

2026 ANNUAL UPDATE

COMPREHENSIVE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

A regional framework for economic resilience,
community investment, and shared prosperity

PREPARED BY

Region I Planning & Development Council

Southern West Virginia

SERVING SIX COUNTIES

McDowell • Mercer • Monroe

Raleigh • Summers • Wyoming

I. Introduction and Purpose

Acknowledgement

The creation and publication of this document were made possible in part by funding from the Economic Development Administration, the Appalachian Regional Commission, the State of West Virginia, local sources, and other contributors.

Region I Planning & Development Council's Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy

Introduction and Purpose

The Region I Planning & Development Council is a coalition of local governments representing six counties in Southern West Virginia—McDowell, Mercer, Monroe, Raleigh, Summers, and Wyoming—along with twenty-five municipalities within these counties. The Council's Board of Directors, which serves as the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) Committee, includes twenty-five mayors, six county commissioners, and private sector appointees. The Council collaborates closely with local Economic Development Authorities, Public Service Districts, and various other organizations across the region.

Each year, the Regional Council is tasked with preparing or updating a Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) for submission to its members, the Appalachian Regional Commission, the Economic Development Administration, the West Virginia Department of Economic Development, and the broader public.

This document serves as an annual update to the region's 5-year Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy. The plan provides a strategic framework, focusing on critical factors for the economic advancement of the region. Economic and community development is fundamentally local, occurring within towns, cities, and counties. Local governments are responsible for providing the essential infrastructure and amenities—such as development sites, water and sewer facilities, solid waste disposal, fire and police protection, as well as recreational and cultural opportunities—that make an area competitive and attractive for development. These elements are crucial prerequisites for attracting employment opportunities.

Economic development planning requires assessing and leveraging local resources, minimizing deficiencies, and coordinating efforts to address economic distress. Local, state, and federal governments agree that this process is most effectively developed at the regional level.

This localized planning approach addresses the region's needs, developing a strategic plan for this Council of local governments, while simultaneously meeting the planning requirements of the U.S. Economic Development Administration, the Appalachian Regional Commission, and the West Virginia Department of Economic Development.

In summary, the CEDS is a regional planning and implementation process aimed at creating jobs, fostering more stable and diversified economies, improving living conditions, and providing a framework for coordinating the efforts of individuals and organizations concerned with economic development. This document outlines the region's challenges, needs, and resources, identifies the goals and objectives of the development program, presents strategies and action plans to achieve these goals, and establishes criteria for evaluating program outcomes.

The Regional Council

WHAT? WHO? WHY? WHERE? HOW?

REGION I PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL

- What?** A public agency created by West Virginia law to provide comprehensive planning of all types for the region; coordination of federal and state funding in the region; a means of technical assistance to and cooperation between units of local government.
- Who?** All units of government in McDowell, Mercer, Monroe, Raleigh, Summers, and Wyoming Counties, plus up to 49% private sector appointees.
- Why?** Because the interdependence and relationships between neighboring communities and counties cover areas of employment, industry, housing, health, recreation, and environmental protection.
- Where?** The Region I Planning & Development Council office is located at 241 Mercer Springs Road, Suite 21, Princeton, WV 24740; Telephone (304) 431-7225; Fax (304) 431-7235; or E-mail us at regionone@regiononepdc.org.
- How?** By the development of overall regional planning, continually updated to meet changing needs and conditions.

Through the review, comment, and assistance in formulation of plans or proposals which involve public funding, governmental action, public property, intergovernmental cooperation, and regional development.

With the involvement of local governments, citizens advisory councils, special interest representation, and task forces.

