The 2017-2021 CEDS is a new 5-year plan for the nine-county region known as Economic Development District 4 (EDR 4), located in west central Minnesota. The counties served by EDR 4 are Becker, Clay, Douglas, Grant, Otter Tail, Pope, Stevens, Traverse and Wilkin. The Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) is a strategy-driven plan for regional economic development. It is the result of a regionally-owned planning process designed to build capacity and guide the economic prosperity and resiliency of an area or region.

A new approach was utilized in the development of this 5-year CEDS. Starting in 2012, the 10 member organizations that make up the Minnesota Association of Development Organizations (MADO) embarked on a collaborative effort to align strategic economic development efforts throughout Greater Minnesota, and leverage resources at all levels for a greater overall development impact. The end result was a Comprehensive Development Strategy for Greater Minnesota that was published January 1, 2016 known as DevelopMN: [http://www.mnado.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/DevelopMN-Plan-2016-final-web.pdf](http://www.mnado.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/DevelopMN-Plan-2016-final-web.pdf).

The intent of the DevelopMN document is two-fold: Identify commonalities and opportunities for cross-region collaboration and serve as a base for each of the 10 Economic Development Districts to build their regional CEDS. This document is intended to focus at a regional level, with a similar format as that used in the creation of the DevelopMN document. Applicable content from the DevelopMN plan has been used throughout this document. The CEDS is also closely tied to West Central Initiative’s Strategic Plan. Much of the services and resources WCI provides are directly related to economic development. The work of the organization that is focused on economic development should be connected and related to the work identified in the regional CEDS and as the Economic Development District (EDD.)

The resulting regional CEDS is intended to be a usable guide for stakeholders to better understand the region’s economy and serve as a resource for actions to improve it.
The CEDS process requires a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats Analysis (SWOT) be conducted as part of the development of the 5-year plan. The SWOT analysis is used to help answer “Where are we now?” It is used to develop the Strategic Direction Action Plan of “Where do we want to go?” and “How are we going to get there?”

In addition to meeting with and receiving input from stakeholders across the region and the DevelopMN plan, information and input were gathered through many sources that informed and assisted in the development and direction of this document (see list at right), and utilized broad-based community participation in their development.

Additional input was sought through a 30-day public comment period that commenced on November 14, 2016. A draft was posted on the WCI website or available in print by request. A press release announcing the comment period was sent to all newspapers in the region. No comments were received.

Links to the following documents can be found in the Appendix section of this document:
- Region-wide SWOT Analysis
- WCI’s Strategic Plan
- DEED Regional Profile
- Family Economic Success Profile
- Blandin Foundation Rural Pulse
- 2011-2016 CEDS
- Regional Workforce Roundtables Summary

The nine-county region of west central Minnesota
Creating economic prosperity is a multi-faceted process. Historically, Greater Minnesota received economic advantages from agriculture, mining, and perceived lower costs (primarily related to inexpensive labor, lower taxes and land availability). Agriculture continues to play a large role in the region’s economy. This includes everything from traditional agricultural pursuits related to crop and livestock production, implement and machinery manufacturing, and also the value-added production and manufacturing of agricultural-related products, such as food, fuel and pharmaceuticals.

While taxes are still lower here than in some areas of the state, local governments in west central and across Greater Minnesota have struggled to keep tax rates low and still have the ability to adequately fund necessary governmental services and infrastructure. Ag land values and input costs have increased, resulting in increased production costs. Successful harvests have been a contributing factor in lower crop prices. Communities have found new challenges in promoting undeveloped land that requires extending already burdened and costly infrastructure to that land. Additionally, many communities have experienced an increase of brownfield sites needing redevelopment. This has become especially challenging for larger institutional property such as schools, hospitals and churches that have closed or not expanded or renovated in their existing location. With the need or decision to construct new buildings in other locations, communities are left with empty structures that are difficult to reuse, repurpose, or as a last option, demolish, which is extremely expensive. Additionally, some communities in the region are now facing challenges in handling the closure, decommissioning, or in some cases, the retrofitting of coal-fired power plants as a result of the increased renewable energy sources and environmental requirements in the United States.

These local/regional factors are now coupled with the ever-increasing need to maintain a connection to, and be part of, the global economy. The region needs to place an emphasis on sustaining traditional industries, improving the quality and cost effectiveness of inputs, all while continuing to adopt innovation and efficiencies as the drivers of long-term competitiveness and business and employment growth.

Additional regional and county level economic development profiles can be accessed via this link: ceds.wcif.org.

The infographics provide a targeted snapshot of the region’s and individual counties’ current socio-economic and demographic condition.
Ultimately, six economic development challenges, or trends, have risen to the top as regional and localized priorities that the Strategic Direction/Action Plan of this 5-year strategy will work to address and improve.

