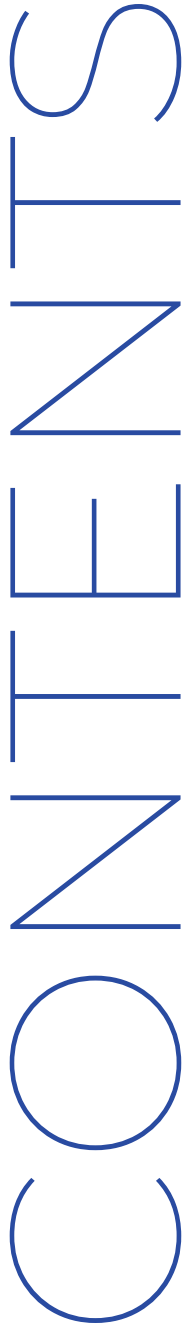




Albemarle Commission One-Year CEDS Workplan

2024

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NON O T C U D O R T N I

The Albemarle Commission Council of Governments (ACCOG) is the Economic Development District (EDD) for Region R in North Carolina, which includes the ten counties of Camden, Chowan, Currituck, Dare, Gates, Hyde, Pasquotank, Perquimans, Tyrrell, and Washington.

As the U.S. EDA-designated EDD for the region, ACCOG is charged with developing and implementing a regional Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS). The CEDS is a 3 or 5-year strategic blueprint for regional collaboration around economic/community development that is designed to build on other regional planning efforts. The plan is approved by EDA and qualifies eligible regional organizations for EDA assistance. The ACCOG CEDS was updated in 2022 and integrated into a digital platform. The next overall update will be due in 2027. This **One-Year Workplan for 2024** places the focus on regionally-driven strategic priorities that will be undertaken during the 12-month period. The workplan provides a guide to prioritizing resources and efforts that support the strategic direction identified in the CEDS.

PLANNING SESSIONS & STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

In collaboration with staff from the International Economic Development Council (IEDC), ACCOG assembled regional stakeholders to meet with two panels of economic development experts March 27-30, 2023.

Diverse groups of stakeholders in all ten counties met with the expert panels to discuss the region's strengths, opportunities, and obstacles from an economic development perspective. The information learned through those conversations and a workshop with representatives from the ACCOG board of delegates and staff was shared in a report that suggested economic development strategies for the region, offered realistic strategies, and outlined implementation steps for the community. (Appendix A) The report was used to inform ACCOG CEDS Committee recommendations on how to strengthen our region's economic resilience and identify new strategies for economic growth.



We cannot solve our problems with the same thinking we used when we created them.

- *Albert Einstein*

PLANNING SESSIONS & STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

Every effort was made to ensure participation by representatives of diverse populations, including:

- County or city-level economic developers, downtown, and/or chamber of commerce leaders
- County or city-level elected officials
- Entrepreneurship partners
- Higher education partners
- Industry leaders
- Local or regional financial institution representatives
- Industrial or commercial real estate professionals
- Representatives from major employers
- Representatives from small businesses
- Utility representatives
- Workforce development representatives
- Faith-based leaders
- School system members

Meetings were held at various times during the day/evening to allow for participants who might be available on different work schedules. However, as there was only one meeting in each county due to the large geographic distance to be covered by the panels, it was understood that not all of the stakeholder types would be able to attend.

PLANNING SESSIONS & STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

IEDC volunteers that provided pro-bono economic development consulting on the panels were:

- Khalfani Stephens, CEcD, Deputy Mayor of Pontiac, Michigan
- Shannon Ogletree, CEcD, Director, Santa Rosa County Economic Development Office
- Milton Chambliss, CEcD, Executive Director and Port Director, Claiborne County Economic Development District
- Ryan Twiss, Vice President of Regional Initiatives, Northeast Indiana Regional Partnership
- Karen Stewart, CEcD, Principal, Karen Stewart Consulting, LLC
- Rob Cleveland, CEcD, President, Cornerstone Alliance
- Chris Morello, Director, Isle of Wight County Economic Development

