobs for people with these skills. There was concern over investing in the right mix of jobs, to provide life-cycle and socioeconomic opportunities. There was concern about whether a local community could control the type of workforce it encouraged (i.e. whether the ‘right type’ of job could be recruited and whether local investment and recruitment could create an environment favorable to certain types of employment). Many thought that an effort should be made to identify the market for skills and the market for labor and to ensure that skills and jobs were matched accordingly to produce “quality” jobs.

Winston County Local Public Meeting, June 7, 2007:

Quick Poll Question: *transportation, higher paying jobs, workforce availability and development, industrial and commercial development and recruitment, housing, community knowledge and involvement, infrastructure, education, land use planning, quality of life, fuel costs*

Discussion: Physical resources- Smith Lake and Bankhead National Forest- were noted as important assets



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that were potentially under utilized. Low economic expectations among the populace were a noted problem. Changing age demographics presented opportunities as well as challenges. Middle income and life-cycle opportunities were needed to retain population and improve economic condition. Investment uncertainty may have an adverse affect, preventing capital investment, which was potentially present but under utilized, from being freed to work in Winston County. Current leadership was seen as a strong community asset and the leadership was undergoing leadership training, which produced had a similar SWOT analysis. County-wide cooperation was high in Winston County and was another major asset. Sprawling city services combined with acute infrastructure needs presented significant challenges. Of the counties in the region, Winston County was probably the most isolated, historically and presently, in terms of access to transportation routes, although I-22 access presented a significant opportunity to amend this deficiency.

Vision Statements (key words): Growth, local assets, non-traditional assets, participation and local buy-in, industry-- retain and grow industrial base, higher paying jobs, population retention, higher standard of living, maintain high quality of life, workforce matching industry, sustainable growth

Strategy Statements (key words): Infrastructure, roads, bypass completed, I-22 completed, public-private housing program, automotive manufacturing, cooperative improvement district industrial park, marketing strengths

Marion County Local Public Meeting, June 11, 2007:

Quick Poll Question: *Higher paying jobs, workforce development and education, transportation, population loss, industrial recruitment, drug abuse, team approach, small business development, area awareness, quality of life*

Discussion: Among Marion County's strengths were its improving transportation infrastructure (I-22), forestry and timber resources, and natural gas deposits. Weaknesses included access to multi-modal transportation links (water and air), lacking communications and wireless communications infrastructure, low graduation rates from high school and college (two- and four-year). Potential threats included a lack of surface water sources for improving water supply systems. Threats to workforce development included lower wages, low school graduation rates, and difficulty providing opportunities needed to retain workforce. Substance abuse was listed as a significant problem for the county.

Vision Statements (key words): Planned growth, beauty and natural resource preservation, cultural and family opportunities, support for existing industry, higher paying jobs, opportunities for higher skilled workers (e.g. college graduates), regionalism and cooperation among leaders, citizen participation, open spaces and urban spaces, quality of life, population retention, housing opportunities, steering growth

Strategy Statements (key words): Incentive package for existing industries, regionalism and cooperation in recruitment, planning and zoning (city), growth in entertainment and recreation opportunities, recruitment of major manufacturer(s)

Colbert/Lauderdale Counties Local Public Meeting, June 13, 2007:

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Quick Poll Question: *Workforce development, industrial recruitment, transportation, workforce expectations, state and federal spending, infrastructure, quality of jobs, land use planning*

Discussion: Shoals area strengths included river access and existing educational opportunities. A new asset for the area was the recently adopted capital incentive fund. Weaknesses included lack of access to an interstate and an under utilized airport. The existing transportation improvements and planning program was seen as an opportunity to change these weaknesses. Optimism and work ethic and a lack of programs to match skills to jobs were seen as threats to economic health.

Vision Statements (key words): Opportunity, diversity, sustainability, trained workforce

Strategy Statements (key words): Marketing plan for industry attraction, new industry, airport facilities improved

Franklin County Local Public Meeting, June 19, 2007:

Quick Poll Question: *Trained workforce, transportation infrastructure, better jobs, immigration, labor unions, economic development, tax incentives, levels of pay, locally owned businesses, funding for projects, education*

Discussion: Franklin County was seen as positioned geographically in a good location for development. Housing costs were low—a plus. The county needed industrial park infrastructure, transportation improvements, and middle income housing opportunities to support growth. Existing industries suffered from workforce shortages for both low skill and higher skilled labor. Demographic changes resulting from immigration were producing changes in the local economy, including dis-integration between ethnic groups and changes in the types of (public and private) services demanded.