REGION I PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL

241 Mercer Springs Road, Suite 21

Princeton WV 24740

Telephone: (304) 431-7225 / Fax: (304) 431-7235

E-Mail: regionone@regiononepdc.org

Website: www.regiononepdc.org

Executive Officers

Chairperson

Charles Saunders, Summers County Commission
120 Ballengee Street
Hinton, WV 25951

Vice Chair

Bruce Mutter, Private Sector
P.O. Box 2182
Bluefield, WV 24701

Treasurer

Tim Pike, Town of Athens
P.O. Box 458
Athens, WV 24712

Secretary

Bill Shiflet, Private Sector
P.O. Box 560
Union, WV 24983

Council Staff

Jason Roberts

Executive Director

Kim Odle

Executive Assistant

Ashleen D'Amato

Project Manager

Lisa Miller

Financial Assistant

Ben Haring

Financial Assistant

Lucas Pettus

Project Manager

Eric Combs

Project Manager

Lori Shrewsbury

Financial Manager

Crystal Hodges

Project Manager

Marie Price

Administrative Assistant

Justin Watkins

GIS Specialist

Missy Mooney

Financial Assistant

Katherine Pauley

Project Manager

Sheldon LeMay

GIS Specialist

Private Sector Membership Ratified July 28, 2026

Public Sector Membership Updated as Changes Occur

MEMBERSHIP ROSTER

*	Michael Brooks	(304) 436-8548	McDowell County Commission	Commission President
*	Greg Puckett	(304) 487-8306	Mercer County Commission	Commissioner
*	Kenny Mann	(304) 772-3096	Monroe County Commission	Commissioner
/	Daniel Hall	(304) 255-9146	Raleigh County Commission	Commissioner
/	Charles W. Saunders	(304) 466-7100	Summers County Commission	Commission President
*	Jason Mullins	(304) 732-0007	Wyoming County Commission	Commission President
**	Dorothy Wilson	(304) 383-2993	Town of Anawalt	Businessperson - Mayor
	Brian Harrison	(304) 967-7370	Town of Bradshaw	Acting Mayor
	Kenneth Gentry	(304) 656-7145	Town of Davy	Miner - Mayor
	Robert Little	(304) 448-2209	City of Gary	Mayor
**	Joe Ford	(304) 938-3035	Town of Iaeger	Businessperson - Mayor
**	Holly Maben	(304) 862-2239	City of Keystone	Acting Mayor
**	Adam Gianato	(304) 585-7913	Town of Kimball	Mayor
**	Robert White	(304) 862-3414	Town of Northfork	Mayor
	David Deel	(304) 875-3111	City of War	Businessperson - Mayor
*	Harold McBride	(304) 436-3113	City of Welch	Businessperson - Mayor
/	Timothy Pike	(304) 384-3525	Town of Athens	Businessperson - Mayor
*	Ron Martin	(304) 327-2401	City of Bluefield	Mayor
	Grant Bennett	(681) 284-2061	Town of Bramwell	Mayor
**	Deborah Rachel	(304) 898-2287	Town of Oakvale	Mayor
	Dewey Russell	(304) 487-5024	City of Princeton	Council Member
	Michael Lively	(304) 753-9509	Town of Peterstown	Businessperson - Mayor
***	Caroline S. Sparks	(304) 772-5522	Town of Union	Business Owner - Mayor
*	Philip Jarrell	(304) 256-1750	City of Beckley	Interim City Manager
**	Kenneth Allen	(304) 934-6301	Town of Lester	Businessperson - Mayor
	Wayne Houck	(304) 253-5654	Town of Mabscott	Businessperson - Mayor
	Ralph Sallie	(304) 683-4456	Town of Sophia	Mayor
*	Jack Scott	(304) 466-3255	City of Hinton	Mayor
*	Alan Mills	(304) 294-7132	City of Mullens	Mayor
	T. H. Evans Jr. (Tom)	(304) 682-6231	Town of Oceana	Retired Businessperson - Mayor
	Aaron Hatfield	(304) 732-6255	Town of Pineville	Mayor
PRIVATE SECTOR MEMBERS				
	Dr. Donald R. Reed, Jr.	(304) 436-6588 ext. 101	McDowell	Executive Director, McDowell Co Commission on Aging
/	Bruce Mutter	(304) 425-6946	Mercer	Director, CART, Inc.
**	Lisa Jones	(304) 952-4264	Mercer	Chief Executive Officer, So. Highlands Mental Health Clinic
	Duane Miller	(304) 646-1575	Monroe	Business Owner
/	Bill Shiflet	(304) 646-3398	Monroe	Insurance Agent
**	Ruthanna Beezley	(304) 497-4300	Monroe	Executive Director, GVEDC
	Jim Nelson	(304) 646-6242	Monroe	CEO, Monroe Health Center
***	Manuel Cartelle	(304) 255-4914	Raleigh	Retired Executive Director Housing Authority
**	Judy Radford	(304) 252-0233	Raleigh	Retired EDA Director
*	Norman L. Kirkham	(304) 647-0364	Summers	Retired Regional Council Director
	Dr. Steve Richman	(304) 466-3943	Summers	Semi-Retired, Physician
**	Peni Adams	(304) 890-6526	Wyoming	Retired Entrepreneur
**	Christy Laxton	(304) 732-6707	Wyoming	Executive Director, Wyoming County EDA
* Member of Executive/CEDS Committee ** Minority / Female *** Minority / Female and Member of Executive Committee */* Officer/Executive Committee				

