

2020-2024

Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy

**White River Planning &
Development District, Inc.**



1652 White Drive, P.O. Box 2396
Batesville, AR 72503
870.793.5233

Cleburne • Fulton • Independence • Izard • Jackson • Sharp • Stone • Van Buren • White • Woodruff

WHITE RIVER PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT DISTRICT, INC.
COMPREHENSIVE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

TABLE OF CONTENTS

<u>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY</u>	<u>2</u>
<u>CEDS COMMITTEE</u>	<u>3</u>
<u>INTRODUCTION</u>	<u>5</u>
<u>BACKGROUND AND SUMMARY</u>	<u>5</u>
<u>REGION AND COUNTY PROFILES</u>	<u>10</u>
<u>SWOT ANALYSIS</u>	<u>22</u>
<u>ACTION PLAN</u>	<u>24</u>
<u>ECONOMIC RESILIENCE</u>	<u>32</u>
<u>COMMUNITY AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STAFF</u>	<u>33</u>

Executive Summary

Janet Smith, Executive Director

North Central Arkansas's Regional Economic and Community Planning Source

Chartered under the Arkansas Nonprofit Corporation Act, the White River Planning and Development District, Inc. was first incorporated in 1967. As a non-profit corporation serving the counties of Cleburne, Fulton, Independence, Izard, Jackson, Sharp, Stone, Van Buren, White and Woodruff the District was designated as an Economic Development District under the provisions of the Public Works and Economic Development Administration of the U.S. Department of Commerce in May 1968. Since that time, the Economic Development Administration has designated the District counties as Distressed Areas, and also nine of the ten participating counties have been designated as being located within the Delta Initiative.

Originally prepared in 1968, this Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy's purpose is to provide an update of the area's economic and social status and reflect changes that have occurred since the previous CEDS was prepared while addressing the challenges faced by the District's communities today in regards to economic development.

This strategy is the foundation for local and regional planning projects of White River Planning and Development. The following report provides a description of the current economic and demographic conditions of the region, an analysis of regional strengths and weaknesses and also an analysis of regional clusters. It also lists the economic development goals and objectives as well as a plan of action and the District's ability to demonstrate resilience while outlying the activities necessary to implement the goals and objectives.

Janet Smith

Innovative Regional Planning

• • •

Employment Development

Community Development

Agricultural Development

Industrial Development

Solid Waste Management

Workforce Assistance

Business Development

Institutional Development

Tourism & Recreation

Local Government Services

Transportation Development

Environmental Enhancement

Human Resources

Grant Writing

Childcare Resource & Referral

Small Business Loans

Cluster Development

Hazard Mitigation Planning

CEDS Committee

Cleburne County

Jerry Holmes, County Judge

Jimmy Clark, Mayor of Heber Springs

Terry Cornet, ASU Heber Springs

Fulton County

Jim Kendrick, County Judge

Curren Everett, Hospital Administrator

Carolyn Lewis, Businesswoman

Independence County

Robert Griffin, County Judge

Boris Dover, Banker

Rick Elumbaugh, Mayor of Batesville

Izard County

Eric Smith, County Judge

Dennis Wiles, Retired Businessman

Jackson County

Jeff Phillips, County Judge

David Steward, Mayor of Newport

Jerry Carlew, Retired Businessman

Phillip Brown, Businessman

Sharp County

Gene Moore, County Judge

Garry Lawrence, Businessman

Jon R. Abele, Businessman

Stone County

Stacey Avey, County Judge

Roger Gardner, Mayor of Mountain View

Stan Townsend, Retired Hospital Administrator

Van Buren County

Dale James, County Judge
Richard McCormac, Mayor of Clinton
Roger Hooper, Retired Businessman

White County

Michael Lincoln, County Judge
Kyle Osborne, Mayor of Searcy
Janet Hearyman, Businesswoman

Woodruff County

Charles Dallas, County Judge
Beverly Chapple, Nonprofit Coordinator
Jim Kelley, Businessman
Regina Burkett, Businesswoman

The White River Planning and Development District CEDS committee is comprised of local officials, business men and women and retired community members who are strong stakeholders in economic development projects of the district. The District began the framework for the CEDS update in the fall of 2017 with 4 public meetings being held throughout the 2018 year and 2 during 2019. The committee and the District kept in consistent contact collecting information and developing ideas for the CEDS throughout the process.

In the future, the Planning District and the CEDS committee will work to create solid connections between the current action plan and performance measures for economic and community development at the regional, state and federal levels. As committee members change, the District will make it a priority to invite valuable new members to become a part of the planning process.



Introduction

What is a CEDS?

Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy

The White River Planning and Development District region consists of a 10 county area that serves a collective population of around 237,000 citizens. Comprised of rural farmland, high quality water resources and a steady growing tourism industry, the District is enriched with robust soils and rolling hills. Each county that lies within the district has qualities that are unique to its area, yet the 10 county district as a whole shares a commonality that creates a region of consistent desirability throughout.

The District's CEDS consist of five sections including:

1. Summary and background of the economic conditions of the district and counties.
2. SWOT analysis of the regional strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats.
3. An action plan which outlines future expectations of the District and how to accomplish them.
4. Evaluation framework that will explain how the district will monitor performance procedures.
5. Economic Resilience and the ability to recover, withstand and avoid.

Summary and Background

Economic Conditions of the Region

Where are we Going?

Originally prepared in 1968, the White River Overall Economic Development Program delineated the purpose of the economic development process to seek economic growth through multi-county economic planning efforts. The ten-county area, like much of Arkansas, had lagged behind the nation for many years in terms of standard of living, economic status, employment, and technology.

The initiation of a regional planning process guaranteed an effort to utilize scarce resources in an orderly and efficient manner. The White River OEDP became a multipurpose tool designed to coordinate and implement various federal, state, and local activities, which contributed to the economic development of North central Arkansas. This **Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS)** is to provide an update of the area's economic and social status and reflect changes that have occurred since the previous CEDS was prepared, and address the challenges faced by the District communities today in regards to economic development.