The project was staffed by the following IEDC staff members:

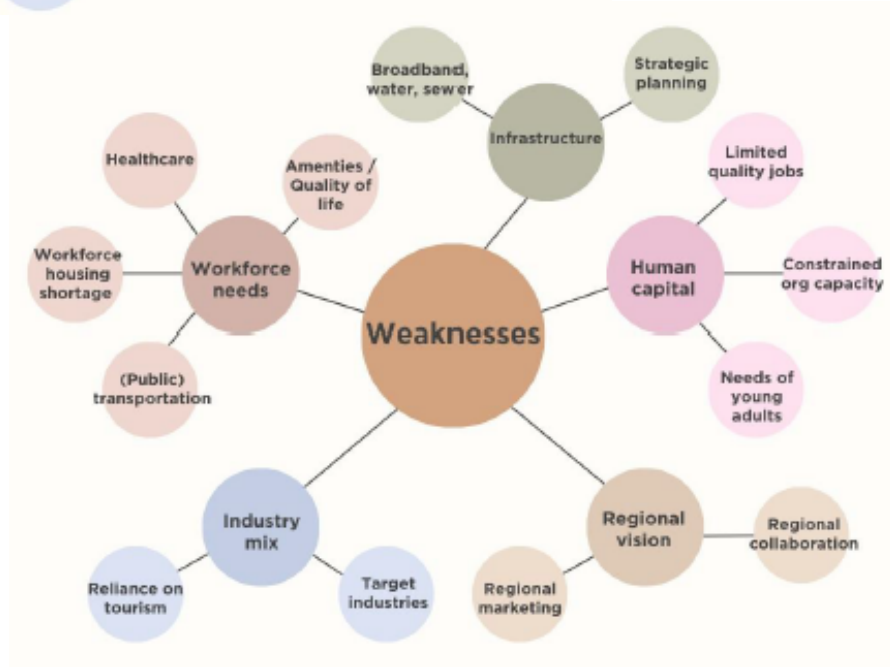
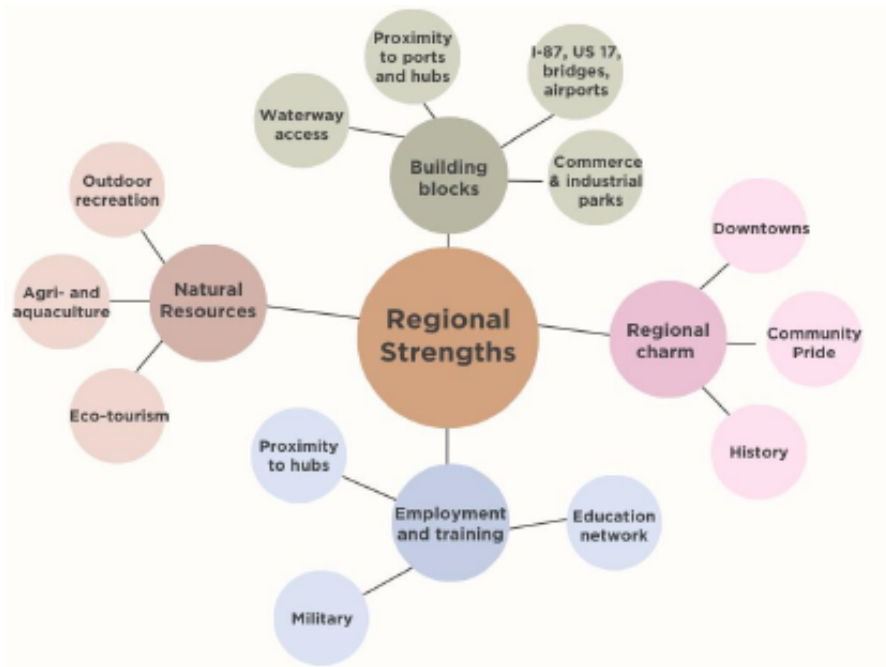
- Dana Crater, Director of Technical Assistance
- Louise Anderson, Director of Research
- Scott Brown, Economic Development Associate



