

Atlanta Regional Commission



CEDS ANNUAL REPORT REVIEW (CEDSAPR)

FOR THE

COMPREHENSIVE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY
(CEDS)

November 8, 2023

Prepared for

U.S. Department of Commerce

Economic Development Administration

229 Peachtree Street NE, International Tower
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Vision

ONE **great** REGION

Mission

Foster thriving communities for all within the Atlanta region through collaborative, data-informed planning and investments.

Goals



Healthy, safe, livable communities in the Atlanta Metro area.



Strategic investments in people, infrastructure, mobility, and preserving natural resources.



Regional services delivered with operational excellence and efficiency.



Diverse stakeholders engage and take a regional approach to solve local issues.



A competitive economy that is inclusive, innovative, and resilient.

Values

Excellence – A commitment to doing our best and going above and beyond in every facet of our work allowing for innovative practices and actions to be created while ensuring our agency's and our colleague's success.

Integrity – In our conduct, communication, and collaboration with each other and the region's residents, we will act with consistency, honesty, transparency, fairness and accountability within and across each of our responsibilities and functions.

Equity – We represent a belief that there are some things which people should have, that there are basic needs that should be fulfilled, that burdens and rewards should not be spread too divergently across the community, and that policy should be directed with impartiality, fairness and justice towards these ends.



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ARC Board (EDD Board): ARC is composed of 41 Members: 25 Public Elected Officials, 15 Citizen Members, and 1 Non-Voting Representative of the Georgia Department of Community Affairs.

The ARC Board acts as the EDD Board.

Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS): The Atlanta Regional Commission developed and adopted the CEDS through a yearlong process in 2022 as required by the EDA: [Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy \(CEDS\) - Atlanta Regional Commission](#).

The CEDS is a strategy for economic competitiveness. The 2022 CEDS process was an opportunity to adapt to changing global and national economic conditions and resident needs. It is a post-recession, post-COVID-19 Action Plan to reset the economy. The pandemic added focus to the vulnerability of one-fifth of our population, compounded by a lens on inequity, racism, and poverty, where communities and businesses of color were more impacted by the loss of jobs, income, medical care, and access to education. This CEDS acknowledges the successes of past economic achievements in the 11-county EDD but also acknowledges limitations. The CEDS includes an Action Plan that adopts practical solutions and optional experimental strategies from business leaders, universities, educational entities, NGOs (non-governmental organizations), and professionals in economic development. It also includes solutions from an expanded base of nontraditional stakeholders such as non-profits, creative sector professional, small businesses (women and minority), and faith-based organizations.

The CEDS will ensure that equity is at the forefront in metro Atlanta including access to good jobs, a well-trained workforce, and the regional collaboration needed to invigorate economic growth. The CEDS allows communities and organizations to receive grants and assistance from the U.S. Economic Development Administration for projects and technical assistance that support the six (6) focus areas and four (4) goals.

2023 set the stage for the implementation of the CEDS Action Plan. Projects and initiatives were completed, and many have been started and will continue throughout the Five-Year Plan timeframe.

Regional Collaboration for Metro Atlanta's Economic Competitiveness: It all happens through collaboration and cooperation of leaders from across the region's public, private, and nonprofit spheres. A variety of stakeholders, organizations, and government leaders need to work together to solve problems and promote projects and programs utilizing resources more efficiently.

Project Financing

Specific CEDS actions and projects are independently financed depending on the nature and scope of individual projects.

The Atlanta Regional Commission has a Partnership Planning Grant (3-year cycle) from EDA. The Atlanta Regional Commission also received a grant for economic development activities from the Southeast Crescent Regional Commission (SCRC) which will be used in 2023 and 2024.

Economic Highlights:

- Metro Atlanta surpassed the three million job mark for the first time ever in August 2022.
- Atlanta's recovery from the pandemic is one of the strongest in the nation, with nearly 6% job growth since before the pandemic.
- Inflation is outpacing wages. Inflation has risen faster in metro Atlanta than in most places, having increased just over 8% over the past year.
- The top four most popular occupations are:
 - Retail Salesperson
 - Laborers and Freight, Stock, Material Movers
 - Customer Service Representatives
 - Fast Food and Counter Workers.

All of these occupations have an average wage of under \$42,000. The jobs with the highest demand in the Atlanta MSA are not always the highest paying.

