



Point Broadband installs new fiber optic cable in Lebanon, VA.

Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy

2024 UPDATE

Cumberland Plateau Planning District Commission

224 Clydesway Drive
Lebanon, VA 24266

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Executive Summary


The Cumberland Plateau Planning District Commission will celebrate its 56th year as an EDD in 2024. The District staff, Board of Directors and local and regional partners stand prepared to continue the District's economic diversification efforts.

The Cumberland Plateau Planning Commission has been working since 1968 with member governments, regional organizations, state and federal agencies and other public and private entities to diversify the regional economy which was based primarily on coal and agriculture. This effort began with the basics of providing public infrastructure to support economic growth. Then came efforts to develop industrial sites, parks and shell buildings to attract new jobs to the region. That effort resulted in major new industries locating in the area in the late 1980s.

At the same time, efforts were being made to support the establishment of the Appalachian School of Law in Buchanan County. The success of this endeavor prompted the County to support the establishment of the Appalachian College of Pharmacy.

In the early 2000s, the PDC joined with LENOWISCO PDC to initiate a regional fiber optic broadband deployment project with the financial support of EDA and the Virginia Tobacco Commission. With Point Broadband and Scott County Telephone Cooperative as partners, this project now provides state-of-the-art broadband services to thousands of businesses, industries, institutions and governments in the region.


A regional 4G wireless project in cooperation with Verizon Wireless, initiated in 2012, was completed in the Fall of 2016, making Southwest Virginia one of the few rural areas in the nation with 4G coverage. This project provides a transformational economic development tool for the Cumberland Plateau and LENOWISCO Planning Districts. The District is committed to making this asset a major piece of local regional and state marketing plans.



With the availability of this robust twenty-first century telecommunications network, several major IT companies have located in the district, including CGI, Northrup Grumman, Foundever, AT&T and SAIC. Other companies, such as PBE Group in Tazewell County, have been able to expand due to the availability of our broadband infrastructure. In addition, the PDC is working with its private ownership partner, Point Broadband, to expand the system to serve residential customers. With two major state telecommunication grants awarded in 2021 and 2022, the District will see universal coverage by the end of 2024 following the construction of nearly 15,000 new broadband passings.

On the negative side, the late 2000s also saw the loss in the District of several of our largest automotive manufacturers, including IAC, Teleflex and Alcoa Wheels. With these closings largely due to problems in the American auto industry, nearly 1,000 good-paying manufacturing jobs were lost. The end result has been that, despite great progress in diversification of the regional economy, the region is still losing jobs and population. The region is supporting regional workforce programs as well as the creation of Centers of Excellence to provide better training for the advanced manufacturing and other industries being recruited to the District.

Despite success in attracting IT and higher education jobs to the area, the continued loss of population has made it apparent that more needs to be done to improve the quality of life in the district in support of creating more manufacturing jobs, jobs for which the District workforce is well-suited. This realization has led to the initiation of several cultural heritage tourism efforts and a robust downtown revitalization program that is transforming Southwest Virginia and its small towns into a national and international tourism destination. Based on the unique music and craft traditions of the region and on the magnificent outdoor recreation assets of the area, Southwest Virginia has seen tremendous growth in tourism over the past fifteen-plus years. This has resulted in increased small business entrepreneurship leading to at least three new motels in the district and many new restaurants, bed and breakfast operations, convenience stores,




and other tourism-related businesses that greatly enhance the region's quality of life. A recent trend has been the creation of several breweries, distilleries and wineries in the District, greatly enhancing the region's quality of life. These new tourism-related businesses and jobs cannot be shipped to other states and other countries and do much to make the region more attractive to young people. Coupled with the availability of state-of-the-art broadband, both fiber and wireless 4G, the region's quality of life is tremendously improved and the ability to attract new jobs is greatly enhanced. There is a need for a more robust marketing effort to highlight these assets which are rarely found in America's rural areas. Additionally, CPPDC itself has worked to recruit a diverse staff of planners, project developers and economic development professionals.

While the District has been at the forefront of these various economic diversification efforts, other partners, such as the Virginia Coalfield Economic Development Authority, the Virginia Economic Development Partnership, the Southwest Virginia Workforce Development Board and our local IDAs, are the primary entities that market the District to new businesses. These organizations, under the banner of the e-Region, are focusing on advanced manufacturing, electronic information technology, energy, agriculture, higher education, emerging technologies, existing businesses, and enterprise (Made in the USA and Opportunity SWVA). The industry clusters for IT, energy and higher education are already well established and the potential for growth is great. The Crooked Road, 'Round the Mountain, Southwest Virginia Outdoors, the Southwest Virginia Cultural Heritage Foundation, Southwest Virginia Culture Center and MarketPlace, Heart of Appalachia Tourism Authority, the Virginia Tourism Corporation and our local tourism offices, are marketing the region's cultural heritage and outdoor recreation assets to the world with great success. The Virginia Coal Heritage Trail, the Spearhead Multi-Use Trail System, the TransAmerica Bike Trail, the Back of The Dragon Motorcycle Trail, the Haysi to the Breaks Trail and other trails are attracting tourists and will bring more in years to come. A major proposed trail, the Clinch

Mountain Trail, will be a world-class attraction. Southwest Virginia tourism revenue increases have led the state for the last few years.

New efforts in agriculture development and agritourism present significant opportunities to reinvigorate farming in the District, especially in the livestock arena. An Agricultural Strategic Plan for the Virginia Coalfield Economic Development Authority was completed in 2017 and is serving as the basis for new agriculture business development in the region. The demand for local, hormone-free and grass-finished beef, sheep and goats is encouraging more young farmers to start new enterprises in the District and has started conversation about a re-emphasis on agriculture education in the District's high schools to create interest in farming as an occupation that is growing. As of recently, Tazewell County's IDA was awarded \$979,000 through the Tobacco Commission to assist with the construction of a USDA Inspected meat processing facility in Tazewell County. This industry is in high demand for Virginia Farmers, as most have endured financial strains due to time constraints with processing. This project will add capacity and help to alleviate some of that strain for Virginia farmers.

Another new initiative led by the Thompson Foundation in Buchanan and Tazewell Counties is focusing on asset-based development in the areas of artisan and musicians, adventure and nature tourism and local agriculture and food. This effort to support economic diversification in these two coal counties is succeeding in bringing entrepreneurs and governmental leaders together. A recent initiative that originated out of this effort is the development of a major hiking trail linking the Appalachian Trail in Tazewell County to the Breaks Interstate Park in Buchanan County. Called the Burkes Garden to the Breaks Trail, it has the opportunity to add a significant link of the Appalachian Trail (AT) to the coalfields region. Another major trail project would link Pisgah in Tazewell County to the Channels in Russell County and on to the Brumley Mountain Trail. This 45-mile trail along Clinch Mountain will be a world-class destination for hiking tourists.



The PDC is participating in the newly-formed Southwest Virginia Solar Workgroup in efforts to develop both residential and utility-scale solar projects in Virginia's coalfields. The PDC Board has recently offered its support of state legislation to make shared solar programs available in Southwest Virginia. These programs can assist in industrial recruitment efforts in the District.

The District also partners with the Small Business Development Center (SBDC) and the Procurement Technical Assistance Center (PTAC) at Southwest Community College in the implementation of its Revolving Loan Fund (RLF). These programs support new business development as well as business expansion in the District.

All of these developments to promote economic development in the District and in Southwest Virginia have been supported by the CPPDC and its local governments. The growth in targeted business and industry clusters, especially in advanced manufacturing, is happening and the District's economy is more diversified. The challenge is to build on the successes and attract more IT, higher education, clean energy, advanced manufacturing and tourism jobs to the region, support a growing interest in agriculture and to further improve the economy and the quality of life in the District.

With the support of its many partners, the CPPDC will continue to provide leadership in promoting the economic development action plan set forth in this document that plots a path forward for economic resiliency that addresses the challenges and vulnerabilities of the District. By focusing on the current assets and opportunities identified in this CEDS Update, the region can overcome those challenges identified.

Regional Background

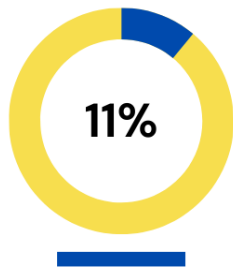
The Cumberland Plateau Planning District is in Southwest Virginia and encompasses the four member counties of Buchanan, Dickenson, Russell and Tazewell and their twelve towns, including Grundy, Clinchco, Clintwood, Haysi, Cleveland, Honaker, Lebanon, Cedar Bluff, Pocahontas, Richlands, Bluefield and Tazewell.

Geographically, the district lies within the Cumberland Plateau which is the southern portion of the great Appalachian Plateau. The region is composed of sedimentary rocks and natural resources like coal and gas of which our four-county district has been widely known for. Nestled in Virginia's coalfields, the district has also been very prosperous in agriculture and cattle farming. A large portion of the district's acreage, specifically through Russell and Tazewell counties, is privately owned farmland.

Southwest Virginia is also known as “four season” country and is described by Virginia Tourism as a “goldilocks climate” – not too hot and not too cold. The region's unique climate allows for snowy winters, rainy springs, humid summers and a cool, crisp fall. The district welcomes many visitors year-round to experience the beauty of the outdoors in every season.