These challenges are:

- Grow the **workforce**
- Need for more **Child Care** openings and providers
- **Housing** affordability and availability
- Increased **Wages**
- Expand **Broadband** access and coverage
- Impacts of the rising cost of **Energy**

Housing, child care and wages are directly related to the workforce challenges the region is facing. They can be attributed as both part of the causation and symptoms of the workforce shortage.

Access to adequate and cost effective broadband has never been more important for business and commerce to occur locally and globally, and for the region’s residents to be connected to the goods and services that are expected in a digital world.

While energy prices have remained relatively low and affordable for most in recent years, those costs in the future will increase. The region experienced indications of those impacts in recent years with $4.00 gas, and when propane prices exceeded $4.00/gallon. While there are numerous benefits with moving toward more renewable energy sources and energy efficient appliances and devices, it is important to recognize the initial costs for these can be much more expensive for the utility providers, energy producers and manufacturers. Those higher costs are typically passed on to the consumers. It will be imperative to remain mindful and consider the impacts that mandates and movement toward new technologies may have in the costs of doing business, and living in the region’s communities. Consideration also needs to be given on how new approaches can negatively disrupt other industries, and employment in those industries.

The focus of economic development has changed over the last decade. Early indications of workforce shortages many years ago have now come to reality, and that has shifted what local and regional economic development focuses on. There has been a shift in focusing efforts to attract people, and less attention on trying to attract new business and industry to communities. In the near term, this is the correct approach. However, it is important for communities to be in a position to accommodate new business and industry when those opportunities arise. The strategic direction and action plan laid out in remaining pages of this document will assist in solving near-term challenges, as well as preserving the ground work for shifts in focus that will likely occur in the long term.

The global world is at the region’s door, and for it to be able to accomplish what is identified in the action plan, collaboration and funding requires public/private partnerships at the local, state and federal levels.
No matter the approach to or focus of economic development, it must always consider two overarching key components: Economic Resiliency and Diversity/Inclusion.

Economic Resiliency is defined as an area’s ability to prevent, withstand and quickly recover from major disruptions (i.e., ‘shocks’) to its economic base, which is a key element to ensuring and preserving regional economic prosperity.

While not called out frequently in the document, it is implied that economic resiliency is a component of all activities associated with economic development in the region.

The Federal Economic Development Administration (EDA) serves as a useful resource in providing consideration and direction in developing strategies to achieve economic resilience. According to the EDA, it should focus on three primary attributes:

- the ability to recover quickly from a shock
- the ability to withstand a shock
- the ability to avoid the shock altogether

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. At the regional or community level, economic development practitioners are instrumental in building the capacity for economic resilience. Economic development professionals and organizations often become the focal point for post-incident coordination, information dissemination, external inquiry response, and the lead grant administrator for federally funded recovery initiatives. In building economic resilience, it is critical that economic development organizations consider their role in the pre- and post-incident environments to include steady-state and responsive initiatives.

Steady-state initiatives tend to be long-term efforts that seek to bolster the community or region’s ability to withstand or avoid a shock. Responsive initiatives can include establishing capabilities for the economic development organization to be responsive to the region’s recovery needs following an incident.

Inclusion and Diversity are the second and equally important considerations. The numbers are extremely telling. Our region’s communities and its workforce will not grow unless we can increase domestic and international migration to our region.

The region’s communities need to incorporate an inclusive approach to attracting and welcoming new residents. If not, new residents won’t stay very long, or may not come at all. The Blandin Foundation’s Community Leadership Program identifies inclusion as 1 of 8 dimensions of a healthy community. It further defines Inclusion as: People consistently making the effort required to capitalize on the range of differences in the community and intentionally seeking ways to utilize the diverse backgrounds, experiences and skills of everyone for the benefit of the whole community. Organizations, groups, and local government should actively seek out and encourage all people to participate in planning, decision-making and action in the community. The community also needs to recognize and value the many benefits of including the voices and perspectives of all its residents. The community must be welcoming and makes a consistent effort to help everyone feel that they belong.

Regardless of how they are defined, growing diversity and creating inclusion needs to be intentional and actionable as communities address their economic development challenges.
Strategic Direction/Action Plan

The Four Cornerstones of Regional Development

The DevelopMN strategy identified four cornerstones as key components of strong regions and communities. They apply to the whole of Greater Minnesota as much as they do to this region. The four cornerstones are:

- Human Capital
- Economic Competitiveness
- Community Resources
- Foundational Assets

These cornerstones are imperative in realizing west central Minnesota’s vision to create a stronger and economically prosperous region.

**COMMUNITY RESOURCES**

A balance must be achieved and maintained that will allow for the ability to preserve the rural values, heritage and community assets that exist throughout the region. At the same time, the community should create an inclusive environment and opportunities for those already here; welcoming newcomers and those returning to the region.