INTERNATIONAL
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
COUNCIL

SWOT ANALYSIS

IEDC participants and regional stakeholders identified the following regional strengths and weaknesses:



IDENTIFIED PRIORITIES

Shannon Ogletree - Director, Santa Rosa County Economic Development Office, returned to conduct a follow-up Strategic Planning session at ACCOG on November 16, 2023

IEDC arranged for a member of the March, 2023 panels to return to ACCOG in November to facilitate a planning session with the ACCOG CEDS Advisory Committee. At ACCOG, the 14-member Board of Delegates with representatives from each county serves as the regional CEDS Advisory Committee.

During the planning session at the Albemarle Commission, Committee Members discussed approaches to coordinating growth in the region with each community's ability to thrive in its preferred environment. Several counties are concerned about maintaining their overall character as a relatively small community, while others are more anxious to recruit a large employer.

The goal of the session was to bring those diverse perspectives together and decide which issues the Commission should use resources toward in 2024. Ultimately, the group communicated its commitment to four issues it believes should take priority for the year (listed on the following page), however; the following discussion points also garnered significant conversation:

- **Site Certification:** Existing sites should be put under local government control to be useful. Electricities can help with this.
- **Lobbying:** ACCOG staff (directors) should be advocating in D.C. (with USDOT, EDA, etc.) for regional infrastructure funding
- **Econ Dev Personnel:** Since many counties no longer have personnel on staff, should ACCOG hire an Economic Developer (shared by the region) to promote the area (multi-county?)

IDENTIFIED PRIORITIES

Based on the group's discussions, the CEDS Advisory Committee identified the following regional priorities for 2024:

01

Broadband

Every committee member in attendance recommended that ACCOG continue the Regional Broadband Expansion Project. It was agreed that significant progress has been made, and the group suggested that work proceed as planned.

02

Housing

The committee acknowledged the need for more housing in the region, housing that is affordable for the workforce, and improvements to the current housing stock in many communities.

03

Infrastructure

Many counties in the ACCOG region are currently, or are planning to, explore water, wastewater, or other utility improvements/expansions. The committee broadly acknowledged the need for local assistance with project planning and funding applications.

04

Transportation

Committee members professed the need for reliable and affordable transportation to get around within the region. Of particular concern is transporting the labor force to jobs.

Other issues mentioned included the continued battle against **drug addiction**, the need for additional and reliable **child care**, concerns around **education** and regional schools, and the need for continued innovation with regard to **workforce development**. The committee expects that the Area Agency on Aging (AAA) and Northeastern Workforce Development Board (NWDB), and the Albemarle Rural Planning Organization (ARPO) will continue work towards their respective missions under their respective directors and the ACCOG umbrella.

2024 ACTION PLAN: BROADBAND

01

Broadband Expansion

This is an ongoing effort throughout the region. EDA funding has allowed ACCOG to employ the services of Mighty River, Inc. to help our member governments navigate state and federal opportunities that will ultimately expand service throughout the region. Staff will continue to collaborate with Mighty River and develop opportunities for counties to coordinate that process. Cell service will also be addressed as part of the overall telecom environment.

Digital Equity is another important aspect of broadband expansion; this will be addressed through a partnership between ACCOG and Broadband Catalysts to ensure that citizens throughout the region have the necessary resources to use and benefit from the internet. Staff will work with Broadband Catalysts, engaging with the regional public to determine what's needed to make sure citizens have what they need to use the internet. This collaboration will also create plans to develop efforts that will increase household broadband adoption and usage throughout the region.



2024 ACTION PLAN: HOUSING

02

Housing

There are several housing-related issues of concern in the Albemarle region:

- Existing housing stock is generally in poor repair, and homeowners/renters can't afford to make the needed renovations.
- Where they exist, local housing codes are unevenly implemented.
- There is not enough housing in the region to adequately serve all citizens.
- In many communities, existing housing has gotten too expensive for most households to afford on the average salaries earned in the region.

