5-Year Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS)

For Upper Explorerland Regional Planning Commission

September 30, 2022 - September 30, 2027

The Counties of: Allamakee, Clayton, Fayette, Howard & Winneshiek

Adopted July 28, 2022

Grantee:

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Executive Summary

This Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) was developed using an Economic Resiliency Framework, reviewed in further detail in this report. To achieve economic resiliency, a region needs to consider risks that could impact its economy, understand local vulnerability or sensitivity to these risks, assess current capacity to respond to risks, and build that capacity so that recovery can be successful and future impacts can be mitigated.

The CEDS planning process revealed several risks and vulnerabilities to the regional economy, and also generated a multitude of recommendations for improving economic resilience by reducing vulnerabilities, building capacity, and improving conditions that strengthen businesses, the workforce and communities. Here is a summary of takeaways:

Demographics & Socio-Economic Factors:
Lower diversity, lower wages, and an aging workforce are all weaknesses in the local economy. Increasing diversity and wages in the workplace are a place to start, and some businesses are making progress, however addressing issues surrounding falling populations and an aging workforce pose a challenge.

Labor Force, **Employment and Training**:
Employment is balanced across multiple leading industries in the region. Unemployment has fluctuated recently, hitting a record high during the pandemic, which did impact several leading industries including the Education, Health Care & Social Assistance and independent contractor/sole-practioner sectors.

Stemming from several issues, the region's labor force participation is going down, and finding a skilled workforce and filling open positions continues to be a challenge. The gap between available jobs & workers may grow in the future. Addressing this will require a multi-faceted approach, such as improving worker incentives/flexibilities, creatively filling worker gaps, and more. Training and education are also important factors in filling worker gaps, building a skilled workforce, and providing development for businesses & employees. Partnerships are key to implementing effective training that serves employers and employees.

Business:
Small businesses dominate in the region. It was also small businesses that felt the greatest impacts and vulnerabilities from the pandemic. For example, supply chain issues are an external threat proven to have a serious impact on the operations of local business.

Local and regional planning efforts and collaborations are needed to address a number of resiliency issues for local business, such as promoting and marketing businesses, providing start-up supports and entrepreneur opportunities, downtown revitalization, resilience and recovery planning, financial planning, and more. Also, business resilience can be built through diversification of the regional industrial mix and retention and expansion support.

Housing:
Many barriers exist for home ownership in the region, even as employers continue to state the urgent need for housing for existing and desired workers. These challenges include not enough homes being available for purchase and limited new construction, the challenge of home maintenance and age, housing costs exceeding recommended levels of household income, competition as housing gets used for short-term rentals and other temporary housing, and limited rental options. The housing stock needs diversification, expansion and updating to meet housing demand and better serve the workforce.

Childcare:
The availability of childcare is having an impact on the region's workforce. According to the Iowa Women's Foundation 2019 Policy Brief, because of childcare issues parents quit jobs, refrain from taking jobs, change jobs, do not accept full time work, take more time off of work, or arrive late/leave early from work. This all results in lost earnings, productivity and revenue impacts, hurting not just parents but also employers and taxpayers. Local childcare demand is exceeding supply by 600+ spaces. We need to improve childcare access, quality and options to support workers and their families.

Transportation:
Many in the region commute to work alone in a car. Because of this, workers are impacted by availability and costs of vehicles & fuel. Expanding public transportation and alternative vehicle options (such as electric vehicles) could decrease costs & increase choice for workers. At the same time, with workers in high demand and a greater selection of jobs, workers may be able to be more selective in where they work, allowing more people to work closer to their homes or from home. Shorter commute distances make alternative & active forms of transportation more feasible and attractive. We need to improve the sustainability of the region's transportation system and address how it can better serve all modes and mobility types, with a focus on walkability, bikability, safety, and increasing transportation affordability.

Broadband:
The pandemic showed that online capabilities made communities more resilient. Quick and reliable access to the internet support flexible delivery of goods and services, remote work & learning, means for communications and marketing, and more. Broadband is expanding, but many areas and facilities are still lacking in needed access & speeds.

Energy:
Both household and transportation energy cost burden are higher for families in the region due to types of fuel or vehicles used, longer commute times, inflation and more. This impacts family finances, particularly low-income, and can be improved by supporting renewable energy and efficiency, alternative fuel vehicles, and other sustainability initiatives.

Community Infrastructure:
Meeting community infrastructure needs becomes challenging when government finances are impacted as was the concern during the pandemic (though federal aid significantly reduced small government financial vulnerabilities). Also, adequate infrastructure is needed to entice new businesses into the community & for others to grow. Communities require ongoing assistance in planning for, funding, and implementing infrastructure work over the long run.

Hazards and Natural Disasters:
Natural disasters, especially flooding, can have a significant financial impact on communities. These threats will grow in the future with the affects of climate change. Ongoing, joint mitigation, recovery and resiliency planning will help to reduce the threats from hazards and disasters.

Natural Resources & Recreation:
Extensive natural resources exist in the region and create unique conditions and opportunities. It is important to support projects that have the potential to capitalize on competitive advantages of the region such as outdoor recreation and tourism. These industries remained steady, or grew, during the pandemic. Also, the natural resources and scenic beauty that appeals to residents and visitors needs to be protected for its own sake, and to build resilience in the environment and reduce the impacts of natural hazards.

Introduction

What is a Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS)?

A Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) is a strategy-driven plan for regional economic development. It's a result of a regional planning process designed to guide the economic resiliency of a region, and provides a vehicle for stakeholders in the public, non-profit and private sectors to engage in a meaningful conversation about what capacity building efforts would best serve economic development in the region. The CEDS takes into account and, where appropriate, integrates or leverages other regional planning efforts, and aims to establish a unified economic development roadmap for the Northeast Iowa region. Regions must update their CEDS at least every five years to qualify for EDA assistance under its Public Works and Economic Adjustment Assistance programs. In addition, a CEDS is a prerequisite for designation by EDA as an Economic Development District (EDD).

