

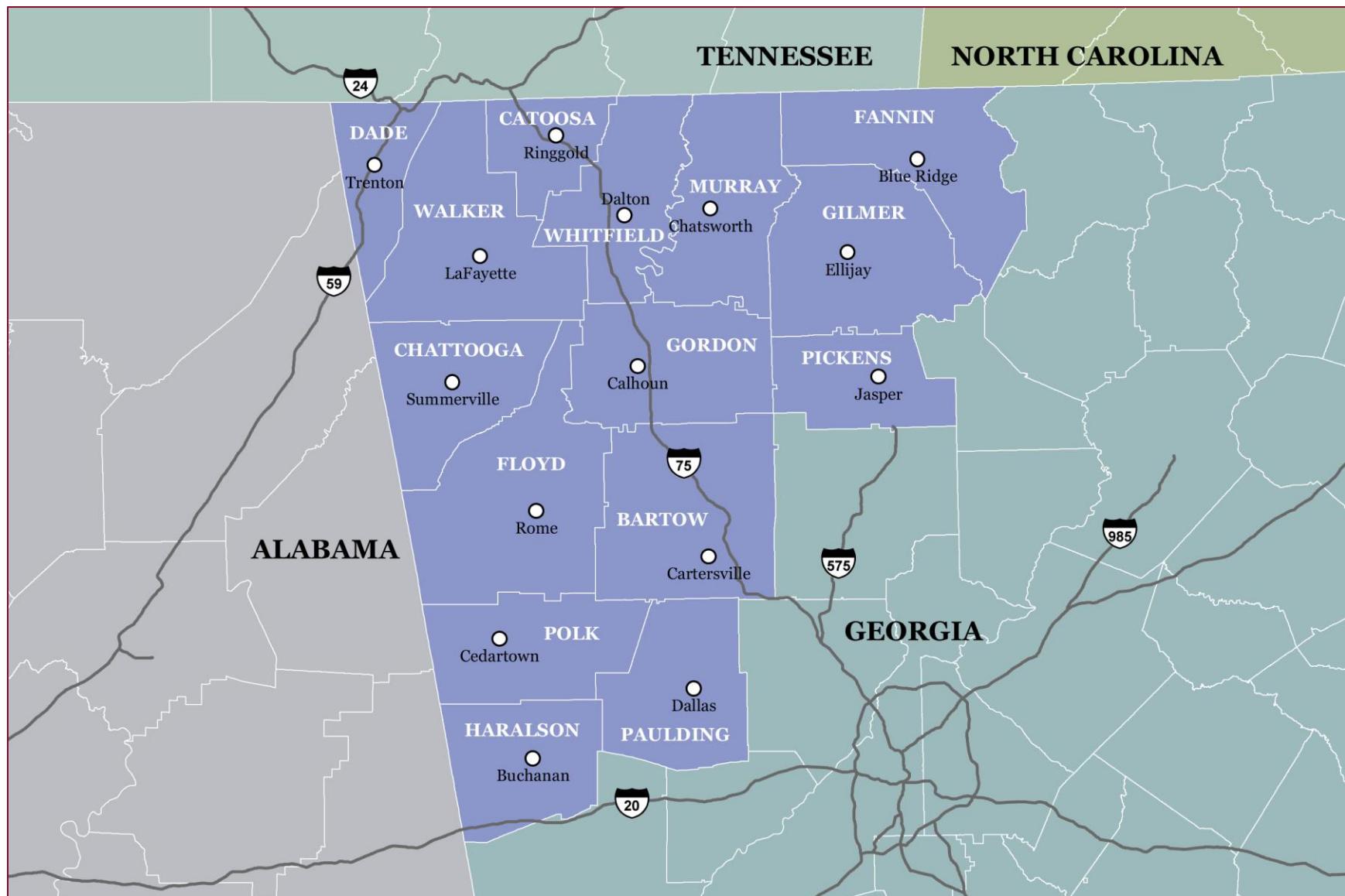
# Northwest Georgia's Economic Development Strategy

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2022-2026 REGIONAL COMPREHENSIVE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY (CEDS)

Northwest Georgia Regional Commission  
NWGRC COMMUNITY AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT  
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## Map of Northwest Georgia



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## CEDS Strategy Committee Membership

Northwest Georgia Regional Commission Council			
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<b>Catoosa County</b>	Mr. Larry C. Black	Ms. Rhonda James	Vacant
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<b>Floyd County</b>	Mr. Wright Bagby	Mr. Craig McDaniel	Mr. Ethan Pender
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<b>Walker County</b>	Mr. Shannon Whitfield	Honorable Andy Arnold	Mr. Chip Catlett
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## Introduction

The Northwest Georgia Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) is a strategy-driven plan for regional economic development. The Northwest Georgia Regional Commission (as the local Economic Development District) develops, implements, and revises the CEDS on a regular basis. The Regional Commission receives Planning Investment Funds from the U.S. Department of Commerce's Economic Development Administration (EDA) to complete this document.

The governing Council of the Northwest Georgia Regional Commission is designated as the CEDS Strategy Committee. This body includes both local elected officials and private sector representatives from each of northwest Georgia's counties, as well as several statewide appointees. Membership of the CEDS Strategy Committee, at the time of adoption of the CEDS update, is listed on the previous page.

The Northwest Georgia Regional Commission is a multi-county organization consisting of 15 Northwest Georgia counties and 49 municipalities. Major responsibilities of the regional commission include: (1) implementation of the Georgia Planning Act of 1989; (2) administration of the Area Agency on Aging; (3) administration of the Workforce Investment Act; and (4) providing planning and development assistance to member governments in areas they could not otherwise afford.

The mission statement of the Northwest Georgia Regional Commission is "to improve the quality of life for every Northwest Georgia resident, through orderly growth, conservation of the region's natural and historic resources, and care and development of the region's human resources."



# Northwest Georgia Regional Overview

## Overview

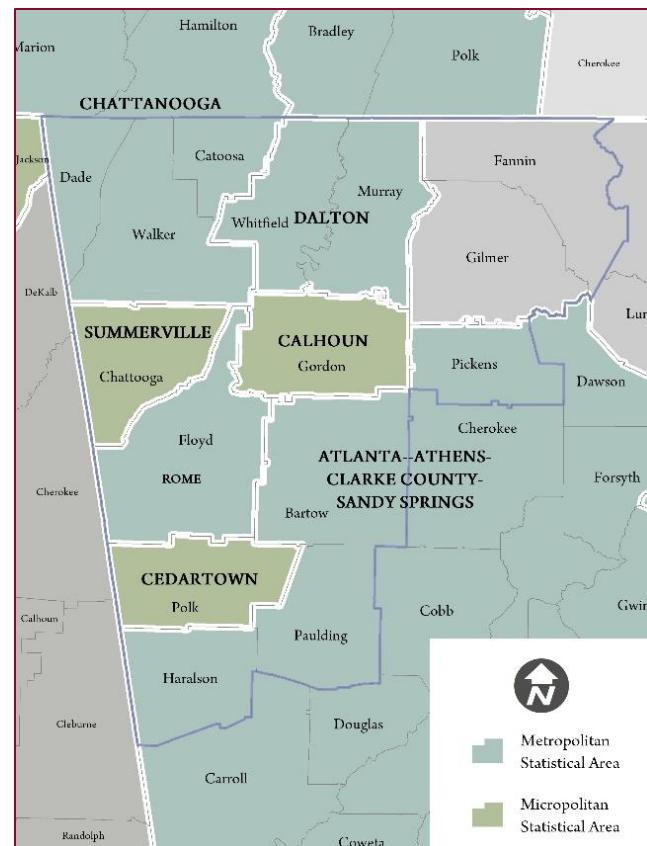
The Northwest Georgia Regional Commission's district consists of 15 counties (Bartow, Catoosa, Chattooga, Dade, Fannin, Floyd, Gilmer, Gordon, Haralson, Murray, Paulding, Pickens, Polk, Walker, and Whitfield) and the forty-nine cities located within these counties. The region is predominantly rural but continues to see substantial growth due to its proximity to Atlanta and Chattanooga. The Interstate 75 corridor runs north-south through the eastern part of the Region connecting these two metropolitan areas. This corridor has seen significant growth over the past decade and growth in the region is projected to continue along I-75 at a faster rate than other areas.

### Geography

Northwest Georgia is located in the southern foothills of the Appalachian Mountains in Georgia's Ridge and Valley, Blue Ridge Mountains, and Piedmont geographical regions. The region consists primarily of rolling hills with valleys and tall hills, ridges, and mountains running primarily north-south. This geography makes east-west connectivity and regional development somewhat challenging. However, the geography of the area also creates some of the most scenic views in the state.

### Core Based Statistical Areas (CBSA)

A Core Based Statistical Area (CBSA) is a geographic area defined by the U.S. Office of Management and Budget (OMB) that consists of one or more counties anchored by an urban center of at least 10,000 people plus adjacent counties that are socioeconomically tied to the urban center by commuting. CBSAs include both metropolitan and micropolitan statistical areas (MSA). The far northwestern counties of Dade, Walker, and Catoosa are located in the Chattanooga MSA. The southern counties of Haralson, Paulding, and Bartow, as well as Pickens County, are located in the Atlanta area MSA. Whitfield and Murray counties share the Dalton MSA, and Rome is in a metropolitan area by itself. Chattooga, Gordon, and Polk counties are all in single county micropolitan areas, and Fannin and Gilmer are not located in either a metropolitan or micropolitan statistical area.



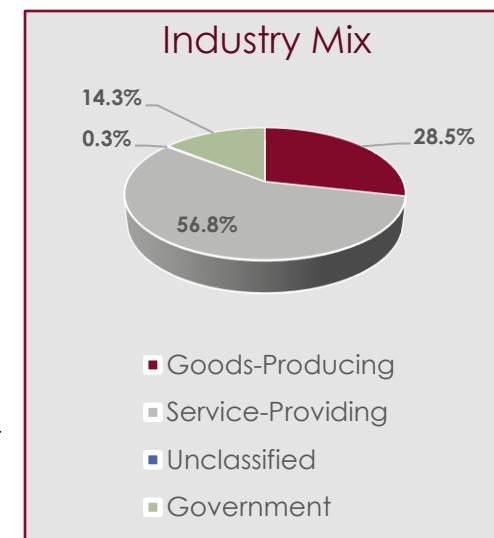
## Economy

Traditionally, the region's economic base has depended upon the manufacturing sector (28.5% of the region's employment in 2021), dominated by floor covering industry. Although, the collapse of the housing industry in 2007 dramatically reduced demand for floor covering products and lead to several plant closings in the region, the floor covering industry still dominates the economy in several of northwest Georgia's counties.

Manufacturing in northwest Georgia continues to change its production model. Moving from a highly labor-intensive, hands-on production system to an automated system, where skilled technicians guide machines using computer programming or perform manual tasks with robotic assistance. In this changing job market, prospective employees must have or be able to learn the required skill set including engineering, computer technology, and programming. Additionally, the labor market appears to be continuing to trend toward a more logistics and services focused economy.

### Industry Mix

Northwest Georgia's economy continues to diversify, moving to a more service-oriented economy. According to the U.S. Bureau of Census, in the past five years the goods producing industry sector has decreased its share of northwest Georgia's economy by 0.6%; decreasing from 29.2% of the workforce in 2016 to 28.6% in 2021. During the same time period, the service providing industry has increased its share of the economy by 1.3%; growing its percentage of the workforce from 55.4% in 2016 to 56.7% in 2021. The unclassified and government sectors saw decreases of 0.1% and 0.7%, respectively. Overall, the regional's workforce grew by 10,631 employees in the past five years; increasing from 259,072 in 2016 to 267,703 in 2021. Healthcare has become a dominant industry in Northwest Georgia, with four of the top ten employers in the region representing this sector. While the flooring industry remains strong with three (Engineered Floors, Mohawk Carpet, and Shaw Industries) of the top ten employers in the region representing this economic sector.



### Ten Largest Employers in Northwest Georgia

1. Engineered Floors
2. Floyd Healthcare
3. Gordon Hospital
4. Hamilton Medical Center
5. Mohawk Carpet
6. Roper Corporation
7. Shaw Industries Group
8. Toyo Tire North America
9. Walmart
10. Wellstar Health System

Source: GA Dept. of Labor

In the goods producing sector, over the last five years the agriculture, forestry, fishing, & hunting industry saw the highest percentage increase, which grew by 26.6%. Manufacturing grew by only 0.9%. Overall, the service providing sector grew by 9,095 jobs, or 6.3% in the last five years. The Arts, Entertainment, & Recreation industry grew the most in terms of percentage in this sector at 33.2%. Health Care and Social Assistance had the largest increase in number of jobs at 3,299. Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services also saw a significant increase in employees during this time period growing by 24.6% and 1,633 jobs. Overall, the number of jobs in Northwest Georgia grew from a total of 259,072 in 2016 to 269,822 in 2021. This represents a five-year increase of 10,750 or approximately 5.2%.

### Economic Distress

The Northwest Georgia Economic Development District is performing below the national average in each of the economic distress criteria. This indicates that, although the region recovered from the Great Recession, northwest Georgia has still not achieved socioeconomic parity with the nation.