The primary emphasis of White River Planning and Development District, Inc. has always been to preserve and improve the quality of life within the White River area; and the direction of District activity continues to address economic development and community development, while maintaining the original concept of regional cooperation and coordination and efficient use of resources. Under the direction of Jan Smith, Executive Director, the staff of WRPDD provides assistance to the local

communities, counties, federal agencies, the private sector, and other entities in such areas as infrastructure development, business development, recreation, solid waste management, and transportation planning, and expansion resulting in job creation/retention.

Administering programs such as waste tire disposal, solid waste management, recycling programs, workforce development, grant management, loan programs, community development and child care programs enables the District to effectively coordinate services for the ten county region. Working with federal, state, and local officials the private sector and agencies such as Arkansas Department of Rural Services, the State Forestry Commission, the Arkansas State Highway and Transportation Department, Arkansas Economic Development Commission, the Economic Development Administration, U.S. Department of Agriculture-Rural Development, and Delta Regional Authority allows a unique relationship, which fosters healthy development within the region.

The following information summarizes the current economic conditions of the ten county district following with more specific demographics of each county.

White River Planning and Development District

State of the Economy

Throughout the history of the agency, developing adequate infrastructure for local communities and cities, i.e., water and wastewater systems, to serve the business community and the residential population has been of major importance. Rural water systems are now developed throughout the region in areas previously unserved while updates to those first installed are currently in progress. WRPDD continues to expand and improve upon the basic infrastructure of the local communities as they grow and prosper, working with the local officials, funding agencies, and the private sector to enhance and improve infrastructure. In addition to infrastructure needs, meeting community facility equipment needs such as fire protection, police and emergency services, community centers, senior centers, healthcare, education, municipal/county buildings, and libraries will improve community services as well as public safety to the citizens throughout the District. Addressing community facility equipment needs will improve community services and public safety to the citizens throughout the District.

Transportation improvements and activities have been an integral component of the development of the region. The continued development of arterial routes, such as U.S. 412, U.S. 67, and U.S. 167, within the region's transportation system have enhanced the area's economic development. Past local improvements such as State Highway 36 route in Searcy along with a fourth clover leaf interchange on U.S. Highway 67 expanded the opportunities available. The District actively works and supports transportation improvements that will benefit the entire region. In addition, a new development has been the emergence of rail transportation in attracting steel industries. The District has been instrumental in securing funding from the Economic Development Administration for rail spurs to serve both existing and new industry by providing rail spurs to existing buildings in Newport and McCrory and Independence County which aided in creating and retaining job opportunities.

A newer area of importance throughout the District is a lack of access to broadband. As needs throughout the years have shifted drastically towards technology, our area has made strides towards making broadband accessible to everyone however the demand has far outgrown the actual capability of cities, counties and industry. New innovative ways to provide these services to the general public as well as the professional community has become challenging.

During the past decades, the financial tools available to the District through the Economic Development Administration Revolving Loan Fund, and the Rural Development Intermediary Relending Program, have enabled the District to be instrumental in many development projects, both public and private. It is anticipated that continued growth and expansion of the economy would be the direct result of these programs in combination with the working relationships with the financial institutions that serve north central Arkansas.

Demographics for the District

Based on the most current Census information, 14.9 percent of families in the District were below the poverty level. Woodruff County had the highest percent at 18.6 percent total population below poverty level, followed by Jackson County at 18.3 percent population below poverty level. Cleburne County represented the lowest level, 10. percent population below the poverty level.

Per capita personal income and median income for the state of Arkansas ranked 48th in the nation in 2014 according to the most recent census. The state also ranked as the eighteenth highest unemployment rate in the nation in 2014, however by 2019 Arkansas has fell to the 22nd lowest tied with 5 other states according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. Within the state, the highest ranked county for per capita income in the district was White County, ranked 14th against the counties of Arkansas. Jackson County was ranked 72th against Arkansas' per capita personal income at \$32,805. All counties of the District were below this figure except for Cleburne County, which was \$33,618.

The ten counties of the District have been designated as long-term economically deteriorated. The U.S. Department of Commerce, Economic Development Administration, under the Public Works and Economic Development Act of 1965, as amended, officially designated the counties as redevelopment areas based on a number of qualifications, such as substantial and persistent unemployment; low median family income; unusual and abrupt rise in unemployment resulting from the loss, removal, curtailment or closing of major employment sources; special impact area; decline in per capita employment; and substantial unemployment rates.

As the region is relatively isolated geographically, large-scale industrial development has been confined to the three growth centers designated economic redevelopment centers: Batesville (Independence County), Newport (Jackson County), and Searcy (White County). With ready access to the railway system and a more developed road network, these areas are able to offer a more suitable transportation system to industry, which serves as a stimulus to large industrial development. In addition, much of the necessary infrastructure is in place and can adequately serve the larger industries. However, recent

closings, downsizings and planned closings in Independence County have taken its toll on the local economy.

The more rural areas of the District have had little or no success in attracting industry, with exceptions in Heber Springs (Cleburne County), Clinton (Van Buren) and more recently, Stone County. The transition for Stone County in the development of an industrial park is different from the other counties. Two of the three major industries in the park are local small businesses that made the decision to become manufacturing facilities. Stone County Ironworks, beginning as a local craft, was an excellent example of the success experienced by the county. The company at one time employed in excess of 100 people, however is has scaled back to a smaller team to focus on design and quality of productivity. Excel Boat Company, also located in Stone County, is a boat manufacturer which has over 80 employees from the area.

Geographic location played a large role in the success of the areas with industrial development. Two primary reasons for lack of success are inadequate transportation networks and the high cost of providing the necessary community infrastructure for economic development. Another reason which is becoming more evident would be the lack of efficient and adequate access to broadband. The District is in dire need to gain access to broadband services in order to attract new industry and businesses.