**FOUNDATIONAL ASSETS**

The communities in the region require proactive and collaborative approaches/strategies to address infrastructure needs in a cost-effective manner. Managing the access to, maintenance, replacement, and expansion of these assets are key to preserving and maintaining communities, and providing for growth opportunities. Foundational assets include above and below-ground infrastructure such as transportation, utilities, and water.

**HUMAN CAPITAL**

Developing, retaining and attracting talent are critical for west central Minnesota in order to sustain and grow rural business and communities. Tracking the characteristics of the labor force and the needs of employers, and creating strategies for alignment between the two, are the basis for this cornerstone.

**ECONOMIC COMPETITIVENESS**

Economic Competitiveness requires communities to develop, grow and link all available assets that will support business and community growth. Enhancing, promoting and encouraging innovation and entrepreneurship throughout the region will continue to be critical to creating jobs, improving living standards, and financing necessary public services.
Human Capital Cornerstone

Labor Force

CALL TO ACTION
While the region was fairly buffered from the full economic impacts as a result of the Great Recession as compared to other parts of the state and country, there were still impacts heavily felt by many. In many ways, the region’s economy has fully recovered to prerecession levels, and the focus has now shifted to the challenge of meeting the hiring and skill needs of employers. The region has seen its labor force increase at a fairly sustained rate, until a drop in 2013. The region recovered from that drop the next year, but an available labor force will be a serious concern going forward.

CONTEXT
Labor force participation is the proportion of people age 16 and older who are either working or seeking work. Students, homemakers, retired individuals and others not looking for work do not count in the calculations. The region’s labor force most likely peaked in 2015, at just under 127,000 people. Greater MN, as a whole, peaked in 2010. Workers in the 25-54 age group are considered the prime labor force. This group is projected to decline by 1.4% statewide by 2025, and for Greater MN it will decline by 5.2% in the same period. Our region is anticipated to fall between those two with a decline of 2.5%.

GOAL
• Increase labor force participation by 2% by 2021

OBJECTIVES
• Advance a skilled workforce: help individuals gain the skills to secure higher pay positions.
• Increase net migration: foster an optimal environment for creating, attracting and retaining a skilled workforce.
• Leverage Business Development: broaden the base of regional employers offering a livable and competitive wage.

STRATEGIES
• Promote and support the efforts of West Central Initiative’s (WCI) regional marketing campaign Live Wide Open: www.livewideopen.com and other complementary local community-based campaigns.
• Support workforce training initiatives offered by WCI and regional partners.
• Provide economic development assistance to communities that support the planning functions of the Economic Development District to ensure a near-term focus of growth of the workforce, while still identifying opportunities to attract and grow business.
Educational Attainment

CALL TO ACTION
A focused effort needs to continue to grow the regional population and regional workforce. It is also important to increase existing workers’ skills, as increasing productivity serves as a partial solution to filling workforce needs, and in turn, grow the regional economy.

CONTEXT
According to the most recent American Community Survey data, 69% of the region’s population aged 25 or older have earned a high school diploma or higher. 38% have earned an associate degree or higher. The current job vacancy survey indicates 21% of all current job vacancies require some post secondary education, 33% require a certificate or license.

GOAL
Increase the number of residents (ages 18-64) who have completed post-secondary education or training with a particular focus on certificates, technical degrees and apprenticeships relevant to employment in middle-skill, living-wage occupations.

OBJECTIVES
• Advance a skilled workforce: help individuals gain the skills to secure higher pay positions.
• Increase Net Migration: foster an optimal environment for creating, attracting and retaining a skilled workforce.
• Leverage Business Development: broaden the base of regional employers offering a livable and competitive wage.

STRATEGIES
• Build and improve access to career technical education opportunities for high school students interested in careers as skilled tradespeople.
• Create and support talent retention and attraction programs.
• Embrace emerging populations, including New Americans, through targeted educational programs and partnerships with agencies that serve this population.
• Encourage opportunities to enhance world-class workforce training.
• Convene workforce labor leaders to foster coordination of and encourage innovation.
• Promote, partner and connect local businesses with Enterprise Minnesota, who is the state’s Manufacturing Extension Partnership, and local educational institution’s customized training and workforce development solutions programs; namely the Minnesota State Community and Technical College system, Alexandria Community and Technical College, White Earth Community and Technical College, and North Dakota State College of Science.
• Support and acknowledge the value of educational programs that invest in the region’s youngest residents early on in their lives.
Entrepreneurship and Innovation

CALL TO ACTION
The region needs to embrace innovation, calculated risk-taking and entrepreneurship in order to compete effectively in the global economy. This is also the case in the local economy and business owners who wish to sell globally. There is a need to find new people to take over existing businesses, and for new businesses to be created as markets demand.