Vision Statements (key words): Skilled workforce, workforce opportunities, recreation opportunities, retail opportunities, infrastructure development, business support, growing and expanding industrial base, cooperation between entities (cities, counties, schools, etc.)

Strategy Statements (key words): Capacity building between economic developers and industries (on the one hand) and educators (on the other), industrial park improvements, transportation improvements, speculative building development

CEDS Committee Meeting, June 26, 2007:

Discussion: The committee discussed the feedback obtained from local level public meetings and presented key concepts for the regional economic vision.

Vision Statements (key words): *Community, identity, quality of life, sustainable, money and timing, marketing, branding, future-oriented, leadership, participation, unity, competitive, collaboration, global, competitive, transportation*

1.3.4 Vision, Goals, and Objectives

The various public discussions produced a planning framework in which priorities were stated as goals, objectives, and strategies representing development priorities with different time requirements. The final stage of establishing a framework for economic planning was synthesizing feedback from various meetings and previous planning actions into an ongoing and adaptive framework to plan for economic growth. This was accomplished by establishing a planning framework classifying planning priorities in terms of priorities and time horizons for achievement. All planning activities outlined in the CEDS represent methods of achieving an overall Economic Vision in the following planning framework:

Vision: Statement of the priority or highest accomplishment of the plan.

Goals: What is to be accomplished in categorical terms.

Objectives: What must be done to meet goals, expressed in more specific terms.

Strategies: Specific, measurable activities designed to accomplish objectives.

To fill in the layers of this framework, both abstract, value-oriented positions and concrete, project-oriented approaches were considered. The Economic Vision was established, which represented the highest order economic values for the region, by reference to various Vision Statements collected during the Phase I public meetings. The goal of the first phase of CEDS meetings was to produce a definitive Vision for the region and to give definition to the goals and objectives that would accomplish this vision. From the various feedback gained, the Economic Vision endorsed by the Board and the CEDS Committee was the following:

Northwest Alabama shall be a regional community defined by a distinctive and recognizable identity, high quality of life, strong leadership and public participation, and unity in pursuit of a sustainable, globally and regionally competitive economy.

Next, the assets and weaknesses listed in discussion and questionnaire responses were examined for insight into the goals desired for regional development. These goals were designed to be comprehensive—that is, encompassing the broadest range of priorities for economic and community development that were necessary for economic growth and prosperity. From conversations, feedback, and questionnaire responses it became obvious that the goals of economic development could not be neatly segregated away from community development objectives. In other words, to support economic development and to provide the employment, wage and industrial opportunities needed to grow; the region must also consider the quality and content of its community development agenda. This meant that regional and local actors must provide for workforce, housing, education, neighborhood and infrastructure developments that were conducive to producing economic opportunities.

A cluster of four related goals surfaced in each of the four Phase I meetings. These were discussed and endorsed by the CEDS Committee and the NACOLG/EDD Board because of their broad support and repeated iteration in public meetings. Although prioritized differently at each of the four local levels, **Transportation (Safety and Connectivity), Community Development (Communities and Infrastructure), Support for Business and Industry (Workforce Development, Recruitment and Retention), and Community**

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Development (Capacity and Civic Culture) were categories of similar activities that captured the essence of much of the interrelated actions needed for regional economic development. These categorical statements were expanded into broader statements and incorporated as development priorities in the CEDS plan. They are described more fully in Section 4.0.

Next, working from more concrete proposals to fill in the gaps in the planning framework, strategies from previous CEDS documents were examined in order to supply measurable benchmarks, or objectives. Strategies also tended to cluster in more narrow categories. Thus, clusters of related strategies from previous CEDS, from stated concrete development proposals, and from the strategic plans of partners were grouped together and presented as objectives. Finally, the individual projects, or strategies, were evaluated. The evaluation of specific goals, objectives, and policies provided the substance of the second round of local level public meetings (Phase II). A summary of Vision, Goals and Objectives is presented below.

Summary

The vision, goals and objectives of the Northwest Alabama Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy were identified as follows:

ECONOMIC VISION: Northwest Alabama shall be a regional community defined by a distinctive and recognizable identity, high quality of life, strong leadership and public participation, and unity in pursuit of a sustainable, globally and regionally competitive economy.