Transportation facilities within the District are sparse. Independence, Jackson, and White Counties represent the most improved transportation facilities of the region. Newport has river transportation developed and is considering port development along with improved rail service. Batesville has a regional airport facility, with a 6,000-foot runway. A major four-lane route, U.S. Highway 67, a direct connection to Little Rock, serves White County. Newport has seen U.S. Highway 67 expanded to four lanes to Newport, with plans for continuation of the improved road to connect to Walnut Ridge and Jonesboro. Highway 167 which runs from Batesville to Ash Flat has also seen major renovations and work is now underway along Highway 412 in order to increase access to Northwest Arkansas. Most counties within the district have planned and underway, major four-lane improvements to the road network.

Major employment centers are located primarily in the three economic redevelopment centers. While manufacturing employment seems to be confined to the economic redevelopment centers in Independence, Jackson, and White Counties the retail trade and service industries showed significant growth throughout the area.

A part of the region has properly turned to the service and retail components of the local economies for new opportunities. Two factors have made this possible. The region's residents have heightened expectations for quality and quantity of goods and services. The most significant of new opportunities, is the emergence of tourism as a notable motivator in the regional economy.

Other areas of the region have continued with an agrarian based economy, which in recent years has become a detriment to a growing economy. This industry has suffered significantly during the past years to a point where it no longer supports the area economy. Family farms, which traditionally have been

the backbone of Arkansas and the national agriculture, are in a crises situation. Large-scale corporate farming operations dominate the agricultural scene in Arkansas. Costs of production, cost of equipment and production inputs, and credit costs have risen dramatically while commodity prices have either stagnated or declined.

The farm situation has deteriorated the economic base of the delta counties, Jackson and Woodruff, and has also negatively impacted the hill county bases. As farm population decreases, other rural economic activity decreases. The discontinuance of small farms and the out-migration of farm population decrease demand for a variety of retail and personal services, causing further out-migration and unemployment. Thus begins the chain of events, which decay the components of the local economy. Major changes in the agricultural sector are expected to continue.

A major change in the agriculture economy has been the expansion of the poultry industry in the Ozark counties. This, combined with expansion of poultry processing industries in Batesville, has helped offset some of the negativity in the agriculture segment. Many portions of Sharp and Izard counties have seen a recent growth in the addition of poultry houses. Most poultry houses in the District lie within the borders of Sharp and Izard Counties, while the poultry is then being transferred to production which primarily occurs within Independence County. The need to have year around access to these houses has resulted in the collaboration between local Poultry Manufactures such as Ozark Mountain Poultry and PECO and the counties and cities to which the poultry farms reside. Due to this collaboration, roads and bridges have been slowly improved.

Imports have effectively hurt the economies of many of the counties. During the recent years, a number of plant closings resulted due to the importation of cheaper products from outside the nation. Within Arkansas, the shoe, textile and garment industries are declining, partially due to imports, along with the agriculture and timber industries. In addition, many manufacturers are outsourcing manufacturing and relocating production due to costs. Measures are being taken on a state level to pull back in some of the manufacturing that has been lost.

In summary, economic deterioration within the White River Planning and Development District is indicative of the many problems still evidenced. The past years have realized some new problem areas in the region, while low incomes, lack of a skilled workforce, lack of transportation, and agricultural uncertainties continue to undermine the area economy. Strides have been taken within the last 10 years to correct these areas and as new programs, grants and access to broadband become more evident it is expected that the District will become more competitive on all levels in the near future.

Although individuals and local, state and federal governments have realized advancements for the District over the years of endeavor, some significant barriers have not disappeared. Per capita personal income of the District is well below that of the state and nation, although there have been absolute number increases, per se. The State of Arkansas is not a positive scale of measurement for comparison purposes because the state ranks 48th in the nation. The State percent of population below poverty level

reflects a 15.8%, compared to a severe 17.1% for the District. White, Independence, and Cleburne Counties are the only counties in the District with lower rates than the state.

Continued efforts must be directed towards the problems affecting the counties. Traditional resolutions to regional and community problems no longer are the typical universal remedy for these issues. Over the years, efforts have been exerted to alleviate the barriers, which prevent a sound and healthy economy; and it is evident that progress has been made. New tools utilized with new approaches must be generated in conjunction with the old overtures. Only through coordination of programs and the cooperation of local individuals, local, state, and federal government will accomplishment of a healthy environment be achieved. Better access to broadband along with a more skilled” job ready” workforce will be key to the District’s success over the next 10 years.

Region and County Profiles

Although Rural, the White River Planning and Development District’s unique region has had a large impact on not only the tourism of Arkansas but also the natural beauty and appeal that the state has to offer to those looking for a more permanent location. The 10 County region of Cleburne, Fulton, Independence, Izard, Jackson, Sharp, Stone, Van Buren, White and Woodruff offers citizens and tourist alike spectacular rolling hills and 322 named lakes and reservoirs throughout the 6,691 square mile area the district is comprised of. The following profiles highlight the counties as they stand today.

Information for the regional and county profiles was derived from the following sources as well as previous strategies:

<https://www.arkansasedc.com/why-arkansas/rankings-accolades/compare-arkansas/major-employers-by-county>

<https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/nav/jsf/pages/index.xhtml>

<https://livingwage.mit.edu/states/05/locations>

<https://map.feedingamerica.org/county/2015/overall/arkansas>

<https://datausa.io/>

<https://www.indexmundi.com/facts/united-states/quick-facts/arkansas/land-area#map>

Lyon College
University of Arkansas Community College of Batesville
Ozarka College (Melbourne, Ash Flat, Mt. View, Mammoth)
Arkansas State University System— Beebe, Heber Springs, Newport
Arkansas Elite Welding

Median Value	\$127,000
Owner Vacancy Rate	2.55%
Rental Vacancy Rate	8.22%
Occupied Housing Units	92,583
Housing Unit Estimate 2018	119,475

Median Household Income	\$36,451.80
Families Below Poverty Level	14.9%
Per Capita Income (Families)	\$21,174
Per Capita Living Wages (Single)	\$21,225
Average Mileage by County	44.90
Food Insecurity Rate	17.17%

2010 Census	2018 Estimate
237,844	237,959

Female	Male	Minority	Median Age	65 & Over	Under 18
50.7%	49.3%	8.88%	45	46,657	52,099