CONTEXT
The StatsAmerica Innovation Index (2.0) establishes a measurement of regional performance based on five component indexes: Human Capital and Knowledge Creation, Business Dynamics, Business Profile, Employment and Productivity, and Economic Well-Being. Overall, the region just exceeds the 100 benchmark at 100.9, and is the second highest of Greater MN region. However, the Business Dynamics Index is the only Index that falls below 100, at 64.9. The Business Dynamics rating includes evaluations of business starts, jobs created, and venture capital investment. Lack of known venture capital investment is the most impactful, which is expected in rural areas. Ensuring businesses in the region have adequate access to other financial resources will serve as the alternative to the venture capital option.

GOAL
Improve the region’s rank on the StatsAmerica Innovation Index for Business Dynamics from 64.9 to 75 by 2021.

OBJECTIVES
- Leverage Business Development: broaden the base of regional employers offering a livable and competitive wage.
- Work to bring in more transition and succession planning resources and buy-in to the region to facilitate the transfer of established businesses.

STRATEGIES
- Advance lending efforts to promote regional economic development, and broaden access to capital options to encourage innovation and entrepreneurship.
- Provide support services for entrepreneurs.
- Assist in the creation of networks of incubator, co-working, proof of concept and maker spaces.
- Establish and expand entrepreneurship education programs in K-12 schools.
- Maintain and expand renewable energy production incentives.
- Invest in value-added opportunities for agricultural and forest products.
Small Business Growth

CALL TO ACTION
Small businesses, especially those in rural areas, have less access to capital than larger businesses. This includes government-based economic development programs. In order for small businesses in the region to prosper they must have access to public and private funding. Another factor facing small businesses in the region is the aging of the population and the impact it is having on the sale and continuation of established businesses. The acceptance of business transition and succession planning is critical for preservation of a healthy business environment in small and large communities alike.

CONTEXT
76% of the businesses in the region have less than 10 employees and 96% have less than 50 employees. Research shows that as much as 80% of job growth comes from existing businesses. Statewide, 15% of the businesses are currently owned by people aged 65 or older. This business ownership percent is much higher for the region and will continue to be higher because this region has a higher percent of the population in the 65+ age group than the state and it will only increase from now until around 2035.

GOAL
Increase the number of and better promote the existing capital investment programs available to small and medium enterprises to allow growth, job creation, and business transition.

OBJECTIVES
- Leverage Business Development: broaden the base of regional employers offering a livable and competitive wage.
- Work to bring in more transition and succession planning resources and buy-in to the region to facilitate the transfer of established businesses.

STRATEGIES
- Identify and build a regional and statewide resource listing of capital programs by eligibility and stage.
- Utilize public-private partnerships to increase small and medium business-oriented lending.
- Establish new business financing programs to fill gaps in the capital market.
- Fully fund regional Small Business Development Centers at the state level.
- Expand and improve technical assistance for growers and producers.
- Advance lending efforts to promote regional economic development, and broaden access to capital options to encourage innovation and entrepreneurship.
- Provide support services for entrepreneurs.
社区资源基石

社会资本

**CALL TO ACTION**

居民必须共同努力，克服挑战，改善他们的社区并将其转变得更好。如果居民认为其公民参与，无论是个人还是更大的群体，都能产生影响，这种情况可以发生。

**CONTEXT**

自1998年以来，布兰丁基金会一直委托进行一项研究，称为“农村脉搏”。这项研究的目的是获得乡村明尼苏达州居民真正实时的现状、感知和优先事项的快照。农村脉搏于2013年首次发布，之后又于2016年发布。当来自西中部明尼苏达州的受访者被问及是否认为当地社区成员合作良好时，76%的人表示“社区共同有效地解决当地问题”，这一数字比2013年的调查下降了2%。

**GOAL**

基于农村脉搏研究，将对社区工作良好以有效解决当地问题的居民人数增加5%的目标，到2021年。

**OBJECTIVES**

- 提高参与度：增加参与为社区未来成功而努力的人员数量。
- 指导并鼓励社区合作：协调当地和区域视角，协助居民采取行动。

**STRATEGIES**

- 积极招募并培养有影响力的社区领导者。
- 正式化社区领导力网络群组。
- 增强社区领导者的知识和能力，并在机会中积极培养他们，以促进积极的社区和地区发展。
- 建立过渡/继任规划项目，以私有、公有和非营利组织。

基于农村脉搏研究，增加对社区工作良好以有效解决当地问题的居民人数，到2021年增加5%。
Arts and Culture

CALL TO ACTION

Arts, culture and placemaking contribute to the vibrancy of the region’s economy and quality of life, and in turn assist in retaining existing residents and attracting new ones. These approaches also are instrumental in bridging connections and providing opportunities for conversations to occur across culturally diverse populations.