However, the mountainous terrain can pose a challenge for economic development. Our natural topography leaves little developable land to create industrial business sites, housing developments, retail space, etc., making marketing efforts for the area sometimes difficult. While Virginia's coalfields are largely insulated from natural disaster conditions, flash floods, as well as occasional large snowfall events, can cause transportation and workforce issues. Due to these geographical and climate-related hurdles, achieving effective economic diversification can be a tall order for the region.

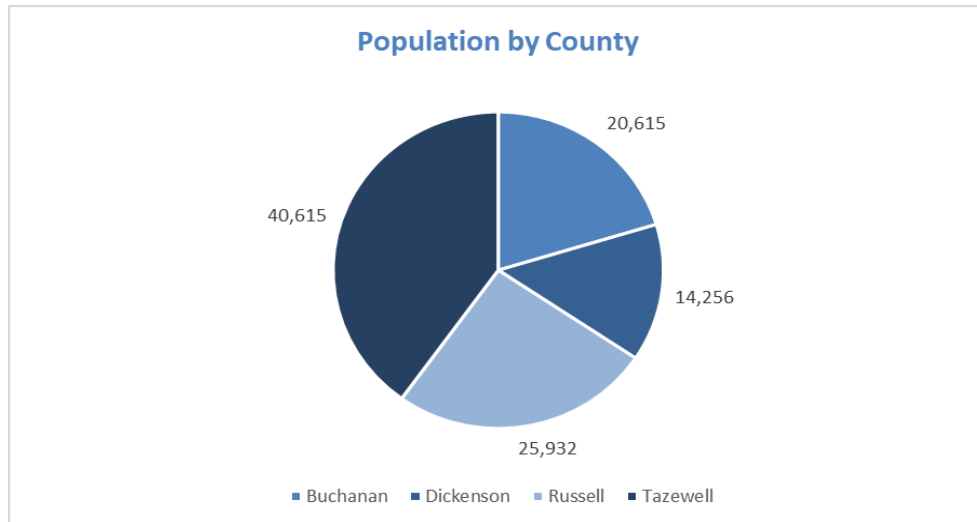
Population in the four-county district has experienced a steady decline for years.



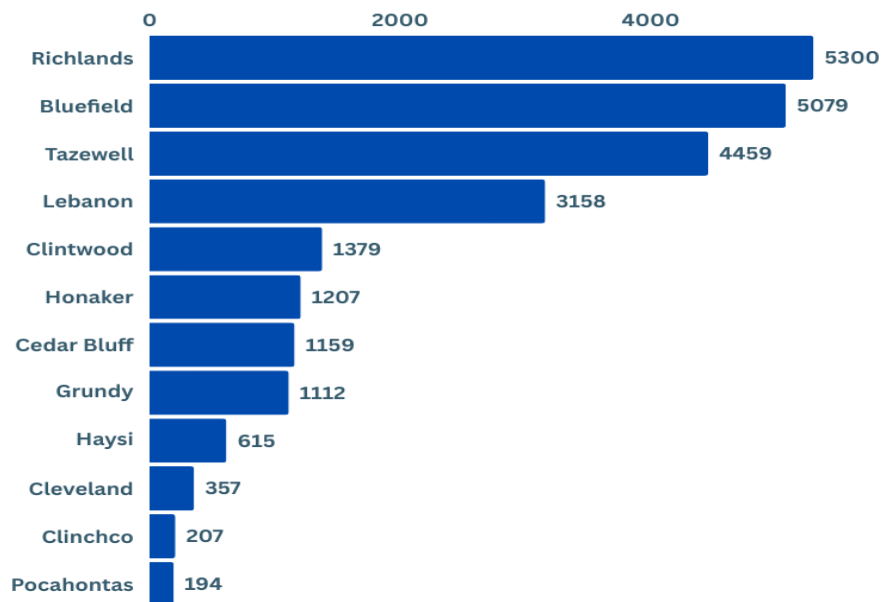
Total population loss for CPPDC District between 2010-2021

Between 2010 and 2021, the population in the District decreased 11.01 percent, declining from 113,976 to 101,418.

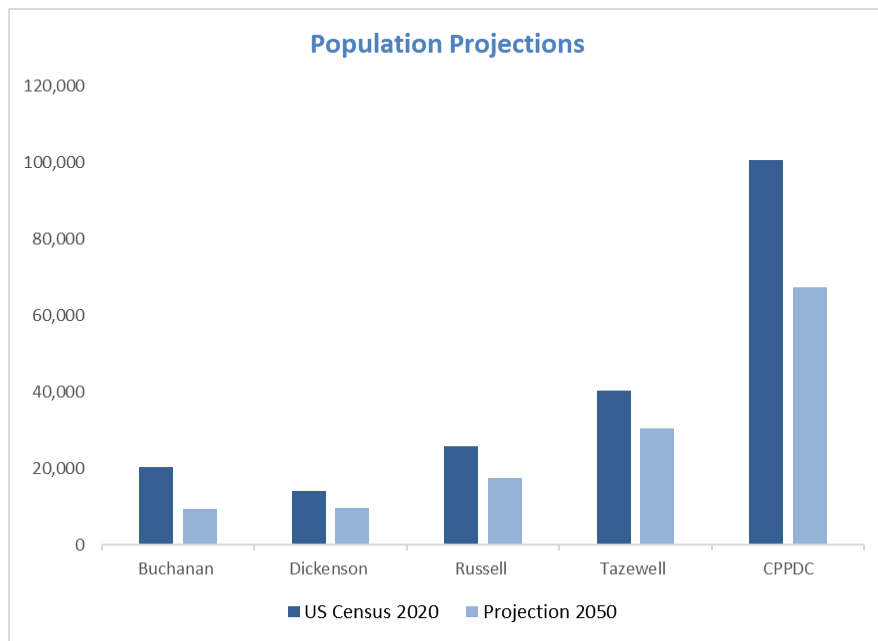
Russell and Tazewell counties had the lowest decline rates recorded with Russell County falling by 10.26 percent and Tazewell County declining by 9.90 percent. During that same timeframe, Dickenson County saw a 10.35 percent decline, while Buchanan County’s population fell by 14.45 percent.



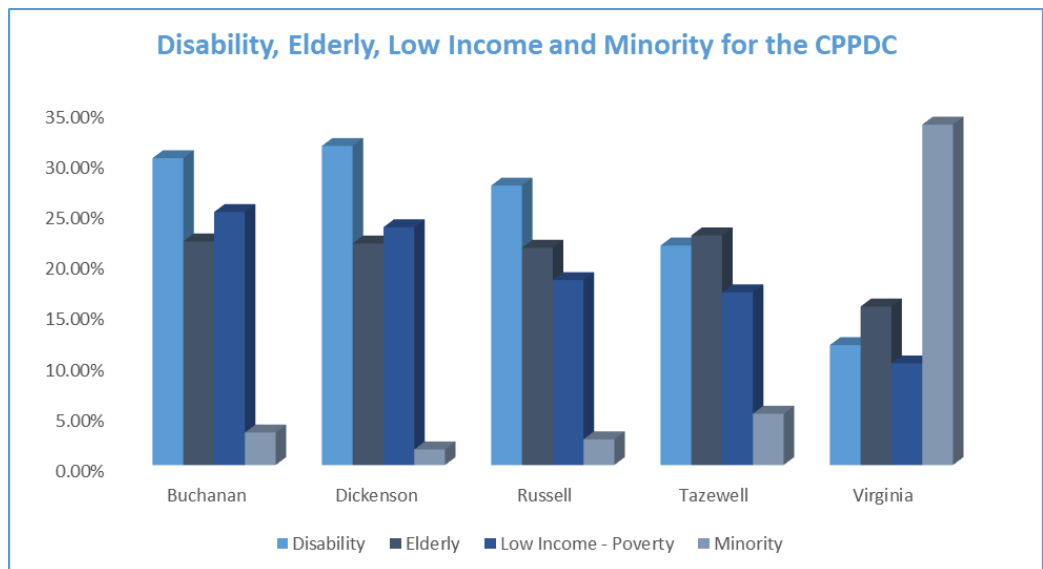
Population by Town (2021)



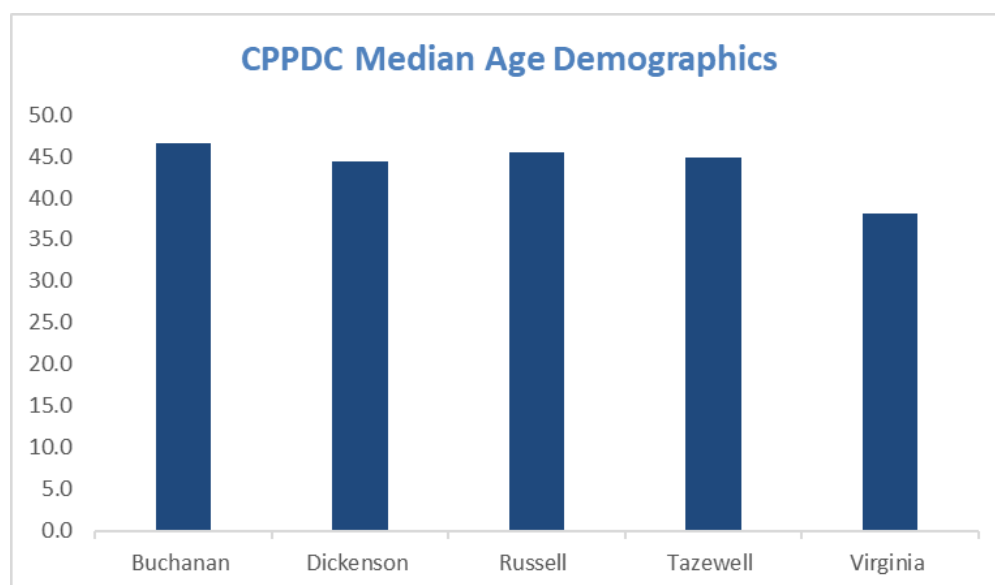
Projections by the University of Virginia Weldon Cooper Center show that the population in all four counties will continue to decline through 2050. The projection shows that by 2050 the Cumberland Plateau Planning District will see a decrease of 33% in population from the year 2020. The decline in the mining industry has contributed to this decline and a much stronger economic recovery will be needed to reverse the population counts and economic trends of the past.