<h1>Elementary & secondary schools</h1> <p>9.95%</p>	<h1>Nursing Care Facilities</h1> <p>3.54%</p>	<h1>Individual & family services</h1> <p>2.14%</p>	<h1>Department stores & discount stores</h1> <p>4.62%</p>	<h1>Building material & supplies dealers</h1> <p>1.25%</p>	<h1>Car Dealers</h1> <p>1.05%</p>	<h1>Executive offices</h1> <p>0.95%</p>	<h1>Construction</h1> <p>0.88%</p>	<h1>Truck transportation</h1> <p>2.23%</p>	<h1>Postal Service</h1> <p>0.77%</p>	<h1>Non-dept. stores</h1> <p>0.65%</p>	<h1>Banking & related activities</h1> <p>2.28%</p>	<h1>Learning & teaching materials, book, and mail stores</h1> <p>0.91%</p>	<h1>Legal services</h1> <p>0.71%</p>
				<h1>Grocery Stores</h1> <p>2.43%</p>									
<h1>Hospitals</h1> <p>5.96%</p>	<h1>Colleges, universities & professional schools, including junior colleges</h1> <p>1.88%</p>	<h1>Home health care services</h1> <p>1.39%</p>	<h1>Animal slaughtering & processing</h1> <p>2.77%</p>	<h1>Industrial & miscellaneous chemicals</h1> <p>1.35%</p>	<h1>Ceramics & wood preparation</h1> <p>0.83%</p>	<h1>Miscellaneous wood products</h1> <p>0.72%</p>	<h1>Restaurants & Food Services</h1> <p>6.61%</p>	<h1>Justice, public order, & safety activities</h1> <p>1.73%</p>	<h1>Farming</h1> <p>0.39%</p>	<h1>Support activities for mining</h1> <p>0.44%</p>	<h1>Real estate</h1> <p>1.12%</p>	<h1>Insurance carriers & activities</h1> <p>0.44%</p>	<h1>Transportation, communication, & utilities</h1> <p>0.44%</p>
	<h1>Child day care services</h1> <p>1.31%</p>	<h1>Offices of health care</h1> <p>0.94%</p>											
<h1>Outpatient care centers</h1> <p>1.00%</p>	<h1>Offices of physicians</h1> <p>0.84%</p>	<h1>Offices of dentists</h1> <p>0.76%</p>	<h1>Agricultural implement manufacturing</h1> <p>1.41%</p>	<h1>Water vehicles & motor vehicle equipment manufacturing</h1> <p>1.34%</p>	<h1>Transportation equipment manufacturing</h1> <p>1.05%</p>	<h1>Transportation equipment</h1> <p>0.93%</p>	<h1>Transportation equipment</h1> <p>0.77%</p>	<h1>Administrative & support activities</h1> <p>0.43%</p>	<h1>Logging</h1> <p>0.51%</p>	<h1>Offices of government</h1> <p>0.39%</p>	<h1>Religious organizations</h1> <p>1.62%</p>	<h1>Offices of health care</h1> <p>0.47%</p>	<h1>Offices of health care</h1> <p>0.37%</p>

Cleburne County



COUNTY SEAT
Heber Springs
(Pop 7,165)

Top 4 Employers

1. Heber Springs School District

2. Walmart Stores, Inc.

3. Defiance Metal Products

4. Green Dental Laboratories

Higher Education

Arkansas State University– Heber Springs
Arkansas Elite Welding Academy

Housing

Median Value	\$127,000
Owner Vacancy Rate	3.3%
Rental Vacancy Rate	1.2%
Occupied Housing Units	10,646
Housing Unit Estimate 2018	16,100

County Population Demographics

2010 Census	2018 Estimate
25,970	25,965

Female	Male	Minority	Median Age	65 & Over	Under 18
50.8%	49.2%	3.2%	49	6,118	5,162

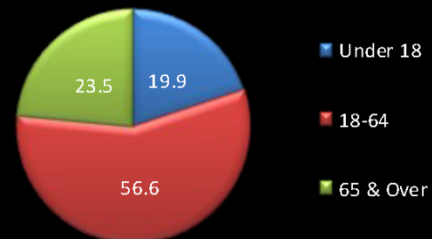
Economic

Median Household Income	\$42,312
Families Below Poverty Level	10.7%
Per Capita Income (Families)	\$26,189
Per Capita Living Wages (Single)	\$21,867
Average Mileage by County	42.46
Food Insecurity Rate	14.9%

Tourism

Greers Ferry Lake
Little Red River
Ruland Junction Toy Train Museum
John F. Kennedy Memorial Overlook
Spring Park

Total Population Percentage



Fulton County

COUNTY SEAT
Salem
(Pop 1,635)



Top 4 Employers

1. Fulton County Hospital	2. Salem School District
3. Eagle Crest Nursing	4. Mammoth Spring School District

Higher Education

Ozarka College— Mammoth Spring Campus

Housing

Median Value	\$91,300
Owner Vacancy Rate	1.3%
Rental Vacancy Rate	8.6%
Occupied Housing Units	5,117
Housing Unit Estimate 2018	6,843

Economic

Median Household Income	\$36,051
Families Below Poverty Level	15.6%
Per Capita Income (Families)	\$19,674
Per Capita Living Wages (Single)	\$21,457
Average Mileage by County	41.97
Food Insecurity Rate	16.5%

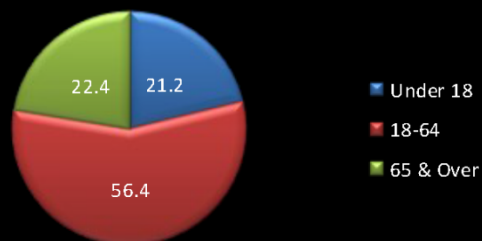
Tourism

Mammoth Spring State Park
Fulton County Fairgrounds
Saddler Falls Waterfall
Riverside Resort
Spring River Oak Campground

County Population Demographics

2010 Census	2018 Estimate
12,245	12,269

Total Population Percentage



Female	Male	Minority	Median Age	65 & Over	Under 18
51%	49%	3.2%	48	2,742	2,598

Independence County

COUNTY SEAT
Batesville
(Pop 10,248)