CHANGES IN THE REGION

CHANGES IN THE REGION (Updated for 2026)

A. Changes within the Regional Council

In Fiscal Year 2026, the Region I Planning & Development Council has seen changes in membership and staffing, continuing to reflect the evolving priorities and capacities of the region. Notably, both private and public sector membership are updated on an ongoing basis as necessary. The Council continues to maintain active participation from all six counties—McDowell, Mercer, Monroe, Raleigh, Summers, and Wyoming—and numerous municipalities, ensuring regional collaboration on economic and infrastructure initiatives.

B. Changes within the Regional Economy

Region I continues to stabilize from the long-term economic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and the decline in the coal industry while adapting to broader structural changes in employment and industry.

Unemployment Trends

As of **January 2026**, the unemployment rate for the Region I PDC area remained elevated relative to state and national averages. This reflects persistent structural labor market challenges in southern West Virginia. The following table provides a comparative snapshot using the most recent month available across all geographies:

Region	January 2026
--------	--------------

Region I PDC	~5.8%*
--------------	--------

West Virginia	4.6%
---------------	------

United States	4.3%
---------------	------

*Region I rate represents a **labor-force weighted average of the six counties (LAUS, not seasonally adjusted)**.

County context (January 2026):

- McDowell County: among highest in the region ($\approx 8\text{--}9\%$)
- Wyoming County: $\approx 6\text{--}7\%$
- Mercer, Raleigh, Summers, Monroe: generally $\approx 4\text{--}6\%$ range

These figures illustrate that portions of Region I significantly exceed both state and national unemployment levels.

Source:

U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), Local Area Unemployment Statistics (LAUS), January 2026

- [LAUS Data Tables](#)
- [State Employment & Unemployment Release \(Jan 2026\)](#)

Employment and Payroll

Employment data differ by geography due to federal statistical methodology:

- **Nonfarm payroll employment (CES)** → available for U.S. and states (jobs by place of work)
- **Total employment (LAUS)** → available for counties (workers by place of residence)

Total Employment (Residence-Based – Comparable Across All Geographies)

Region January 2026

Region I PDC ~123,000 employed*

West Virginia ~746,400

United States ~161.2 million

*Region I estimate represents the sum of LAUS employment across Mercer, McDowell, Monroe, Raleigh, Summers, and Wyoming counties.