The CEDS includes the following primary sections:

Regional Background and Trends – A summary background of the economic conditions of the region, supported by current, relevant data.

SWOT Analysis – An in-depth analysis of regional strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT). The SWOT is a strategic planning tool used to ensure the establishment of clear objectives informed by an understanding of a region's capabilities and capacity. It identifies the region's competitive advantages—those local assets that make the region special or competitive in the economy—juxtaposed against those internal or external factors that can keep a region from realizing its potential. Determining and analyzing what the region already possesses that could be leveraged to build the capacity for growth is critical to developing the strategic direction and implementation plan to promote economic resiliency.

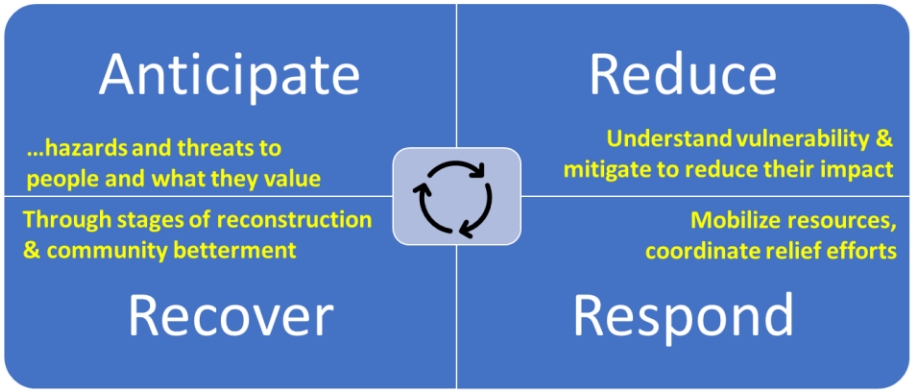
Strategic Direction/Action Plan – The Strategic Direction includes a vision statement, goals, and objectives that respond to the analysis of the area's development potential and problems (i.e., SWOT analysis). The goals reflect the desires of regional stakeholders engaged in the CEDS process, and address things that can be accomplished in both the near and long term. They provide a strategic framework for public and private decision-making and serve as the basis for the formulation and focus of the action plan. The Action Plan distills the vision, goals and objectives into concrete, specific actions to achieve the aspirations of the region's stakeholders. Building on the well-defined strategic direction, the action plan describes how the region will work together to achieve its goals and measurable objectives, including activity ownership, timetables, and committed resources.

Evaluation Framework - Performance measures used to evaluate the organization's implementation of the CEDS and impact on the regional economy. It provides information for the CEDS Annual Performance Report (regular updates that keep the strategic direction and action plan current and the plan as a whole relevant).