Staff will continue to implement current housing repair programs as appropriate, making repairs/improvements for low-income homeowners with special needs. Programs will be continually evaluated internally and in coordination with funding agencies to determine effectiveness. Programs that do not meet standards may be restructured or discontinued.

Additional housing-related solutions will be explored to address the remaining issues raised by the CEDS Advisory Committee.



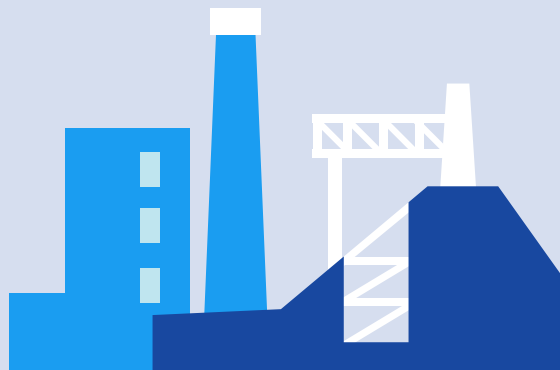
2024 ACTION PLAN: INFRASTRUCTURE

03 Infrastructure

As counties in the Albemarle region consider essential improvements/expansions in existing public infrastructure, staff at ACCOG will work to identify available funding opportunities and assist with application submissions as needed.

Staff will also work to increase awareness of the important role infrastructure plays in the regional economy. In line with the ACCOG's mission to help member governments improve the quality of life for citizens in the region, improvements to infrastructure ensure convenient transportation, dependable utilities, and reliable safety. These in turn attract skilled professionals, stimulate tourism, and create a sense of community well-being.

Lack of capacity has prevented many local governments in the ACCOG region from making needed improvements over several decades. As a result, current local leaders might not know the status and quality of their public infrastructure assets. Available budget allocations are often insufficient to meet routine maintenance needs.



2024 ACTION PLAN: TRANSPORTATION

04 Transportation

Although some small county transit systems operate within the region, many citizens still can't get to jobs, food, or healthcare. Albemarle Regional Health Services (ARHS) operates a somewhat larger system that covers five contiguous counties that provides more options, but more needs to be done to ensure that all residents have equal access to opportunities and services.

In 2024, the Albemarle Rural Planning Organization, along with ACCOG staff, will explore transportation possibilities that might enhance the region's quality of life by offering a convenient network of multimodal choices to residents of all ten counties. Staff will coordinate conversations with county transit systems and ARHS to examine possible solutions.

The Albemarle Rural Planning Organization, along with ACCOG staff will also identify opportunities to advocate at the state and federal levels to raise awareness of regional transportation needs and increase funding for essential projects, including ongoing I-87 development.



MEASURING PROGRESS

Progress towards 2024 priorities will be tracked and measured as outlined in the chart below:

Task	Responsible Party and Partners	Desired Outcome 2024
Continue to assist counties with efforts to navigate broadband expansion throughout the region as needed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Special Projects • Executive Director • ACCOG Board • Mighty River, Inc. • NC Rural Center • EDA 	Member counties will report increased understanding of broadband expansion plans in their communities and a decrease in the number of unserved households
Work with Broadband Catalysts to create a regional Digital Equity Plan with addenda for individual counties	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Special Projects • Broadband Catalysts • Institute for Emerging Issues 	One published Regional Digital Equity Plan for the ACCOG region
Conduct Public Engagement sessions to gather information and feedback about regional broadband access	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Special Projects • Broadband Catalysts • Institute for Emerging Issues 	Information and feedback will drive implementation actions/efforts to ensure continued resources and equity