Non-Farm Payroll Employment

Geography January 2026

United States ~158.3 million jobs

West Virginia ~717,600 jobs

Region I PDC Not available (county-level data not produced)

Key Point:

The Bureau of Labor Statistics does **not publish monthly nonfarm payroll employment at the county level**, meaning Region I payroll totals must be derived from:

- Metro-level CES data, or
- Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages (QCEW)

Summary of Trends

- Region I continues to **lag both the state and nation in unemployment performance**, with several counties significantly above average.
- West Virginia's labor market remains slightly weaker than the national average.
- Employment totals show the **scale disparity** between national, state, and rural regional economies.
- Data limitations require mixing:
 - **LAUS (employment/unemployment)** for counties
 - **CES (payroll jobs)** for state and national comparisons

Sources

- U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), Local Area Unemployment Statistics (LAUS) <https://www.bls.gov/lau/>
- U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), State Employment and Unemployment – January 2026 <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/laus.htm>
- U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), Economy at a Glance – West Virginia <https://www.bls.gov/eag/eag.wv.htm>

Economic Recovery and Resiliency

Region I continues to leverage federal and state recovery programs to address long-standing economic challenges and foster resilience. Programs supported by the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC), U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA), and specialized funding initiatives have catalyzed improvements in:

- Water and wastewater systems
- Transportation planning
- Broadband and digital inclusion
- Energy efficiency and conservation

The variety of funding requests prepared and submitted during this previous fiscal year demonstrates the PDC's commitment to regional community development and dedication to being a multi-talented asset to our communities.

Assessment of Progress in FY-26

In order to determine and assess the progress made during the planning year on an ongoing basis, the evaluation will show the relationship of funded projects to the planning goals and objectives of the CEDS. This will result in reports which will document the progress of the CEDS.

The review of this will be used as an evaluation of the effectiveness in meeting the goals and will be used to adjust the CEDS, as needed. This report will be made available to the public and Board of the Regional Council for decision making adjustments.

Progress for FY-26: During this period, the Regional Council prepared and submitted 161 applications representing \$609,054,246 in funding. See the following assessment for recent program evaluation.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

COMMUNITY FACILITIES AND SERVICES

(Neighborhood Improvements, Libraries, Public Safety, Sewer, Water, Solid Waste and Recreational)

Goal

- To provide, where financially and physically feasible in the most effective period possible, adequate sanitary sewer, water, and solid waste facilities to meet both the existing needs and the future growth and development needs of the Region I area.
- To provide adequate community facilities and services for each community within the region.
- Ensure that future generations will have the opportunity to enjoy the open space and adequate recreation facilities and services.

Objectives

- Provide technical assistance and procure investments for development of traditional land innovative sanitary water and sewage systems and solid waste collection and disposal systems where there exists and imminent threat to public health as a result of untreated waste and/or contaminated water, or there is a designated growth area, special development opportunity, or rural service center that can feasibly support growth.
- To assist local governments in developing their abilities for planning and development through creation of planning commissions and development authorities.
- To upgrade existing municipal streets and sidewalks and county orphan roads.
- To provide fire and police protection to adequately protect all residents and their property.
- Preserve and reserve land for open space purposes.
- Maintain the existing public recreational facilities and services.
- To increase data collection and data collection capabilities.
- To increase economic resiliency.
- To increase resiliency to natural disasters.
- To expedite recovery from natural disasters

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Goal

-To encourage industrial/commercial development, tourism and travel growth, which enhance employment opportunities and diversity, resulting in a large tax base needed to support the existing and future community.

Objectives

-To provide for industrial parks, making the most efficient use of land, water facilities, sewage facilities, and minimizing excessive traffic flow patterns.

-To preserve our existing job opportunities throughout the Region I area.

-To encourage the location and expansion of diversified job opportunities for the unemployed and underemployed.

-To encourage future retail, commercial and service enterprises toward existing central business districts.

-To reserve areas of sufficient size which have location and service characteristics unique to industrial and commercial development requirements, thus making the Region I area highly attractive for new industries and resulting opportunities. Characteristics of primary importance to industrial and commercial development land use are proximity to interchanges, variety of modes of transportation and essential public utilities.

-To organize local development groups throughout the region, including but not limited to Area Partnership Councils, Economic Task Forces, and County Development Authorities.

-To preserve, yet develop, our many national attractions to generate additional tourism and travel to the region.

-To increase data collection and data collection capabilities.

-Analysis and implementation of economic diversification efforts.

-To increase economic resiliency.

-To increase resiliency to natural disasters.