Goal I: Transportation- Increase and improve the transportation opportunities that connect neighborhoods, cities, and counties.

Objective (a): Identify and remove dangerous transportation conflict points throughout the region.

Objective (b): Improve regional and local (street) transportation networks to increase access to goods, services, markets, and employment opportunities.

Objective (c): Identify and complete improvements to the region's multi-modal transportation network to improve local and regional access to goods, services, markets, and employment opportunities.

Goal II: Community Development (Neighborhood and Infrastructure) - Establish inclusive planning and development practices that provide safe, sanitary and affordable neighborhoods and communities.

Objective (a): Identify and complete infrastructure improvements that allow for a continued high quality of life by municipal and county residents.

Objective (b): Foster sharing of municipal services and public infrastructure where beneficial to area municipalities and counties.

Objective (c): Seek funding for housing initiatives and mixed-use urban redevelopment fostering



compact commercial and residential forms.

Objective (d): Improve resident and visitor recreational and cultural opportunities as a means of facilitating population growth and retention and increased economic opportunity.

Objective (e): Initiate an urban and neighborhood planning process that provides master plans and infrastructure improvement assessments for municipalities and counties within the NACOLG region.

Goal III: Support for Business and Industry (Workforce Development, Recruitment and Retention) - Establish strategies that coordinate multiple agencies and private entities in a cooperative effort to attract and retain business and industry.

Objective (a): Expand access to and understanding of technology resources in the region.

Objective (b): Identify opportunities to expand workforce development opportunities by coordinating agencies and industries and businesses and implementing appropriate educational and skills development and recruitment programs.

Objective (c): Promote industrial development as a means of attracting higher-skill and higher-wage employment opportunities.

Objective (d): Explore opportunities to support the expansion of existing businesses and the recruitment of additional businesses to the region.

Goal IV: Community Development (Capacity and Civic Culture) - Promote associational life and community identity necessary to leverage the economic benefits of physical and human capital.

Objective (a): Explore the application of asset based economic development principles of identity and sustainability to the development programs of the region.

1.3.5 Phase II Summary-Identifying Strategies

The most specific planning element of the CEDS was a listing of specific strategies or action-oriented projects that represented a narrow step toward larger goals, objectives, and ultimately the economic vision of the region. Phase II of the CEDS planning process was designed to identify and review specific objectives and strategies intended to implement the plan. In the pages that follow are the specifics of these strategies, their allied planning goals and objectives, and the stakeholders likely to take the lead implementing them. These projects were identified through local level public meetings at which a variety of strategies, largely drawn from previous CEDS planning and ongoing economic development initiatives, were presented for review and comment. Where needed, strategies were updated to incorporate new information regarding the project. New projects were added based on the criteria that they contain stakeholder information (see below and Section 4.0) and were identified as high priorities for economic development.

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Each of the Phase II public meetings followed a similar format. Poster-style presentations were made for the framework of the plan, including a discussion of the Economic Vision, goals and objectives of the plan. Local government officials, regional and county development partners, and members of the CEDS Committee were invited to review and comment on the vision, goals, and objectives that were the outcome of the first phase of public meetings. Following this brief presentation, attendees were encouraged to review the specific strategies proposed for the plan and to provide feedback in the following areas: identifying project priorities, including missing or incomplete projects; identifying stakeholders and points of contact; and identifying performance metrics. A summary of the feedback and comments received at these public is presented below.

CEDS Committee, June 26, 2007: The CEDS Committee, representing regional interests, was invited to review and discuss proposed “Regional Priorities”. Most of the strategies presented were regional transportation projects with long-term time horizons. Alabama Department of Transportation representatives were on hand to discuss the projects. Suggestions were made regarding expanding the workforce development initiative for Winston County to a regional workforce development strategy to include all five counties in an inventory of programs and data needs. Corrections to specific projects were offered for Winston County, as well as a proposal for 4-laning portions of 195 to connect to proposed I-22 and provide access to the Winston County Cooperative Improvements District Industrial Park.

Colbert/Lauderdale Counties Local Public Meeting, July 17, 2007: Suggestions were made for refining a strategy for implementing the Entertainment Industry Study proposals. Changes were suggested to regional transportation priorities that would re-cast transportation projects in terms of their effects on the five-county region, rather than statewide impact.