CONTEXT

In 2015, the Creative MN Regional Profiles identified the region benefits of over $10 million in economic impact from the arts and culture. Additionally, it identified 273 people who are directly employed, and over 1,500 volunteers who contributed 66,000 hours of time. Jobs in this industry are very entrepreneurial and innovative by nature, and growing employment in this industry will provide more than just economic benefits to the region. The region already has a strong arts and culture presence and there is boundless potential to grow this industry more by taking advantage of existing resources. Placemaking initiatives that utilize the arts have become a standard and effective tool in improving communities, especially in downtowns and public spaces.

GOAL

Increase employment in the arts industry in the region by 5% by 2021.

OBJECTIVES

- Leverage Business Development: broaden the base of regional employers offering a livable and competitive wage
- Advance a skilled workforce: help individuals gain the skills to secure higher pay positions.
- Increase net migration: foster an optimal environment for creating, attracting and retaining a skilled workforce.
- Enhance engagement; increase the number of people engaged in working toward the future success of their communities.
- Guide and encourage community collaboration: align local and regional perspectives around needs and strategies, assisting residents to take action.

STRATEGIES

- Utilize arts-based placemaking to improve downtown areas and public spaces.
- Connect artists with the resources they need to make a living and live in the region.
- Expand existing and create new artist-in-residence programs.
- Support and enhance arts and culture efforts through an increase of Legacy Act investments in the region.
- Create ways to identify and train potential community leaders
Tourism

CALL TO ACTION

Jobs in the leisure and hospitality industry comprise 10% of the region’s workforce. Tourism in the region is recognized as an essential industry for economic development.

CONTEXT

In the region, travel and tourism make up a large portion of the overall industry. As a result, jobs at all levels of employment are created, sales are generated, and traveler spending indirectly supports/creates jobs in other industry sectors. This industry also plays a key role in exposing potential new residents to the region. The most recent economic impact numbers for the leisure and hospitality industry show almost $400 million in gross sales, and over $26 million in generated sales tax. The average employment in the industry is around 8,700 people.

GOAL

Increase visitor spending in the region by 10% by 2021.

OBJECTIVES

- Increase Net Migration: foster an optimal environment for creating, attracting and retaining a skilled workforce.
- Enhance Engagement: increase the number of people engaged in working toward the future success of their communities.
- Guide and Encourage Community Collaboration: align local and regional perspectives around needs and strategies, assisting residents in taking action
- Leverage Business Development: broaden the base of regional employers offering a livable and competitive wage.

STRATEGIES

- Promote and support the efforts of WCI’s Live Wide Open regional marketing campaign and other complementary local community-based campaigns that work, in part, to promote and market community aesthetics.
- Develop career paths in the tourism industry to attract and keep younger employees while staying competitive in pay and benefits to attract and retain employees.
- Advance lending efforts to promote regional economic development.
- Assist communities in welcoming and engaging with diverse populations.
Natural Resources/ Water Quality

CALL TO ACTION
The west central region has an abundance of natural resources that are essential to the state’s economy. As the region continues to grow, the strain on those resources will also continue to increase. Solutions to threats like ground water contamination and overuse, invasive species, decline of natural areas, exploitation of natural resources, and loss of species must be part of the conversation as the region continues to grow and change.

CONTEXT
Much of the sales, sales tax, and employment in the leisure and hospitality industry are directly related to the region’s natural resources. The 2,700 additional jobs in the natural resources and mining industry, and its own related financial economic impact make the region’s natural resources more than just aesthetics and something to recreate in. It also provides great economic benefit to the region.

GOAL
Protect and preserve the region’s natural resources and water quality for continued responsible use.

OBJECTIVES
• Increase Net Migration: foster an optimal environment for creating, attracting and retaining a skilled workforce.
• Enhance Engagement: increase the number of people engaged in working toward the future success of their communities.
• Leverage Business Development: broaden the base of regional employers offering a livable and competitive wage.

• Guide and Encourage Community Collaboration: align local and regional perspectives around needs and strategies, assisting residents in taking action.
• Promoting Philanthropy: broaden the base of residents engaged in identifying and investing in their vision for the region.

STRATEGIES
• Identify and work to safeguard valuable natural resources and outdoor heritage through education, preservation and conservation efforts.
• Encourage community and regional planning that address all aspects of natural resource protection, preservation and restoration.
• Create ways to identify and train potential community leaders.
• Engage residents in opportunities that foster positive community and regional development.
• Advance efforts to create a unified vision for infrastructure planning.
• Increase applications for Legacy Act investment in the region.
• Continue the Healthy Lakes and Rivers Program with interested lake associations.
• Bring residents together around local philanthropic issues.
Broadband Access

CALL TO ACTION
Affordable high-speed internet is necessary to remain competitive in today's global economy. Many businesses and residents in the region experience limited access to reliable broadband at acceptable speeds and costs.

CONTEXT
Based on broadband maps provided by MN Office of Broadband, counties’ access to wireline broadband at speeds of 10 Mbps download and 5 Mbps download vary in the region. The lowest number of those with access is 60%, all the way to 99.23% who have access to those speeds. Regardless of delivery source, the region is underserved in many areas. The current desired goal for all businesses in MN to have accessibility to speeds of 100 Mbps download and 20 Mbps upload by 2026 (broadband source is unspecified) is even farther off.