-To expedite recovery from natural disasters.

ENVIRONMENT

Flood Prevention

Goal

- To promote flood control projects where needed.
- To utilize new technologies to utilize recovery funds more efficiently.

Objectives

- To assist in short-term flood prevention projects.
- To assist the local governmental entities in developing flood plain management policies.
- To increase data collection and data collection capabilities.
- To increase economic resiliency.
- To increase resiliency to natural disasters.
- To expedite recovery from natural disasters.

HUMAN RESOURCES

Vocational Education

-To provide vocational education facilities within each county of the region.

Higher Education

-To provide a variety of easily accessible, quality, higher education opportunities which consider present and future professional needs.

-To provide maximum cooperation and coordination between secondary, private, local and regional sectors.

-To provide maximum productivity and efficiency in program and utilization of resources.

Public Education

The goals of public education for the children and youth of the region may be stated as follows:

-To develop skills in reading, spelling, perceiving, speaking, listening, adding, subtracting, multiplying and dividing numbers and using reference materials.

-To develop the knowledge of governmental, social and economic systems in order to make informed choices.

-To develop the knowledge, skills, and attitudes required to function successfully in advanced academic and technical training programs and useful occupations.

-To develop the knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary to develop self-esteem.

-To develop the knowledge, skills and attitudes related to the creative, visual and performing arts to enrich the quality of their lives and provide an undertaking of their culture and heritage.

-To develop the knowledge, skills and attitudes related to science and technology, rational decision-making and creative problem solving to function successfully in a high technology society.

TRANSPORTATION

Goal

-To promote an effective transportation and circulation network that improves the movement of people and goods, protects the environment, facilitates energy conservation, promotes sound development patterns, and is supportive of economic growth.

Objectives

-To enable a well-coordinated system of streets and highways, separating local traffic from industrial traffic, thus improving the accessibility of transportation to public facilities.

-To help develop large commercial airports to handle the present and future needs of developing areas.

-To encourage the expansion of a passenger rail system.

-To promote an adequate public transportation system in terms of jobs and shopping opportunities for elderly, handicapped, and low-income residents.

-To encourage the utilization of existing and potential tourism parkways throughout the region.

-To increase data collection and data collection capabilities.

-To perform the technical and analytical services for the Fayette/Raleigh Metropolitan Planning Organization.

-To increase economic resiliency.

-To increase resiliency to natural disasters.

-To expedite recovery from natural disasters.

GOVERNMENT

Goal

- To promote developments that are indicative of our balanced land use strategies and which are compatible with our efforts to minimize air, water and noise pollution.
- Schedule future development based on the availability of required facilities and services.
- Minimize strip development in areas unsuited for it in terms of soil capabilities, slope conditions, or location of development in flood plains.
- To increase data collection and data collection capabilities.
- To analyze exterior impacts and disruptions; implement continuity of operations procedures.

ENERGY

Goal

-To promote economic prosperity and ensure a safe environment for the region through energy conservation and efficiency, the wise management of traditional energy resources, and the development and use of viable competitive and alternative energy systems.

Objectives

-To develop a Comprehensive Regional Energy Development Plan

-To develop an energy impact planning capability within the Regional Staff.

-To provide proper management for the siting and improvement process for energy production and generation, especially from our coal resources.

-To utilize hydrogen and other alternative fuels as a complement to traditional natural resources.

-To increase data collection and data collection capabilities.

-To increase economic resiliency.

-To increase resiliency to natural disasters.

-To expedite recovery from natural disasters.

HOUSING

Goal

-An adequate amount of decent, safe, and sanitary housing in various price ranges so that every person/family has the opportunity to buy or rent decent housing in a suitable living environment.

Objectives

-To plan neighborhoods which will retain long-term livability and be free from blighting factors such as incompatible land use.

-To pursue a program of renovation of existing units, especially for those on social security and those in low-income brackets.

-To eliminate housing discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex or national origin.

-To improve and expand the immediate housing opportunities for all residents of the region in order to alleviate housing shortages.