According to the US Census Bureau the Cumberland Plateau PDC has an average of 27.68% of its population that have a disability, 21.95% that are elderly, 20.88% that are low income and 3.08% that are minority. In comparison, Virginia has 11.80% that have a disability, 15.60% that are elderly, 10% that are low income and 33.50% that are minority.



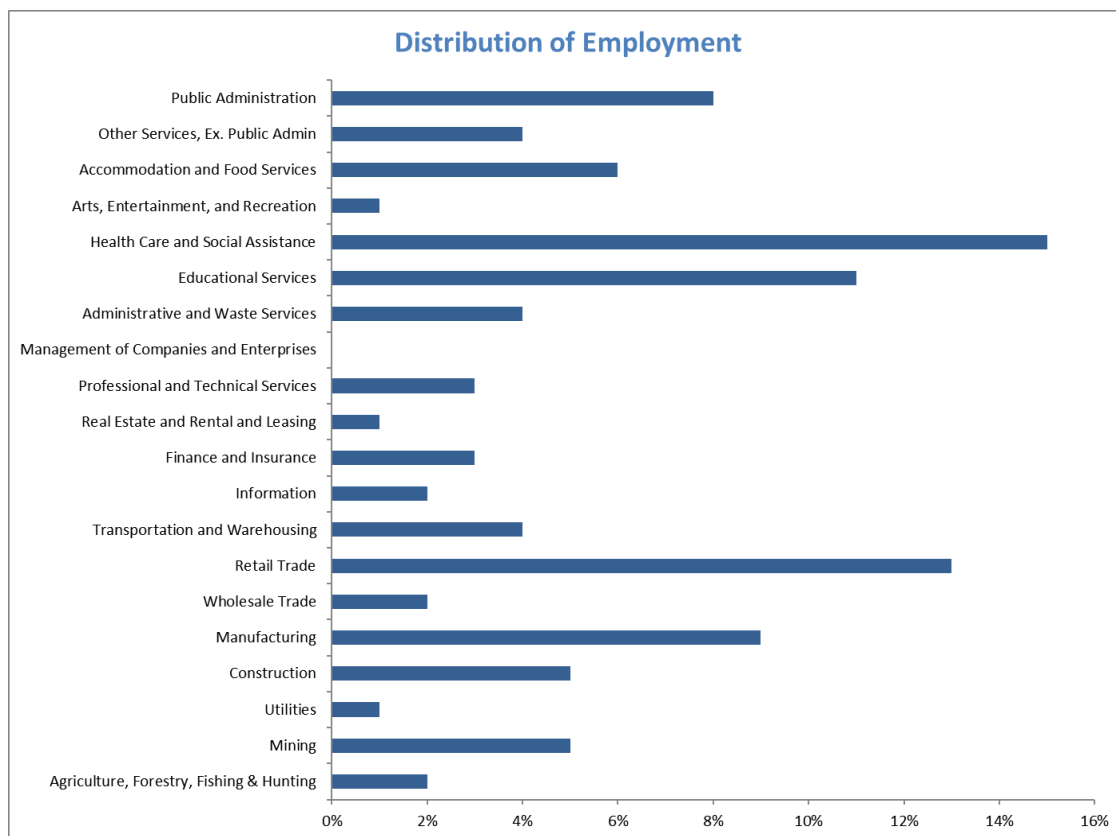
Age is another characteristic that differs significantly from the State's population statistics. The populations of all four counties are slightly older on average than that of the State, with median ages of 46.5 (Buchanan), 44.3 (Dickenson), 45.4 (Russell) and 44.9 (Tazewell) respectively, in comparison to 38.1 for the State between 2017-2021. Much of the younger generation has steadily relocated out of the region due to quality and quantity of jobs available, housing, wages, and quality of life infrastructure needs.



In 2022, unemployment was less in all counties compared to 2021. Buchanan County was at 4.7 percent, Dickenson County was at 4.4 percent, Russell County was at 3.6 percent and Tazewell County was at 4.2 percent. In comparison, Virginia's unemployment rate in 2022 was 2.9 percent and the Cumberland Plateau Planning District as a whole posted a rate of 4.1 percent.

Employment by industry data shows that the largest percentages of employment in the four county area are in healthcare, retail trade, entrepreneurship, and educational services. The percent of employment in mining was appreciably smaller in Russell County (4.0 percent) and Tazewell County (3.0 percent) than it was in Buchanan County (10.0 percent), or Dickenson County (9.0 percent) reiterating the relative

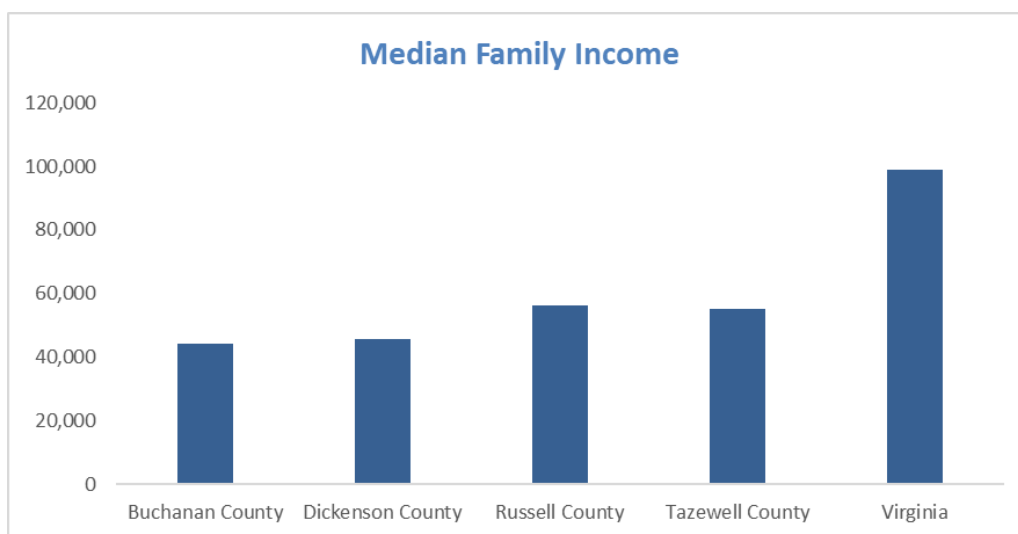
diversity of the economies in Tazewell and Russell as opposed to the other two counties. The figures for mining employment in 2021 are considerably smaller than they were in 2010 in all four counties due to the continued downturn in coal production.



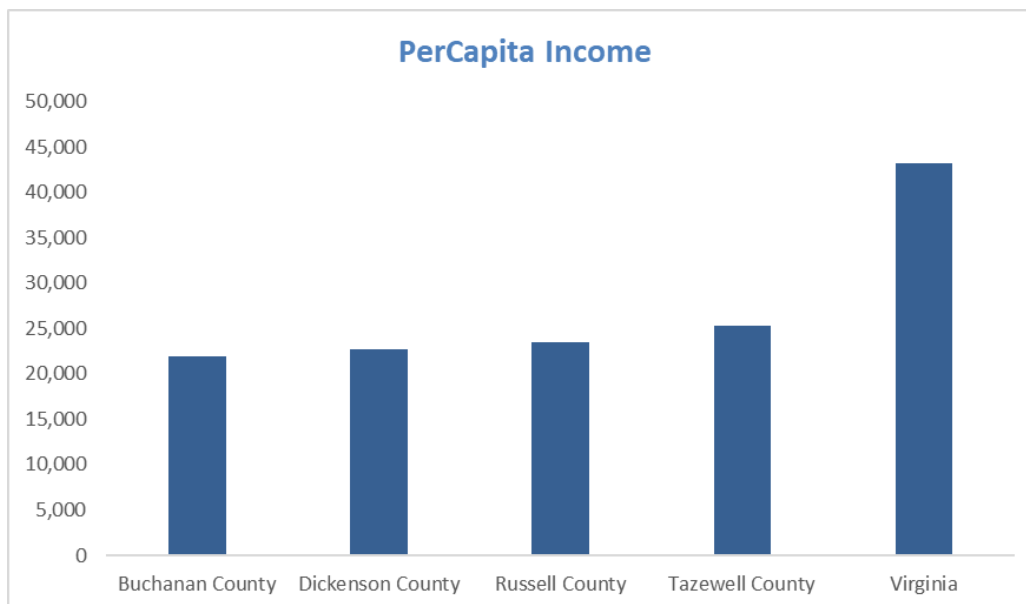
With the cyclical nature of the coal industry, the development of more educational and vocational training will be vital in addressing segments of the active labor force that may be furloughed.