GOAL
100% of businesses and households in the region have access to broadband with speeds of 100 Mbps download and 20 Mbps upload by 2026.

OBJECTIVES
- Leverage Business Development: broaden the base of regional employers offering a livable and competitive wage.
- Increase Net Migration: foster an optimal environment for creating, attracting and retaining a skilled workforce.
- Enhance Engagement: increase the number of people engaged in working toward the future success of their communities.
- Guide and Encourage Community Collaboration: align local and regional perspectives around needs and strategies, assisting residents in taking action.

STRATEGIES
- Advocate for broadband funding at both state and federal levels.
- Create and leverage public-private partnerships to fund improved broadband access
- Ensure the collection of accurate data around served and unserved areas.
- Promote an understanding of the importance of broadband to a community’s infrastructure, a business’ ability to be competitive, and the value of having broadband access in the home.
- Provide support services for entrepreneurs.
- Advance efforts to create a unified vision for infrastructure planning.
Transportation

CALL TO ACTION
Economic growth and trade depend on safe and reliable transportation networks. Virtually no value-added production or commerce can take place unless raw material, manufactured products, labor and fuel can be moved efficiently to and from their respective sources and destinations.

CONTEXT
In the region, county and state highways are the primary means for moving freight. Planning experts have determined that there will be a significant shortfall in funding to provide a transportation system that addresses congestion and meets the needs of business.

GOAL
Increase the percentage of the region’s roads assigned a fair quality rating in the next 20 years. This includes arterials and collectors under both state and local jurisdictions.

Work with regional stakeholders to preserve and improve access to rail and air resources over the next ten years.

OBJECTIVES
• Leverage Business Development: broaden the base of regional employers offering a livable and competitive wage.
• Increase Net Migration: foster an optimal environment for creating, attracting and retaining a skilled workforce.

STRATEGIES
• Continue to integrate transportation planning and economic development planning at a regional level.
• Continue to develop the regional transportation plan and assist Mn/DOT in the development of the statewide freight plan.
• Offer assistance to local units of government with their long-range planning to address transportation reliability and resiliency.
• Encourage state and local units of governments to use all available options that increase transportation funding.
• Prioritize transportation projects that connect regional economic hubs.

• Advance efforts to create a unified vision for infrastructure planning.
Active Transportation

CALL TO ACTION
Active-living planning approaches and implementation will help improve community health, livability and social capital.

CONTEXT
Generally, active living planning is creating intentional connections between the built environment (land use, transportation, parks and recreation) and impact on public health. Moreover, projects and initiatives that are connected to active living increase community aesthetics, recreational opportunities, and multi-modal transportation options.

The Bicycle Friendly Community (BFC) and its sister, Bicycle Friendly Business, programs both provide a roadmap to improve conditions for bicycling at the community and business level. Currently, there are 3 communities in the region that are designated as a Bicycle Friendly Community: Fargo-Moorhead Metro, Fergus Falls and Frazee. The City of Fergus Falls also has 4 designated Bicycle Friendly Businesses in the community.

Complete Streets is an approach to road planning and design that considers and balances the needs of all transportation users. Its main premise is simply making it easier for people to move from point A to point B more safely and efficiently, using whatever method of transportation they choose. Current regional communities that have adopted a Complete Streets policy are: Fargo-Moorhead Metropolitan Council of Governments, Breckenridge, Battle Lake, Dilworth, Glenwood, Wilkin County, Clay County, Otter Tail County, Fergus Falls, Frazee and Parkers Prairie. The cities of Battle Lake and Parkers Prairie have both completed a Complete Streets project and the city of Glenwood’s project will be as part of their Minnesota Avenue project in 2018.

Safe Routes to School is a national program that is overseen at the state level by MN/DOT. West Central Initiative is the local entity that assists communities in the development of community-level plans. The Safe Routes to School Plan program is intended to create safe, convenient and fun opportunities for children to bicycle and walk to and from schools. The goal is to reverse the decline in children walking and bicycling to schools, increase kids’ safety and work to change the progression of childhood obesity and inactivity. In addition to creating safer routes to school, the program also plans for and improves general bike and pedestrian infrastructure in
the communities. Communities that WCI has assisted, or are assisting with Safe Routes to School plans are: Ashby, Barnesville, Battle Lake, Breckenridge, Fergus Falls, Frazee, Glenwood, Glyndon, Henning, Lake Park-Audubon, New York Mills, Ogema, Parkers Prairie, Perham, Rothsay and Wheaton.

GOALS
Increase the number of communities that have achieved a BFC-designated status by the League of American Bicyclists.

Increase the number of communities that have adopted Complete Streets policies and implemented projects.