-To provide the distribution of housing resources, including assisted housing to meet the needs of all citizens in order to provide a choice of housing types, price and location.

-To encourage private developers to increase production and to develop a diversity of housing units at various price ranges throughout the region.

-To increase data collection and data collection capabilities.

-To increase economic resiliency.

-To increase resiliency to natural disasters.

-To expedite recovery from natural disasters.

The following Community Facilities and Services Projects have been funded in FY-26 to address our goals and objectives.

I. Community Facilities and Services Goals:

- Anawalt Water: \$3,000,000
- Beckley-Raleigh County Convention Center Upgrades: \$37,000
- Bradshaw WWTP IJDC Critical Needs Project: \$219,047
- Brenton/Baileysville Waterline Extension: \$280,000
- Davy Sewer Step I: \$5,750,000
- Davy Sewer Step II: \$1,000,000
- Fitzpatrick Park Lighting Improvements: \$37,000
- Gary Sanitary Sewer Upgrade: \$1,000,000
- Glen Rogers Sewer System Improvements Part A: \$3,200,000
- McDowell PSD Elkhorn Water Phase III: \$2,500,000
- McDowell PSD Jolo V Waterline Extension: \$6,364,000
- Mullens Volunteer Fire Department: \$1,500,000
- North Welch/Jr. Poca Waterline Extension: \$500,000
- Princeton High Street Sidewalk Project: \$75,000
- Red Sulphur PSD Adair Road Waterline Extension: \$3,803,000
- Sophia Police Department HVAC Upgrades: \$25,000
- SWP Grant – Reservoir Evaluation: \$21,000
- SWP Grant – Big Bend Security Upgrades: \$13,822
- Welch CSO Removal: \$250,000
- Wyoming County Emergency Services: \$487,000

II. Economic Development Goals:

Region I understands that economic development is vital to the success of the region. To that end, Region I assists (either directly or indirectly) with multiple economic development applications and planning continually.

-Region I PDC ARC Planning Grant: \$108,599

-Barkers Creek Industrial Park Shell Buildings: \$506,650

-BEDA Create Center Lights Replacement: \$35,000

III. Environmental Goals

Region I has experienced multiple federally designated natural hazard events over the past decade and is dedicated to helping the communities facing these events prevent future tragedies.

IV. Human Resources/Education

Region I realizes the need for continued education and professional development. To that end Region I utilizes local educational resources whenever possible.

V. Transportation Goals

Region I realizes the importance of adequate transportation infrastructure and services. Region I has assisted in acquiring funding for multiple transportation studies throughout its tenure.

VI. Energy Goals

The Region places an ever-important emphasis on energy efficiency and conservation and has assisted with the applications for multiple organizations to bring energy independence to the Mountain State.

VII. Housing Goals

Region I has assisted various county and municipal agencies with meeting local housing needs. Extensions of water and sewer to many previously unserved communities is a major factor in improving housing needs within the Region.

VIII. Government Goals

The Region regularly aids member communities with a myriad of assistance in local and community projects.

-Region I Cybersecurity Planning and Infrastructure Upgrade: \$20,480

Total of all funded projects for FY-26= \$30,732,598

Regional Projects Listing

Region I utilizes an online platform that enables communities to enter their respective projects into a regional project listing. The first component of the survey polls the community for their “Category Priority Ranking,” ranking their priorities for the following overall categories:

- Community Facilities and Services
- Economic Development
- Human Resources
- Environment and Natural Resources
- Transportation
- Housing
- Energy
- Government

The second part of the survey polls communities for specifics of their anticipated projects. Accommodations in the survey are made to accept the following information:

- Project Category
- Project Name
- Estimated Cost
- Is Service Currently Provided?
- Number of Persons Benefitting
- Amount of Funding Committed

The survey also allows communities to add additional comments, as well as to upload their respective approved formal resolutions adopting the outlined projects as their desired project list. The Region will continue to utilize this improved methodology as it increases data entry efficiency and expedited generation of the Regional Project Listing.