- National home prices have increased four times faster than wages since 2014.
- The ARC region has seen improvements in overall poverty rates, especially for children, higher median household incomes, and lower school dropout rates. However, with over 500,000 11-County residents in poverty, many disparities remain.
- Poverty within the 11-county EDD is greater among the Black population.
- African American residents have seen the largest increase in median household income but they are still less likely to own their own businesses and earn less revenue than their peers in the same industry owned by those of other racial backgrounds.
- Nearly 60% of those employed in the Atlanta MSA in 2019 were employed by the largest firms (500+ employees). However, only 3% of all regional firms have at least 500 employees, and these large firms represent just over 66% of the region's overall payroll.

Note: The new Metro Atlanta Speaks will be added to this document in November when available. Here is the last Metro Atlanta Speaks.

CEDS Focus and Implementation:

The adopted CEDS (2022) includes six (6) focus areas and four (4) goals, with associated actions, and an evaluation framework.

Focus Areas:

- Equity, Inclusion & Access (EIA)
- Housing Production and Preservation (HPE)
- Infrastructure Expansion and Maintenance (IEM)
- Education and Workforce Development (EWD)
- Entrepreneurship, Innovation & Small Business Development (ESB)
- National and Global Business Competitiveness (NGB)

Goals:

- Build on Previous Successes to Promote the Economic Resiliency and Prosperity of all Residents, Businesses, and Communities with a Renewed Focus on Equity
- Reinforce Equity as the Foundation for Regional and Local Initiatives
- Focus on Business Innovation to Support the Development of Small and Mid-Sized Businesses
- Ensure the Global and National Competitiveness of the Regional Economy

2023 Successes:

The Implementation chapter of the CEDS has a list of Action Items to assist the Region meet the established goals. The Implementation Timeframe is organized as Year 1, which are immediate actions and Year 5, which will be addressed over time. ARC has focused on completing the Year 1 actions while starting to work on the more long-term Year 5 actions. Some key successes are listed below:

1. *Support the Collaborative Approach to Economic Development*

The Atlanta Regional Marketing Alliance (RMA) was formed in the spirit of collaboration out of the Atlanta Regional Commission's Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) in 2012. The Alliance consists of the 11 Metro Atlanta Counties as well as the Atlanta Regional Commission (ARC), the City of Atlanta (Invest Atlanta), the Metro Atlanta Chamber, Georgia Power Company, and the Georgia Department of Economic Development.

The economic developers of RMA work collaboratively to promote the region by operating as a unit when marketing to site location consultants and real estate brokers while sharing best practices to uplift each county and economic development organization in the Atlanta Region.

ARC attended by-monthly meetings as well as consultant connect events such as one held at the Big Green Egg Store and Warehouse.

Website: [The Alliance – Atlanta Regional Marketing Alliance \(atlalliance.com\)](http://atlalliance.com).

2. *Further amplify the Aerotropolis Atlanta*

The original Blueprint, now being updated and known as Blueprint 2.0, is the strategic plan and action items for Aerotropolis Atlanta Alliance and their partners. Blueprint 2.0 has been so successful that partners wanted to expand the scope. Clayton County Development Authority, Fulton County Development Authority, the City of Fairburn, and Aerotropolis Atlanta provided additional funds to pursue the additional scope.

ARC CARES Act Funds: \$150,000 (Initial Blueprint 2.0)/Partner Funds.
Website: [Aerotropolis Atlanta - Aerotropolis Atlanta \(aeroatl.org\)](https://aerotropolisatlanta.org).

3. Expand the Metro Atlanta Housing Strategy in coordination with LLHAC and continue with a new group of local leaders

The Local Leadership Housing Action Committee (LLHAC) consists of elected officials from around the region. Cohort #2 met over the past year to explore the region's housing challenges and identify their leadership roles in influencing and transforming affordable housing in their communities and Metro Atlanta.

4. Utilize the Atlanta Housing Forum to input on regional housing strategies

ARC and other partners host a Housing Forum quarterly. Over 200 people attend each Forum. The Forum examines housing policies, best practices, ongoing collaborations and initiatives, and the need for more subsidies in affordable housing development throughout metro Atlanta. 2023 topics include homelessness, zoning, and housing authorities.

