

**TENNESSEE'S UPPER CUMBERLAND  
COMPREHENSIVE ECONOMIC  
DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY  
2019 UPDATE**





# 2019 UPDATE

The Upper Cumberland is home to approximately 352,000; a 3.5% increase over five years. The growth of the area is expected to continue and reflect in the 2020 census with the City of Cookeville becoming the region's first urban center. The remainder of the region is primarily made up of smaller rural towns. The median household incomes in the region range between \$33,933 and \$47,457. The unemployment rate in November 2019 is 3.9% and the average age is 42.3 both of which may cause challenges for employers in the coming years. The region is home to multiple educational facilities including a premier engineering college, Tennessee Tech University, several Community Colleges, and TN Colleges of Applied Technology which are all working to create a pipeline of skilled workers, but demand for a skilled workforce is still outnumbering the incoming labor force for certain sectors. Additional regional goals for 2017-2022 are detailed below and include advocacy, industrial development, retail development, and transportation infrastructure. The following document will provide an update on the progress of the regional goals. Though significant progress has been made in each category there is still work to be done. The leadership of the Upper Cumberland is committed to continuing this work and moving towards a more prosperous region.

## WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

### **1. Educated & Healthy Workforce Meeting All Employment Needs in the Region.**

- Objective 1: Connect employers to employees.
- Objective 2: Increase the number of citizens with postsecondary degrees and certificates.

## REGIONAL ADVOCACY

### **2. Legislative Members are Fully Educated on Most Prominent Needs and Concerns of the Region.**

- Objective 1: Local leadership identifies the most important legislative issue to the region.
- Objective 2: Increase legislator awareness of the region's stance on political subjects.



## INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT

### 3. Prepared Communities, Competitive in Industrial Recruitment and Expansion.

- Objective 1: Increase inventory of industrial property across the region.
- Objective 2: Improve request for information responses (RFI) by participating in TVA RFI audit program, sharing responses across the region, and implementing regional marketing.
- Objective 3: Increase regional marketing efforts through industrial trade shows such as Select USA Investment Summit. Proactively share regional marketing material to develop awareness of the Upper Cumberland among business decision makers.
- Objective 4: Create local business retention & expansion programs in each county.

## RETAIL DEVELOPMENT

### 4. The Region Has Adequate, Thriving Retail Establishments Supporting the Quality of Place of the Upper Cumberland.

- Objective 1: Grow the community by attracting new retail space.
- Objective 2: Retain and grow existing commercial businesses.

## TRANSPORTATION INFRASTRUCTURE

### 5. The Region is Easily Accessible to Residents, Visitors and Businesses.

- Objective 1: Improve transportation network.
- Objective 2: Educate state and federal partners on the identified needs

As the region changes so do the goals and priorities of the communities within. Throughout the process of developing the 2019 Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy Update there were a number of additional goals that were identified including housing, homelessness/poverty rate, substance abuse, impacts of the 2020 census, telecommunication gaps and regional marketing. Data in the area is beginning to reflect a greater income divide and an unacceptable level of poverty. Many of the region's goals involve helping people out of poverty. The five goals laid out in this plan are just a glimpse of the regionwide work that is underway to make the Upper Cumberland a more vibrant and thriving area.

# Goal 1

## Educated & Healthy Workforce Meeting All Employment Needs in the Region



Grand Opening Automation & Robotics Center at Motlow State Community College - Warren County

In every meeting and strategic planning session workforce development arises as one of the single most important issue and thus the first goal for the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy. A number of new and potential programs in the Upper Cumberland are under discussion to further enhance the educational system. One program under development is offering mentorships to high school students not planning to pursue post-secondary education. This program could make a tremendous impact in our younger population according to local leadership.

One question that has emerged is the viability of a community college anchored in the Upper Cumberland. The region is served by several great educational institutions, each of them having main campuses based outside of the region. This can create challenges and gaps in service to the region. Very preliminary conversations have occurred across the region about the pros and cons of the current system. A feasibility study should be conducted to determine if the region is adequately served through the affiliate sites as they currently operate, or if an Upper Cumberland Community College would better serve the region. If the feasibility study reveals the need to pursue a new community college a comprehensive plan will need to be established detailing the steps necessary to begin that process.