Increase the number of communities that have adopted a Safe Routes to Schools plan and have accessed Implementation Funding for the plan recommendations.

OBJECTIVES
• Increase Net Migration: foster an optimal environment for creating, attracting and retaining a skilled workforce.
• Enhance Engagement: increase the number of people engaged in working toward the future success of their communities.
• Guide and Encourage Community Collaboration: align local and regional perspectives around needs and strategies, assisting residents in taking action.

STRATEGIES
• Work with state and local partners to coordinate efforts to develop and enhance regional bicycle and pedestrian systems.
• Explore long-term funding mechanisms for maintenance and improvement of bike and pedestrian infrastructure.
• Work with state and local partners to support the expansion and maintenance of regional trail systems.
• Assist communities in welcoming and engaging with diverse populations.
• Promote Early Childhood Initiative coalitions in our region.
• Convene workforce labor leaders to foster coordination of and encourage innovation.
• Engage residents in opportunities that foster positive community and regional development.
• Advance efforts to create a unified vision for infrastructure planning.
Transit

CALL TO ACTION
Public transit within the region—both in the more rural areas and the regional centers—will become increasingly more important for access to services. As anticipated demographic changes to the region continue to impact the increasing mobility gap, the region will need to identify approaches for rural transit systems to best meet the changing needs.

CONTEXT
The rural nature of the majority of the region impacts transit providers’ ability to be cost effective in delivering services with standard approaches. For communities to be able to provide access to these services, solutions must be impactful and recognize limited funding availability and therefore, be innovative.

GOAL
Increase the level of service to the regional transit system by 2021.

OBJECTIVES
- Increase Net Migration: foster an optimal environment for creating, attracting and retaining a skilled workforce.
- Enhance Engagement: increase the number of people engaged in working toward the future success of their communities.
- Guide and Encourage Community Collaboration: align local and regional perspectives around needs and strategies, assisting residents in taking action.

STRATEGIES
- Work to ensure that long-range public transit policy decisions in Greater Minnesota address future demographic shifts and needs.
- Work with state and local partners to evaluate funding and service options to meet mobility and access needs of individuals.
- Assist regional transportation planners with updates to the region’s transit plan.
- Advance efforts to create a unified vision for infrastructure planning.
- Assist communities in welcoming and engaging with diverse populations.
- Convene workforce labor leaders to foster coordination and encouragement of innovation.
Community Facilities/
Water-Wastewater
Infrastructure

CALL TO ACTION

Communities in the region, especially those with smaller populations, struggle with the affordability of their capital investments and community facility projects, especially related to water infrastructure; they lack the economies of scale that help keep costs down. As costs for the rehabilitation, replacement or expansion of community infrastructure has continued to increase along with new regulations requiring the improvement, even larger communities struggle with identifying adequate funding to complete the projects. Without adequate, affordable, and functional infrastructure, the communities, residents and businesses within them will not survive.

CONTEXT

Much of the water-related infrastructure in the region’s communities was built in the 1930s, with an intended design life of 50 years. Added to aging infrastructure are the increasing number of requirements to remove more pollutants from the water to protect our natural resources. These requirements are often expensive and add to the already high costs of system upgrades or replacement. Regionally, anticipated water infrastructure costs for drinking and wastewater treatment, and stormwater conveyance are approaching $1 billion. As examples, the City of Detroit Lakes is currently facing a $26 million wastewater treatment plant upgrade, and the cities of Breckenridge and Morris are looking at drinking water treatment plants exceeding $15 million each.

GOALS

• Increase the number of communities that are developing Capital Improvement Plans.
• Increase the number of communities that have access to and utilize an appropriate mix of funding resources to address water infrastructure repair, retrofits and replacement, as well as other capital investments and projects related to community facilities.

OBJECTIVES

• Enhance Engagement: increase the number of people engaged in working toward the future success of their communities.
• Guide and Encourage Community Collaboration: align local and regional perspectives around needs and strategies, assisting residents in taking action.

STRATEGIES

• Engage residents in opportunities that foster positive community and regional development.
• Advance efforts to create a unified vision for infrastructure planning.
• Encourage cities to develop capital improvement plans and, if applicable, ensure that they are aligned with comprehensive plans and zoning/land use ordinances.
• Collect and share funding scenarios and solutions to update outdated and undersized systems.
• Facilitate dialogue around right-sized wastewater infrastructure projects.
• Focus municipal infrastructure improvements to support business development and affordable housing.
Housing Availability

CALL TO ACTION
Availability of affordable and diverse housing, owned or rented, varies from county to county in the region. This is also the case from community to community within counties. For owner-occupied homes, some communities face a shortage of available housing, some an over abundance. Price and condition most often contribute to the over abundance. The same factors of price and condition impact rental housing when there is an over abundance. Even though each community may face different issues, a regional voice and approach can add value to the conversation.