Website: [Atlanta Regional Housing Forum](https://atlantaregionalhousingforum.org),

5. Address commercial gentrification for communities and businesses

ARC, based on community input, created a toolkit to retain and expand small, minority, and legacy businesses. The toolkit provides resources for government staff and elected officials, the development community, and community members.

6. Eliminate poverty of information by expanding Broadband Access

ARC partnered with the Department of Community Affairs (DCA), the Georgia Municipal Association (GMA), and the Georgia Technology Authority (GTA) to highlight existing Broadband Programs and upcoming funding opportunities. As funding and other opportunities become available, we will partner again to provide this regional and statewide information.

Website: [Statewide Broadband Programs and Funding Opportunities - ARC \(atlantaregional.org\)](https://atlantaregional.org/statewide-broadband-programs-and-funding-opportunities).

7. Support the use of EDA and other state and federal equity- based programs

Grants:

Awarded:

Funding/Funder: \$56,000-Southeast Crescent Regional Commission (SCRC) Local Development District (LDD)

Purpose: For capacity building and educating our communities on funding and opportunities.

Website: [SCRC Local Development District \(LDD\) Capacity Building Program - Southeast Crescent Regional Commission](#).

Submitting/Submitted:

1. *Funding/Funder:* \$500,000/Up to \$20 million-Economic Development Administration (EDA)-Recompete Pilot Program Strategy and Plan

Purpose: The Recompete Pilot Program will invest in distressed communities to create, and connect workers to, good jobs in places that need them most. ARC's eligible areas are the cities of Forest Park and Jonesboro as well as identified census tracts within the city of Atlanta around the southside of the Beltline.

Website: [Distressed Area Recompete Pilot Program \(Recompete Pilot Program\) | U.S. Economic Development Administration](#).

2. *Funding/Funder:* Possible \$130-\$150 million-US Department of Transportation

Purpose: The Reconnecting Communities and Neighborhoods grant that ARC submitted is focused on the Finding the Flint effort. Prioritizing disadvantaged communities, aiming to improve access to daily needs such as jobs, education, healthcare, food, and recreation, fostering equitable development and restoration, reconnecting communities by removing, retrofitting, or mitigating highways or other transportation facilities that create barriers to community connectivity, including to mobility, access, or economic development are key areas of focus.

Website: [Reconnecting Communities and Neighborhoods Grant Program | US Department of Transportation](#)

2024 Implementation (5-Year Action Plan):

The following items are examples of some priority initiatives which are expected to be addressed over the next four years. Work will continue or begin in 2024 for some action items.

1. Update the Metro Atlanta Housing Strategy: LLHAC and Data and Trends in the Region

The Metro Atlanta Housing Strategy provides detailed information and data about the region's housing market and offers a set of actionable steps that local communities can consider taking to address their housing issues.

Website: [Home - Metro Atlanta Housing Strategy \(metroatlhousing.org\)](#).

Effort 1: Form and Execute LLHAC Cohort #3

ARC will continue the Local Leadership Housing Action Committee (LLHAC). This will be the third year and incorporate new elected officials and issues relevant to participants and regional trends.

Effort 2: Update the Metro Atlanta Housing Strategy Data and Webpage
Funding: EDA Partnership Grant-\$50,000

2. Small Business Support (including minority and women owned businesses)

Effort 1: Update procurement and permitting requirements and processing-Start to work with local and state government to promote more favorable and accessible procurement regulations and permitting processes.

Effort 2: Identify Available Government, Non-Profit, or Faith-Based Property for Small Business or Housing-Work with communities and regional partners to identify underutilized properties or buildings that might be available to small businesses or provide options for housing.

Effort 3: Foster, promote, and expand business incubators and similar models/programs-ARC will research what facilities and resources are available in the Region and convene a meeting to work with partners to make recommendations on next steps to support continued investment in this important sector.

3. Define and Quantify the Metro Atlanta Creative Economy

Build off the success of the Arts, Culture, and Creative Placemaking Strategic Plan and the Culture and Community Design Program.

Website: [ARC Culture and Community Design Program - ARC \(atlantaregional.org\)](http://atlantaregional.org/arc/culture-and-community-design-program).