Population bleed throughout the four counties can also be attributed to lower wages and income throughout the district. The CPPDC footprint continues to lag behind the median family income for the State of Virginia. While the median family income in Buchanan, Dickenson, Russell and Tazewell counties increased by 20.43, 34.40, 31.92, and 27.06 percent, respectively, between 2010 and 2021, the State increased by 34.35 percent.

Even though the counties increased in median family income at a significant rate, there is still a great disparity with the State on the actual dollar amounts of the median family incomes. Average Median Family Income in the 2017-2021 period for the four counties of the planning district was \$50,401 compared to \$98,771 for the state of Virginia.



The same trend holds for per capita income. From 2010 to 2017-2021, average per capita income increased by 31.25% in Buchanan County, 39.56% in Dickenson County, 31.44% in Russell County and 33.13% in Tazewell County. State per capita income increased by 34.59% for the same period. The counties of the planning district have grown at a rate comparable to the state, but the per capita income differential between Virginia (\$43,267) and the District average of \$23,388 is still very large.



The District has one of the most robust telecommunications networks of any rural area in America. Built by the Cumberland Plateau Company in conjunction with Bristol Virginia Utilities Authority, Virginia Coalfield Economic Development Authority, the Virginia Coalfield Coalition and Scott County Telephone Cooperative, the broadband infrastructure and wireless network now in place provides a critically important tool in the District's economic development toolbox. An aggressive effort with a new operating partner, Point Broadband, to grow residential services in the District is underway with anticipated completion in late 2024.

The district is tourism heavy with numerous outdoor recreation and cultural heritage tourism assets throughout the four county-region. These assets are being aggressively marketed through several regional initiatives, including the Southwest Virginia Cultural Heritage Foundation and the Friends of Southwest Virginia, Heart of Appalachia Tourism Authority and County Tourism Offices. As the umbrella organization for the Crooked Road: Virginia's Heritage Music Trail, 'Round the Mountain': Southwest Virginia's Artisan Network, and Southwest Virginia's Outdoor Recreation Initiative, the Friends of Southwest Virginia promotes the 19 counties and four cities of Southwest Virginia to national and international tourists. This effort has brought the region to near the top of Virginia's tourism destinations.

Likewise, Heart of Appalachia promotes the seven-county and one-city area that defines Virginia's coalfields, including the four CPPDC member counties.



Much work lies ahead on the region's most significant new outdoor recreation initiative, the Clinch River State Park. Once developed, Clinch River State Park will highlight the Clinch River's natural, historical and recreational resources.


It will be the first blueway state park in Virginia, consisting of several smaller (250-400 acres) anchor properties connected by multiple canoe/kayak access points along a 100-mile stretch of the Clinch River.

Another regional organization, Spearhead Trails, is focused on the development of a multi-use trail system in Virginia's coalfield counties. Of special importance is the development of an ATV trail system similar to the Hatfield-McCoy Trail in West Virginia. This trail has recently prompted an increase in tourism and economic development in the region.



All of the District's counties have access to Breaks Interstate Park which is located on the Virginia-Kentucky border with most of the Park's 4,500 acres falling within Dickenson County. The Park boasts the largest canyon east of the Mississippi, carved out by the Russell Fork River, and nicknamed the "Grand Canyon of the South." While only a small portion of The Breaks Park is located in Buchanan County, there is major cooperative effort between the Park and Buchanan County supporting the management of the only elk herd in Virginia. The herd thrives on abandoned mine land in Buchanan County, and The Breaks sponsors bus tours to observe the elk. This effort is drawing tourists to the District in significant numbers.

Another significant outdoor recreation site in Dickenson County is the John W. Flannagan Dam and Reservoir which is located five miles from Haysi on the Pound River, a tributary of the Russell Fork River. Visitors to the Reservoir enjoy opportunities to participate in outdoor activities such as picnicking, hiking, camping, swimming, fishing, boating and paddleboarding. The lake is a well-known small-mouth bass and walleye fishing venue.



White water rafting and kayaking are additional activities offered on a seasonal basis on the Russell Fork River below the Flannagan Dam. During October of each year, whitewater enthusiasts from all over the world come to Dickenson County to enjoy one of the best whitewater experiences in North America. Estimates of the regional economic impact of a 21-day rafting season on the Gauley River in West Virginia--\$16.8 million in total direct and indirect revenues-- provide strong incentive for pursuing the development of rafting and related tourist industries in the area around the Flannagan Dam. Efforts are being made to increase the number of releases from the Dam in the Fall to expand the length of the whitewater season. Another major effort is the development of a hiking/biking trail from the Town of Haysi along the Russell Fork and into the Breaks Gorge. The trail will have international appeal.

The four counties in the District share access to Jefferson National Forest, a 690,000 acre forest located in Southwest Virginia. Dickenson, Russell and Tazewell Counties claim small portions of this forest's huge acreage and its many recreational attractions. Jefferson National Forest has received media attention for becoming the nation's first forest to actively promote tourism rather than simply waiting for people to ask for information. This bodes well for the District and Southwest Virginia as many world-class outdoor recreation assets are located in the region. In the District, in addition to the aforementioned Breaks Park, John Flannagan Reservoir and Jefferson National Forest, The Channels State Forest, Brumley Mountain Trail, Laurel Bed Lake, the Clinch Mountain Wildlife Management Area, the Appalachian Trail and Burkes Garden are all located along Clinch Mountain on the District's southern border. In addition, many world-class assets, including the Pinnacle Natural Area Preserve and the Cleveland Barrens are associated with the Clinch River, North America's most biodiverse river, which runs through Russell and Tazewell counties.

The District is also rich in historical sites, including the Historic Crab Orchard Museum and Pioneer Park located on 110 acres of land near Tazewell and designated as a prehistoric and historic site by the Virginia Division of Historic Landmarks and the National Register of Historic Places. The Museum presents the history of Tazewell County and Southwest Virginia from 570 million years ago to the present time. Other sites of historic interest in the District include: The Town of Pocahontas, which has been placed on the Virginia Register and the National Register as a historic preservation zone; the Old Russell County Courthouse, designated as a Virginia historic landmark and placed on the State Register; Honaker Historic Downtown District, and the Cedar Bluff Roller Mills, placed on both the State and National Registers for historic places. The Ralph Stanley Museum and Traditional Mountain Music Center in Clintwood is one of the major venues on “The Crooked Road” Music Trail that attracts thousands of cultural heritage tourists to the Southwest Virginia region. Numerous affiliated venues of The Crooked Road are located throughout the District, and all four counties are on Artisan Trails sponsored by ‘Round the Mountain.

District SWOT Analysis

The Cumberland Plateau Planning District has been widely known for our coal and gas production. Economic Development has been challenging as production for these industries and their supportive businesses have declined. The decline has caused a domino effect handcuffing displaced workers from the coal industry that were unable to find a new trade or skill set, and by also creating a generational age gap within the workforce as children and family members of those working in our once iconic industries have either moved on to new trades and careers that are not prominent in our region, or possibly suffer a loss of educational training due to their economic status from the downturn of coal and natural gas production.

Industry automation combined with cyclical market conditions make the employment base in this sector quite volatile. Between 2012-2022, the mining sector in Virginia decreased by some 4,000 total jobs, according to statistics reported by the Virginia

STRENGTHS

- **Natural Assets**, i.e. Clinch River, Breaks Interstate Park, Burkes Garden, Cleveland Barrens
- **Local, Regional and State support for diversification efforts**
- **Robust Broadband and Wireless 4G Network**
- **Low Cost of Living**
- **Quality higher education and workforce training opportunities**, i.e. Bluefield University, Southwest Virginia Community College, Appalachian School of Law, Appalachian School of Pharmacy, UVA- Wise, various vocational schools
- **Appalachian cultural heritage, music, and crafts**
- **Outdoor recreational activities to support tourism development**
- **Friendly and welcoming communities**
- **4- lane highway transportation in 3 member counties**

WEAKNESSES

- **Mountainous terrain**
 - Transportation challenges
- **Quality of life Ecosystems**
- **Lack of sewer infrastructure in some areas across the district**
- **Lack of investment capital**
- **No Interstate Highway**
 - Supply chain access
- **Demographics challenges**
 - Population loss
 - Aging population
- **Opioid epidemic**
 - Generational age gap related to workforce
 - lack of treatment facilities

OPPORTUNITIES

- **Partnership collaboration for new and expanding regional efforts**
 - Agriculture Workgroup, Solar Workgroup, Cumberland Plateau Industrial Facilities Authority
- **Expensive marketing efforts in the region to showcase regional assets**
- **New and expanding workforce efforts**
 - advanced manufacturing, agriculture, telecommunications, alternative energy, small business/ entrepreneurship, and outdoor recreation
- **Continued efforts with the Coalfield Expressway**
- **Take advantage of federal funding specifically targeting rural America to attract new investment in the region**
- **AI Technologies**

THREATS

- **Inadequate public transportation**
- **Lack of available and affordable housing**
- **Lack of developable land to support site development for industries and housing developers**
- **lack of quality healthcare providers**
- **Population loss and demographic hurdles (i.e. loss of younger generation) that negatively impact local government budgets and K-12 resources**
- **Lack of technology workforce specialists and resources**
- **Lack of skilled tradesman in the district- causing a disruption in infrastructure and development projects**
- **Opioid issue affecting workforce numbers**

Employment Commission. In addition to direct employment, coal and natural gas severance taxes represent vital budgetary sources for our local governments, many of which rely on these corporate taxes to fund basic services such as police and fire departments, garbage collection, etc. Based on these budgetary numbers, The Appalachian Regional Commission has categorized Buchanan and Dickenson Counties as “distressed” and Tazewell and Russell counties as “at risk” therefore creating a less desired region for those looking to invest.