MEASURING PROGRESS

Task	Responsible Party and Partners	Desired Outcome
<p>Provide information sessions and 'Office Hours' with Mighty River for counties' education and clarification about broadband expansion details</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Special Projects • NC Rural Center • Mighty River 	<p>Increased knowledge and understanding will be measured by feedback from member counties and number of sessions offered by ACCOG</p>
<p>Assist with submission of broadband funding applications and necessary documentation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Special Projects • Mighty River • County Staff 	<p>Increased investment throughout the region for broadband expansion, measured in \$ invested and/or # of submissions</p>
<p>Continue the Urgent Repair Program (URP) through North Carolina Housing Finance Agency (NCHFA)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Housing • Special Projects • Executive Director • Finance • NCHFA 	<p>Improvement of existing housing stock in the region, measured by number of homes repaired and \$ invested in each county</p>
<p>Host information session(s) to introduce current code enforcement strategies to county officials and staff</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Housing • Special Projects • Executive Director • County Officials/Staff 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased understanding of code enforcement benefits and approaches to facilitation, measured by session attendance

MEASURING PROGRESS

Task	Responsible Party and Partners	Desired Outcome
<p>Explore possibilities with regard to attracting affordable housing developers to the region</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Special Projects • Executive Director • Housing 	<p>Increased staff understanding of affordable housing programs and processes</p>
<p>Contact potential developers and host a regional roundtable to connect them with county leaders</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Special Projects • Executive Director • Housing • Developers 	<p>Connections between ACCOG counties and potential affordable housing developers, measured by connections made (appointments scheduled)</p>
<p>Assist counties/towns as needed with identification of infrastructure opportunities and application submissions</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Special Projects • Planning • Funding agencies • Consultants 	<p>Increased number of submissions, increased \$ investment in regional infrastructure</p>
<p>Host regional roundtable(s) to increase awareness of infrastructure concerns, discuss needs/solutions and promote funding opportunities</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Special Projects • Planning • Executive Director • County infrastructure representatives • Funding agencies 	<p>Greater understanding of regional needs, potential for regionalization of solutions</p>

MEASURING PROGRESS

Task	Responsible Party and Partners	Desired Outcome
<p>Facilitate discussion with Albemarle Regional Health Services to explore opportunities for partnerships in response to continued transportation issues in the region (workforce, etc.)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planning • Special Projects • Executive Director • ARHS • NWDB 	<p>Understanding of the limits of the multi-county transit system and barriers to improvement and/or expansion</p>
<p>Explore potential mergers of small county transportation systems</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Special Projects • Executive Director • Planning • ARHS 	<p>Increased knowledge of how small county transit systems work in the region, ideas for improvement</p>
<p>Plan and facilitate a regional transit system roundtable to share ideas about a regional transit system</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Special Projects • Planning • Executive Director • County Transit Systems • Admin 	<p>Begin discussions for planning a regional transit system</p>
<p>Develop State and Federal connections to advocate for regional transportation funding and essential projects</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Executive Director • Planning • NCDOT • FTA • Legislators 	<p>Improved communication and increased relationships</p>

CONCLUSION

2023 was a busy year at ACCOG - we guided broadband expansion across more of the region, improved the existing housing stock, and helped member governments invest in our region's infrastructure.



Regional Broadband Expansion

A lot has happened since we started work on this project about three years ago. We've learned that we have to hold the service providers accountable, ensuring that they provide the service they're paid to do. We also now know that there is enough current funding to pay for coverage to all of the households in our region still without broadband. We've got the resources to finish the job, all we have to do is see it through!

Housing

The ACCOG Housing Program has been hard at work since its re-inception in July 2022. Funds are available to finance emergency home repairs and modifications for low-income homeowners with special needs. Assistance is provided in the form of deferred, forgiven loans to qualified homeowners. Since this program was brought back in-house under staff supervision, close to \$1 million dollars has been invested in regional housing improvements.



Infrastructure

Public infrastructure in the ACCOG region received a boost from federal and state agencies after 2020 to fund critical capital projects enabling work, education, and health monitoring in response to the public health emergency caused by the ripple effects of covid-19. ACCOG helped member governments navigate the process for allowable spending, ensuring that our communities have access to the high-quality modern infrastructure.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many thanks to the Albemarle Commission staff who work every day to enhance the quality of the lives of our citizens through direct services and assistance in planning, program development and management, public-private partnerships and leadership.

Special thanks to IEDC and EDA for their guidance in putting this plan together.

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