Other Successful Programs and Projects:

Community Development Assistance Program (CDAP):

Projects are chosen based on areas of regional priority identified by ARC and the selection committee. Quality-of-life improvements such as smart communities, creative placemaking, housing affordability, and healthy food access are some of the focus areas used in selection. Website: [Community Development Assistance Program - Atlanta Regional Commission](http://atlantaregional.org/arc/community-development-assistance-program).

Projects Receiving ARC Staff Assistance:

- *City of Suwanee Roundabout Master Plan: The City of Suwanee will work with ARC staff to build upon the 2015 Downtown Suwanee Master Plan Update to develop a vision for an activity node at the intersection of Buford Highway and Russell Street to better connect the Old Town and Suwanee Town Center. The project will guide desired downtown land uses based on market studies and inform design guidelines for future buildings and public spaces in the area.*
- *College Park Housing Authority's College View Hills Stakeholder Engagement: The College Park Housing Authority will work with ARC staff to engage in community outreach for an ongoing redevelopment feasibility study for the College View Hills development. This project will allow residents from College View Hills and surrounding neighborhoods to help guide redevelopment of this space to meet the needs of all community members.*

Projects Receiving ARC Grant Assistance:

- DeKalb County Stone Mountain Trail Master Plan/Grant Amount: \$300,000
DeKalb County received a project grant to assist in developing a two-year master plan for an area along the Stone Mountain PATH Trail. This project will bring together cross-jurisdictional stakeholders to help align planning goals and regulations to create more affordable housing, multimodal transportation options, and places for the community to work and play.
- Henry County Local Bus Service Creative Placemaking Plan/Grant Amount: \$125,000
Henry County received a project grant to assist in assessing new fixed-route local bus services in Henry County between McDonough and Stockbridge. The study will develop the proposed bus route into a more transit-friendly corridor by designing bus stops, bus stop signs, bus stop shelters, landscaping, sidewalks, crosswalks, flashing beacon lights and other "transit creative placemaking" concepts that prioritize safety and accessibility.

Projects Receiving CDAP Partner Assistance:

- City of Marietta Mountain to River (M2R) Trail Activation Strategy
The City of Marietta will work with the Georgia Conservancy to conduct a trail activation study for the Mountain to River (M2R) Trail that links Kennesaw Mountain National Battlefield to the Chattahoochee River National Recreation Area and beyond. The study aims to reinvigorate access to Marietta Square and use creative art installations and other amenities that encourage greater use of the trail.

Livable Centers Initiative:

The Atlanta Regional Commission (ARC) awarded \$1.6 million in Livable Centers Initiative (LCI) grants for ten planning studies across metro Atlanta to help communities reimagine their downtowns, create vibrant transit corridors, and promote live-work-play environments. Upon completion of the studies, the grant recipients will be eligible to apply for federal transportation funding projects, such as corridor improvements and bike-ped infrastructure, to bring their visions to life.

Website: [Livable Centers Initiative \(LCI\) - Atlanta Regional Commission](#)

2023 LCI Study Grant Recipients

- **Atlanta Airport Community Improvement Districts/Grant Amount: \$160,000**
The Northwest Clayton LCI Update aims to improve quality of life and economic opportunity in northwest Clayton County, near I-285 and Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport. The study will review the area's growth since the last LCI plan adoption in 2011 and outline a comprehensive vision for equitable future growth and development to include improving access to affordable housing, employment, recreational spaces, and transit-oriented development around planned MARTA BRT stations.
- **City of Fairburn/Grant Amount: \$200,000**
The Education Campus Expansion & Community Connectivity Study will leverage the Fairburn LCI Downtown Master Plan to transform the city's Education Campus, which consists of Georgia Military College and Brenau University South Campus. The study seeks to turn the area into the primary gateway into the city's downtown, improve connectivity between the campus and downtown Fairburn's amenities, and incorporate smart technology and creative placemaking along the Highway 29 Overlay District.
- **City of Lawrenceville/Grant Amount: \$80,000**
The Honest Alley Activation Project aims to determine the feasibility and benefits of improving Honest Alley in Lawrenceville to be pedestrian friendly and include placemaking features. By making the area more welcoming to residents and visitors, the project will spur economic development for properties in the alleyway while also increasing community connectivity within Lawrenceville's downtown.
- **City of Stone Mountain/Grant Amount: \$200,000**
The Connecting Parks, PATHs and Public Spaces Project will evaluate Stone Mountain Village's downtown since the last LCI plan adoption in 2013. The project will encourage seamless community connection between the city and Stone Mountain Park through a bicycle and pedestrian loop that links public green spaces.