#### *Unemployment Rate*

The 24-Month Unemployment Rate for Northwest Georgia is 5.56%, which is 0.17% lower than the national rate. Four counties in the region (Catoosa, Dade, Fannin, and Pickens) have a 24-month unemployment rate of less than 4%. Two counties have 24-month unemployment rates of over 6%, and the county with the highest 24-month rate is Murray County, which has a rate of 6.23%.

#### *Per Capita Income*

The 2020 Per Capita Personal Income calculated by the U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA) for the region is \$37,683, which is only 66.7% of the national average. None of the fifteen counties in Northwest Georgia has a per capita personal income equal to, or greater than, the national per capita income of \$56,490.

Economic Distress Criteria — Geographic Components			
	24 Month Unemployment	2020 Per Capita Personal Income (BEA)	2020 Per Capita Money Income (5-year ACS)
United States	5.73 %	\$56,490	\$35,384
Northwest Georgia	5.56 %	\$37,683	\$26,858
Bartow County	4.60 %	\$39,505	\$27,047
Catoosa County	3.58 %	\$36,399	\$28,537
Chattooga County	6.21 %	\$31,577	\$18,523
Dade County	3.60 %	\$34,639	\$24,964
Fannin County	3.78 %	\$37,385	\$29,845
Floyd County	4.85 %	\$39,314	\$27,418
Gilmer County	4.16 %	\$35,576	\$27,789
Gordon County	4.30 %	\$35,557	\$25,114
Haralson County	4.43 %	\$37,582	\$27,507
Murray County	6.23 %	\$30,964	\$23,208
Paulding County	4.05 %	\$38,978	\$29,766
Pickens County	3.80 %	\$48,493	\$32,501
Polk County	4.67 %	\$34,055	\$24,258
Walker County	4.11 %	\$34,078	\$25,157
Whitfield County	5.77 %	\$39,927	\$24,361

Sources: U.S. Bureaus of Census, Labor Statistics, and Economic Analysis; Calculations generated by StatsAmerica.

## Demographics

### Population

The estimated population of Northwest Georgia was 927,899 in 2020. The Georgia's Office of Planning and Budgeting expects the region's population to increase at an annual rate of 0.78% over the next four years to reach a projected population in 2024 of 960,766. This growth rate, although lower than the historic rate for the region, is more than the anticipated growth rate of the United States according to the Census Bureau.

Northwest Georgia is a predominately rural region; however, the northern counties are part of the Chattanooga MSA and the southern counties are within parts of the Atlanta metropolitan area. These counties, and those located along the I-75 corridor, continue to experience elevated population growth relative to other counties in the region. Paulding and Bartow counties continue to grow at a considerably higher rate than the rest of the region due to their location within commuting distance of the Metro Atlanta area. Likewise, Pickens and Gilmer counties are also experiencing elevated growth due to the construction of Highway 515, which connected these formerly rural counties to jobs in northern Atlanta.

### Age

The median age in northwest Georgia is 39.4 years; a significant increase from the 2016 median age of 38.1 years. According to the Area Agency on Aging the aging population in the region has been growing significantly faster in recent years than the state average of 19.9%. The Governor's office of Planning and budget has projected an increase in the senior population age 60+ of 58% by 2040. The 80-84 age group is expected to be the fastest growing population segment in northwest Georgia by percentage with a projected growth rate more than doubled by 2040. Murray and Paulding counties are expected to experience higher growth in the aging population at 85% and 213% respectively. The aging of the region's population is especially concerning as much of the region is rural, limiting access to aging and long term-care services. The aging of northwest Georgia's population also poses significant concerns

### Population



927,899

### Annual Growth Rate



0.78%

### Median Age



39.4

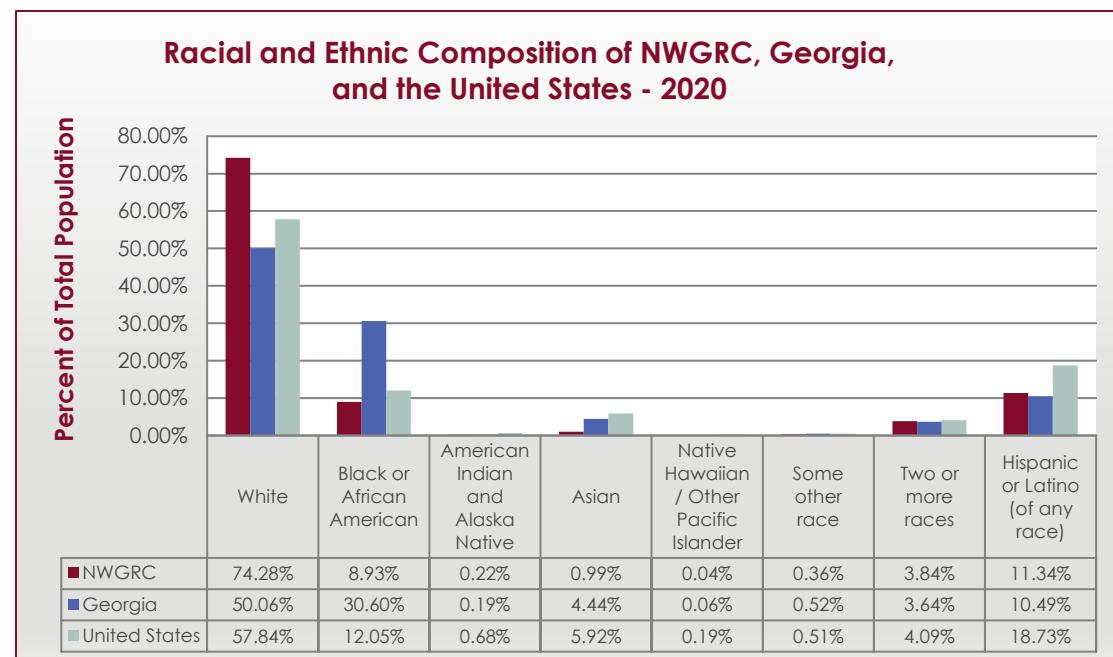
for today's workforce. As an elevated number of retirements are expected in the coming years, many employers are concerned about finding replacements with comparable skills, leadership ability, and management experience.

The retiring Baby Boomers created a significant management and experience gap, with Generation Xers, who make up a much smaller portion of the region's population, not able to fill all vacated positions. Millennials are the largest living generation in the United States and have now fully entered the workforce with Generation Z beginning to graduate college and starting their first professional jobs. The influx of Millennials into the workforce created challenges with priorities and desires for employment that were at odds with the previous generations. Generation Z has brought new priorities to their professions and challenges of their own.

## Race

According to U.S. Census Bureau, the white race represented 74.28% of the region's population in 2020, a decline from 84.10% in 2010. The region's 2020 white share was considerably higher than that for the state (50.06%) and nation (57.84%). The region's black or African American share of total population increased from 7.94% in 2010 to 8.93% in 2020. The region's 2020 black or African American share was considerably lower than that for the state (30.60%) and nation (12.05%). As compared to 2010, the percentage of the population that is Asian or of two or more races went up, while the percentage that is American Indian or Alaskan Native, Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander, or some other race went down slightly.

The Census Bureau does not include Hispanic as a race. The census accounts for this population under ethnicity. Consequently, persons of Hispanic or Latino origin comprise portions of more than one racial group. The region's Hispanic or Latino population accounted for 11.34% of the total in 2020, up from 9.54% in 2010. The 2020 share was higher than that of the state (10.49%) but lower than that of the nation (18.73%).



## Education

A highly educated and skilled workforce is necessary to support economic competitiveness and resiliency. Education is vital when aligning worker skills with the needs of employers, which is critical to increasing productivity and growing the region's economy. Improved high school graduation rates is an important first-step in ensuring the region has a skilled workforce, but it is also essential for the labor force to have an ample number of workers with advanced training, certifications, and degrees.

### *High School Graduation*

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, approximately 83.1% of adult residents of northwest Georgia have attained a high school diploma or equivalent. The counties in the region with the highest percentage of high school graduates include Paulding (91%), Catoosa (89%), and Fannin (88%). The Counties with the lowest percentage of high school graduates include Whitfield (71%), Murray (72%), and Chattooga (72%). Each year, over ten thousand students graduate from the region's public high schools. Northwest Georgia's graduation rate was 91.0% in 2021. This is a significant increase over the 83.0% graduation rate in 2016. The public-school systems with the highest graduation rates were Calhoun (100%), Chickamauga (100%) and Trion (98.7%) city schools and Murray (97.3%), Gordon (97.0%) and Haralson (96.6%) county schools. These graduating seniors represent the future workforce of northwest Georgia and should be encouraged to participate in apprenticeships, internships, and on-the-job training programs; attend technical college; or enroll in traditional colleges and universities in order to achieve their career goals. (2021 Four-Year Graduation Rates by county are listed in the appendix.)

### *College and Career Academies*

In northwest Georgia, high schools and their post-secondary partners are joining together to create local college and career academies to prepare high school students to meet the needs of employers in advanced manufacturing and other high-skilled professions. College and Career Academies are unique learning environments that provide the best opportunities for school systems to focus educational resources on the needs of their community, local businesses, and area industries. Working closely with local employers, eleven communities in northwest Georgia have established

## Educational Attainment



83.1%

*(high school diploma or equivalent)*



27.1%

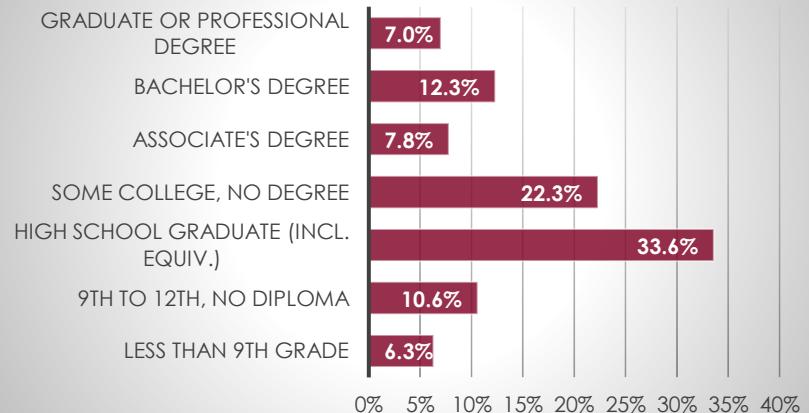
*(Associates Degree or Higher)*

college and career academies; these include Floyd County College and Career Academy (in Rome), City of Rome College and Career Academy, Catoosa County College and Career Academy (in Ringgold), Fannin County College and Career Academy (in Blue Ridge), Gordon County College and Career Academy (in Calhoun), Haralson County College and Career Academy, Northwest Georgia College and Career Academy (in Dalton), Bartow County College and Career Academy (in Cartersville), Paulding County College & Career Academy (in Dallas), Polk County College and Career Academy (in Rockmart), and Calhoun City College and Career Academy (in Calhoun).

#### *Educational Attainment*

More than 80% of the region's population over 25 years old are high school graduates or higher. Approximately 25% have a college degree, including 7.8% with an associate's degree, 12.0% with a bachelor's degree, and 7.0% with a graduate or professional degree. Unfortunately, this leaves approximately 15% of the adult population with less than a high school degree, and 6.3% of the adult population has less than a 9th grade education. For the region to attract and retain professional, technology, or advanced manufacturing-oriented employers, the workforce needs additional skilled workers with technical training, certifications, and degrees, as well as a college educated and professional workforce component.

**Northwest Georgia Educational Attainment**



#### *Institutions of Higher Education*

Post-secondary education in northwest Georgia is provided by the Technical College System of Georgia, the University System of Georgia, and private colleges. Three technical colleges serve the region; including Georgia Northwestern Technical College with campuses in Floyd, Walker, Catoosa, Gordon, Polk, and Whitfield counties; Chattahoochee Technical College with campuses in Pickens, Bartow, and Paulding counties; and West Georgia Technical College with a campus in Haralson County. The technical college system provides a broad range of career opportunities through a variety of certificate, diploma, and associate degree programs; continuing education programs; and economic development programs. Two University System of Georgia colleges also serve northwest Georgia; Georgia Highlands College in Floyd County and Dalton State College in Whitfield County. Additionally, University of North Georgia, Kennesaw State University, and University of West Georgia have satellite campuses in the region. Berry College, Shorter University, and Covenant College are also located in the area.

## Workforce

According to the American Community Survey, there were approximately 345,000 workers residing in northwest Georgia in 2020. Of these, approximately 53.6% worked in their county of residence, 36.1% worked in Georgia but outside their county of residence, and 10.3% worked outside the state of Georgia.

### Employment by Industry

The largest number of workers in the region are employed in the manufacturing industry which retains 22.52% of the labor force. While the Educational services, and health care and social assistance industry employs 19.32% of the labor force and the retail trade industry employs 10.92% of the labor force. Each of the other industry sectors employs less than 10% of northwest Georgia's laborers.

### Employment by Occupation

The largest percent of northwest Georgia's workers are employed in management, business, science, and arts occupations jobs at 27.75% of the workforce. Production, transportation, and material moving occupations employ the next largest percent at 22.59%; while sales and office occupations employ close to the same number of workers at 21.92%. Service occupations employ 15.88%. Natural resources, construction, and maintenance occupations employ 11.87% of the region's workforce.