However, the Cumberland Plateau Planning District Commission strives to promote collaboration and active partnerships, working to solve problems through regional thinking. Despite the challenges notated in our SWOT diagram, the Cumberland Plateau Planning District CEDS Committee is committed to leaning into our known assets and strengths such as our uniquely-positioned, world class tourism assets and our robust Broadband and wireless 4G Network to start thinking outside the box to find meaningful ways to spur new private business investment through telecommunications, advanced manufacturing, clean energy, agriculture, and healthcare.

Strategic Goals/Objectives

The vision statement developed by the CPPDC takes into consideration the strategic direction of where the District wants to go. The goals and objectives plot the course for how to get there.

The Cumberland Plateau Planning District Commission envisions:

A future in which all units of government and other public and private institutions work together toward the creation of a vibrant regional economy which will attract and support a wide diversity of economic and community development opportunities, providing meaningful jobs and a high quality of life to benefit the district's citizens.

The goals and objectives were developed collaboratively between CPPDC staff and the CEDS Committee. The Executive Director and the Economic Director of the CPPDC realigned the CEDS Committee to include a more inclusive and diverse group for broader insight and perspective. More than half of the committee is female or from a minority group. The committee also has representatives from each member county and represents various development sectors that pertain to our projects and goals for the region including, tourism, healthcare, transportation, workforce, etc. ([CEDS Committee](#))

Other regional organizations' economic development plans were taken into account as well as the 2022 CPPDC Roadmap to Economic Resiliency planning document, the 2023 Tele-pharmacy Strategic Plan, and the upcoming 2024 CPPDC Regional Housing Needs Assessment. These planning documents play a large role in goal-setting for both the economic development staff and planning staff. Goals and objectives were set based on activities and projects already underway, the new opportunities available, and the impact each goal and objective would have on addressing economic development needs in the District.

CPPDC Planning and Development Goals

Economic Development

Focusing on strengthening our region through quality of life infrastructure for community development, job creation and job retention. Work with local governments to foster new and expanding business, especially in the target industries of information technology (cyber security, remote technology services, etc.), advanced manufacturing (battery production), agriculture and aquaculture.

Tourism

Work closely with tourism partners and member counties to assist in development of new parks and recreational facilities, as well as work on revitalization efforts to existing parks and recreational activities to attract more tourists. Continue to promote our natural assets in outdoor recreation with marketing and projects that are centered around hiking, biking, white water rafting, fishing, hunting, rock climbing, and ATV trail riding . Work with our local communities in support of tourism infrastructure facilities, such as hotels, breweries, distilleries, wineries, restaurants, campgrounds, shooting complexes, etc., as well as focusing on hospitality industry efforts to better serve the local and traveling public.

Telecommunications

Address the challenges throughout the District with broadband and wireless services for residents, businesses, industries, and institutions through the regionally- owned CPC/Point Broadband Network. Continue communicating with Verizon and Old Dominion Power/ Kentucky Utilities through the Virginia Telecommunications Initiative on securing connection throughout the region.

Workforce Development and Education

Work to provide a highly trained workforce by partnering with K-12 public schools, vocational schools, and our regional higher education facilities to encourage and incentivize students to utilize their knowledge and talents here in Southwest Virginia. Support the SWVA Workforce organizations in assisting those who have been displaced due to the closure of coal and gas manufacturers or related to the opioid/drug problems. Create new workforce and entrepreneurship opportunities through the use of broadband/ wireless internet.

Housing

Support the expansion of the range of housing opportunities and options for all District citizens, primarily targeting affordable family homes, townhomes, and retirement homes. Work alongside the Cumberland Plateau Regional Housing Authority and other regional organizations for strategy and planning.

Infrastructure Development

Working toward the goal of sparking new development through quality of life improvements, specifically aiming to provide public water and sewer services, broadband and wireless communications, and roadway construction and development. Partner with regional organizations to market toward industrial, commercial, and residential development, as well as market available properties for new mega sites in advanced manufacturing.

Transportation

Encourage the continued development of a transportation network, especially the Coalfields Expressway and Rt. 80, as well as public transportation that will enhance highway safety and provide better access to the Districts downtowns, cultural heritage and outdoor recreational spaces, and industrial sites. Create alternative transportation options, such as e-bikes, to support regional bike trails. Work with local community airports to develop industrial/commercial sites adjacent to those airports.

Entrepreneurship and Small Business Development

Work with local district EDD's , IDA/EDA, and area chambers to ensure small business owners and entrepreneurs are supported with business planning and strategy, financial literacy, marketing, etc. Work with localities to market small business development, especially for the development in the District's downtowns, through the Cumberland Plateau Revolving Loan Fund, the VCEDA Seed Capital Fund, Opportunity Southwest Virginia, the technical assistance programs of the SBDC and PTAC and other business development programs.

Health and Substance Abuse

Develop and support the expansion of quality medical care throughout the region, specifically targeting diverse medical modalities and physicians in the areas of pediatrics, cardiology, oncology, orthopedics, and respiratory. Develop and support programs through schools, clinics, and organizations that better serve families, veterans, and those fighting substance abuse. Work to address the needs of mental health of the region's citizens and its workforce. Support the establishment of residential drug treatment facilities, specifically Wildwood Recovery Center in Dickenson County, as well as Veterans Clinics to support the health needs of the veterans community. Utilize broadband and wireless 4G network to introduce tele-health options to the District.

Physical Environment

Create a live, work, play environment through encouraging the achievement of a healthful, pleasing and efficient physical environment which encompasses a diversity of living patterns and provides for a broad range of choice for each citizen. Promote the revitalization of the District's downtowns and community centers.

Agriculture and Non-Timber Forest Products

Support and work to enhance and grow the local Agribusiness sector through the forestry, agriculture and non-timber industries, especially in the areas of produce, livestock, bee pollination, wood products (alternative fuels from wood chips), agri-technology (aquaculture), green house, as well as carbon capture and storage.

Asset- Based Development

Create quality jobs to build sustainable local economies through the support of value-added businesses and asset-based development strategies, especially in the areas of cultural and natural heritage tourism (music, history and craft) and outdoor recreation (trails, campgrounds, etc.).

Natural Resources

Support and promote the use of local natural resources, such as coal, natural gas and timber. Encourage natural resource development using clean coal technology, alternative energy and hydro-electric technologies that will create the most jobs while protecting the natural environment. Support the development of pump storage, aviation biofuel, and solar energy projects.

Regional Collaboration

Continue building and expanding on District partnerships and collaborations to ensure SWVA growth and opportunity within the coalfields. Prioritize commitments with programs and events such as the GO Virginia program, the SWVA Regional Economic Development Forum, the NAcO Building Resilient Economies in Coal Communities program (BRECC) and the SWVA Celebrate Tourism Summit, etc.

CPPDC Planning and Development Objectives

1. Work with regional and local entities to create one large mega-site (200+ acres) for industrial growth in the District's Coalfields region, and support local, regional and state investments into site development and industrial shell building construction throughout the District
2. Work with regional and local partners to create and/or maintain a minimum of one thousand (1,000) jobs over the next five (5) year period.
3. Develop new and/or promote existing business and technology parks of at least one hundred acres in Buchanan, Dickenson, Russell, and Tazewell Counties.
4. Continue to work with Federal and State Agencies to plan and develop water and sewer projects that are essential to future economic growth. The availability of sewer should increase by a minimum of ten percent over the next five (5) years.

5. Work with local governments, school boards, Virginia Coalfield Economic Development Authority, Southwest Virginia Cultural Heritage Foundation and other organizations to develop sustainable development programs in the areas of agriculture (produce and livestock), aquaculture and nature tourism.
6. Encourage the completion of the Coalfields Expressway, which links the District to I-77 and U.S. 23, U.S. R. 460 and other Smart Scale projects. Work to improve State Route 80 to the Breaks Interstate Park, as well as Rt. 83 at Lover's Gap and Rt. 460. Also, other secondary highways in the Highway Safety Improvement Program. These projects will substantially improve the District's ability to foster tourism and industrial development growth.
7. Work to support the efforts of the Southwest Virginia Cultural Heritage Foundation, The Crooked Road, 'Round the Mountain, Southwest Virginia Outdoors, the Spearhead Trails, Coal Heritage Trail, and other outdoor recreation organizations to make Southwest Virginia a world-class destination for cultural heritage and outdoor recreational tourism. Work hard to support the continued development of the Haysi to Breaks Trail, and the development of the Burkes to Breaks Trail and the Clinch Mountain Trail as world-class tourism destinations.
8. Effectively use the WIOA and other training programs to upgrade and expand the work-force available to industry by providing customized training to meet the needs of individual industries. Support the development of workforce training facilities in the District and Southwest Virginia as part of the Centers of Excellence effort in advanced manufacturing.