- City of Woodstock/Grant Amount: \$176,000
 The Highway 92 Development Standards Study seeks to create a new set of development standards along Highway 92. The goal is to pave the way for future economic growth through intuitive, user-friendly standards, intentional architectural design, incorporation of affordable/diverse housing options, and improved walkability. This study will also include a Housing Rehabilitation Program Strategy to retain legacy residents and preserve affordable housing resources.
- Town of Tyrone/Grant Amount: \$160,000
 The Town Center Streetscape & Mobility Schematic Project intends to create a livable and sustainable town center in Tyrone along Senoia Road through creative placemaking, multimodal mobility, smart technology, and planning and environmental design best practices. The study will work towards community revitalization, modernization, and sustainability through streetscape design guidelines, street construction standards, creative placemaking, and integrated smart technology.
- Upper Westside CID, City of Atlanta/Grant Amount: \$200,000
 The Huff Road Multimodal Study will reimagine this industrial freight corridor as an accessible, safe, and multimodal network, in line with the community's goal of creating a restorative urban environment. The study will also include the recommendations from the Upper Westside Creative Placemaking study for bus stops along Huff Road.
- Cumberland Community Improvement District/Grant Amount: \$100,000
 The Cumberland CID Creative Placemaking Plan seeks to create a strategic plan that identifies opportunities for placemaking initiatives while promoting pedestrian safety and local art. Through collaborative public-private partnerships, the plan will work to activate underutilized public and private open spaces to bring members of the community together through the arts.
- City of Sandy Springs/Grant Amount: \$200,000
 The Peachtree Dunwoody Road Corridor Study seeks to identify spaces for placemaking improvements that will facilitate future multimodal mobility and align with the Perimeter Center LCI and Perimeter Small Area Plan's vision for Sandy Springs. This vision includes connecting two transit stations and the Perimeter employment district. The study will also incorporate a Transit Oriented Development (TOD) Plan for 13 acres of undeveloped land at the North Springs MARTA Station.

- Douglas County/Grant Amount: \$120,000

The Highway 92 LCI Update seeks to reevaluate Highway 92 from I-20 to Lee Road to reflect the study area's growth and development since the last LCI plan adoption in 2009 and the Lee Road Small Area Plan adopted in 2019. The update will target mobility, livability, placemaking, smart technology, and housing goals informed by community outreach.

State Opportunity Zones:

Local governments which undertake redevelopment and revitalization efforts in certain older commercial and industrial areas can now qualify those areas for the State's maximum job tax credit of \$3,500 per job. The incentive, which is available for new or existing businesses that create two or more jobs, is a Job Tax Credit which can be taken against the business's Georgia income tax liability and payroll withholding tax. The credit is available for areas designated by DCA as an "State Opportunity Zone." DCA will consider designations for areas that are within or adjacent to a census block group with 15% or greater poverty where an enterprise zone or urban redevelopment plan exists.

Number of communities with designated Opportunity Zones in the Atlanta Region: 18
Expiration in 2023: 3

Here is a link to the designated Opportunity Zones and expiration dates:

[opportunity_zones_designation_dates_updated_may_1_2023_0.doc \(live.com\)](#)

Recent Partnerships:

Throughout 2023, ARC worked with a variety of stakeholders, organizations, local governments, and others. Here is representative list of partners:

- Non-Profits
- Faith Based Organizations
- Creatives (Arts and Entertainment)
- Small Business
- Elected Officials
- Economic Development Directors
- Community Improvement Districts
- Educators
- Urban Land Institute (ULI)
- MARC (Model Atlanta Regional Commission)
- University Presidents/Professors
- Elected Officials (Current/ Former)
- Housing Specialists
- Youth Organizations

- Creatives Representatives
- Technology (Georgia Technical Authority)
- Corporations
- Financial Institutions
- Georgia Municipal Association

The Atlanta Regional Commission had a very successful year implementing the CEDS Action Plan and supporting economic efforts in the Atlanta Region. We will build off our growing network and utilize our region's resources to continue to move toward our vision of **One Great Region**.