Top 4 Employers

1. White River Medical Center

2. Peco Foods, Inc.

3. Batesville School District

4. FutureFuel Corporation

Higher Education

Lyon College
University of Arkansas Community College of Batesville

Housing

Median Value	\$104,400
Owner Vacancy Rate	2.6%
Rental Vacancy Rate	6.8%
Occupied Housing Units	14,288
Housing Unit Estimate 2018	16,591

County Population Demographics

2010 Census	2018 Estimate
36,647	37,678

Female	Male	Minority	Median Age	65 & Over	Under 18
51%	49%	8.1%	39	6,275	8,840

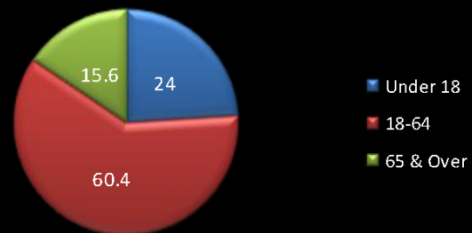
Economic

Median Household Income	\$39,945
Families Below Poverty Level	13.8%
Per Capita Income (Families)	\$23,056
Per Capita Living Wages (Single)	\$21,457
Average Mileage by County	49.38
Food Insecurity Rate	15.5%

Tourism

White River
Old Independence Regional Museum
Batesville Community and Aquatic Center
Old Historic Downtown/Main Street
Mark Martin Museum

Total Population Percentage



Izard County

COUNTY SEAT
Melbourne
(Pop 1,848)



Top 4 Employers

1. Columbia Flooring

2. Ozarka College

3. Melbourne School District

4. Community Medical Center

Higher Education

Ozarka College (Main Campus)

Housing

Median Value	\$79,400
Owner Vacancy Rate	3.1%
Rental Vacancy Rate	9.8%
Occupied Housing Units	5,189
Housing Unit Estimate 2018	7,297

Economic

Median Household Income	\$39,135
Families Below Poverty Level	12.3%
Per Capita Income (Families)	\$19,737
Per Capita Living Wages (Single)	\$21,457
Average Mileage by County	48.11
Food Insecurity Rate	15.8%

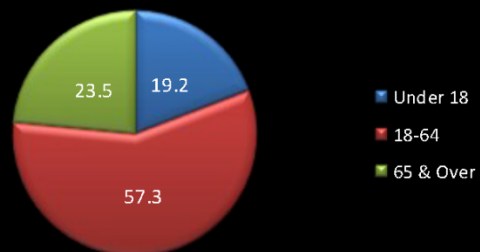
Tourism

Gristmill Falls
Pioneer Day
White River
Calico Rock Museum and Visitor Center
Guion Caves

County Population Demographics

2010 Census	2018 Estimate
13,696	13,593

Total Population Percentage



Female	Male	Minority	Median Age	65 & Over	Under 18
48.5%	51.5%	4.2%	47	3,352	2,435

Jackson County

COUNTY SEAT
Newport
(Pop 7,879)



Top 4 Employers

1. Arkansas Department of Correction

2. Shearer's Foods

3. Arkansas Steel Associates

4. Southwest Steel Processing

Higher Education

Arkansas State University Newport

Housing

Median Value	\$61,300
Owner Vacancy Rate	3.9%
Rental Vacancy Rate	14.4%
Occupied Housing Units	6,179
Housing Unit Estimate 2018	7,587

County Population Demographics

2010 Census	2018 Estimate
17,997	16,811

Female	Male	Minority	Median Age	65 & Over	Under 18
50.4%	49.6%	20.2%	41	2,848	3,526

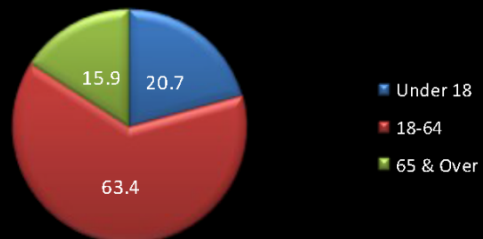
Economic

Median Household Income	\$32,783
Families Below Poverty Level	18.3%
Per Capita Income (Families)	\$19,458
Per Capita Living Wages (Single)	\$20,513
Average Mileage by County	47.78
Food Insecurity Rate	20.4%

Tourism

Jackson Port State Park
Arkansas Rock 'N' Roll Hwy 67 Museum
Blue Ridge Center for the Delta Arts
Rommel Park
White River

Total Population Percentage



Sharp County

COUNTY SEAT
Ash Flat
(Pop 1,082)



Top 4 Employers

1. Highland School District

2. Walmart (Ash Flat)

3. Cave City School District

4. Cave City Nursing Home

Higher Education

Ozarka College— Ash Flat Campus

Housing

Median Value	\$ 79,900
Owner Vacancy Rate	3.3%
Rental Vacancy Rate	9.8%
Occupied Housing Units	7,296
Housing Unit Estimate 2018	9,882

Economic

Median Household Income	\$31,792
Families Below Poverty Level	17.9%
Per Capita Income (Families)	\$20,078
Per Capita Living Wages (Single)	\$20,513
Average Mileage by County	42.36
Food Insecurity Rate	17.4%

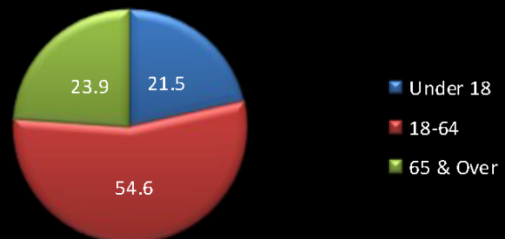
Tourism

Spring River
Historic Downtown Hardy
Thunderbird Lake
Cave City Watermelon Festival
Arkansas Pie Festival (Cherokee Village)

County Population Demographics

2010 Census	2018 Estimate
17,264	17,366

Total Population Percentage



Female	Male	Minority	Median Age	65 & Over	Under 18
50.6%	49.4%	4%	47	4,366	3,632

Stone County

COUNTY SEAT
Mountain View
(Pop 2,748)