9. Develop expanded business and industrial marketing programs targeted to the District and the Virginia Coalfields region. This will be accomplished in association with the Virginia Coalfield Economic Development Authority, the Virginia Tobacco Commission, Southwest Virginia Alliance for Manufacturing, local IDAs and other development partners.
10. Expand the Southwest Virginia Regional Broadband and Wireless Networks to bring universal Broadband infrastructure to the District using fiber and wireless technologies.
11. Support ongoing downtown revitalization projects in the District's 12 towns.
12. Work with GO Virginia and other agencies to address targeted economic and community development initiatives.
13. Work to support the development of the Clinch River State Park and a collaborative community development strategy for the towns and communities along the Clinch River through participation in the Clinch River Valley Initiative (CRVI).
14. Support continued improvements at the Breaks Interstate Park, The Pinnacle and The Channels Parks, as well as outdoor recreation infrastructure for future projects such as the Clinch Mountain Trail in all District communities.

Actionable Steps and Planning:

The Cumberland Plateau Planning District is a victim of economic dislocations in the coal mining industry. Since the turn of the 20th century, the District economy has relied on the coal industry to provide jobs for its people. The nature of the coal industry has always been one of “boom” or “bust”, thus creating an unstable economic base. Now that global market changes, regulatory issues and

competition from natural gas and renewables have dramatically impacted the coal industry in the district in an adverse way, it is essential that the CEDS Committee and the Planning District staff understand the changing structure of the District economy and identify the opportunities which are available if the District is to develop and implement an effective action plan for the future.

In looking at the goals and objectives derived from the SWOT analysis, the following projects are planned for the District in the coming year as projects that have the greatest potential to contribute to diversification of the District's economy. Many other projects that relate to ongoing maintenance and operation are not included here.

CPPDC 2024 Proposed Projects

Project	Description	Potential Funding	Location
Energy Storage & Electrification Manufacturing for Jobs	Advanced manufacturing project to promote battery manufacturing within the district.	EDA VCEDA Thompson Charitable ARC POWER GO Virginia	Buchanan Tazewell
Regional Housing Needs Assessment	Housing planning effort to assess affordable housing needs and develop corrective measures to address inventory.	VA Housing Local	District
Regional Broadband Project	Expansion of regional broadband and wireless network projects to achieve universal coverage.	VATI Point Broadband CPC	District

Project	Description	Potential Funding	Location
Telepharmacy Initiative Phase II	Phase II launch of tele-pharmacy initiative in partnership with Appalachian College of Pharmacy.	EDA ARC POWER GO VA	Buchanan Tazewell
Red Onion Industrial Park	Development of a large regional industrial park on the Dickenson and Wise county border.	VCEDA EDA Virginia Energy Private ARC	Dickenson
Southern Gap Industrial Park	Development of a 3200- acre site for industrial, commercial, and residential infrastructure.	ARC Virginia Energy CDBG GO Virginia EDA VCEDA	Buchanan
Breaks Regional Airport Infrastructure Project	Provide infrastructure to expand the airport for new business sites.	Virginia Energy CDBG ARC EDA other	Buchanan
Clinch Mountain Trail	Development of 30 mile hiking trail with connectivity to The Channels.	Ratcliffe Foundation EDA ARC Friends of SWVA	Russell Tazewell
Cavitt's Creek Park Development	Development of accessible trails and other recreational amenities as well as camping/lodging.	ARC EDA CPROP DCR Local	Tazewell County

Project	Description	Potential Funding	Location
Coalfields Pump Storage and Solar Project	Development of one pump storage facility with solar arrays on AML Lands.	Dominion Energy Virginia Energy Tobacco Commission VCEDA ARC	District
Dante Regional Sewer Project	Sewer line extension from Dante to St. Paul STP.	CDBG ARC Local	Russell
Honaker Welcome Center	Development of a welcome center for the TransAmerica bicycle trail.	CPROP Local	Russell
Buchanan County WasteWater Treatment Plant	Construction of a replacement waste water treatment plant for Buchanan County Sewer System.	EDA CDBG ARC DEQ Local	Buchanan
Southwest Virginia Regional Agriculture Industrial Park	Development of an industrial agriculture park to house a meat processing facility and other agriculture business.	VCEDA Tobacco Commission ARC GO Virginia CBDG AML	Region
Breaks Park WasteWater Treatment Plant	Relocation of waste water plant.	Virginia Energy ARC VCEDA CBDG	Dickenson
Project Reclaim	Development of a 232 acre megasite on reclaimed coal property.	AMLER Tobacco Commission ARC Virginia Energy Private	Russell County

Project	Description	Potential Funding	Location
Spearhead Trails	Multi-use trail system.	Thompson Charitable VCEDA GO Virginia ARC Power EDA	Region
Bluestone Business and Technology Center	Development of sites and infrastructure in the businessess and technology park.	EDA ARC CBDG VCEDA Tobacco Commission Local	Tazewell
Friends of SWVA Outdoor Recreation	Regional outdoor recreational initiatives.	Thompson Charitable CDBG ARC Power Local	Region
VA Dept. of Transportation SMART SCALE Project	Safety intersection study through VDOT and CPPDC Localities.	SMART SCALE ARC Local	District
Skilled Trades Workforce Development Center	Development of trade skill facility at the Education and Research Center for community and rehab facility focusing primarily on heavy equipment, plumbing, electrician, and construction.	EDA ARC Power Tobacco Commission	Dickenson
Project Planet Infrastructure	Site development and infrastructure for food service and multi-use facility at Southern Gap	EDA ARC CPROP Local	Buchanan

Project	Description	Potential Funding	Location
Substance Use Disorder Project	Rehab center development and expansion in collaboration with Addiction Recovery Cares (ARC)	VCEDA ARC EDA Local	Dickenson
Comprehensive Wireless Needs Assessment and Future Deployment	Comprehensive regional study that will identify remaining cellular deficits and set priorities for future cell tower development	VCC Tobacco Commission	Region
Laurel Bed Lake Access Development	Development of a new access road from Russell County to 330-acre lake property with significant tourism potential.	VCEDA CPROP Local	Russell County
Project Jonah	Critical infrastructure, including water, wastewater and natural gas, to support aquaculture projects adjacent to Southwest Virginia Community College.	VCEDA EDA ARC VDH Local	District
Haysi Industrial Site Development	Repurposing of the previous high school for an industrial site.	VCEDA ARC Virginia Energy Local	Dickenson County
Meat Processing	Construction of meat packing facility.	USDA Tobacco Commission VCEDA	Tazewell County
Three Rivers Pedestrian Bridge	Development of bridge/walkway connecting to Three Rivers Destination Center	Local VDOT Congressional Direct Spending (CDS)	Russell County

Evaluation Framework:

The Cumberland Plateau Planning District Commission staff, in collaboration with the CEDS Committee, local governments and other partners, will evaluate progress towards economic diversification as it relates to the CEDS Action Plan on an annual basis. This evaluation will quantify progress toward achieving the goals outlined in the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy based on number of jobs created, number of business locations and investments, number of jobs retained, amount of private sector investment, and significant changes in the region's economy. Such changes might include employment shifts from coal mining and related industries to advanced manufacturing, healthcare, and tourism. Groundwork for a sustainable future is being done, however, progress takes time.

In Virginia's coalfields, economic and community development is considered a team exercise. These processes will rely on the Virginia Coalfield Economic Development Authority, the Virginia Economic Development Partnership, the Virginia Coalfield Coalition, the Virginia Tobacco Commission, the Virginia Employment Commission, our local governments and IDA's and other agencies and organizations that track the effects of existing as well as new economic activities in determining which areas of our economic and development program might require additional attention.


Updates on progress being made on the Action Plan's top priority projects will be given at CEDS Committee meetings and PDC Board of Directors by staff. Should progress on any project be behind schedule, staff assignments will be given to identify problems and determine any alternative actions required to get the project back on schedule.

Evaluation will also include progress made on the CEDS goals and objective set forth in this Update. Success will depend greatly on the effectiveness of the various partners the District has engaged to address its strengths and weaknesses.

Economic Resilience:

The economy of the Cumberland Plateau Planning District has historically been largely a resource-based economy – timber, coal and agriculture. All of these sectors are subject to boom or bust cycles, resource depletion and/or market conditions. Having been tasked with addressing the need for economic diversification, the CPPDC staff has worked with its local, regional, state and federal partners to support numerous economic diversification efforts that fall into the category of steady-state initiatives. The impacts of these initiatives, which have included partnerships in alternative energy projects, deployment of a robust broadband and wireless 4G infrastructure network, as well as several asset-based initiatives in cultural heritage and outdoor recreation tourism and sustainable agriculture, have somewhat mitigated the recent dramatic losses in coal and coal-related employment in the District.

These positive diversification initiatives are a result of planning efforts with a multitude of partners, including local, regional, state and federal agencies and organizations as well as many non-profit and private entities. No stone is left unturned in efforts to fund such transformative initiatives. Most recently, the PDC is partnering with the Thompson Foundation in an economic diversification initiative in Buchanan and Tazewell Counties that is focusing on local assets, particularly trail development. All of the asset-based initiatives in the region have built on unique local and regional cultural and natural assets that can't be shipped overseas. And the broadband and wireless network was funded through federal funding partners (EDA and NTIA), state partners, (the Virginia Tobacco Commission and the Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development), regional partners (Virginia Coalfield Economic Development Authority) and private carrier partners. This robust telecommunications network provides the redundancy that past, current and future network customers such as Northrup Grumman and CGI require in support of their business needs and employment of hundreds of people in the District. Significant efforts are being made to expand broadband deployment focusing on residential connections. Major progress was made



between 2020-2023 with over 9,000 new connections made in partnership with Point Broadband, the private company that operates the Cumberland Plateau Broadband System. Two major VATI applications for state funding were approved in 2021 and 2022 that will serve nearly 15,000 passings by the end of 2024.