### Unemployment

As previously discussed, unemployment in the region has largely recovered from the COVID-19 pandemic, with the 24-Month Unemployment Rate for northwest Georgia at 5.56%, which is only 0.6% higher than the national rate.

2020 Employed Population 16+ by Industry	
Total	345,757
Agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting, and mining	1.33%
Construction	8.32%
Manufacturing	22.52%
Wholesale trade	2.46%
Retail trade	10.92%
Transportation and warehousing, and utilities	5.46%
Information	1.31%
Finance and insurance, and real estate and rental and leasing	4.30%
Professional, scientific, management, administrative and waste management	7.78%
Educational services, and health care and social assistance	19.32%
Arts, entertainment, and recreation, and accommodation and food services	7.88%
Other services, except public administration	4.73%
Public administration	3.67%

2020 Employed Population 16+ by Occupation	
Total	345,757
Management, business, science, and arts occupations	27.75%
Service occupations	15.88%
Sales and office occupations	21.92%
Natural resources, construction, and maintenance occupations	11.87%
Production, transportation, and material moving occupations	22.59%

## Long-term Industry Projections

The Georgia Department of Labor published long-term employment projections for the Northwest Georgia Region in which they predict 2028 employment in select industries. According to this study, educational services (although at a slower rate than the previous 5 years) will continue to see the highest number of jobs added with 3,520 by 2028 with an annual growth rate of 1.40%. The industry sector with the highest projected annual growth rate, however, is Transportation Equipment Manufacturing, which is projected to see an annual growth rate of 3.00% for a total of 2,130 new jobs in 2028.

INDUSTRY TITLE	2018 BASE YEAR EMPLOYMENT	2028 PROJ. YEAR EMPLOYMENT	TOTAL CHANGE IN EMPLOYMENT	PERCENT CHANGE IN EMPLOYMENT	PROJ. ANNUAL GROWTH RATE
Educational Services	24,250	27,770	3,520	14.60%	1.40%
Ambulatory Health Care Services	10,840	14,030	3,190	29.40%	2.60%
Food Services and Drinking Places	23,960	27,140	3,180	13.20%	1.20%
Transportation Equipment Manufacturing	6,270	8,400	2,130	34.10%	3.00%
General Merchandise Stores	8,690	10,540	1,850	21.20%	1.90%
Hospitals	9,830	11,640	1,810	18.40%	1.70%
Truck Transportation	4,910	6,350	1,440	29.30%	2.60%
Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services	7,040	8,240	1,200	17.00%	1.60%
Social Assistance	4,000	5,170	1,170	29.20%	2.60%
Local Government, Excluding Education and Hospitals	11,680	12,740	1,060	9.10%	0.90%
Administrative and Support Services	10,080	11,000	920	9.30%	0.90%
Merchant Wholesalers, Durable Goods	8,200	9,080	880	10.80%	1.00%
Food and Beverage Stores	5,730	6,440	710	12.30%	1.20%
Crop Production	4,950	5,650	700	14.10%	1.30%
Plastics and Rubber Products Manufacturing	4,520	5,170	650	14.50%	1.40%
Nursing and Residential Care Facilities	5,260	5,780	520	9.50%	0.90%
Warehousing and Storage	1,830	2,310	480	25.90%	2.30%
Primary Metal Manufacturing	1,290	1,730	440	34.20%	3.00%
Total Self Employed and Unpaid Family Workers	17,440	17,800	360	2.10%	0.20%
Health and Personal Care Stores	2,110	2,460	350	17.00%	1.60%

Source: Georgia Department of Labor, Workforce Statistics and Economic Research

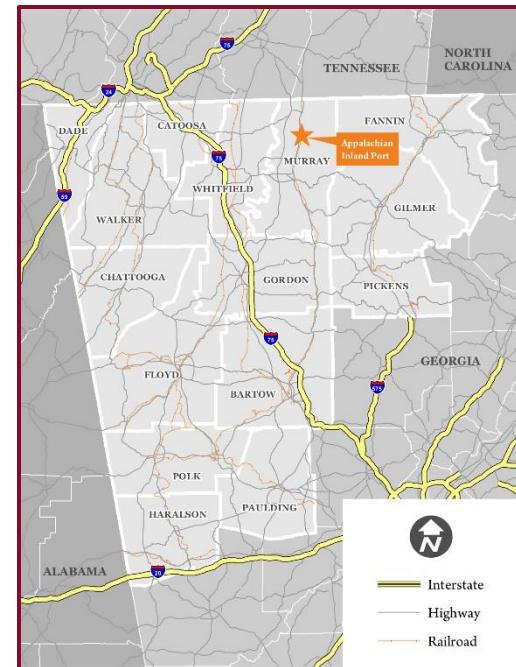
## Transportation

An adequate, safe, and reliable transportation network, with access to both urban and rural areas, is vital to the economic growth and economic prosperity of the Northwest Georgia Region. Without access to a well-maintained, multi-modal transportation network, goods and raw materials could not efficiently move into or out of the region - resulting in low economic productivity. Reliable transportation, including transit and bike/pedestrian facilities, is also necessary to ensure employees can arrive at work safely and on time. The Region's transportation network includes interstates I-75, I-20, and I-59 as well as several US and state highways, railways, airports and public transit.

### Roadway

Northwest Georgia is served by an extensive roadway network (consisting of local roads, several state and federal highways, and three interstates) that traverses throughout the region. The primary transportation corridor in northwest Georgia is Interstate 75, which runs north-south through the eastern part of the Region connecting Atlanta and Chattanooga. Interstate 59 runs through Dade County in the extreme northwest corner of the region, and Interstate 20 runs through Haralson County in the extreme southwest. Additionally, Interstate 24 dips into northern Dade County for approximately four miles and Interstate 575 extends into Pickens County for less than one mile. Major US and state highways in the region primarily run north-south parallel to I-75, making east-west transportation of goods somewhat problematic.

In Georgia, trucking is the dominant mode for carrying freight. Therefore, the performance of the highway network is critical for the transportation of freight into, out of, through, and within the northwest Georgia region. By 2040, the share of freight carried by trucking is projected to be 61.5% by weight and 62.4% by value. The interstate highways carry the highest volumes of freight at present and are expected to remain the principal facilities for transporting truck freight well into the future, with volumes projected to increase by as much as 177% by 2035. Some rural highways connecting urban areas to the interstates, such as US 411/SR 20 connecting Rome



and Cartersville/I-75, are also expected to carry significant freight volumes in the future. Additionally, freight traffic on US 411 is projected to significantly increase as the Appalachian Inland Port in Murray County continues to expand.

#### *Rail*

Rail is an increasingly effective alternative for moving goods while relieving congestion and avoiding congested routes. Two major rail routes through northwest Georgia are rated for 50-74 tons and from 75-99 tons; there are smaller connector routes throughout the region as well. The construction of the Appalachian Inland Port has greatly enhanced northwest Georgia's access to global markets. However, trucking will remain important to regional industries, as goods moving via other modes often use trucks for the first and last mile of the trip. Rail service is primarily provided by CSX and Norfolk Southern Railroads, although two short-line (Class III) railroads also operate in the region. Overall, existing rail service throughout the region is adequate with short-line operators moving into areas that might have otherwise been abandoned. While there is currently no high-speed commuter rail service in the region, state commuter rail studies are underway.

#### *Transit*

Mass transit services are provided in Rome, Georgia with fixed bus route services inside the city boundaries. The Region is also served by 10 Section 5311 Rural Public Transportation Programs, which provide a variety of services to each local community. Recent studies of transit systems in the region indicate a need for connectivity between counties, as well as increased access within county systems. While each county currently provides its own transit service, a coordinated approach to the delivery of these transportation services could be cost efficient and equally effective for all participants.

#### *Aviation*

No commercial service airports are located within the Northwest Georgia Region. However, three main Air Carrier Commuter Airports serve residents of the region; Hartsfield International Airport in Atlanta, Lovell Field Airport in Chattanooga, Tennessee and Birmingham Airport in Birmingham, Alabama. Additionally, nine general aviation airports are located within northwest Georgia. Several improvements to airports in the region have been identified in the Statewide Aviation Plan including increased runway length and other upgrades.

#### *NWGRC Transportation Planning*

The Northwest Georgia Regional Commission participates in planning activities with Georgia DOT District 6 in Cartersville, with the Chattanooga-Hamilton County Metropolitan Planning Organization, the Rome Metropolitan Planning Organization, the Dalton Metropolitan Planning Organization, the Cartersville-Bartow Metropolitan Planning Organization, the Metro Atlanta Metropolitan Planning Organization, Atlanta Regional Commission, Thrive Regional Partnership, and other agencies including those supporting the disabled, cyclists and pedestrians.

### *COVID-19 Impact on the Economy*

The negative economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic in Northwest Georgia were significant; however, the region began to recover in the second half of 2020. The area's economy continued its recovery during 2021 and 2022, with only minor disruptions as new Covid-19 cases spiked during early Summer 2021. Data suggests that a similar disruption in the region's economic recovery was not experienced during the surge in new cases caused by the Delta or Omicron variants.

Key takeaways from the NWGRC Economic Impact Analysis; Impact of COVID-19 on Northwest Georgia include:

- The Manufacturing Sector, which is the largest sector of the region's economy according to the Georgia Department of Labor Area Labor Profile for Northwest Georgia Regional Commission, was hit hard by COVID-19.
  - According to the Demographic Atlas of the United States, all five of the counties with the highest weekly unemployment claims during the March 7 – June 13 period when the pandemic hit hardest have Manufacturing as their largest sector.
  - Manufacturing had significantly more weekly unemployment claims than any other sector.
  - The 2-digit NAICS Code industry sector that lost the most jobs in 9 of the 15 counties was Manufacturing.
- The Food Services industry subsector of the economy was also hit hard.
  - 12 of the region's 15 counties had Accommodations and Food Services as the largest or second-largest 2-digit NAICS Code industry sector in terms of weekly job claims.
  - Food Services & Drinking Places was the 3-digit NAICS Code subsector that lost the most jobs between March 7 & June 13 for 10 of the region's 15 counties.
  - Community leaders listed Food Services as the industry hit the hardest more commonly than any other industry in the Georgia Tech EDA University Center survey.
- The unemployment rate peaked in April and has since gone down to a level slightly above what it was pre-pandemic.
- Low-income workers were hit less hard by the pandemic in the region than in many other parts of the country.

- According to a model used by the University of Georgia, had the jobs lost in the first few months of the pandemic remained lost for a year, this would have resulted in the loss of most of the region's employee compensation and gross regional product (the value of the goods and services produced by the region).
- Most of the region collected more sales tax revenue in 2020 than in 2019 despite the pandemic. The combination of an increase in revenue from general merchandise and a decrease in revenue from wholesale indicates that retail moved online.
- A survey conducted by Georgia Tech's EDA University Center found that businesses experienced significant revenue loss problems but that most unemployment due to the pandemic has already occurred. Community leaders and companies expressed that more assistance with finding ways to make revenue, more employee development, and more leadership development were needed for businesses. Community leaders indicated that business location, expansion, and relocation projects were either not affected or have resumed work.

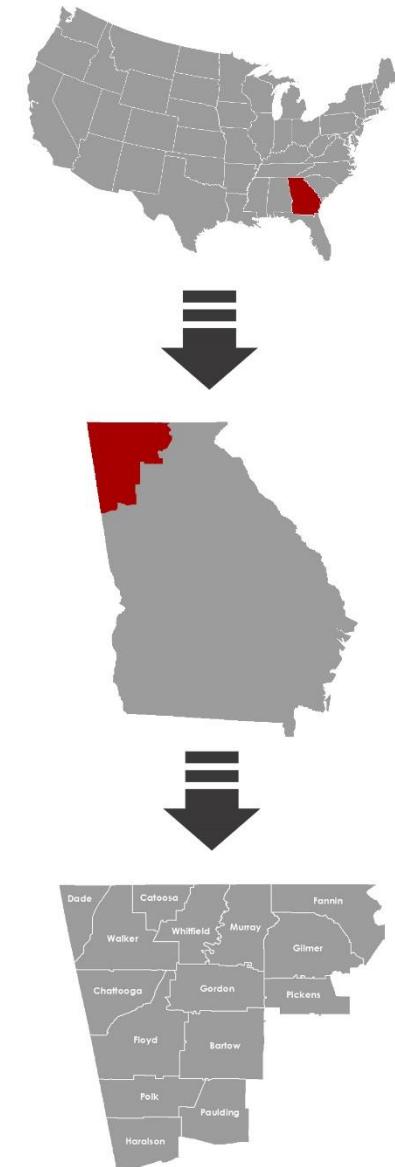
Temporary Job Loss in 2020 Due to COVID-19 Pandemic			
Sector	Industry	Number of Jobs Lost	Percentage of Jobs Lost
Goods Producing	Agriculture and Related	52,483	19.62%
	Mining and Extraction	234	41.64%
	Construction	7,753	77.40%
	Manufacturing	92,792	138.90%
Service-Providing	Utilities	45	3.66%
	Wholesale Trade	8,496	76.26%
	Retail Trade	25,406	72.17%
	Transportation	5,770	61.14%
	Information	2,233	150.81%
	Finance and Insurance	1,254	24.81%
	Real Estate and Rental	1,689	76.29%
	Professional	6,493	85.40%
	Management	550	72.94%
	Administrative and Waste	22,118	195.79%
	Educational Services	4,494	191.76%
	Health and Assistance	33,802	106.63%
	Entertain and Recreation	4,994	204.84%
	Accommodate and Food	52,483	196.29%
	Other Services	6,337	112.44%
Unclassified	Unclassified	34,358	5833.28%
Government	Public Administration	2,311	5.75%

### *NWGRC's COVID – 19 Response*

In early March, Georgia Governor Brian Kemp issued a stay-at-home order for all Georgians in response to the onset of the COVID-19 Pandemic. To ensure continued, consistent, and efficient communication with the region's 15 counties and 49 cities the Community and Economic Development team made the decision to use the NWGRC Community and Economic Development Newsletter as a platform to guide that communication. The Community and Economic Development team significantly increased communication with northwest Georgia local governments to disseminate information regarding the impact of COVID-19, any assistance to be available, and provide NWGRC's state and federal partners the platform to share valuable information with the region.