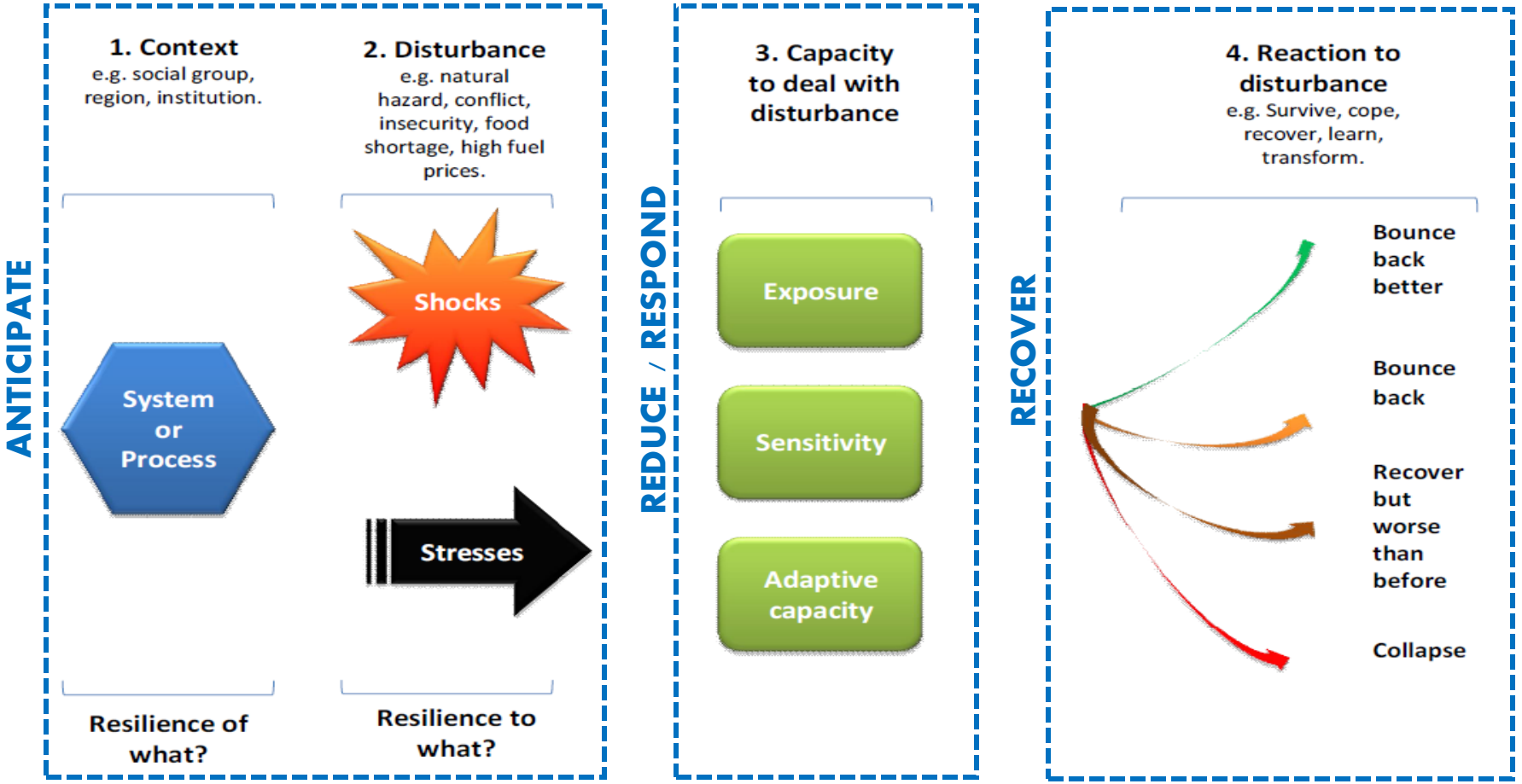
Economic Resilience Planning Framework

The U.S. Economic Development Administration defines ECONOMIC RESILIENCE as the "ability to anticipate risk, evaluate how that risk can impact key economic assets, and build a responsive capacity."

Similarly, COMMUNITY RESILIENCE is defined as "the capability to anticipate risk, limit impact, & recover rapidly through survival, adaptability, evolution, & growth in the face of…change" (White et al, 2015).



Given these definitions, Figure. 1. below illustrates what a resilience framework might look like:



Economic resilience is a priority for the region, so an economic resilience framework was applied in the development of the CEDS through:

1) **Analysis of the economic impacts of the pandemic –** UERPC planners reviewed available local, state, and federal data on economic impacts of the pandemic. This information was brought to stakeholders via the economic resiliency planning process and incorporated in the CEDS document.

2) **Identification of economic vulnerabilities -** The CEDS economic resiliency meetings were formatted to get participants thinking about which groups, industries, and practices were more vulnerable to economic stresses associated with the COVID-19 pandemic. In many cases, vulnerabilities were not new to the pandemic, but were existing vulnerabilities that were revealed or exacerbated by the economic disaster. An example of this would be childcare challenges, which were a standing concern for communities coming into the pandemic, but which further impacted workers as the pandemic caused increased unemployment, financial stresses, and the closure or reduction of existing childcare operations. In other cases, vulnerabilities were unique to the special conditions of the pandemic. For example, essential industries and workers had increased negative outcomes during the pandemic because of workplace stress and unemployment related to pandemic-spurred health and safety concerns.

3) **Understanding of local response/recovery capacity –** Understanding the capacity of stakeholders to respond to and recover from economic disturbances is critical to "bouncing back better" and reducing the impact of future disasters. CEDS economic resiliency meetings provided several key takeaways in this regards:

   - **Further resiliency planning is needed**- Many organizations have not been in the practice of planning or preparing for potential economic disasters. Planning could relate to disaster and recovery planning specifically or be focused on certain topics of business resilience, such as continuity, financial or marketing planning.
   - **Adaptive capacity is critical to business resilience** – To make it through the economic stresses and changed conditions of the pandemic, businesses had to quickly adapt to survive. For many, this meant understanding new government mandates and quickly implementing safety protocols, changing or reducing public interface, increasing work options & flexibilities (e.g. work from home, etc.), increasing the use of technology (e.g. online meetings, increased online presence and sales, etc.), and staying attuned to and pursing financial aid.
   - **Financial and human resources are strapped** – Many small governments and businesses are strapped with regards to financial and human resources, reducing their responsive capacity. Coming into the pandemic, many local organizations had limited financial reserves, and duties and responsibilities were focused on too few employees -- a glaring weakness as employees were out sick or positions were lost.

4) **Identification of opportunities to recover & bounce back better** – The CEDS economic resiliency meetings incorporated a discussion of Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities & Threats for the region. Further, feedback gathered via interviews and meetings with local stakeholders mined ideas for best practices and response & recover actions that have been successful in the region. Building on these existing strengths and seizing on internal and external opportunities to coordinate, plan, practice and implement projects for the betterment of the regional economy was a key focus of the planning process.

Stakeholder Engagement

The CEDS process involved broad stakeholder engagement in order to fully assess the economic problems and potential of the region. Stakeholder input and support was solicited in the following ways:

The Comprehensive Economic Development Committee

The CEDS committee included the Northeast Iowa Business Network (NIBN) executive committee, as well as the Upper Explorerland Regional Planning Commission Board. These entities served as a source for information on the state of Northeast Iowa's economy and the resources and entities that are involved in supporting, growing and marketing businesses and employees here. And via meetings and one-on-one interactions and correspondence, provided critical input regarding vision, goals and actions needed to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic and build a more economically resilient region in the future.

Economic Resiliency Engagement

A set of economic resiliency meetings were held in the region in 2021 and 2022 to address economic conditions through and following the COVID-19 pandemic. This engagement included:

1. **Economic Resilience Interviews**: With economic development directors, emergency management coordinators, and higher education representatives, to assess community and economic impacts from the pandemic, and current and potential strategies for economic recovery and resiliency.

2. **County-level Economic Resilience Meetings**: All city and county governments, as well as local and county level economic development representatives, were asked to attend these meetings. Participants ended up including a few non-profits and large employers as well. Information on pandemic impacts to the region were reviewed -- including state and local economic indicators and feedback from economic resilience interviews – the region's Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities & Threats were discussed, and economic recovery and resiliency strategies were identified. Aside from engaging regional stakeholders in the development of the CEDS, the meetings provided a great opportunity to share resources for economic resilience and planning, including the UERPC Resilience Toolkit and materials pertaining to pandemic related project and funding opportunities.

3. **Regional Economic Resilience Meetings**. City clerks and administrators and the Northeast Iowa Business Network (NIBN) were engaged in regional economic recovery and resiliency discussions. The format and materials covered in these regional meetings largely mimicked that provided in the county economic resilience meetings. Further, a second meeting was held with NIBN to hone the SWOT and strategic direction/action plan.