In 2019 Motlow McMinnville opened the Automation and Robotics Training Center. This facility is being used to train Motlow students in addition to classes of employees from across the nation. Similarly, the TCAT Livingston opened a satellite campus in Jackson County offering lineman and information technology training. As a region we are seeking to identify niche training needs in each community and develop training programs to support them. It is critical for industrial recruitment efforts to differentiate our communities with individualized training. It is also a vital service to our existing industries to offer specialized training for their manufacturing processes.

The State of Tennessee has placed a special impetus on the distressed communities, four of which are located in the Upper Cumberland. Workforce development is a leading factor in the long term economic development of a community and the regional leadership must capitalize on this state-wide focus and pursue significant improvements and expansions of our educational infrastructure.

# Goal 2

## Legislative Members are Fully Educated on Most Prominent Needs and Concerns of the Region



Tennessee State Capitol Building

Advocacy is most effective when coordinated and implemented from a regional level. The Upper Cumberland is fortunate that the elected leadership understand the need to speak with one voice and support projects across the region. The Upper Cumberland Region is well represented with state and federal legislators. During 2019 the region's legislative exposure increased significantly with the election of State Representative Cameron Sexton to Speaker of the House. Additionally, the region's Legislator of the Year, Senator Paul Bailey, serves as Chair of the Senate Commerce Committee. The Upper Cumberland Region will utilize this time of additional awareness and strong leadership to advocate for those issues most important to the citizens of the region.

Current priorities include transportation as detailed in Goal 5, assistance to distressed communities through sales tax rebate, incentive options for retail development, substance abuse, and the lack of assistance in stepping off welfare programs.

The Upper Cumberland Development District has taken additional efforts to prepare for regional advocacy with the expansion of a current position. Many city and county mayors as well as regional partners are active in legislative events in Nashville and Washington, DC and will continue to focus on regional advocacy.

# Goal 3

## Prepared Communities, Competitive in Industrial Recruitment and Expansion

Hörmann Industries - White County

According to the TN Department of Economic and Community Development there have been 968 new job commitments in 2018 – 2019 and a capital investment of over \$243 million among 13 projects. Two of the six communities that were home to these job announcements were distressed communities. Spurring job creation through the entire Upper Cumberland region, especially our distressed counties, is a top priority as industrial development is the foundation upon which community development occurs.

In order to be competitive in industrial recruitment, each county and municipality must continue to develop industrial product. This effort has been supported through grant programs offered by the State of Tennessee and TVA Economic Development. During 2018-2019 Site Development Grants were awarded to five Upper Cumberland Counties totaling over \$1.3 million dollars. The region has also seen successes in the InvestPrep program including the Plateau Partnership Park in Cumberland County which has received a second grant to assist with site due diligence and development of a grading and drainage plan for 150+ acres.

Another program the region has successfully utilized is the Property Evaluation Program through the State of Tennessee. This program helps communities identify the most viable industrial properties by evaluating 8 submitted sites and conducting a site visit to the region. Nine Upper Cumberland counties have participated in the program and in 2019 White County applied for the program a second time. This program provides a strong foundation for long-term planning and development of industrial property and guide elected officials in spending often limited development funds.

# Goal 4

## The Region has Adequate, Thriving Retail Establishments Supporting the Quality of Place in the Upper Cumberland

Shoppes at Eagle Point - Putnam County

The expansion of retail across the Upper Cumberland has occurred naturally over the past year due to the positive state of the economy, but recruitment efforts have been limited. Several communities participated in additional training through the Retail Academy and some communities attended recruitment trade shows in Nashville and Atlanta. Regional partners are seeking means to assist communities in retail recruitment as the primary tool required is manpower and data. Much of the necessary data has been supplied through the Retail Academy and TVA Economic Development. Regional partners and local leaders must identify the proper community members to capitalize on this data to drive results. Real estate agents are a natural fit as their daily focus is on matching buyers and available properties.