Newsletters consisted of informative articles which detailed various topics such as the American Recovery Plan Act, the region's economic impact assessment and recovery plan, and upcoming webinars and grant opportunities. Additionally, in 2021 and 2022, NWGRC hosted several webinars and workshops on a number of topics including Appalachian Regional Commission, downtown development, and financing water and sewer infrastructure projects. Participating partners included Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC), Georgia Department of Community Affairs (DCA), Georgia Environmental Finance Authority (GEFA), United States Department of Agriculture-Rural Development (USDA-RD), United States Economic Development Administration (EDA), and the Georgia Municipal Association. Participation in these events ranged from 30 to 35 attendees.

The results of the increased newsletters and webinars included the local governments contacting the Community and Economic Development Team to request grant assistance and project development with economic recovery from the COVID-19 Pandemic. Likewise, local governments have had the opportunity to learn more about northwest Georgia's state and federal partnerships.



## Federal Opportunity Zones in Northwest Georgia

Federal Qualified Opportunity Zones were created by the Federal 2017 Tax Cuts and Jobs Act and designed to spur economic development by bringing private investment to areas that might otherwise have difficulty attracting it. Opportunity zones consist of low-income census tracts nominated by the State of Georgia and comprise economically distressed areas where new investments may be eligible for preferential tax treatment and the resulting investments.

Five census tracts in Northwest Georgia are designated as qualified opportunity zones. These zones are located in Floyd County (Census Tract 11 and 16), Gilmer County (Census Tract 803), Polk County (Census Tract 104), and Walker County (Census Tract 202). Located mainly in urban/suburban areas, these tracts offer residential, commercial, and industrial development and redevelopment opportunities.

The following incentives are offered to investors who put their capital to work in these qualified opportunity zones:

### 1. Temporary, capital gain tax deferral:

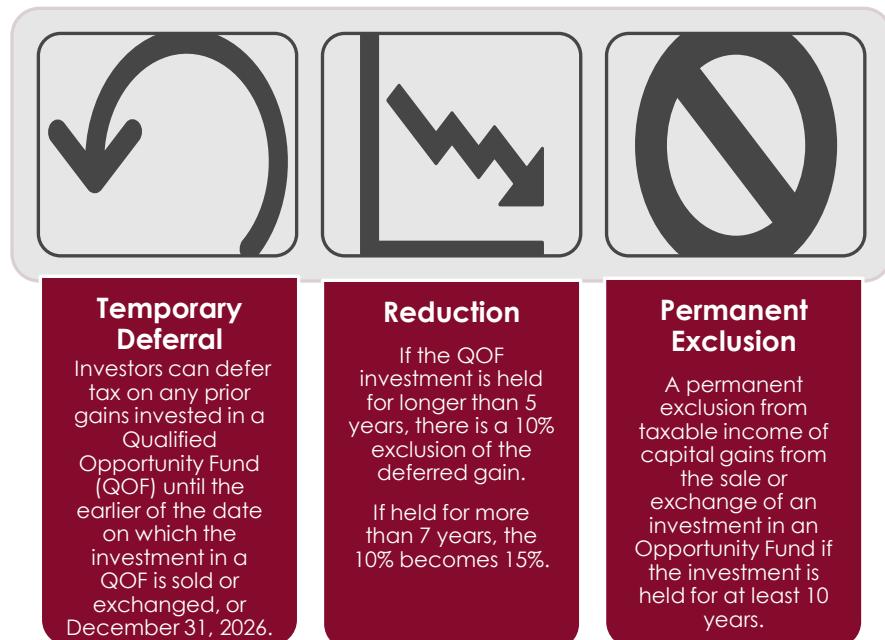
- The period of capital gain tax deferral ends upon 12/31/2026 or an earlier sale

### 2. A step-up in basis:

- Investment held for 5 years – Basis increased by 10% of deferred gain (90% taxed)
- Investment held for 7 years – basis increased by another 5% of deferred gain (85% taxed)

### 3. Forgiveness of additional gains

- Investment held for 10 years – Basis equal to fair market value; forgiveness of gains on appreciation of investment of sale or exchange of Opportunity Fund investment. This exclusion only applies to gains accrued after an investment in an Opportunity Fund.



## Cedartown / Polk County

### OPPORTUNITY ZONE OVERVIEW

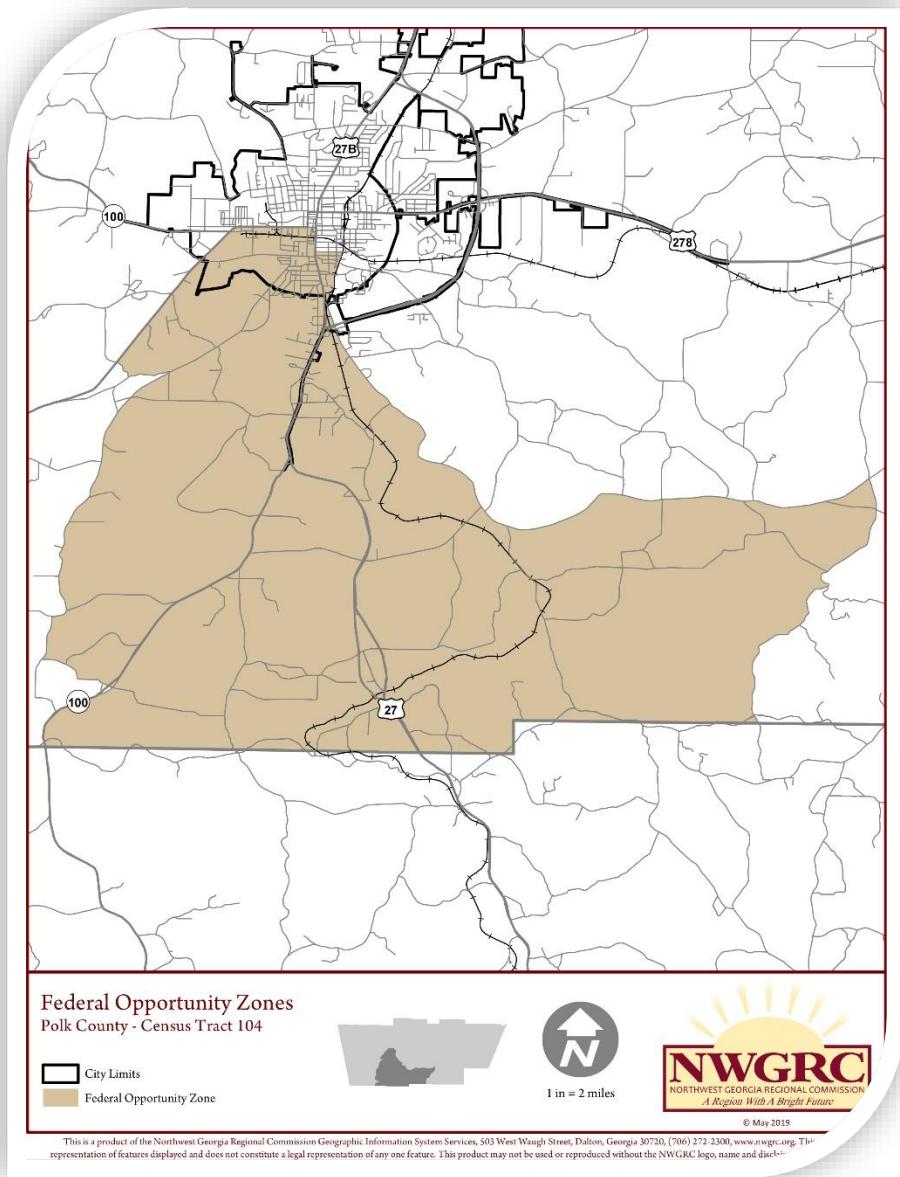
Located in **Cedartown / Polk County** the opportunity zone encompasses Census Tract 104, which includes the southern section of downtown Cedartown and much of southwestern Polk County. Except for the portions in and around the City of Cedartown, the opportunity zone is predominately rural in nature. The opportunity zone borders Haralson County to the south. Opportunities for residential, commercial, and industrial development / redevelopment are available in this zone.

### Quick Facts

Population	7,008
Labor Force	2,672
Labor Force Participation	56.2%
Unemployment Rate	6.3%
Per Capita Income	\$15,930
Poverty Rate	28.3%

### Development Opportunities

- Downtown Properties including commercial and upper story residential*
- 2.94 acres of vacant commercial property formerly used as an auto dealership at the intersection of Canal/South Main*



## Ellijay / East Ellijay / Gilmer County

### OPPORTUNITY ZONE OVERVIEW

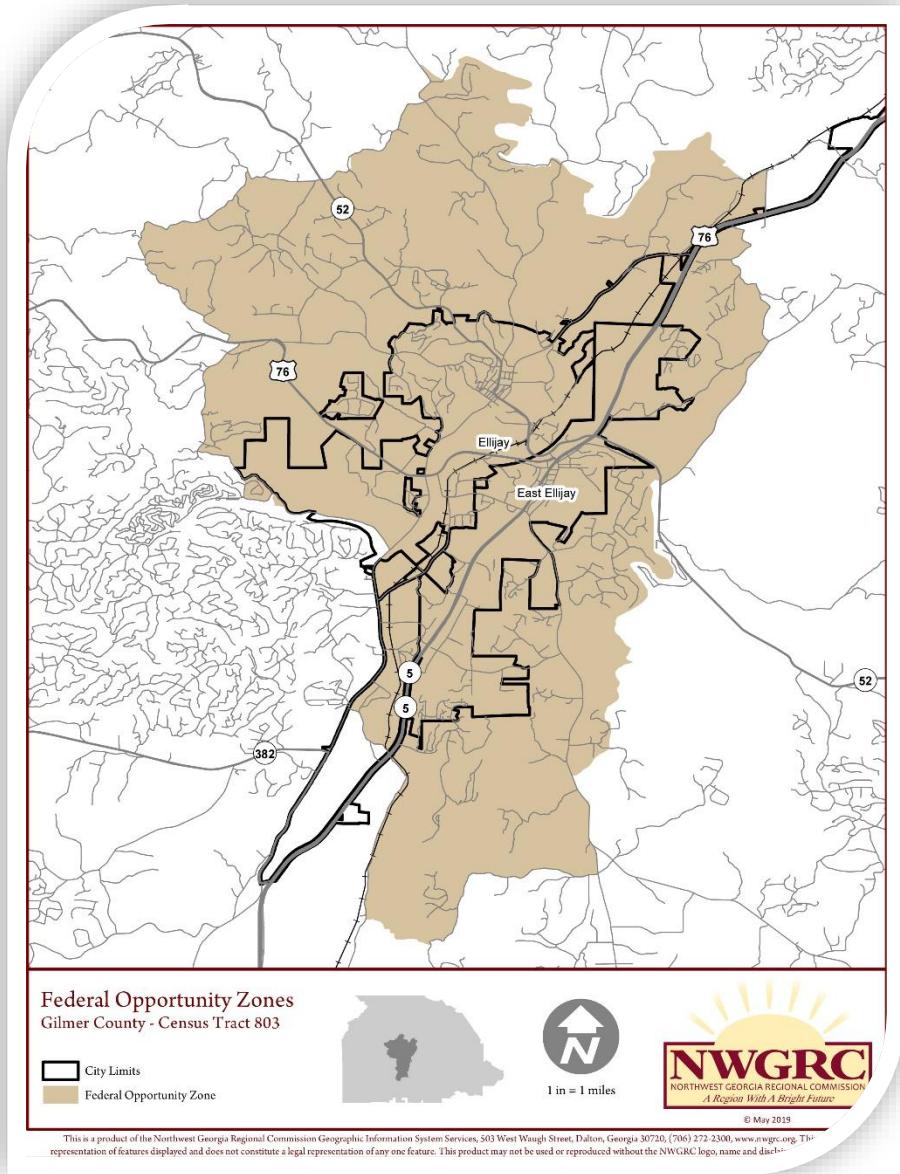
Located in **Ellijay / East Ellijay / Gilmer County** this opportunity zone includes Census Tract 803, which includes all the cities of Ellijay and East Ellijay and the central portions of Gilmer County. The opportunity zone is mainly suburban and includes downtown Ellijay and the commercial corridor along Hwy 515. Opportunities for residential, commercial, and industrial development / redevelopment are available in this zone.