The CPPDC has spent and continues to spend significant staff time in support of business retention and expansion programs targeted at downtown revitalization and entrepreneurship. For example, the Cumberland Plateau Planning District Commission is among the first cohort in the Building Resilient Economic Coal Communities (BRECC) Action Challenge through NaCO and EDA. The CPPDC Action Challenge Team made up of regional stakeholders, will present to federal partners in February 2024, the *Cumberland Plateau Entrepreneurship Innovation Strategy*, a planning strategy that will assist in promoting wealth replacement/growth in local entrepreneurial efforts, promote government sector table-setting efforts that support new small business investments through facility acquisition and reuse, infrastructure improvements and recyclable concept plans that can be deployed in any number of our communities, and to explore why existing businesses that provide needed community amenities often close their doors, and what can be done to prevent it. Currently, at least 9 of the District's 12 towns, as well as about 20 others in the region, have completed or are currently engaging in downtown revitalization construction projects to enhance their downtown communities by creating attractive locations for new and expanding businesses to increase consumer traffic and revenues.

These planning efforts are economic drivers for regional collaboration in Southwest Virginia involving 19 counties, 54 towns and four cities to promote national and international outdoor recreation tourism excitement while also highlighting the small town vibe based on our unique music and craft traditions of the region.



In 2022, stated by The Virginia Tourism Corporation (VTC), Virginia's tourism industry generated \$30.3 billion in visitor spending, an increase of 20.3% from 2021, exceeding 2019 spending by 4.4%. Dramatic increases in tourism and tourism-related tax revenues within the District, the region, and the State prove that planning strategies in this sector are working.

The staff of the District is working in support of recent efforts to build a resilient workforce, a difficult challenge in light of the large numbers of dislocated industry workers, the lack of childcare, the lack of transportation, and scarce opportunity for meaningful employment and high wage positions in the region. Several workforce initiatives hold promise, including at least two POWER-funded programs that run through the Virginia Community College system and regional workforce agencies. Another effort, the Centers of Excellence, which is funded by the Virginia Tobacco Commission, is focusing on transferable skill sets from mining employment to advanced manufacturing. A satellite training facility in Tazewell County is targeting credentialing in advanced welding, for example. An aquaculture facility funded by EDA, ARC, VDH, and others is in development phase to produce fresh farm salmon on the Tazewell and Russell County border. This will be the world's largest vertically integrated indoor aquaculture facility and will produce 200+ jobs for the district.

In addition, the CPPDC staff recently completed its District Hazard Mitigation Plan Update which identified and prioritized potential hazards that can likely impact District localities and developed a risk assessment targeted to the high and medium-high hazard classifications. This plan identifies and builds support for mitigation activities and incorporates them into post-disaster recovery activities. In response, some District localities have initiated pre-disaster planning activities. All District counties and towns have approved the latest update.

Planning For and Implementing Resilience

The Cumberland Plateau CEDS Committee in conjunction with PDC staff, local, regional, state and federal economic development agencies, as well as community development professionals, has plotted a course to economic resiliency through a robust economic diversification effort. With the sobering realization that the coal, timber and tobacco industries were in decline, this effort began years ago and has evolved through a thoughtful progression of infrastructure development and asset-based strategies.

The CEDS Committee has identified the major economic challenges of the District in the previous SWOT analysis section and developed Goals and Objectives and actions to address vulnerabilities in support of the District's long-term recovery. The mountainous terrain and high costs of infrastructure, transportation and site development steered the PDC staff about 15 years ago to take an active role in broadband deployment and cultural heritage and outdoor recreation tourism development. These initiatives support the significant downtown revitalization projects in the District which provide attractive, low-cost alternatives for small businesses to locate and expand.

A robust entrepreneurship initiative, Opportunity SWVA, of which the CPPDC is a Steering Team member, is providing training and challenge incentives for new business development.

These initiatives have led to a broader regional approach to economic development in the 54-town, four-city region of Southwest Virginia which includes four EDDs. A branding initiative was recently completed, and, for the first time, Southwest Virginia has a unified presence in the Virginia Travel Guide issued each year by the Virginia Tourism Corporation. This collaborative approach to marketing Southwest Virginia's unique music, craft and outdoor recreation assets to the world is paying significant dividends. These marketing approaches hope to make the region and its communities more attractive to a younger and more diverse population who are looking for more tele-work opportunities. With the implementation of our world-class broadband and wireless network, we are reversing the brain drain and improving the demographics of

our workforce. All of this is building economic resilience in the District and in Southwest Virginia and supports job creation opportunities in all economic sectors.

Establishing Information Networks

The CPPDC serves as a source of information to deal with economic challenges through its website and the inclusion of our CEDS and a wealth of Census data on the website. The CPPDC, along with its sister PDCs in the region and state, acts as a convener of the region's stakeholders to discuss and react to economic and community development challenges.

A good example is the role that the CPPDC is taking to expand the dialogue about alternative energy opportunities in solar and pump storage. Another example is the role of the states' PDCs in convening numerous stakeholders, public and private, in implementing GO Virginia, the state's newest initiative to address Virginia's loss of defense-related jobs and jobs in other sectors. A state council headed by private sector representatives, as well as legislative and Administration appointees, has designated nine regions across the state and has tasked each region to form a council to implement the program. The goal is to incentivize collaboration in job creation and governmental efficiency activities to bring back Virginia's status as the number one state for business in the country.

The Cumberland Plateau, LENOWISCO and Mt. Rogers PDCs are very involved in this effort in our three Planning Districts which make up Region One in the GO Virginia structure. The Cumberland Plateau Executive Director is a member of the GO VA Region Board. The coalfields region of Virginia has faced many economic challenges since the turn of the 20th Century, but most especially since mechanization allowed coal companies to mine coal with far fewer coal miners. This led to mass out migration in the 1950's to the industrialized cities of the North and Midwest. Overcoming the topographic and access challenges that our remote, mountainous location poses has not


been easy. But we now have effective strategies that can provide for a prosperous way forward.

Climate Resiliency and Pre-Disaster Recovery Planning

The Cumberland Plateau member counties have experienced alarming weather disruptions throughout the years. The region can identify, utilizing The District's Hazard Mitigation Plan and the Covid-19 Implementation Plan from the 2022 CEDS document, that the main natural threats are flooding, winter storms, wildfires and landslides, with flooding the only one posing a high hazard level. The District's terrain increases the likelihood of our counties experiencing severe flooding disasters in various parts of the year. The CPPDC serves very rural, vulnerable and distressed communities, which can result in challenging recovery efforts following these extreme conditions.

Flooding is not new to the coalfields region. In fact, efforts have already been underway throughout the District to relocate areas directly affected by flooding. The Town of Grundy in Buchanan County moved its entire downtown district to a new site out of the floodplain. Following the completion of that project, Buchanan County has continued to advance additional Army Corps of Engineers flood proofing efforts, including an in-progress initiative to address a number of Vansant-area structures eligible for elevation or removal. Other significant relocation and mitigation activities have been implemented in the Town of Bluefield in Tazewell County and the Town of Cleveland in Russell County. A major Army Corps of Engineers project in Dickenson County resulted in the consolidation of multiple schools to new locations out of the floodplain.

Buchanan and Tazewell counties recently have experienced more extreme disasters out of the four member counties. In July 2022, Buchanan County braved severe flooding in the communities of Patterson, Hale Creek, Pilgrims Knob, Whitewood, and Jewell Valley. This flood event followed a similar disaster in the Hurley community one year prior. To date, these communities are navigating the aftermath as they attempt to rebuild community buildings, bridges, and houses that were destroyed.



This past May 2023, Tazewell County endured major flooding, including a documented 3.5 inches of rainfall by the National Weather Service. The flooding spanned most of Bluefield, VA in areas the Town had not seen impacted for years, including sections of Abbs Valley, Pocahontas, Baptist Valley, Cedar Bluff, and Bandy. The disastrous effects of this flood opened caves because of the heavy standing water. Local businesses in downtown Bluefield, VA spent weeks cleaning floors of water and debris. Recreational fields across the county experienced major damage, halting recreational activities for the community.

These major flooding incidents resulted in responses both locally and at the state level, with area legislators supporting state budget funds for flood relief assistance in the FY2024 state budget. Additionally, the Tazewell County Board of Supervisors has started work on a county-wide flood study to address issues for those communities. Officials in Buchanan had already begun the same efforts at the time of the flood activity.

The Cumberland Plateau Planning District CEDS Committee is committed to creating key partnerships and collaboration efforts with local and state officials as the region works toward goals and strategies that will better assist our communities when climate-related disasters strike.