CONTEXT
Between 2010 and 2014, the share of households in the region paying 30% or more of income for monthly housing costs was 28.6%. That is down 1% from the last reported period, but up over 6% from 2000.

Homelessness has seen a decline since its peak in 2009, but 269 people were considered to be homeless in 2015.

A vacancy rate of 5% is generally considered a sign of a healthy rental housing market. In some communities in the region, there is a 0% vacancy rate.

GOAL
Move the region toward equilibrium in local housing markets.

OBJECTIVES
• Advance a Skilled Workforce: help individuals gain the skills to secure higher paying positions.
• Increase Net Migration: foster an optimal environment for creating, attracting and retaining a skilled workforce.
• Enhance Engagement: increase the number of people engaged in working toward the future success of their communities.
• Guide and Encourage Community Collaboration: align local and regional perspectives around needs and strategies, assisting residents in taking action.

STRATEGIES
• Facilitate regional conversation and support to address housing needs.
• Advance lending efforts to promote regional economic development.
• Provide support services for entrepreneurs.
• Encourage opportunities to enhance world-class workforce training.
• Engage residents in opportunities that foster positive community and regional development.
• Advance efforts to create a unified vision for infrastructure planning.
• Advocate for funding programs for demolition of vacant, unsafe and dilapidated housing units.
• Increase the number of units rehabilitated or preserved.
• Encourage development of transitional and permanent supportive housing.
• Collect and share best management practices around housing policy and financing.
One intent of this plan is to identify the goals, objectives and strategies identified in the Strategic Plan Framework for West Central Initiative as a regional community foundation with those that are similar in the DevelopMN plan and work to accomplish them at a regional level.

Those identified parallels have been incorporated into this document, which will, in turn, advance the work and impacts of the Economic Development District in carrying out a continuous economic development process. This document will also serve in aligning partners in working on commonly identified areas of focus and initiatives. A comprehensive listing of existing partners and generalized partnership categories can be found in the Appendix.

Moreover, the 2017-2021 CEDS will implement the goals and objectives in a manner that:

- Promotes economic development and opportunity
- Fosters effective transportation access
- Enhances and protects the environment
- Maximizes effective development and use of the workforce consistent with any applicable state or local workforce investment strategy
- Promotes the use of technology
- Balances resources through sound management of physical development
- Obtains and utilizes adequate funds and other resources through public and private partnerships
- Factors in economic resiliency, and diversity and inclusion as key elements/components in all activities associated with economic development.

As annual performance reports are prepared, each cornerstone will be evaluated. The analysis and review will take into account traditional EDA performance measures, such as jobs and tax base, as well as additional investment for specific projects and other assets leveraged. WCI tracks various performance measures as part of its strategic plan evaluation, and those which are determined to be applicable to both documents will be incorporated into the annual performance reporting. The performance measures will evaluate both the organization’s independent and collaborative contributions to the regional economy through the implementation of the CEDS. As part of that evaluation, it will seek input on two questions from stakeholders and the board: How is the organization doing? What could the organization be doing better?

Over the next five years, financial and time investment will be directed on projects that align and impact the goals identified in this plan. Investment of time and resources (financial and otherwise) will focus primarily on initiatives that grow the regional population and workforce, increase wages, improve child care capacity and availability, increase housing affordability and availability, access to broadband, and begin to examine the cost of energy.
Below is a listing of specific projects that West Central Initiative is involved with that are intended to have positive impact on the goals under each of the four cornerstones:

**HUMAN CAPITAL**
- Live Wide Open
- Bestforce Workforce Grant Program
- Partnerships with local colleges
- Customized Training support
  - Chamber workforce initiatives
- Dream It! Do It!
- Lakes Country Service Cooperative partnerships
- Labor Force Development Council

**ECONOMIC COMPETITIVENESS**
- Live Wide Open
- Loan Programs
- SBDC Partnership
- NW Legal Services Partnership
- Immigrant Law Center
- Child Care Loans and Grants
- Emergency Preparedness work in business continuity planning
- Banker meetings and convening

**COMMUNITY RESOURCES**
- Live Wide Open
- Community leadership program support
- Creative Action Network
- Partnering with local level marketing/tourism campaigns
- Working with Explore MN
- Legacy Act training session
- Early Childhood Work
- Heart-land Giving

**FOUNDATIONAL ASSETS**
- Transportation Planning
  - Safe Routes to School, Complete Streets, Transit
- Pine to Prairie GIS Users Group
- Housing program promotion
- Business Retention & Expansion

**Appendix**
- Regionwide SWOT Analysis
- WCI’s Strategic Plan
- DEED Regional Profile
- Family Economic Success Profile
- Blandin Rural Pulse
- 2011-2016 CEDS
- Regional Workforce Roundtables Summary Feedback and Conclusions
- DevelopMN Plan
- Partners
- EDD Board and CEDS Committee

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