#### *Development Opportunities*

- 17.24 Acre property on Eller Road zoned Commercial
- 0.95 Acre property at 60 Main Street near downtown Ellijay with a 4,266 SF building
- 6 Acre corner lot at 750 Progress Road zoned Commercial. The lot is level and partly cleared.

#### *Development Opportunities*

- 19.85 Acres of commercial land on Highway 515 located just south of the cities of Ellijay and East Ellijay.
- 3.65 Acre commercial property on Industrial Boulevard appropriate for retail/shopping



## Rome / Floyd County

### OPPORTUNITY ZONE OVERVIEW

Census Tracts 11 and 16 in Rome / Floyd County are both designated as qualified opportunity zones. These zones are adjacent to one another and are entirely within the city limits of Rome. The area is urban/suburban and includes downtown Rome, commercial developments, industrial sites, and residential neighborhoods. The opportunity zones are served by US Hwy27 and Hwy411 and state Hwy20 and Hwy101. Opportunities for residential, commercial, and industrial development / redevelopment are available in this zone.

#### Quick Facts

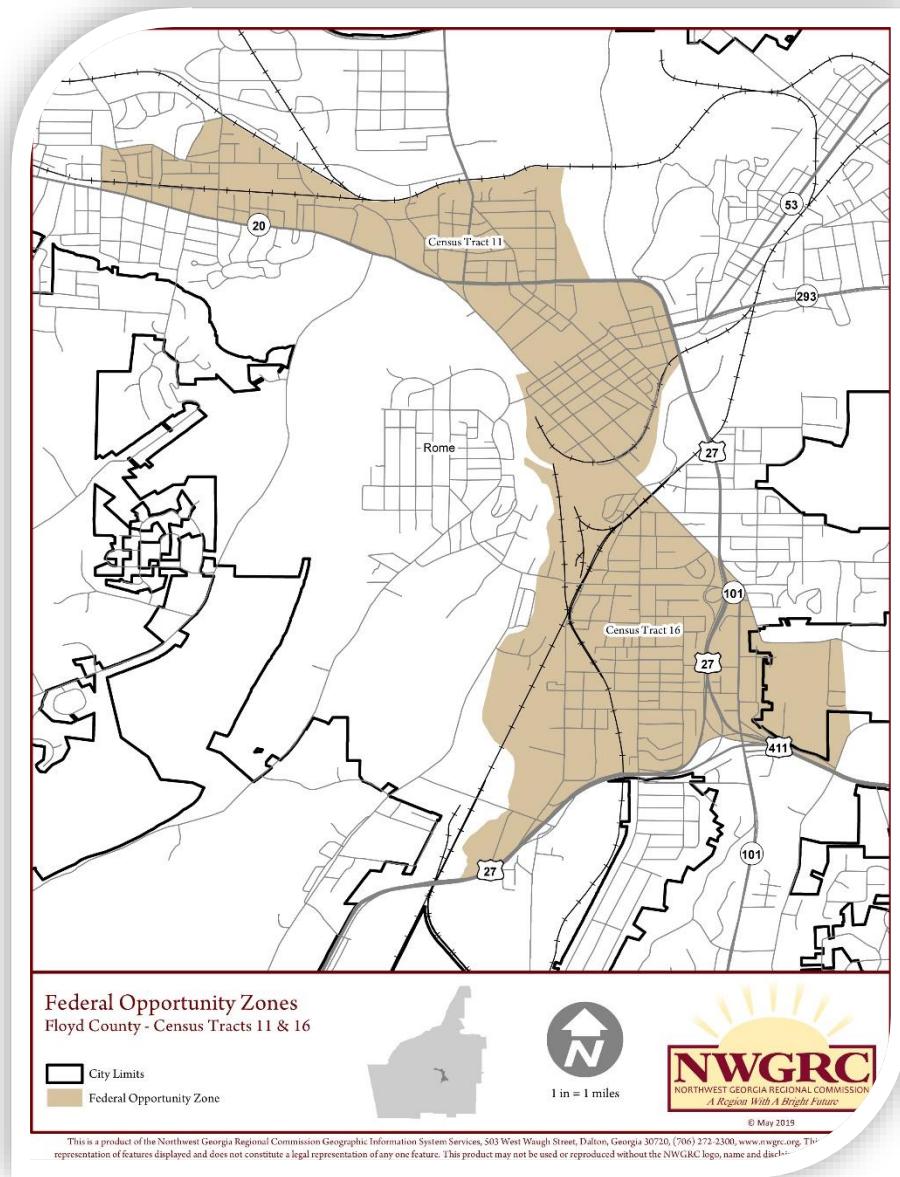
##### Census Tract 11

Population	2,750
Labor Force	1,099
Labor Force Participation	49.0%
Unemployment Rate	7.3%
Per Capita Income	\$29,858
Poverty Rate	30.7%

#### Quick Facts

##### Census Tract 16

Population	2,553
Labor Force	1,017
Labor Force Participation	53.6%
Unemployment Rate	6.6%
Per Capita Income	\$16,366
Poverty Rate	33.5%



## Rossville / Walker County

### OPPORTUNITY ZONE OVERVIEW

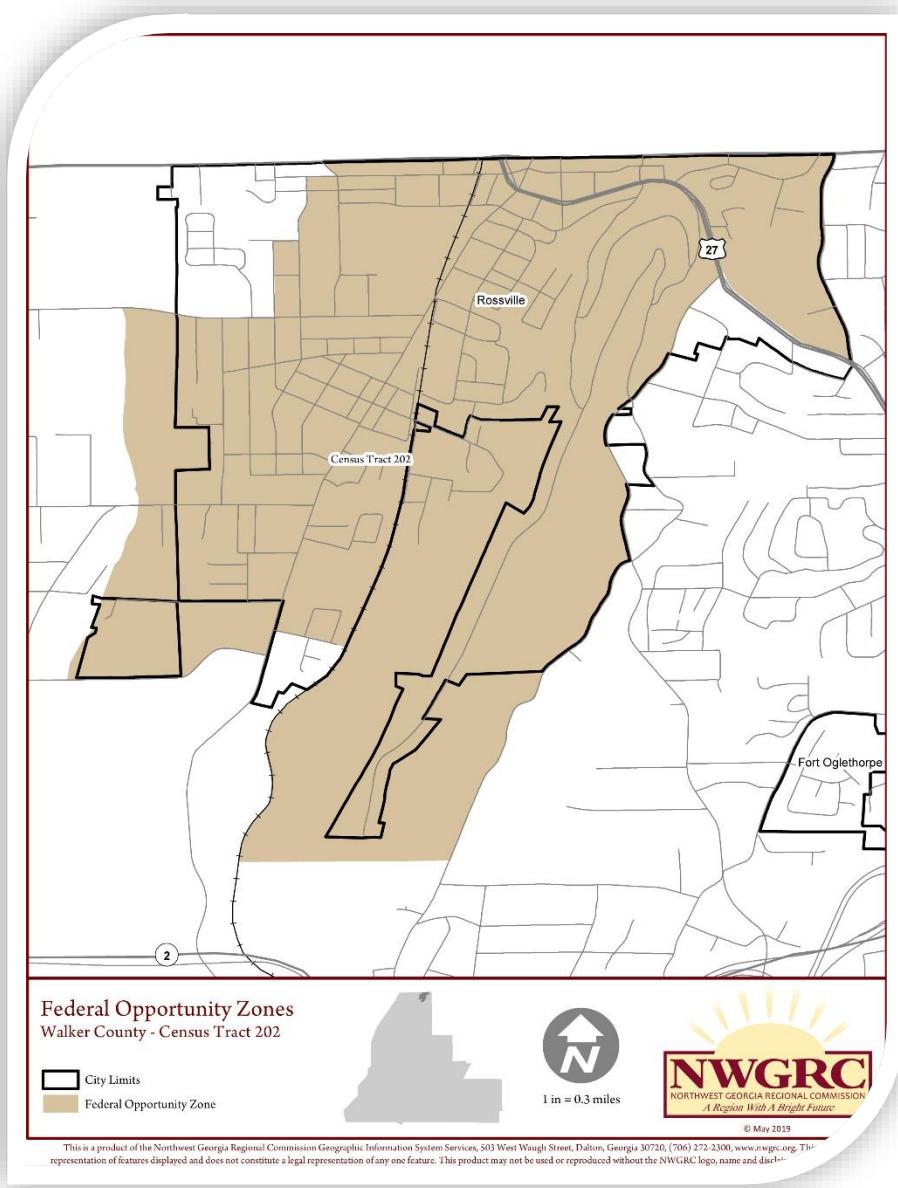
Encompassing Census Tract 202, the opportunity zone located in **Rossville / Walker County** includes the vast majority of the City of Rossville and some areas just south or west of the city limits. The opportunity zone has an 0.18 jobs-to-residents ratio, which would normally indicate that it is highly residential in nature. The opportunity zone borders Chattanooga, Tennessee to the north and is largely a commuter city for the metro area.

### Quick Facts

Population	3,470
Labor Force	1,549
Labor Force Participation	57.7%
Unemployment Rate	5.0%
Per Capita Income	\$23,013
Poverty Rate	24.1%

### Development Opportunities

- Peerless Mill Complex, a privately owned 1.2 million square feet complex that contains the historic mill
- Coats American Building, an eight acre 300,000 sq/ft brick-constructed manufacturing facility located on Maple Street
- 



## Planning Process

### Stakeholder Meetings

In 2021, NWGRC staff held four stakeholder meetings throughout the region to define regional needs as identified by local officials and economic development professionals. A fifth stakeholder meeting was held with regional community and economic development partners in other agencies. Information gathered during these meetings helped NWGRC to develop the regions resiliency plan and served as the starting point for the updated CEDS.

In August 2022, NWGRC hosted a meeting with regional partners and local economic development officials to perform a SWOT analysis and establish goals and action steps for the region's economic development efforts. The meeting was open to the public and was attended by forty economic development partners. Fourteen of the region's fifteen counties were represented. Officials from state and federal agencies, traditional high schools and college and career academies, technical colleges, development authorities, and chambers of commerce attended. Local businesses, utilities, city and county governments, the Small Business Development Center, and Georgia's Rural Center were also represented.

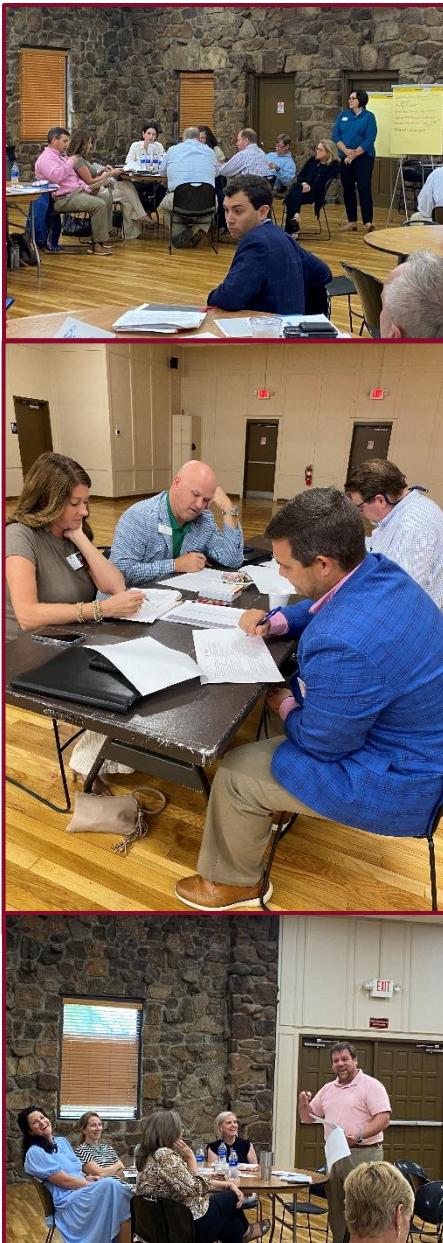
### Stakeholder Interviews

Regional Commission staff followed-up these meetings with one-on-one interviews with stakeholders and economic development professionals who were unable to attend the meetings. Input gathered during the public meetings and interviews is reflected in the SWOT Analysis and regional goals and strategies listed in the next sections.

### SWOT Analysis

Originated by Albert S. Humphrey in the 1960s, the SWOT Analysis is a useful technique for understanding Northwest Georgia's *Strengths* and *Weaknesses*; it identifies both the *Opportunities* open to the region and the *Threats* that the area may face. The SWOT Analysis was facilitated by Elyse Davis, Northwest Georgia Region Manager & Supervisor with Georgia Power's Community & Economic Development Division. Results of the SWOT





analysis for northwest Georgia were organized into five broad categories (human capital, community assets, essential infrastructure, business climate, and resiliency) and are presented on the following pages.