4. **UERPC Board Review and Adoption**. The UERPC Board provided a final review and adoption of the region's 5-yr CEDS.

Public Review/Comment

The draft plan was noticed in the UERPC newsletter which goes out to 1,344 email contacts. A link for review and comment on the plan was provided. Any public input was incorporated in the plan prior to final approval.

UERPC CEDS Committee List

The CEDS committee consisted of a diverse set of stakeholders involved in all aspects of economic development for the region:

Government Representatives

Elected officials and/or employees of a general purpose unit of state, local or Indian tribal government who have been appointed to represent the government.

Table 1: Government Representatives

Name	Government	Position
Larry Schellhammer	Allamakee County	Supervisor
Barb Collins	City of Monona	City Administrator
Ray Peterson	Clayton County	Supervisor
Brett DeVore	City of Oelwein	Mayor
Marty Stanbrough	Fayette County	Supervisor
Mark Vick	Winneshiek County	Supervisor
Dylan Mulfinger	City of Oelwein	City Administrator
Pat Murray	Howard County	Supervisor
Bonnie Basemann	City of Marquette	Clerk
Shirley Vermace	Winneshiek County	Supervisor

Non-Government Representatives

Private Sector and Non-Profit Representatives: Any senior management official or executive, holding a key decision-making position, with respect to any for-profit enterprise.

Table 2: Non-Government Representatives

Name	Organization	Position
Leon Griebenow	Hawkeye Stages	Private Business
Jack Knight	Allamakee Co. - USDA	Resident
Roger Arthur	Allamakee-Clayton Electric Cooperative	Private Business
Tim Lecander	Winneshiek County	Resident
Nina Taylor	Small Business Development Center	Resident
Peggy Lensing	Luther College	Private Business
Mary Koopman	Allamakee County	Resident
Patti Ruff	Clayton County Sanitation & Zoning	Business
Alison Holten	Northeast Iowa Community College	Business
Val Reinke	Allamakee Co. Economic Development & Tourism	Economic Development
Jason Passmore	Howard Co. Economic Development & Tourism	Economic Development
Stephanie Fromm	Winneshiek Co. Economic Development	Economic Development
Darla Kelchen	Clayton Co. Development Group	Economic Development
Mallory Hanson	Fayette Co. Economic Development & Tourism	Economic Development

Regional Background & Trends

A summary background of the economic development conditions of the region

Demographic Characteristics

The region's population skews older, is low in diversity, and is going down.

Table 3. Demographic Summary

Name	Estimate (MoE +/-)
Total population	80183
Percent male	50.1%
Percent female	49.9%
Percent under 5 years	5.5%
Percent under 18 years	21.3%
Percent 18 years and over	78.7%
Percent 21 years and over	74.1%
Percent working age (25 to 64 years)	47.4%
Percent 65 years and over	21.7%
Percent White	96.13%
Percent Black or African American	1.02%
Percent American Indian and Alaska Native	0.36%
Percent Asian	0.57%
Percent Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander	0.01%
Percent some other race	0.38%
Percent two or more races	1.53%
Percent Hispanic (of any race)	3.02%

Source: U.S. Census Local Business Profile (2011-2015 and the 2016-2020 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates); Census Business Builder: Regional Analyst Edition - 4.2.1

Overall Population:

The total population for the region is 80,729 persons (U.S. Census, ACS 2019 5-Yr Estimates). Population is declining in each county over time, as well as in the region, as shown in the Population 10-Yr Trend table below.

Age:

Almost 22% of the population is 65 and over (versus only 17% for the state). Further, 30% of the workforce are 55 or older, in comparison to only 24% at the state level.

Diversity:

Over 96% of the population in the region is white, with Hispanic the second most common race at only 3%. The state runs more diverse, with over 10% non-white residents.

Table 4. Worker Age

All worker ages	30865
Worker age 14-18	1322
Worker age 19-21	1325
Worker age 22-24	1479
Worker age 25-34	5633
Worker age 35-44	5998
Worker age 45-54	5834
Worker age 55-64	6598
Worker age 65-99	2679

Source: U.S. Census Local Business Profile (2021 Quarterly Workforce Indicators dataset); Census Business Builder: Regional Analyst Edition - 4.2.1

Table 5. Population 10-Yr Trend

	Allamakee	Clayton	Fayette	Howard	Winneshiek	Region	Change
2010	14331	18202	20992	9610	21031	84166	
2011	14309	18150	20938	9591	21033	84021	-.17%
2012	14285	18056	20894	9568	21033	83836	-.22%
2013	14242	17990	20822	9560	21038	83652	-.22%
2014	14152	17900	20693	9529	20957	83231	-.50%
2015	14060	17806	20589	9494	20884	82833	-.48%
2016	14001	17735	20391	9430	20789	82346	-.59%
2017	13940	17711	20139	9321	20575	81686	-.80%
2018	13880	17672	19929	9264	20401	81146	-.66%
2019	13813	17625	19803	9226	20262	80729	-.51%
% Change:	-3.6%	-3.2%	-5.7%	-4.0%	-3.7%	-4.1%	

Socio-Economic Characteristics

Educational attainment and average household income in the region are lower than in the state.