Top 4 Employers

1. Mountain View School District

2. Walmart Stores (Mt. View)

3. Stone County Medical Center

4. Mountain View Nursing

Higher Education

Ozarka College— Mountain View Campus

Housing

Median Value	\$107,300
Owner Vacancy Rate	0.5%
Rental Vacancy Rate	1.1%
Occupied Housing Units	4,910
Housing Unit Estimate 2018	6,882

County Population Demographics

2010 Census	2018 Estimate
12,394	12,457

Female	Male	Minority	Median Age	65 & Over	Under 18
50.6%	49.4%	3.2%	48	3,212	2,497

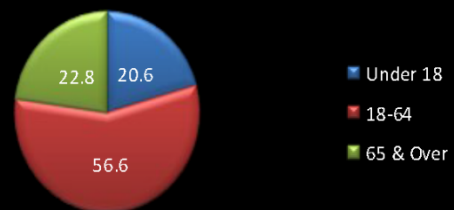
Economic

Median Household Income	\$33,901
Families Below Poverty Level	14.3%
Per Capita Income (Families)	\$19,881
Per Capita Living Wages (Single)	\$21,457
Average Mileage by County	41.42
Food Insecurity Rate	17.2%

Tourism

Blanchard Springs Caverns
Ozark Folk Center
Beanfest
Blue Grass Festival
Ozark National Forest
Loco Ropes
Mountains, Music and Motorcycles

Total Population Percentage



Van Buren County

COUNTY SEAT
Clinton
(Pop 2,602)



Top 4 Employers

1. Ozark Health Medical Center

2. Clinton School District

3. Walmart (Clinton)

4. South Side Bee Branch Schools

Higher Education

University of Arkansas Community College
of Morrilton- Clinton Campus

Housing

Median Value	\$98,900
Owner Vacancy Rate	4.7%
Rental Vacancy Rate	8.6%
Occupied Housing Units	6,867
Housing Unit Estimate 2018	10,463

Economic

Median Household Income	\$34,428
Families Below Poverty Level	15.4%
Per Capita Income (Families)	\$20,568
Per Capita Living Wages (Single)	\$21,457
Average Mileage by County	44.78
Food Insecurity Rate	16.2%

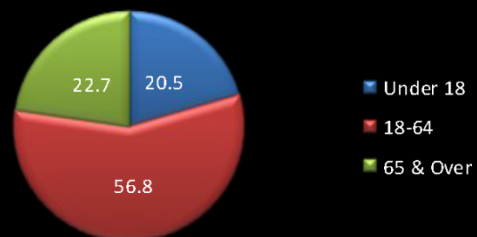
Tourism

National Championship Chuckwagon Races
Fairfield Bay Convention Center
Greers Ferry Lake (Van Buren Side)
Sugar Loaf Mountain National Nature Trail
Little Red River
Fairfield Bay Marina (Van Buren Side)

County Population Demographics

2010 Census	2018 Estimate
17,295	16,603

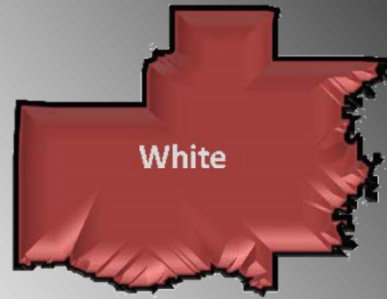
Total Population Percentage



Female	Male	Minority	Median Age	65 & Over	Under 18
50.1%	49.9%	4%	47	4,197	3,343

White County

COUNTY SEAT
Searcy
(Pop 22,858)



Top 4 Employers

1. Walmart Stores (Searcy)

2. Unity Health WCMC

3. Harding University

4. Searcy School District

Higher Education

Harding University
Arkansas State University at Beebe

Housing

Median Value	\$116,400
Owner Vacancy Rate	1.7%
Rental Vacancy Rate	10.3%
Occupied Housing Units	29,217
Housing Unit Estimate 2018	33,942

County Population Demographics

2010 Census	2018 Estimate
77,076	78,727

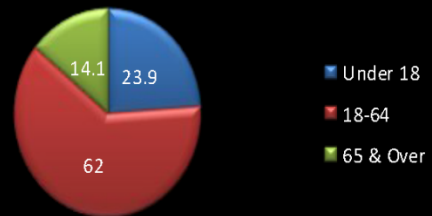
Economic

Median Household Income	\$44,074
Families Below Poverty Level	12.1%
Per Capita Income (Families)	\$23,120
Per Capita Living Wages (Single)	\$21,881
Average Mileage by County	43.01
Food Insecurity Rate	15.9%

Tourism

Pioneer Village
Titanic Museum
Carmichael Community Center
Camp Wildwood
Red River Shores
Lake Barnett
Historic White County Courthouse

Total Population Percentage



Female	Male	Minority	Median Age	65 & Over	Under 18
51%	49%	8.6%	36	12,084	18,616

Woodruff County

COUNTY SEAT
Augusta
(Pop 2,199)



Top 4 Employers

1. McCrory School District

2. Augusta School District

3. Sloan Valve

4. Bunge Grain

Higher Education

N/A

Housing

Median Value	\$63,700
Owner Vacancy Rate	1.1%
Rental Vacancy Rate	11.6%
Occupied Housing Units	2,874
Housing Unit Estimate 2018	3,888

County Population Demographics

2010 Census	2018 Estimate
7,260	6,490

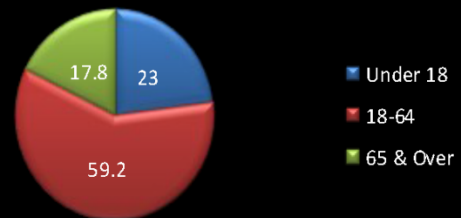
Economic

Median Household Income	\$30,097
Families Below Poverty Level	18.6%
Per Capita Income (Families)	\$19,987
Per Capita Living Wages (Single)	\$20,554
Average Mileage by County	47.73
Food Insecurity Rate	21.9%

Tourism

Mosquito Fest
Cache River
Bayou Deview Duck Gumbo Cook-Off
Historic McCrory Waterworks

Total Population Percentage



Female	Male	Minority	Median Age	65 & Over	Under 18
52.5%	47.5%	30.1%	43	1,463	1,450

SWOT ANALYSIS

The SWOT is a strategic planning tool used by organizations to ensure that there is a clear objective informed by a comprehensive understanding of a region's capabilities and capacities.