The 2023 CEDS Committee has deemed the following concerns and vulnerabilities worthy of notation as the District and its partners work to safeguard the region's investments to the extent possible. (see chart below)

<u>Community Partner</u>	<u>Concern</u>	<u>Strategy</u>
CPPDC/ Local Emergency Service Personnel	Emergency Communication	The CPPDC is completing a region wide Broadband initiative. With these resources in place, the district can work with emergency personnel to roll out emergency communication plans.
Healthcare Providers / SWVA Workforce / colleges and universities	Patient care/ emergency health care	Offer training for emergency safety precautions in each district to healthcare workers and community members to provide more assistance from trained staff and volunteers.
DCHD/ Virginia Housing/ AmeriCorps	Flood Plains	Work with organizations and localities to establish and keep a document of flood plains within the district to ensure housing and infrastructure is not built in those areas for safety hazards.
DHCD/ Virginia Housing/ Virginia Energy	Energy Efficient Infrastructure	Upgrades to current or new infrastructure with energy efficient components and storm/ weather proof materials to deter severe damage.
Clinch River Valley Initiative Authority	Community Connection	Work together to educate younger generations and the communities on keeping a clean environment, and protecting the natural assets SWVA possesses.
The Nature Conservancy	Agriculture	Complete a study indicating what specific plants and vegetation can be planted and used to mitigate flooding.

Pre-Disaster Recovery Planning

Pandemic conditions brought about by COVID-19 have necessitated a retooling of the economic development strategy within the District. The District staff, in conjunction with community leaders throughout Cumberland Plateau counties and towns, will continue to implement direct pandemic response measures triggered by future widespread health events, as well as long-term strategic approaches to soften the economic impact of a future pandemic within the District.

To quickly and effectively implement any and all necessary measures in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as in the event of new pandemic conditions, the District will work to facilitate the formation of a local Pandemic Response Task Force whose membership will ideally consist of the current county administrators, emergency management coordinators, economic development directors, tourism directors and chamber of commerce directors in the counties of Buchanan, Dickenson, Russell and Tazewell, in addition to other community stakeholders.

The planning district will also work to facilitate the development of an online information-sharing portal that consolidates resources pertaining to the pandemic as well as future economic disruptions. Ideally, the portal will contain all known economic recovery resources available to the local business community. This web portal will also ideally provide the general public with information on best practices for supporting businesses in our communities by means other than traditional patronage, including options for home deliveries and revised services that adhere to evolving pandemic response guidelines.

While many aspects of the COVID-19 response in 2020 created greater challenges for our region, other effects of the pandemic created new opportunities. The District will work with state, regional and local groups to advance the development of programs that promote the Cumberland Plateau counties and towns as ideal landing spots for tech employees who seek to take advantage of the remote working boom that has resulted

from the nationwide COVID-19 response. This relocation or, in some cases, “repatriation,” initiative will aim to appeal to workers in tech sectors who are permitted by their employers to work from any location of their choosing. Summer 2020 reports indicated tech giants – such as Google and Facebook, among others – are now open to allowing a certain percentage of their workforce to perform their duties from anywhere. Business surveys also indicate two-thirds of tech workers in San Francisco would live and work from other areas if given the option. The District recognizes this movement as an opportunity to reinvigorate its workforce and population levels within its respective counties and towns where infrastructure exists to support such an initiative.

With the District’s high quality of life, low cost of living and considerable access to outdoor recreation opportunities available as marketing assets, the Cumberland Plateau region appears as poised as any comparable locality to advance such initiatives alongside community development partners.

In light of negative economic impacts related to COVID-19 within our region, the District will double-down on efforts to develop and support an Outdoor Economy in the four Cumberland Plateau counties, which has been identified as a key priority for the District. The pursuit of a successful Outdoor Economy will:

- Result in the fostering and support of job growth initiatives within the outdoor environment, outdoor adventure, wildlife management and tourism entrepreneurship sectors where, in many cases, employment is less-likely to be severely impacted by future pandemic conditions
- Support new investments in agriculture, aquaculture, livestock, forestry, farming and other initiatives that specifically enhance and bolster the region’s food supply chain and access to family-sustaining commodities
- When and where possible, preserve the natural environment, which will support the overall objective of building a successful Outdoor Economy around the region’s unique natural assets

- Prop up the aforementioned CEDS goals related to creating a desirable living environment within the Cumberland Plateau counties in an effort to attract and lure potential workforce talent who desire to relocate from more densely-populated regions of the U.S.

The development and retention of other industry sectors projected to boast varying degrees of insulation from future pandemic conditions will also receive underscored support from the District, including, but not limited to, the following sectors:

- Tech and data
- Healthcare
- Shared Services and IT
- Warehousing and delivery
- Construction
- Meat preparation and processing
- Machinery and equipment manufacturing
- Fabricated metal manufacturing
- Tourism

While work is active and constant between the District and Point Broadband to achieve universal fiber broadband coverage within the region, COVID-19 very effectively exposed the most glaring holes within the region's high-speed internet infrastructure grid, particularly as it pertained to broadband access for school-age children and working adults who desire -- or are required to -- telework within the District. In an effort to shore up these deficiencies, District staff will:

- Strive to more accurately identify potential project zones for future fiber broadband deployment beyond areas already targeted in two large Virginia

Telecommunications Initiative projects, both of which are underway following funding approvals at the state level

- Conduct an assessment of proposed publicly-accessible Wi-Fi hotspot locations to supplement hotspot projects already completed or underway by the PDC, where quick deployment of fiber is neither feasible nor practical
- Work to identify and solve gaps in Wi-Fi and cellular connectivity at recreational locations, including trails, parks and conservation areas
- Work to identify and solve gaps in Wi-Fi and cellular connectivity in residential areas not already served by the local wireless network

Measuring Resilience

The PDC staff maintains data that measures population income and employment by industry data compared with state and national statistics as a means of determining progress toward diversification. The staff also attempts to align changes in this data with the several initiatives identified in the CEDS. A good example is the continuation of broadband and wireless 4G fiber internet. As this project continues to roll out giving more access to residents and commercial business owners, components of our downtown revitalization efforts and the creation of more amenities such as nicer restaurants, craft-breweries and performance venues will bring growth in the 25-34 age group in the region, thus increasing population. This growth corresponds with the live, work, play environment and the cultural heritage initiative, The Crooked Road, the outdoor recreation initiative, and Southwest Virginia Outdoors.

The Cumberland Plateau Planning Staff has made great strides in economic diversification this year and will continue to monitor the data and measure progress toward economic resilience.



Appendices:

[Hazard Mitigation Plan](#)

[Roadmap to Economic Resiliency](#)

[Cumberland Plateau TelePharmacy Strategic Plan](#)

[CEDS Committee](#)

BUCHANAN COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

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Knox District



Robert Craig Horn
County Administrator

Lawrence L. Moise, III Esq.
County Attorney

November 6, 2023

U.S. Department of Commerce
Economic Development Administration
Philadelphia Regional Office, Curtis Center
Independence Square West, Suite 140S
Philadelphia, PA 19106

Dear Sir or Madam:

It is the intent of Buchanan County, Virginia to continue participating under the Cumberland Plateau Planning District Commission's Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS). This letter represents a formal acknowledgement for Buchanan County to be covered under the 2024 CEDS Update.

Please don't hesitate to let me know if further action or information is needed.

Sincerely,

Robert C. Horn
County Administrator

Russell County Virginia

“The Heart of Southwest Virginia”

Tim Lovelace
District 1

Steve Breeding
District 5

Carl Rhea
District 3

Lou Ann Wallace, Chairperson
District 2

Rebecca Dye
District 6

David Eaton
District 4

Oris Christian, Vice-Chairman
At-Large

Lonzo Lester
County Administrator

December 11, 2023

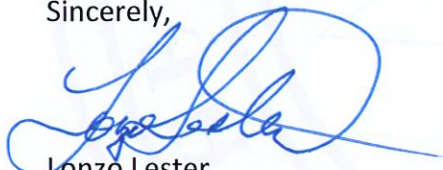
U. S. Department of Commerce
Economic Development Administration
Philadelphia Regional Office, Curtis Center
Independence Square West, Suite 140S
Philadelphia, PA 19106

Dear Sir or Madam:

It is the intent of Russell County, Virginia to continue participating under the Cumberland Plateau Planning District Commission's Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS). This letter represents a formal acknowledgement for Russell County to be covered under the 2024 CEDS Update.

Please don't hesitate to let me know if further action or information is needed.

Sincerely,



Lonzo Lester
County Administrator



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RHONDA SLUSS
Clintwood District

County Attorney
WILLIAM J. STURGILL

January 24, 2024

U. S. Department of Commerce Economic
Development Administration
Philadelphia Regional Office, Curtis Center
Independence Square West, Suite 140S
Philadelphia, PA 19106

Dear Sir or Madam:

It is the intent of Dickenson County, Virginia to continue participating under the Cumberland Plateau Planning District Commission's Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS). This letter represents a formal acknowledgement for Dickenson County to be covered under the 2024 CEDS Update.

If further information is needed, please don't hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

Larry Barton, County Administrator

TAZEWELL COUNTY VIRGINIA

“Bound For Progress”

Andy Hrovatic, Chair
Western District

Aaron Gillespie, Vice Chair
Southern District



Kyle Cruvey, Member
Northern District

Chuck Presley Member
Eastern District

Shanna Plaster, Member
Northwestern District

C. Eric Young
County Administrator

January 29, 2024

U.S. Department of Commerce
Economic Development Administration
Philadelphia Regional Office, Curtis Center
Independence Square West, Suite 140S
Philadelphia, PA 19106

Dear Sir or Madam:

I am writing on behalf of Tazewell County, VA, acknowledging the continued support and participation in the 2024 Comprehensive Economic Development Strategic Planning document (CEDS) executed and delivered through the Cumberland Plateau Planning District Commission.

Please contact me if you have any questions or need any further information concerning Tazewell County.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "C. Eric Young".

C. Eric Young, Esq.
Tazewell County Administrator