Franklin County Local Public Meeting, July 19, 2007: The development of an entrepreneurial center in Franklin County was discussed and will be included in the 2007-2008 CEDS. Stakeholders and points of contact were identified. Benchmarks for performance were discussed.

Winston County Local Public Meeting, July 23, 2007: Transportation priorities were discussed. Due to the impact of I-22 and the development of the Winston County cooperative improvements district, the County’s focus has largely shifted from northern roads to the development of a four-lane southern route along Highway 13 from the industrial park to I-22. ALDOT Division II officials were on hand to discuss these priorities. The project will be included in the 2007-2008 CEDS.

Marion County Local Public Meeting, July 26, 2007: Attendees stressed the need to coordinate planning priorities among different regional and state efforts. Capacity-building goals were discussed, with emphasis on the need for grass-roots involvement, public visioning, and understandable priorities. Several representatives of Winston County were also present and re-iterated a commitment to transportation improvements between I-22 and the cooperative district industrial park. Project priorities will be updated as specific infrastructure improvements are identified.

CEDS Committee and NACOLG/EDD Board Meetings, August 16, 2007: The final draft of the document was presented for the review of these bodies at separate meetings on this date. The draft was approved as the official “Northwest Alabama Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy, 2007-2008” and was made available



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for public review and comment via the NACOLG web site. The final draft was understood as a “working copy” to be expanded, updated, and changed by the CEDS Committee as new data or circumstances required. The capacity to amend the document would not extend to the vision, goals and objectives of the plan, but would apply to implementation strategies, performance reviews, and the factual data and interpretations of the CEDS.

1.4 Implementation and Performance Changes

Recently, the trend in economic planning has been toward streamlining short-range policies in order to apply greater emphasis and leverage to accomplishing a few, well-defined tasks. To assist in this task two important steps were made with the adoption of the 2007-2008 CEDS. First more stringent performance measuring and review recommendations were adopted that place responsibility for project implementation in the hands of local-level individuals and organizations. The eventual goal has been to identify points of contact within the community and offer assistance with implementation, while realizing that significant progress toward implementation was only possible where local demand and capacity produced (with or without outside assistance) consistent demand. Contrasted with an over-broad “wish list” of unfocused efforts, this highly concentrated approach allows a variety of resources to come to bear for the purposes of solving economic problems. Second, the CEDS Committee was established as a persistent sub-committee charged with holding regular meetings, updating the plan as necessary, reviewing progress toward implementation, and making suggestions for improving future CEDS planning efforts.

These changes were made to improve the force and effect of the CEDS as a tool for accomplishing short-range strategies and long-range priorities. In contemplating the significance of short-range strategies, a consensus formed early on that only those projects having an active agenda and representation in the community would be given priority; and that an entity—a point of contact-- would be essential to show progress and to maintain status as a regional economic development priority. Frequent contact with stakeholders and periodic updates to the CEDS document were endorsed as methods of ensuring the efficacy of the plan. Therefore, the CEDS presented specific strategies and information pertaining to timing, performance metrics for measuring progress on implementation, and the sponsoring agency and primary implementation organization for each. The changes were introduced to the CEDS Committee and the Board as part of the CEDS for 2007-2008.

1.5 Document Organization

The remainder of the CEDS document describes the background for economic planning in Northwest Alabama, including a description of the political and geographic environment (Section 2.0) as well as an economic audit of the region (Section 3.0). Both the background information and the economic audit are designed to provide relevant, timely material to economic developers throughout the region. The broad array of information, in particular the statistical information of Section 3.0, is meant to be a foundation for further inquiries undertaken by Planning Organization staff and other economic developers. These statements do not represent the definitive conclusions of the Planning Organization or its partners; instead, they are a point of reference and a beginning point for a continuous process of inquiry designed to provide greater understanding of the economic climate, its components, and its effects on the residents of Northwest Alabama. Then, in Section 4.0 the planning framework of the CEDS is reviewed and the goals and objectives of the plan are described in greater detail before presenting the specific project-oriented strategies included in the 2007-2008 CEDS. A



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number of performance measures and implementation features are included for each of the strategies, and these are described in greater detail in Section 5.0, which details the agency's efforts to implement the CEDS and to increase its potential to affect the efforts of other economic developers. As the plan matures, these elements will be further refined and strengthened.