The White River Planning and Development SWOT was an in-depth analysis of regional strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats that could affect the ten county District presently and throughout the next 5 years. This categorization better determines where the District is now, where it should be going and what areas it needs to pay close attention to in order to avoid damage to the economy or flourish.

Through the direction of the planning committee, relevant data and the region's unique assets the District identified the internal and external factors that complement the region's unique history and determine its next course of action. Although it is recognized that there are many other factors to which make the district successful or challenge its economy, the list encompasses the essence of our unique area. The state of the regional economy is also largely affected by external trends and forces such as industry sectors and public and private partnerships.

After the above strength, weaknesses, opportunities and threats were determined each area was further examined to determine the top priority. Despite the determination of a top priority, it is acknowledged that many other factors could become the "top" priorities in the near future. All areas of the SWOT analysis are important to our area and will be important to the economy throughout the future.



ACTION PLAN

Strategic Direction and Evaluation Framework

In the past, the White River Planning and Development District, Inc. CEDS has identified similar goals as the ones addressed in this CEDS. However, as the District has changed so has the need of a more strategic and detailed plan of action.

The White River Planning and Development District, Inc. action plan addresses 7 significant priorities that were developed by the CEDS committee during the planning process. These action items reflect the current interests of the planning district and the future aspirations.

Although this action plan will provide a guide for prioritizing resources and efforts, it will not be used to limit the identification and implementation of other activities that support the strategic direction of the overall vision and goals of the district.

The *Evaluation Framework* for the WRPDD CEDS process serves as a mechanism to gauge progress on the successful implementation of the overall CEDS. A combination of the action plan and the evaluation framework has been determined for this CEDS as it allows a more comparable overall document.

The Framework is an important element of the ongoing planning process and assists with answering how well the overall district is doing and the areas that may need further development. The CEDS is reviewed annually by the committee and any changes are submitted to EDA. The review may serve as a performance report for EDA and allows EDA to monitor any progress or changes that may have occurred throughout the district.

The following action items have been determined as the areas of focus for the 2020-2024 CEDS:

1. Workforce Development and Training
2. Access to Broadband
3. Infrastructure Improvements
4. Competitive Living Wages
5. Tourism
6. Rural Access to Quality Healthcare
7. Disaster Planning

GOAL #1

Workforce Development and Training

Target:

Businesses and industry do not have the skilled workforce available while out of school youth and dislocated worker numbers are growing.

Strategy:

Through WRPDD's WIOA program, offer job placement and monetary assistance for training while connecting local businesses with skilled workers.

Benefit:

Increasing the number of skilled laborers will attract industry and will provide economic stability and resiliency.

Activities

1. Educate local government on the need for a more skilled workforce to supply new businesses and industry and improve the overall quality of life.
2. Make connections with local businesses and discover what their main needs are concerning skilled labor.
3. Create a bridge between local institutions of higher education or training and industry or businesses.
4. Connect out of school youth and dislocated workers with monetary assistance and training resources.

Accountability Team:

WRPDD
City and County Governments
Colleges and Training Centers
Industry and Businesses

Timeframe:

Immediate Start
1-5 years and Ongoing

Priority:

High

GOAL #2

Access to Broadband

Target:

Broadband access throughout the district is limited to the more populous areas and controlled by large companies that prohibit local governments from offering services in some areas.

Strategy:

Work with interested parties to offer a better solution and bridge communication gaps that currently exist.

Benefit:

Ensuring everyone has access to broadband will boost economic development, spur job growth and benefit educational institutions.

Activities

1. Bring together local and county governments with state legislators to discuss broadband issues and needs. Encourage education of citizens on the importance of broadband to their area.
2. Meet with telecommunication companies that service the District to discuss concerns and what can be done to better service our areas locally.
3. Research other rural states and what they are doing to provide services to their areas more efficiently.
4. Correspond with local utility service providers to explore the steps to take in order to ensure broadband can easily be provided when the opportunity arises.

Accountability Team:

WRPDD
City and County Governments
Telecommunication Companies
Utility Companies

Timeframe:

As soon as possible
1-5 years
Ongoing as needed

Priority:

Moderate

GOAL #3

Infrastructure Improvements

Target:

Infrastructure throughout the District is aging and in need of replacement while new infrastructure for growing areas is required with little local funds available.

Strategy:

Work with local government to address infrastructure needs in the area and how to provide funding for these projects.

Benefit:

New infrastructure that serves the communities' needs will ensure economic stability and allow the communities to be more competitive.

Activities

1. Meet with each county judge or city mayor to determine what immediate infrastructure needs would currently benefit their areas.
2. Compile a complete list of all needs and what past projects have already been completed.
3. Research and compile a growing list of funding sources that supply infrastructure support that can be distributed to judges and mayors. Encourage the education throughout their area of the need to provide infrastructure upgrades and additions.
4. Work with local and county governments to secure funding and administer projects.

Accountability Team:

WRPDD
City and County Governments
State/Federal Funding Sources
Local Financial Institutions

Timeframe:

Immediate Start
1-5 years
Ongoing

Priority:

High

GOAL #4

Competitive Living Wages

Target:

The District has made strides in attracting higher paying industry, however many areas still are experiencing high poverty and low paying jobs.

Strategy:

Work with local and county governments to stress the need of attracting industry to the area and utilizing available Opportunity Zone advantages.

Benefit:

Having jobs that pay wages which are comparable to other parts of the state will attract citizens and provide economic stability.