Table 6. Socio-Economic Summary

Name	Estimate (MoE +/-)
Average income	$69989
Percent high school degree or higher	91.8%
Percent Bachelor's degree or higher	20.8%
Average household size	2.27
Percent in poverty	10.9%
Percent population 16 years and over in labor force	65.3%
Percent employed	63.8%
Percent disabled	12.9%
Percent with health coverage	94.7%
Percent of all workers 16 and over who commute to work	91.6%
Percent who drive alone to work	75.1%
Percent who carpool to work	7.9%
Percent who use public transportation to commute to work	0.2%
Percent who walk to work	6.5%
Percent who use other means to commute to work	1.9%
Percent who work from home	8.4%
Average travel time to work (mins)	20.7
Percent with no vehicles available	5.1%
Percent with 1 vehicle available	27.1%
Percent with 2 or more vehicles available	67.8%
Percent veterans	7.5%

Source: U.S. Census Local Business Profile (2011-2015 and the 2016-2020 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates); Census Business Builder: Regional Analyst Edition - 4.2.1

Poverty:

11% of the region's population is in poverty (based on the % of families or unrelated individuals whose total income falls below a poverty threshold that varies by family size & composition -- if a family's total income is less than the dollar value of the threshold, then that family and every individual in it are considered to be in poverty). And 13% of families are below 150% of poverty level (Source: U.S. Census, ACS 2020 5-Yr Estimates).

Educational Attainment:

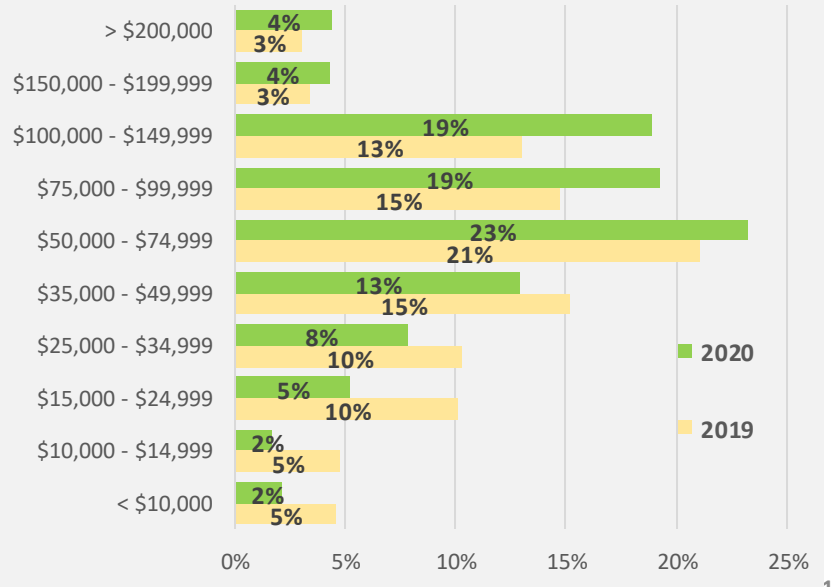
As shown in Table 6., 91.8% of individuals 25 or older have a high school degree or higher in the region (similar to the state rate of 92.5%). However only 21% have a bachelors degree (compared to 29% across Iowa).

Income:

The average household income in the region is $69,989 (based on the ratio of aggregate household income in the past 12 months in 2018 inflation adjusted dollars to the total number of households), which is $10,000 less than the state average of $80,316 (U.S. Census, Census Business Builder). An estimated 30% of the region's families earn less than $50,000 (U.S. Census 2020 ACS 5-Year Estimates), an improvement from the year before when 45% of families did. An improvement can also be observed with regards to families making less than $25,000. In 2019 this figure was 20% of families & in 2020 only 9%.

The per capita income for the region has continued to rise, but all counties in the region have a per capita income level lower than that of the state.

Figure 2: Family Income Distribution



Labor Force Characteristics

Falling population and shifting age brackets impact the region's labor force.

As shown in Table 7., the region's overall population is decreasing as the share of the population that is 65 and over increases. As older workers retire (a condition accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic), and younger age brackets generally decrease, the working population (age 16+) is going down, which may be a contributing factor in the falling labor force participation rate. The fall in labor force participation -- and female labor force participation in particular -- is higher in the region than it is for the state.

Table 7. Labor Force Participation Rate & Factors

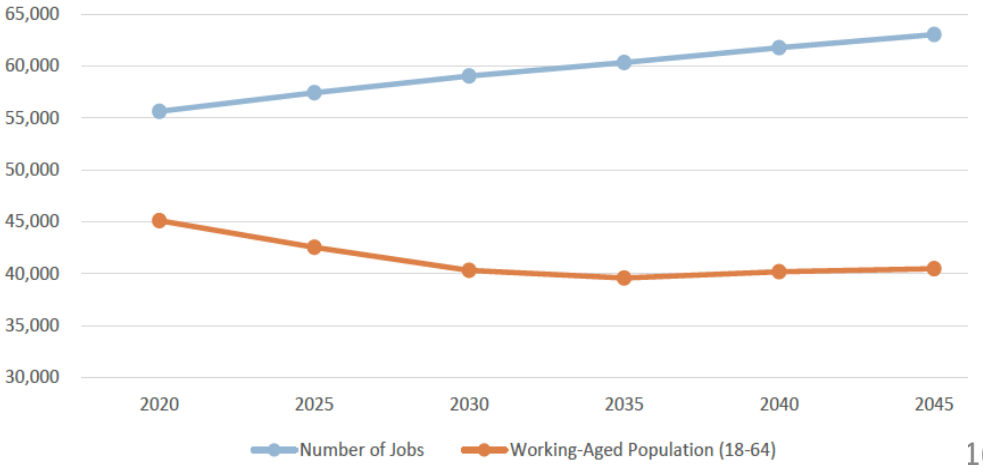
	UERPC Region **2011**	UERPC Region **2020**	**Regional** 10-yr Change	State of Iowa **2011**	State of Iowa **2020**	**State** 10-yr Change
Total Population	84,021	80,183	-3,838	3,032,266	3,150,011	+117,745
Population 65 and over (%)	19%	22%	+3%	15%	17%	+2%
Population under 65 (%)	81%	78%	-3%	85%	83%	-2%
Population age 16 years and over	67,495	65,083	-2,412	2,392,818	2,504,540	+111,722
Workers age 16 years and over	42,168	42,486	-318	1,524,370	1,679,440	+155,070
Labor force participation rate	68%	65%	-3%	69%	67%	-2%
Female labor force participation rate	63%	60%	-3%	64%	63%	-1%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2011 - 2020 ACS 5-Yr Estimates

Projecting population change impact on workforce.