#### *Goals and Strategies*

Utilizing the finds from the stakeholder meetings and the SWOT Analysis, stakeholders recommended economic development goals and strategies to be included in the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS). Although the goals were largely left unchanged from the previous CEDS, new goals were added for economic resiliency. Additionally, strategies for implementing these goals were also updated. Additional changes were made after NWGRC staff conducted stakeholder interviews.

#### *Economic Resiliency*

The U.S. Economic Development Administration requires that each region's CEDS address economic resiliency. As noted by EDA, "establishing economic resilience in a local or regional economy requires the ability to anticipate risk, evaluate how that risk can impact key economic assets, and build a responsive capacity." Members of the CEDS committees were encouraged to consider economic resiliency throughout the SWOT analysis and during the process to develop the region's goals and strategies. It should also be noted that each community in northwest Georgia has prepared a *Pre-Disaster Mitigation Plan*, which is updated every five years, discussing the threats posed by natural and manmade disasters. These plans focus on preparation for, mitigation of, and response to disasters, including events that could cause severe economic disruptions.

#### *Public and Stakeholder Involvement*

The Northwest Georgia Regional Commission actively sought input from community leaders and economic development professionals during the development of the 2022 CEDS Update. Input was received during stakeholder meetings and interviews.

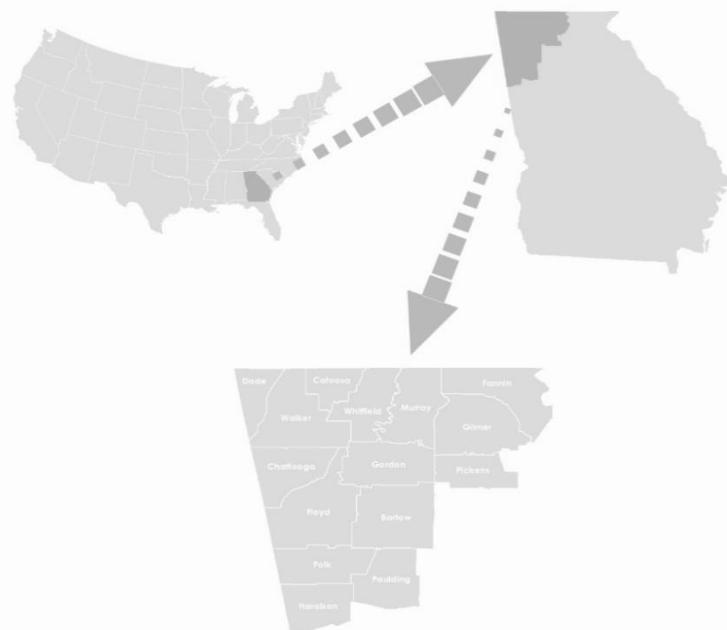
Members of the CEDS stakeholder group were selected to represent broad community participation throughout northwest Georgia. Sectors represented in the stakeholder group include agriculture, education, labor, workforce boards, utilities, nonprofits, local government, tourism, economic development, and the private sector.

Community participation was encouraged throughout the process with information about the meetings being published in local newspapers, on social media, and in the NWGRC Newsletter that has over three hundred subscribers from all communities throughout northwest Georgia.

A draft of this plan was distributed and posted on the NWGRC website for public comment and review in September 2022, prior to final plan adoption by the CEDS Strategy Committee on September 15, 2022. Any comments received will be noted in the final plan.

#### *Adoption of Plan*

Northwest Georgia's Economic Development Strategy: 2023-2028 Regional Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) was adopted by the governing council of the Northwest Georgia Regional Commission during its September 15, 2022 monthly meeting. The adoption resolution is in the appendix.



# SWOT Analysis

## Strengths

### Human Capital

- Multiple College and Career Academies
- Promote “best practices” to CCAs across region
- Connecting with middle/high school education pathways to secondary
- CTAE in elementary schools
- Strong education system
- Technical Colleges
- Colleges and Universities
- Good connection between workforce and employers
- Apprenticeship
- HOPE

### Community Assets

- Tourism
  - McLemore
  - Agritourism
  - Sports Tourism
  - Natural Resources
  - Culture – Arts – History
  - Wineries
  - Heritage Tourism
  - World class museums
  - Resorts
  - Destination cities
  - Two state visitor centers
  - I-75; I-20 corridors, 515 and Hwy 27 corridors
- Strong Medical facilities

- Thriving Downtown Areas
- New initiative emerging to support small, local food growers
- Progressing in advancement of Quality-of-Life amenities

### Essential Infrastructure

- Strong transportation network; great interstate systems
- Ahead of other regions in broadband capabilities
- Good mix of rural/semi-urban with “fair” infrastructure
- Appalachian Region Port (Chatsworth)

### Business Climate

- Strong economic developers
- New zoning categories
- Industry Diversity
- Collaboration
- Manufacturing (representative of 25% of workforce)
- State incentives / Local incentives
- Sound business climate; low taxes
- Strong support for entrepreneurs
- Safe region
- Low cost of living

### Resiliency

- More distance learning options
- Utilize emerging technologies and distance/learning to educate future workers

## Weaknesses

### Human Capital

- Lack of support services for workers
- Lack of childcare
- Soft skill deficiency
- Lack of candidates to meet the middle skills gap
- Lack of workers seeking employment
- Lack of individuals in workforce with advanced degrees
- Forced industry automation resulting in job elimination
- Negative perceptions about manufacturing jobs
- Changing lifestyle demands in workforce
  - Emerging workforce demands work/life balance
  - Jobs must follow available workers

### Community Assets

- Housing
  - Expanding homelessness; lack of transitional housing
  - Increased Substance Abuse
  - VRBO/short-term hurting hotels and raising housing prices
  - Lack of transitional housing
  - Lack of affordable (attainable) housing options for workers
  - Lack of housing opportunities in downtown areas
- Lack of rural hospital options
- Lack of Service to veterans
- Tourism
  - Entertainment/livability options for people under 40
  - Represents low paying jobs (perception)
  - Lack of funding at local level for some communities
  - Local tourism groups should think collaboratively and regionally to pool resources to promote their areas
- Lack of resources for disabled/mentally ill population

### Essential Infrastructure

- Supply chain to support existing and future growth
- Competition for jobs
- Lack of Wi-Fi/internet in rural areas
- Lack of publicly owned business parks
- Water/Wastewater Treatment
  - Lack of water/sewer lines to industrial sites
  - Aging infrastructure
  - Lack of sewer treatment capacity
- Lack of methods to finance public infrastructure to foster community development projects
- Transportation
  - Limited east/west connector routes (state highways)
  - Current east/west routes are unequipped
  - Lack of public transit networks in rural areas

### Business Climate

- Lack of Fine dining options
- Lack of Visionaries
- Hotels/Motels Quality
- Lack of shared space options

### Resiliency

- Lack of interconnectivity of Water and Sewer
- Focus on Floor Covering Industry
- Lack of Communications between ED staff and local officials
- Lack of shared space options

## Opportunities

### **Human Capital**

- Reentry programs
- Expand CCA's in all counties
- Entrepreneurism support – funding needed
- Incubator – funding needed
- Focus on adult career transition
- Capitalize on growing demand for supply chain workers in the logistic/transportation job growth segments
- Create collaborative K-16 education systems throughout region to build curriculum for future needs
- Create programs that pair disabled citizens with employment opportunities
- Continue support for Tri-State Workforce Alliance (Ala., TN., GA)

### **Community Assets**

- Senior living facilities at a range of price points for influx of 70 years plus
- CDBG, DCA funding
- Ecommerce in food industry
- Enhance quality of life opportunities (more recreation, trails, restaurants, housing)
- Promote partnerships opportunities across county lines
- Capitalize on film and movie industry
- Provide Desirable Housing - housing options for all income levels, home sizes, and costs
- Promote utilization of agrotourism resources by hosting seminars with the Georgia Department of Economic Development and other state organizations

### **Essential Infrastructure**

- Access to additional permitted water capacity
- Potential for growth in areas with excess wastewater treatment capacity

### **Business Climate**

- Joint initiative for community housing
- Communicated manufacturing advertise opportunities
- Enhanced digital marketing
- Mom and pop business focus
- Manufacturers adapt to “worker’s needs”
- Ecommerce food industry
- Vertical food integration in older, abandoned buildings – farm to table
- Build on existing, solid framework of local community and economic development professionals, and elected officials, to foster further collaboration
- Build on strong state/federal partnerships, utility organizations, and non-profits that currently exist across NW GA Region
- Continue support of multi-county/state partnership initiatives

### **Resiliency**

- Abundance of permitted water capacity in some areas
- Existing Hazard Mitigation Plans
- Collaboration initiatives established for COVID-19 can be expanded for other emergencies
- Regional Cooperation

## Threats

### Human Capital

- Increase in those not seeking employment
- Wage disparities
- Traditional enrollment, 25+ years old to retool, retrain skills
- Temporary work visas – immigration laws
- Aging workforce – unfilled positions due to retiring workforce
- Lack of skilled, experienced workers
- Automation

### Community Assets

- Rising cost of real-estate
- Lack of community pride
- Lack of ordinance enforcement
- Lack of funding for recreation and quality of life
- “Status Quo” thinking – being change resistant (Baby Boomer vs. Millennial vs. Gen z perceptions)
- Potential loss of millennials and Gen Z living in region
- Lack of engagement of millennials and Gen Z changing

### Essential Infrastructure

- Lack of available land
- Lack of sewerage coverage and capacity
- Merger and acquisition of medical facilities
- Lack of housing/workforce
- High density housing development without adequate code enforcement or infrastructure
- Lack of code enforcement in rural communities

- EPD regulations of water
- Traffic flow/congestion
- Federal conservation easements
- Lack of waste disposal (mattress, tires, etc)
- Lack of large Georgia Ready for Accelerated Development (GRAD) sites
- Annexation and jurisdiction laws an issue for water and wastewater expansion

### Business Climate

- Disinformation on social media
- Environmental changes and regulations
- Power plants closures/coal
- Inflation costs
- Political environment
- Federal legislation impacts of changes to policies, ie; tracking WIOA recipients, CDL, etc.
- Fuel costs
- EV vehicles and power grids
- Rapid growth of logistic projects taking up available land
- Fear of change – NIMBYs
- Restricted access to capital for some communities
- Lack of resources to foster innovation
- Lack of understanding of opportunities “manufacturing” provides

### Resiliency

- Possible emergence of more fed/state COVID regs
- Inflation

## Regional Vision, Goals, and Strategies

### Regional Vision

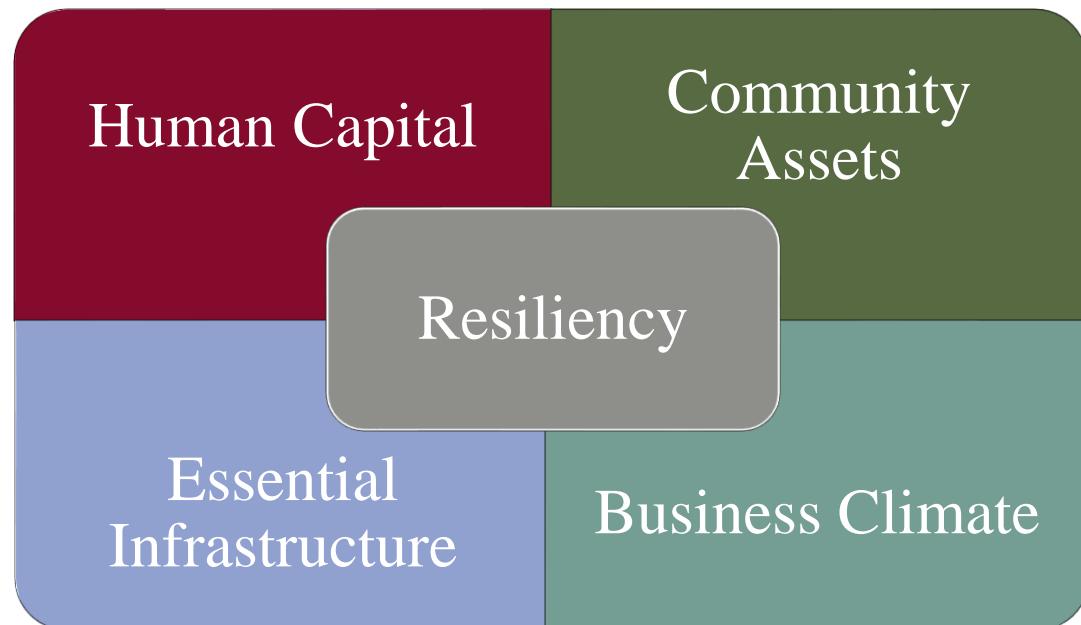
Northwest Georgia strives to become a region where economic opportunities are available for all citizens; where our natural resources are used wisely and conserved for future generations; where community facilities and services support the needs of everyone; where cooperation among the public, private, and non-profit sectors is commonplace, and where citizens have opportunities to enjoy a healthy and productive life.

### Regional Goals & Strategies

Matching the themes identified in the SWOT Analysis, the regional goals in Northwest Georgia's Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy are organized into five broad categories:

1. Human Capital,
2. community Assets,
3. Essential Infrastructure,
4. Business Climate, and
5. Resiliency

These categories are associated with regional goals and appropriate strategies in the following section of the document.