Activities

1. Meet with county and local officials to access what they find as the most attractable industry to their areas and how these industries could help decrease poverty.
2. Determine Opportunity Zone areas throughout the District and educate local government on the advantages and benefits of having these areas in their cities and counties.
3. Through WRPDD's WIOA program, work with citizens to develop a more skilled workforce that can attract higher paying industry.
4. Work with local government and industry to bridge any communication gap concerning expanding businesses and services in hopes of wage increases.

Accountability Team:

WRPDD
City and County Governments
Local Industry/Businesses
State Government

Timeframe:

As soon as possible
1-5 years
Ongoing as needed

Priority:

Moderate

GOAL #5

Boost Tourism

Target:

The District is rich in historical landmarks and attractions that are not being marketed and developed in order to boost the economy.

Strategy:

Encourage county and city governments to work together to promote tourism throughout their area.

Benefit:

Promoting tourism not only creates a sense of community but also helps create jobs and boost the local tax base.

Activities

1. Research and compile a list of local historical landmarks and attractions in each county that could be marketable or further promoted.
2. Meet with local officials to determine if the list of sites in their area could be promoted through local funds or grants.
3. Create a work plan for each area of interest that could help to promotion and tourist attraction.

Accountability Team:

WRPDD
City and County Governments

Timeframe:

As soon as possible
1-5 years
Ongoing as needed

Priority:

Moderate

GOAL #6

Rural Access to Quality Healthcare

Target:

Due to the rural nature of the District, many areas lack access to quality healthcare and must travel long distances to reach emergency providers.

Strategy:

Conduct a group of interested parties from each county to examine possibilities of providing healthcare in a timely manner to everyone.

Benefit:

Ensuring that the District has healthcare available to all of its citizens fosters a sense of economic stability and will attract and sustain citizens.

Activities

1. Create a list of the most medically underserved areas throughout the District.
2. Organize a meeting with health care providers and county officials to discuss the gaps in service and what steps can be taken to overcome the lack of service.
3. Work with healthcare providers to find funding to expand and enrich through programs to ensure they can serve a larger population.
4. With the help of local officials conduct a mass survey to citizens that determines their immediate needs and expectations for quality healthcare in their areas.

Accountability Team:

WRPDD
City and County Governments
Healthcare Providers

Timeframe:

As soon as possible
1-5 years
Ongoing as needed

Priority:

High

GOAL #7

Disaster Planning

Target:

Natural disasters occur throughout the District each year leaving financially strapped communities with little means to recover.

Strategy:

Through programs and grants made possible by WRPDD, disaster plans and funding will be made available to all counties and cities.

Benefit:

By providing the cities and counties with a one-stop solution to disaster planning, this will ensure economic resilience to disasters.

Activities

1. Educate local cities and governments on the importance of Hazard Mitigation Planning and provide services administration of projects.
2. Compile a list of past catastrophic disasters that have occurred throughout the district and the response time as well as the economic impact that occurred.
3. Convene with county emergency response personnel as well as office of emergency management in each area to provide information and determine a response in the event of a disaster.
4. WRPDD serve as the alternate point of contact for OEM and personnel pre and post disaster.

Accountability Team:

WRPDD
City and County Governments
County OEM
Emergency Response Personnel

Timeframe:

Immediate Start
1-5 years
Ongoing

Priority:

High

Economic Resilience

White River Planning and Development District believes that a region's economic prosperity is linked to an area's ability to prevent, withstand and quickly recover from major disruptions to its economic base.

The CEDS committee feels it has included "steady-state" and "responsive" initiatives to this strategic plan in order to insure that the District's role in the pre and post incident environment of an economic disaster is effective. In addition to the factors that have already been included in the action plan, the District intends to incorporate the following into their framework and work plan:

- Work with local officials, governments and economic partners to engage in comprehensive planning efforts that involve extensive involvement from the community. These efforts will align with other current and future planning efforts such as Hazard Mitigation Plans, local city initiatives, school district COOP plans and county emergency plans. The District currently is active in assisting cities, counties and school districts in the writing and administration of Hazard Mitigation Plans. Each county within the District has either an active plan or is currently working on a plan.
- White River Planning and Development District, Inc. has worked to broaden the industrial base of the region through various projects since the district's conception. It has been and will continue to be a priority of the District to build on the area's unique assets and competitive strengths and to provide stability to any industry during economic distress. The State's and federal government's new focus and distinction of Opportunity Zones will be a priority in the recognition of potential cluster development. The District will continue to work with incoming and potential businesses to ensure that Opportunity Zone incentives are utilized to their fullest especially in the event of an economic downturn.
- The District has worked with various businesses to assist them with retention and expansion programs during the recovery process and has also worked to assist dislocated workers with job search and training. Workforce training is an important component to economic resilience thought the ten county districts and will remain part of its work plan. By helping dislocated workers quickly and effectively shift between jobs and industries the District will remain a strong and adaptable area.
- The District, through its Hazard Mitigation Program, works with cities, counties and entities to ensure that there is an established process for regular communication in the event of an economic disaster. This pre-disaster recover planning ensures that the District will better respond to any type of disaster that may occur. White River Planning and Development District, Inc. serves as point of contact for the north central region of the state in the event of a disaster and will serve as a point of collaboration between public, private, educational and non-profit sectors on existing and future tasks.



WRPDD Community and Economic Development Staff

Janet Smith

Executive Director

Email: jsmith@wrpdd.org

Phone: 870.793.5233

Mitzi Hargan

Director of Community Development

Email: mitzi@wrpdd.org

Phone: 870.793.5233

Carrie McIntosh

Community Development Coordinator

Email: cmcintosh@wrpdd.org

Phone: 870.793.5233

Regan Miller

Economic Development Planner

Email: regan@wrpdd.org

Phone: 870.793.5233



For more information concerning economic
growth in your area contact:

**WHITE RIVER PLANNING AND
DEVELOPMENT DISTRICT, INC.**

**P.O. Box 2396 • 1652 White Drive
New Site: 4441 Harrison Street
Batesville, Arkansas 72503-2396**

**Telephone: 870.793.5233
Fax Number: 870.793.4035**

www.wrpdd.org

Janet Smith, Executive Director