The total population in the five-county region is forecasted to decrease by approximately 3.7% between 2020 and 2045; the population of working-age individuals (aged 18-64) is forecasted to decrease by 10.2% during the same time. As the population of working-age individuals decreases, the number of jobs in the five-county region is forecasted to increase simultaneously by 13.3%. Figure 3. plots the forecasted change in population of working-aged individuals against the forecasted change in the number of jobs from 2020 to 2045 (Source: RPA-1 Long Range Transportation Plan, http://uerpc.org/transportation.html); State Data Center of Iowa (Woods & Poole Economics, Inc. 2018).

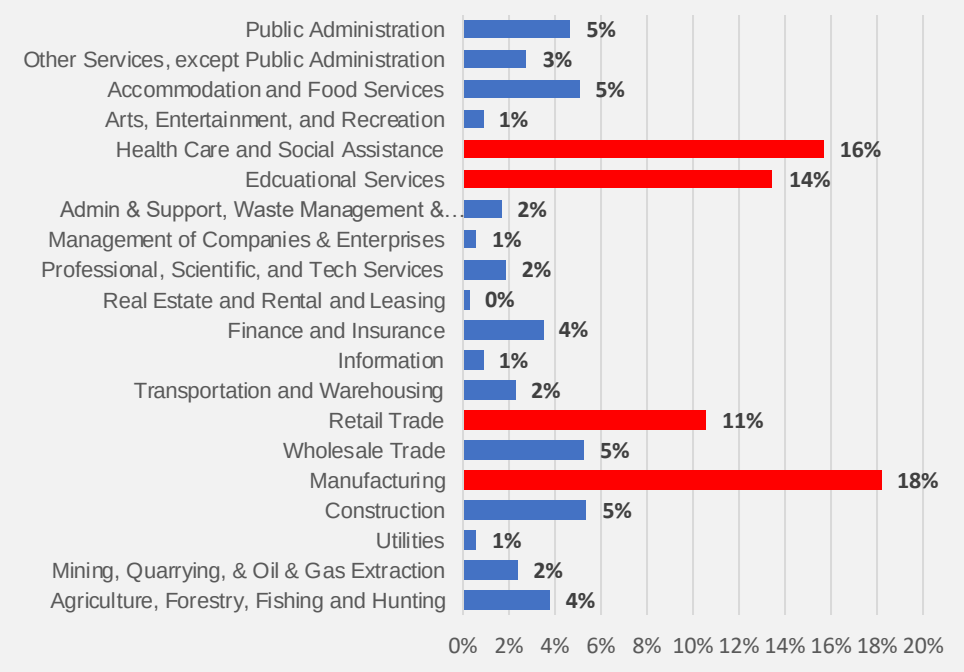
Figure 3. Projected Jobs and Population Comparison



Industries / Business

Employment is balanced across multiple leading industries, and small businesses dominate.

Figure 4. Employing Industries in Region, 2019



Leading Industries:

Employment in the region is balanced cross several leading industries (Figure. 4, shown in red). Manufacturing is 18% of jobs, closely followed by Health Care and Social Assistance (16%), Education Services (14%) & Retail Trade (11%).

Regional Industry Clusters:

A location quotient (LQ) is a statistic that measures a region's industrial specialization relative to a larger geographic unit (usually the nation). An LQ is computed as an industry's share of a regional total divided by the industry's share of the national total for the same statistic. An LQ of 1.0 means that the region and the nation are equally specialized for the industry in question, greater than 1 means the region has a higher concentration of the industry than the nation. Table 9. illustrates all industries in the region that have an LQ exceeding 1.0. The top 5 industries are highlighted in blue (Source: Stats America, Regionizer).

Table 8: Employment Summary

Name	Value (MoE +/-)
All Employer establishments (Total)	2333
Average employment per employer	12
Establishments with less than 5 employees	1341
Establishments with 5 to 9 employees	435
Average payroll per employee	$36770
Establishments with 10 to 19 employees	296
Establishments with 20 to 49 employees	171
Establishments with 50 to 99 employees	45
Population per employer	35
Establishments with 100 to 249 employees	n/a
Establishments with 250 to 499 employees	n/a
Establishments with 500 to 999 employees	n/a
Establishments with 1,000 employees or more	n/a
Total employment of employers	27455
Total annual payroll of employers ($1,000)	$1009527

Small Businesses:

Small business are common in the region. Almost 60% of employers have fewer than 5 employees, and over ¾ have fewer than 10. In addition, almost ¾ of all businesses in the region (6,683 firms) have no paid employees at all (i.e. independent contractors & sole proprietors). In all, there are around 9,016 businesses in the region, including 34,138 employees / independent contractors.