## Regional Goals at a Glance

### **Human Capital**

- Workforce Skills: Increase the number of residents skilled in advanced manufacturing in order to meet current and changing needs of northwest Georgia employers.
- Educational Attainment: Expand the number of students in the region that are prepared for future employment in skilled and professional positions through enhanced educational opportunities and active career counseling.
- Human Services: Ensure appropriate human services are available to meet the needs of the region's current and future workforce.

### **Community Assets**

- Tourism and Film Industry: Increase tourism, visitor spending, and revenue earned from the film industry in northwest Georgia.
- Quality of Life: Enhance quality of life amenities in the region to retain talent and gain a competitive advantage when recruiting new businesses and industry.
- Housing: Ensure adequate housing is available to meet the needs of the northwest Georgia workforce, which is attainable, decent, and safe.

## **Essential Infrastructure**

- Industrial Properties: Ensure northwest Georgia has sufficient, ready to develop industrial properties available to meet the region's current and future needs.
- Transportation: Advocate for transportation projects that are critical for regional economic development.
- High Speed Internet: Increase coverage and accessibility of high-speed internet for residential, commercial, and industrial areas, with a focus on rural areas.
- Traditional Infrastructure: Ensure communities in the region have adequate basic infrastructure to implement their community and economic development objectives.

## **Business Climate**

- Increase entrepreneurship and innovation by supporting business development in existing and emerging sectors.

## **Resiliency**

- Disaster Mitigation and Preparedness: Ensure that all communities have updated hazard mitigation plans and are prepared for natural disasters.
- Communications During Economic Downturn or Emergency: Ensure adequate communication infrastructure between local governments and economic development organizations during economic downturns.
- Resilient Workforce: Ensure that education and workforce training are suitable to allow workers to easily switch jobs and get broader skill sets.
- Industrial Diversity: Achieve sufficient industrial diversity to minimize the impacts to the regional economy of a downturn in any given industry sector.

## Human Capital

Attracting, developing, and retaining talent is critical in sustaining and growing the economy of northwest Georgia. The region should pursue a workforce strategy that ensures the labor force possesses the skills and education necessary to meet current and future needs of employers. Strengthening workforce skills will improve economic vitality benefiting both workers and companies. A healthy, skilled, and ready workforce improves the overall resiliency and adaptability of the region's communities.

### I. Workforce Skills

*Goal: Increase the number of residents skilled in advanced manufacturing in order to meet current and changing needs of northwest Georgia employers.*

#### Strategies:

1. Develop education campaigns that change parental and educational staff mindset and perception of the manufacturing industry.
2. Continue to expand robotic and Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Mathematics (STEAM) programs into middle schools that connects with real world applications. Support the expansion of STEAM programs and STEAM labs at the secondary school level.
3. Ensure workforce curriculum in middle and secondary schools are targeted to appropriate students.
4. Support efforts to expand apprenticeships, internships, and on-the-job training programs.
5. Support programs that assist residents with completing apprenticeships, on-the-job training programs, certifications, technical degrees, and post-secondary education in high demand areas.
6. Ensure the current and future workforce, of all age groups, are prepared for jobs of the future by obtaining necessary education and training.

## II. Educational Attainment

*Goal: Expand the number of students in the region that are prepared for future employment in skilled and professional positions through enhanced educational opportunities and active career counseling.*

### Strategies:

1. Support programs that increase high school graduation rates, attendance at technical colleges, and enrollment in traditional colleges and universities.
2. Develop exploratory pathways at the secondary school level to allow students to explore different paths before committing to a particular area/career.
3. Encourage students planning to attend colleges and universities to acquire credentials in academic areas in which a knowledge gap is anticipated due to northwest Georgia's aging population.
4. Establish new College and Career Academies (CCA) in areas that are currently underserved and offer more CCA type classes in traditional high schools.
5. Foster greater cooperation between College and Career Academies and traditional high schools. Encourage school jurisdictions within the same county to cooperate in developing a single college and career academy, where appropriate. Advocate for full-time-equivalent (FTE) funding revisions that would help facilitate greater levels of cooperation.
6. Assist students at the secondary school level with matching their individual aptitudes and interests to appropriate career pathways that prepare them for jobs of the future.

### III. Human Services

{ *Goal: Ensure appropriate human services are available to meet the needs of the region's current and future workforce.* }

#### Strategies:

1. Support programs that remove barriers to participation in the workforce (such as childcare, affordable healthcare, and public transportation).
2. Support programs aimed at attracting, engaging, and retaining workforce entry populations in northwest Georgia's communities.
3. Assess and address needs unique to the region's special population; this initiative should:
  - a. Ensure appropriate housing options are available
  - b. Work with local employers to create positions to provide a source of income for those able to work
  - c. Address transportation needs of this segment of our population.

## Community Assets

Cultural and natural resources, quality of life improvements, thriving downtowns, quality medical facilities, and abundant agricultural lands are assets that northwest Georgia's communities should leverage for greater economic development potential. Northwest Georgia has rich cultural heritage and abundant natural treasures. The region's natural and cultural resources contribute to the area's sense of identity and can provide a basis for sustainable, place-based economic development. The development and promotion of these natural and cultural assets has the potential to become a critical economic driver for northwest Georgia, especially in the tourism and film industries.

### I. Tourism and Film Industry

*Goal: Increase tourism, visitor spending, and revenue earned from the film industry in northwest Georgia.*

#### Strategies:

1. Encourage and assist communities in participation in Georgia's Camera-Ready Communities program, which connects film and TV productions with skilled county liaisons across the state to provide local expertise and support.
2. Support occupations related to Georgia's film and digital media economy and expand educational programs associated with the industry.
3. Encourage collaborative marketing among the various communities and tourism destinations to create synergy to attract greater visitation.
4. Compile and continue to update an exhaustive list of tourism resources available by county and market for promotion utilizing currently available resources.
5. Support tourism initiatives by educating the public on the positive impact tourism brings to the region, increase funding for tourism, and market the region's tourism assets to further strengthen Georgia's economy.



## II. Quality of Life

{ *Goal: Enhance quality of life amenities in the region to retain talent and gain a competitive advantage when recruiting new businesses and industry.* }

### Strategies:

1. Enhance and expand community parks, amphitheaters, trails, and recreation programs to retain talent and attract investment in the area.
2. Implement public art programs to improve downtowns and public spaces and enhance the local economy. Support concerts, festivals, and special events in city- and town-centers that attract all sectors of the population to the region's downtown areas.
3. Develop, implement, and enforce land use policies that balance economic competitiveness and resiliency with cultural and natural resource preservation.



### III. Housing

{ Goal: Ensure adequate housing is available to meet the needs of the northwest Georgia workforce, which is attainable, decent, and safe. }

#### Strategies:

1. To foster growth and job creation/retention across the region, ensure that attainable housing is readily available for all income levels.
2. Create an Attainable Housing Taskforce with members from each county to assess housing issues and create a regional housing implementation plan.
3. Support local efforts to improve workforce housing.
4. Encourage private developers to construct new workforce and attainable housing in underserved areas. Promote the housing tax credit and other state and federal housing programs that encourage private investment in workforce housing.
5. Determine barriers to affordable housing construction (i.e., restrictive zoning and land use regulations) and mitigate these barriers.



## Essential Infrastructure

To remain competitive in the global economy, northwest Georgia communities must continue to maintain, improve, and expand infrastructure necessary for economic growth. Essential infrastructure for economic development includes both above-ground and below-ground facilities, such as transportation, utilities, and broadband. Ready to develop properties are also vital for continued industrial growth.

### I. Industrial Properties

*Goal: Ensure northwest Georgia has sufficient, ready to develop industrial properties available to meet the region's current and future needs.*

#### Strategies:

1. Identify properties that are appropriate for development or redevelopment as industrial sites or as industrial parks.
2. Identify funding mechanisms to provide utilities (such as water, sewer, natural gas, and fiber) for future industrial development.
3. Develop a campaign, through the local development authorities, that can be utilized in each county to educate the public and elected officials on Georgia Ready for Accelerated Development (GRAD) sites to include:
  - a. What is GRAD
  - b. The benefits of GRAD certification
  - c. Funding options to certify GRAD property

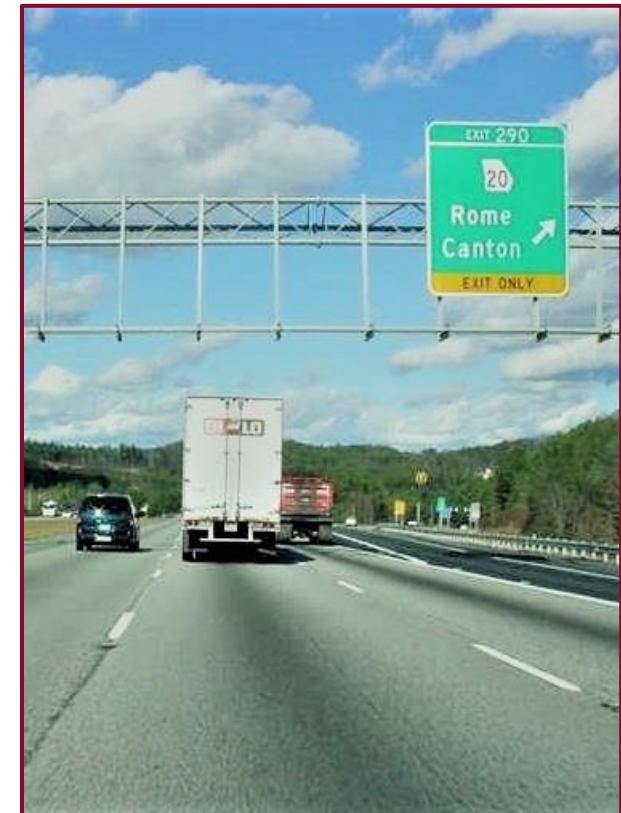


## II. Transportation

{ Goal: Advocate for transportation projects that are critical for regional economic development. }

### Strategies:

1. Plan for and invest in Electronic Vehicle (EV) readiness. Identify funding mechanisms to provide EV charging stations throughout the region. Advocate for projects that support electric vehicle charging stations for residential use and businesses that align with local community and economic development strategies
2. Encourage state and local governments to support and pursue options that increase the availability of transportation funding (including consideration of Transportation Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax (TSPLOST) referendums).
3. Support investments in multi-modal transportation systems that strengthen connections to regional, national, and global markets.
4. Form and participate in a regional transportation coalition to advocate for vital projects in northwest Georgia.
  - a. Focus advocacy on appropriate transportation networks leading to and from the Appalachian Inland Port.
  - b. Continue to advocate for the development of safe, efficient, and reliable East-West transportation corridors.
5. Encourage local transit providers to focus on efficiently connecting people to jobs and services.



### III. High Speed Internet

*{ Goal: Increase coverage and accessibility of high-speed internet for residential, commercial, and industrial areas, with a focus on rural areas. }*

#### Strategies:

1. Support efforts of local governments and school districts to ensure all students have access to high-speed internet service to enable students to complete assignments at home and advance their educational attainment.
2. Identify resources to support the expansion of high-speed internet and other telecommunication infrastructure to all communities in the Northwest Georgia Region.
3. Identify existing assets and service providers to foster public/private partnerships to pursue expansion opportunities.

### IV. Traditional Infrastructure

*{ Goal: Ensure communities in the region have adequate basic infrastructure to implement their community and economic development objectives. }*

#### Strategies:

1. Identify areas with aging infrastructure and assist communities with developing a plan and identifying funding mechanisms for replacement.
2. Ensure each community has adequate water and wastewater treatment capacity to allow for anticipated commercial growth and industrial development.
3. Extend water and sewer infrastructure to areas in northwest Georgia where commercial and industrial development are appropriate and anticipated.

## Business Climate

Fostering an attractive environment for economic growth is essential to creating jobs, improving living standards, and financing necessary public services. Northwest Georgia communities should promote a strong business climate that supports entrepreneurial and business development in existing and emerging sectors. A business climate that supports both small-scale and large enterprises is critical for economic growth, innovation, and resiliency.

### I. Improved Business Climate

*{ Goal: Increase entrepreneurship and innovation by supporting business development in existing and emerging sectors. }*

#### Strategies:

1. Support efforts to foster and grow Northwest Georgia's Electronic Vehicle (EV) economy.
2. Ensure the Northwest Georgia Region's ability to compete globally by supporting sound regulatory practices and a favorable tax environment that enables further economic development growth in manufacturing, tourism, entrepreneurs, and small business start-ups.
3. Develop Business Centers to act as incubators and accelerators providing business development services and space for entrepreneurs in the region to aid with entrepreneurship and innovation. Consider merits of the "Georgia Southern" model which provides an innovation network with physical locations that foster innovation in small communities.
4. Improve access to capital for entrepreneurs, start-up companies, and innovative expansions that focus on emerging markets.
5. Create "resource page" to enhance access to existing small business resources (i.e., Small Business Development Centers, Chambers of Commerce, and business mentors).