It is important in the Upper Cumberland that retail recruitment efforts be balance with efforts to support local entrepreneurship. One way this may be accomplished is by sharing leakage data with existing retailers and hopeful entrepreneurs of what residents leave their respective communities to purchase, and help them identify areas in which an expansion of their business would be supported.

There is no income tax collected in the State of Tennessee; therefore, sales tax is Tennessee's principal source of state tax revenue which accounts for approximately 60% of all tax collections. Whether generated through local entrepreneurs or brought in through recruitment of big box retailers, growing the sales tax in the Upper Cumberland is an important part of providing the necessary resources for the region.

# Goal 5

## The Region is Easily Accessible to Residents, Visitors and Businesses.



An area of significant improvement in transportation is the creation of two new public transportation bus routes established in Cumberland and Warren County. The three largest communities in the Upper Cumberland now have deviated fixed routes running in the county seat providing consistent access to dozens of locations.

Steps have been taken by the State Department of Transportation (TDOT) to advance the development of a truck route in Celina, TN. This is a top priority for the region in an effort to improve safety of drivers and pedestrians in the historic downtown square of Celina while also creating industrial grade access to the community's largest industrial site.

Another priority for the region is the widening of Hwy 127 between Crossville and Clarkrange. This is a major thoroughfare connecting a distressed county with the interstate and connecting employees to and from Fentress and Cumberland counties. This widening project is in progress, but has seen many delays and reductions of scope. It is critical that the region continues to pursue the proper completion of this project.

Even though Hwy 10 in Macon County has seen improvement over the past five years, is still insufficient in serving the community. This state highway needs to be widened to four lanes from Trousdale to Lafayette for Macon County to have adequate connectivity to the interstate.

Interstate 40 runs through Smith, Putnam and Cumberland counties in the Upper Cumberland and is a tremendous asset. A truck lane was added to the east bound lanes in Smith County in 2019 to relieve congestion. This has proven very beneficial and further highlighted the need for a truck lane between the City of Cookeville and the Town of Monterey.

Another project that would be a tremendous catalyst of growth for one of the region's distressed communities is the widening of Hwy 56 between Interstate 40 at Baxter to the Town of Gainesboro. One of the next most viable areas to experience growth is the southern portion of Jackson County. The improvement of Hwy 56 and the expansion of utilities to this area will make a tremendous impact over the next decade.

Lastly, the region is focused on improving existing I-40 Interchanges which pose challenges including exit 258 in Gordonsville and exit 280 in Baxter. Additional studies need to be conducted at these interchanges and feasible solutions created. Expanding the region's transportation infrastructure will continue to be a primary goal, both at the local and state level. Advocacy will play a key role in pursuing assistance with the region's state highway transportation needs.



# UPPER CUMBERLAND DEVELOPMENT DISTRICT

## **Providing Solutions Through Regional Cooperation**

The Upper Cumberland Development District (UCDD) was created by the Tennessee General Assembly to provide regional planning and assistance to the following counties: Cannon, Clay, Cumberland, DeKalb, Fentress, Jackson, Macon, Overton, Pickett, Putnam, Smith, Van Buren, Warren, and White. UCDD staff members are dedicated to providing quality services to the people of the Upper Cumberland region of Tennessee through the programs and services offered in each department: Area Agency on Aging and Disability, Economic and Community Development, and Housing and Family Services. It is UCDD's belief that the fourteen counties, along with the many municipalities contained within, are made stronger through regional cooperation and shared resources.

UCDD's Economic and Community Development staff members are well equipped to assist communities with a wide variety of services offered through our Economic and Community Development programs: Cumberland Area Investment Corporation, Economic Development, Geographical Information Systems, Grant Writing and Administration, Historic Preservation, Local Planning, Solid Waste Assistance, Statistical Information, Strategic Planning, Tennessee Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations, THDA Home Rehabilitation Program, and Transportation Rural Planning Organization.

The areas of expertise and unique skill sets represented within the staff position the Upper Cumberland Development District to be a strong asset to communities and enable the agency to serve as a driving force in economic development throughout the region.