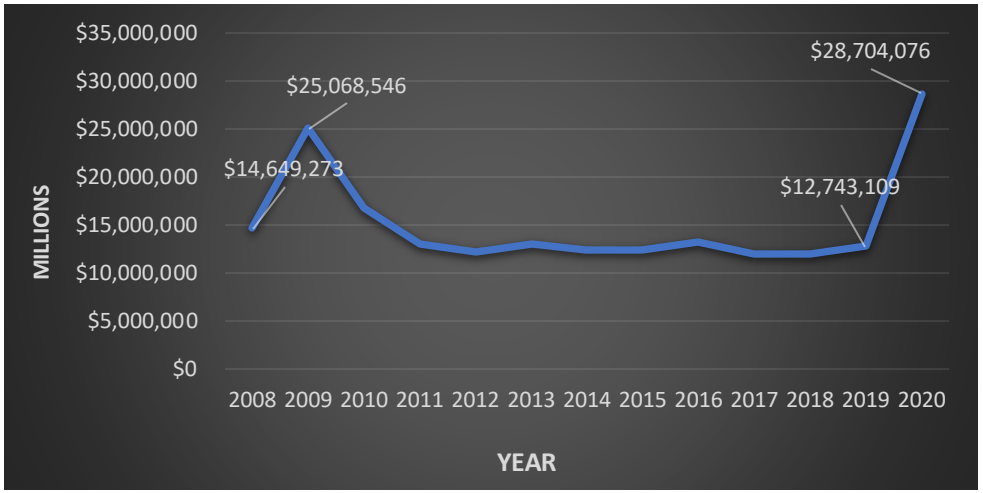
Table 9. Regional Clusters

Trailers, Motor Homes, and Appliances	7.83
Livestock Farming	4.38
Nonmetal Mining	4.04
Automotive	3.22
Recreational and Small Electric Goods	2.69
Metalworking Technology	2.13
Food Processing and Manufacturing	2.07
Production Technology and Heavy Machinery	1.61
Leather and Related Products	1.59
Livestock Processing	1.56
Lighting and Electrical Equipment	1.45
Plastics	1.13

Unemployment

Unemployment reached record highs during the pandemic but is back on track.

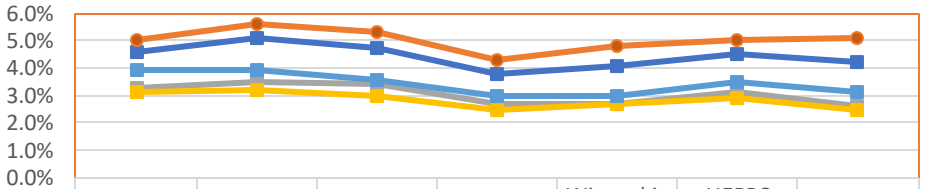
Figure 5. UERPC Region Unemployment Insurance (UI) Benefits Paid



Source: Unemployment Insurance Data Tool- https://www.iowalmi.gov/unemployment-insurance-statistics

The COVID-19 pandemic temporarily resulted in historically high unemployment rates in the region. Figure 5. shows that Unemployment Insurance Benefits (UI) paid out in 2020 exceeded those paid out in 2008 during the Great Recession. However, by the end of 2021, UI benefits paid were less than ½ those paid in 2020, and the annual average unemployment rate for the region had begun to creep down.

Figure 6. Historical Unemployment Rates, 2017 - 2021



	Allamakee	Clayton	Fayette	Howard	Winneshiek	UERPC Region	Iowa
2021	4.6%	5.1%	4.7%	3.8%	4.1%	4.5%	4.2%
2020	5.0%	5.6%	5.3%	4.3%	4.8%	5.0%	5.1%
2019	3.3%	3.5%	3.4%	2.7%	2.7%	3.1%	2.6%
2018	3.1%	3.2%	3.0%	2.5%	2.7%	2.9%	2.5%
2017	3.9%	3.9%	3.6%	3.0%	3.0%	3.5%	3.1%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2020 ACS 5-Yr Estimates

Housing

The housing stock needs diversification, expansion and updating to meet housing demand.

Table 10. Housing Summary

Total Units and Household Type:	
Total # of households:	33,730
Owner-occupied housing units	78%
Renter-occupied housing units:	22%
Household Size and Occupancy Type:	
Average household size:	2.29
Family households, or non-family but not living alone:	23,396 (69%)
Non-family households (householder living alone):	10,334 (31%)
Householder living alone, 65 years and over:	5,215 (50%)
Income and Monthly Housing Costs:	
Average household income (10-yr avg., 2010-19):	$49,644
Monthly housing costs 30% + of household income :	7,309 (22%)
Vacancy Status:	
Vacant, for rent (units):	780
Vacant, for sale (units):	490
Vacant, for seasonal, recreational, or occasional use:	2417
Housing Age:	
% Occupied units built prior to 1940:	38%
% Occupied units build prior to 1980:	72%
Home Valuations:	
# homes under $100,000 (owner-occupied w/mortgage)	4,558 (33%)

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, ACS 2019 5-year estimates.

Housing Tenure: The vast majority of households in the region are owner occupied (78%), and home ownership is a common goal for our region. Almost 1/3 of households are a householder living alone, and 50% of those are 65 years and older (5,215 households in all). Turnover of homes owned by the elderly for use by new families and workers in the region has been a discussion, however senior homes and senior living are a need.

Housing Age & Value: The region's housing tends to be older, & housing values & median rents are generally lower. Over 1/3 of homes were built prior to 1940 (compared to only 1/4 homes at the state level), and 1/3 of homes in the region are valued at less than $100,000 (this number was closer to 50% in 2010, so values have increased) (Source: U.S. Census, 2020 ACS 5-year Estimates).

Housing Affordability: Nearly 1/4 of households have monthly housing costs exceeding 30% of household income. Housing maintenance costs in these cases could be a challenge, and lack of maintenance can further add to the cost of purchasing and fixing up a home as turnover happens.

Vacancies: Around 1,270 units are vacant and available for rent or ownership in the region. In some counties, vacant homes for sale are extremely limited (Howard Co. has only 31, and Winneshiek Co. 77). Almost twice that number (2,417 units) are vacant but will only be rented out or used for seasonal, recreational, or occasional use, and are not serving the need for new home ownership. Many communities in the region are worried about the limited number of available homes dwindling as a result of being converted for use as short-term rentals.

Childcare

Childcare demand is higher than supply in the region.