## Resiliency

The Economic Development Administration defines economic resiliency as "the ability of a region or community to anticipate, withstand, and bounce back from any type of shock, disruption, or stressor." This definition includes not only natural disasters and hazards such as hurricanes and tornados, but also man-made economic disruptions such as widespread layoffs or quarantines due to an infectious disease. Economic resiliency is important because it allows for quicker recovery from economic downturns, reducing the harm caused to the community.

There are several common methods for achieving resiliency. Some of these methods include plans and strategies to define and implement a collective vision for resilience, preparing for natural disasters, broadening the industrial base so the regional economy is not over-reliant on any one industry sector, and building a workforce that can easily shift between different types of jobs.

### I. Disaster Mitigation and Preparedness

*Goal: Ensure that all communities have updated hazard mitigation plans and are prepared for natural disasters.*

#### Strategies:

1. Update hazard mitigation plans where necessary.
  - a. Examine county hazard mitigation plans to ensure they are current and address all likely disasters
  - b. Develop a strategy for implementing projects listed in local hazard mitigation plans

2. Ensure critical infrastructure is reliable and resilient.
  - a. Investigate current infrastructure for reliability and resiliency and improve any deficiencies found
  - b. Ensure water and wastewater systems are resilient as well as interconnected when feasible
  - c. Ensure energy production and transmission infrastructure is resilient and adequate for changing weather conditions
  - d. Install backup generators on all critical infrastructure

## II. Communications During Economic Downturn or Emergency

*{ Goal: Ensure adequate communication infrastructure between local governments and economic development organizations during economic downturns. }*

### Strategies:

1. Ensure that local governments and economic development organizations are familiar with each other.
2. Ensure that local governments and economic development organizations have an easy way of getting together and communicating.
  - a. Collaborate to determine the most effective way of communicating during emergencies
  - b. Arrange to have the chosen methods available when emergencies happen



### III. Resilient Workforce

*{ Goal: Ensure that education and workforce training are suitable to allow workers to easily switch jobs and get broader skill sets. }*

#### Strategies:

1. Work with local schools and organizations on retraining programs.
2. Advertise existing programs (such as those run by Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA)).
3. Promote incentives that encourage students to enter high demand careers.

### IV. Industrial Diversity

*{ Goal: Achieve sufficient industrial diversity to minimize the impacts to the regional economy of a downturn in any given industry sector. }*

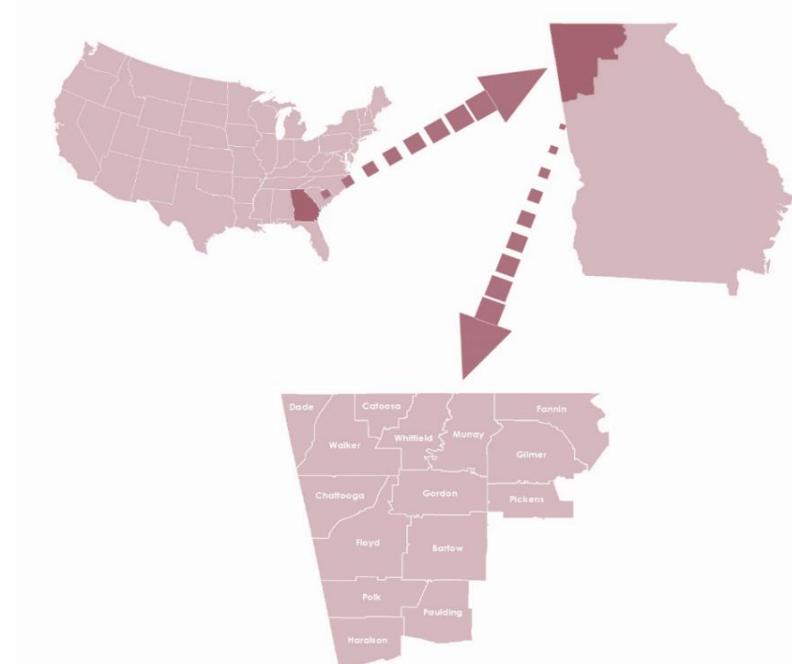
#### Strategies:

1. Determine industries that would synergize well with current businesses and target incentive packages to attract those not commonly represented in the local area.
2. Market industrial parks and available properties to industries that complement existing industries or broaden the industrial base.

## Plan of Action

The Northwest Georgia Regional Commission, Northwest Georgia counties and cities, local/regional/state economic development individuals/groups are all responsible for implementation of the CEDS goals/objectives and work program. The NWGRC, utilizing Economic Development Administration Planning Investment funds, will assist and guide responsible parties in the implementation of the CEDS.

In addition to EDA grant funds, NWGRC will continue to employ the following implementation tools in meeting the CEDS goals and projects: Georgia Department of Community Affairs Business Development Funds, Appalachian Regional Commission Grant Funds, US Department of Agriculture-Rural Development Economic Development Programs, OneGeorgia Authority, Georgia Recreational Trails Program, U.S. Land and Water Conservation Fund, and local and statewide initiatives such as Freeport Exemption, Job Tax Credits, Enterprise Zones and job training programs.



## Performance Measures

Northwest Georgia Regional Commission's report of accomplishments to EDA will be used to evaluate the successful development and implementation of the CEDS. Primary evaluation criteria will include private sector jobs created/retained, private investment, number and types of businesses/industries assisted, and the economic environment of the region. As annual CEDS updates are prepared, NWGRC staff will measure the success of meeting identified CEDS goals and report the same to the NWGRC CEDS Committee and NWGRC Council. Specific performance measures that may be used to measure success for identified goals include the following.

### Human Capital

- Workforce Skills: Increased number of students in career and technical education programs, including apprenticeships, internships, and on-the-job training programs.
- Educational Attainment: Increased number of residents that have high school diplomas, have graduated from College and Career Academies, and have received post-secondary certificates or degrees.
- Human Services: Increased number of programs that remove barriers to participation in the workforce (such as childcare, affordable healthcare, and public transportation).

### Community Assets

- Tourism and Film Industry: Increase in tourism and visitor spending in the region; increased participation in Georgia's Camera Ready Communities program.
- Quality of Life: Number of projects completed aimed at improving quality of life amenities in the region, such as trails, parks, recreation programs, community centers, and public safety programs.
- Housing: Number of projects completed that increases or improves availability of workforce housing, which is affordable, decent, and safe.

## **Essential Infrastructure**

- Industrial Properties: Increase in ready-to-develop industrial parks, spec buildings, and Georgia Ready for Accelerated Development (GRAD) sites.
- Transportation: Number of projects completed that are critical for regional economic development.
- High Speed Internet: Increase coverage and accessibility of high-speed internet in northwest Georgia.
- Traditional Infrastructure: Number of projects completed that provide or improve basic infrastructure that allow communities to implement their community and economic development objectives.

## **Business Climate**

- Improved Business Climate: Increase number of programs supporting business development in existing and emerging sectors; enhanced access to capital; and number of new or improved business centers that act as incubators and accelerators providing business development services and space.

## **Resiliency**

- Disaster Mitigation and Preparedness: All communities have updated hazard mitigation plans.
- Communications During Economic Downturn or Emergency: Increase participation of economic development staff in emergency planning and preparedness meetings.
- Resilient Workforce: Increased number of students in career and technical education programs.
- Industrial Diversity: Increased industrial diversity in each community.

## Appendix

- Resolution Authorizing Transmittal of CEDS
- Stakeholders
- Four-Year Graduation Rate
- Industry Mix

## Resolution Authorizing Transmittal of CEDS

### A RESOLUTION

WHEREAS the Northwest Georgia Regional Commission's Comprehensive Economic Development Committee has prepared a Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy for 2022-2027 for the Northwest Georgia Region, in compliance with the Economic Development Administration's Comprehensive Economic Development Strategies Summary of Requirements and 13 CFR § 303.7:

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED

That the 2022-2027 Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy CEDS is hereby authorized to be transmitted to the Economic Development Administration for review, pending changes and comments received during the 30-day review period.

SO RESOLVED, THIS 15th DAY OF SEPTEMBER, 2022.

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Shannon Whitfield  
Chairperson  
Northwest Georgia Regional Commission

## Stakeholders Consulted

Stakeholder	County / Organization
Patrick Vickers	Department of Community Affairs
Eric McDonald	Haralson County
Green Suttles	Pickens County
Janet Cochran	Georgia's Rural Center
Carl Campbell	Whitfield County IDA
Stephanie Watkins	Walker County
Spencer Hogg	NWGA JDA
Al Hodge	Hodge Consulting Services
Tamara Brock	Georgia Department of Economic Development
Shane Evans	Chattahoochee Technical College
Jim Henry	Chattooga County
Stephen Smith	Murray County
Barry Gentry	Murray County Chamber
Phyllis Walker	WIOA Northwest Georgia
Susan Gentry	WIOA Northwest Georgia
Missy Kendrick	Rome Floyd County Development Authority
Katie Gobbi	City of Euharlee
Lynn Reeves	Area Agency on Aging - NWGRC
Lindsay Wilson	Area Agency on Aging - NWGRC
Blake Elsberry	Chattooga County

Stakeholder	County / Organization
Holly Sutton	Floyd County
Sammy Rich	City of Rome
John R?	Floyd County
John Boyd	City of Rome
Diane Lewis	Floyd County
Bob Grigsby	Floyd County
Heidi Popham	Georgia Northwestern Technical College
Dan Wright	Catoosa County
Julianne Meadows	Regional Planning – NWGRC
Sheree Ralston	Fannin County
Chris Thomas	Polk County
Meghan Trusley	Catoosa County
Alex Williams	Floyd County
Britany Pittman	Department of Community Affairs - ARC
Boyd Austin	Executive Director – NWGRC
Nora Guzman	UGA Small Business Development Center
Kathy Johnson	Gordon County Chamber
Michael Hughes	Paulding County
Annaka Woodruff	Department of Community Affairs - ARC
Stephanie Scearce	Georgia Northwestern Technical College

## Four-Year Graduation Rate

Georgia Department of Education 2021 Four-Year Graduation Rate			
System Name	Graduation Class Size	Total Graduated	Graduation Rate
Bartow County	926	867	93.6
Catoosa County	821	724	88.2
Chattooga County	152	121	79.6
Dade County	157	132	84.1
Fannin County	190	172	90.5
Floyd County	666	627	94.1
Gilmer County	253	238	94.1
Haralson County	432	419	97.0
Murray County	205	198	96.6
Paulding County	447	435	97.3
Pickens County	2,447	2,185	89.3
Polk County	296	281	94.9
Walker County	552	483	87.5
Whitfield County	569	516	90.7
Bremen City	1,008	879	87.2
Calhoun City	165	161	97.6
Cartersville City	273	273	100
Chickamauga City	343	313	91.3
Dalton City	102	102	100
Rome City	542	461	85.1
Trion City	453	421	92.9
Norwest Georgia Region	79	78	98.7

Source: Georgia Department of Education

## Industry Mix

Industry Mix – Northwest Georgia 2021					
INDUSTRY	Average Number of Establishments	Average Monthly Employment	Average Monthly Percent	Average Weekly Wages	
<b>Goods-Producing</b>	<b>3,147</b>	<b>77,681</b>	<b>28.8</b>	<b>1,020</b>	
Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing & Hunting	138	1,056	0.4	750	
Mining	22	483	0.2	1,324	
Construction	1,797	10,328	3.8	1,035	
Manufacturing	1,190	65,814	24.4	1,019	
<b>Service-Providing</b>	<b>12,661</b>	<b>152,427</b>	<b>56.5</b>	<b>824</b>	
Utilities	27	1,213	0.4	2,078	
Wholesale Trade	860	10,497	3.9	1,096	
Retail Trade	2,738	34,389	12.7	629	
Transportation and Warehousing	515	9,604	3.6	1,004	
Information	124	1,212	0.4	1,107	
Finance and Insurance	848	5,534	2.1	1,236	
Real Estate and Rental and Leasing	613	2,173	0.8	1,059	
Professional Scientific & Technical Svc	1,335	8,272	3.1	1,225	
Management of Companies and Enterprises	48	1,014	0.4	1,935	
Admin., Support, Waste Mgmt, Remediation	944	11,371	4.2	666	
Education Services	115	2,066	0.8	863	
Health Care and Social Assistance	1,671	31,077	11.5	1,065	
Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation	223	2,682	1.0	440	
Accommodation and Food Services	1,554	25,821	9.6	383	
Other Services (except Public Admin.)	1,046	5,502	2.0	754	
<b>Unclassified - industry not assigned</b>	<b>1,256</b>	<b>704</b>	<b>0.3</b>	<b>1,075</b>	
<b>Total - Private Sector</b>	<b>17,064</b>	<b>230,812</b>	<b>85.1</b>	<b>890</b>	
<b>Total - Government</b>	<b>765</b>	<b>39,009</b>	<b>14.4</b>	<b>883</b>	
Federal Government	121	1,461	0.5	1,226	
State Government	255	5,523	2.0	786	
Local Government	389	32,025	11.8	884	
<b>ALL INDUSTRIES</b>	<b>17,829</b>	<b>269,822</b>	<b>99.5</b>	<b>889</b>	

# Northwest Georgia's Economic Development Strategy

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2022-2026 REGIONAL COMPREHENSIVE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY (CEDS)