Table 11. CCR&R Childcare Supply vs Demand

	2011	2021	% Change
Total number of childcare programs listed w/ CCR&R:			
Allamakee	50	22	-56%
Clayton	47	20	-57%
Fayette	55	24	-56%
Howard	51	22	-57%
Winneshiek	72	37	-49%
UERPC Region Total/Average:	275	125	-55%
Total number of childcare spaces listed w/ CCR&R:			
Allamakee	726	579	-20%
Clayton	788	577	-27%
Fayette	820	839	2%
Howard	847	541	-36%
Winneshiek	978	904	-8%
UERPC Region Total/Average:	4159	3440	-18%
Total number of children ages 0-5:			
Allamakee	1,186	1,116	-6%
Clayton	1,295	1,137	-12%
Fayette	1,447	1,320	-9%
Howard	795	738	-7%
Winneshiek	1,271	1,089	-14%
UERPC Region Total/Average:	5,994	5,400	-10%
Families with all parents working & children under age 6:			
Allamakee	74%	71%	-3%
Clayton	85%	72%	-13%
Fayette	63%	73%	10%
Howard	72%	69%	-3%
Winneshiek	83%	94%	11%
UERPC Region Total/Average:	75%	76%	0%

Source: Child Care Resource & Referral, 10-Yr Comparison Data Sheets by County, July 2011 – July 2021, https://iowaccrr.org/data/2021-county-data-sheets/10-yr-trend-2011-2021/

Childcare vs Supply Analysis:

According to a review of historical county level childcare data attained from Iowa Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R) covering the 10-yr period from July 2011 - July 2021, the number of childcare spaces listed with the organization went down 18% in the region (from 4,159 to 3,440 spaces). The number of children ages 0 – 5 in the region also went down, but only by 10% (5,994 to 5,400). The percent of families with all parents working and children under 6 in the region is 76% through July 2021. Based on these figures, an estimated 4,104 children (76% of children ages 0 – 5 in July 2021) may need childcare, but only 3,440 spaces are registered with CCR&R, making childcare capacity in the region an estimated 664 spaces short. However, these numbers could be impacted – potentially going down – based on the number of 5-yr olds enrolled in full day kindergarten, which was not easily attained from publicly available Iowa Department of Education statistics.

Natural Hazards

Flooding is a significant hazard risk and source of economic loss for the region.

Table 12. Hazard Risk Index – Estimated Annual Losses (EAL) 2021

	Allamakee	Clayton	Fayette	Howard	Winneshiek	REGION TOTAL:
Cold Waves						
EAL - Total ($)	90827.83	148182.01	152239.29	149364.56	178543.34	$719,157
EAL Rating	Relatively Moderate	Relatively Moderate	Relatively Moderate	Relatively Moderate	Relatively Moderate	
Drought						
EAL - Total ($)	8204.93	7624.11	400424.95	1130294.58	1240710.98	$2,787,260
EAL Rating	Very Low	Very Low	Relatively Moderate	Relatively Moderate	Relatively Moderate	
Hail						
EAL - Total ($)	127517.65	509473.71	943235.78	150616.63	890205.63	$2,621,049
EAL Rating	Relatively Low	Relatively Moderate	Relatively Moderate	Relatively Low	Relatively Moderate	
Landslide						
EAL - Total ($)	147245.61	113327.49	17589.98	5776.01	59453.51	$343,393
EAL Rating	Relatively Moderate	Relatively Moderate	Relatively Low	Very Low	Relatively Moderate	
Riverine Flooding						
EAL - Total ($)	585319.66	2828754.58	1431348.97	290469.31	448626.86	$5,584,519
EAL Rating	Relatively low	Relatively Moderate	Relatively Moderate	Relatively Low	Relatively Low	
Strong Wind						
EAL - Total ($)	235698.87	307037.65	998460.03	654577.66	147086.84	$2,342,861
EAL Rating	Relatively Low	Relatively Moderate	Relatively High	Relatively Moderate	Relatively Low	
Winter Weather						
EAL - Total ($)	27736.66	42804.45	137900.53	40968.11	123503.78	$372,914
EAL Rating	Relatively Low	Relatively Low	Relatively Moderate	Relatively Low	Relatively Moderate	
Tornado						
EAL - Total ($)	351044.08	528472.08	812094.44	262378.09	528793.53	$2,482,782
EAL Rating	Relatively Low	Relatively Low	Relatively Moderate	Relatively Low	Relatively Low	
Hurricane						
EAL - Total ($)	72229.3	130530.44	133807.89	101769.94	121238.25	$559,575.82
EAL Rating	Relatively Low	Relatively Low	Relatively Low	Relatively Low	Relatively Low	

Natural Hazard Risks:

A review of Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) National Risk Index data for counties in the U.S. from November 2021 shows that certain hazards have a higher impact on the region when considering Estimated Annual Losses (EAL). Table 12. provides a summary of these, covering EAL by county and region, as well as the risk index rating. Ratings are either very low, relatively low, relatively moderate, relatively high, or very high (with the last being considered the greatest impact). The EAL of riverine flooding for the region more than doubles any other hazard impact in dollars. And it is important to note that these losses may not account for flash flooding, which is another regular occurrence throughout the region. When considering risk rating however, cold waves, drought, hail and landslides are considered the greatest risk for the region (with at least three counties identified as having "relatively moderate" risk).

A review of FEMA Disaster Declarations on the Analysis Platform for Risk, Resilience and Expenditure in Disasters (APRED) also provides insight into impactful hazards. In the 20-yr period from 2002 to 2021, there were 72 disaster declarations in the region. The most common involved severe storms (40 declarations) and flooding (22). However, 80% of the severe storm declarations also including flooding (Stats America, APRED, http://ctil.iu.edu/projects/apred/#/).

Transportation

Commuting is common but not everyone has access to vehicles; transportation costs and options will impact workers.

Figure 7 . Commuting Distances

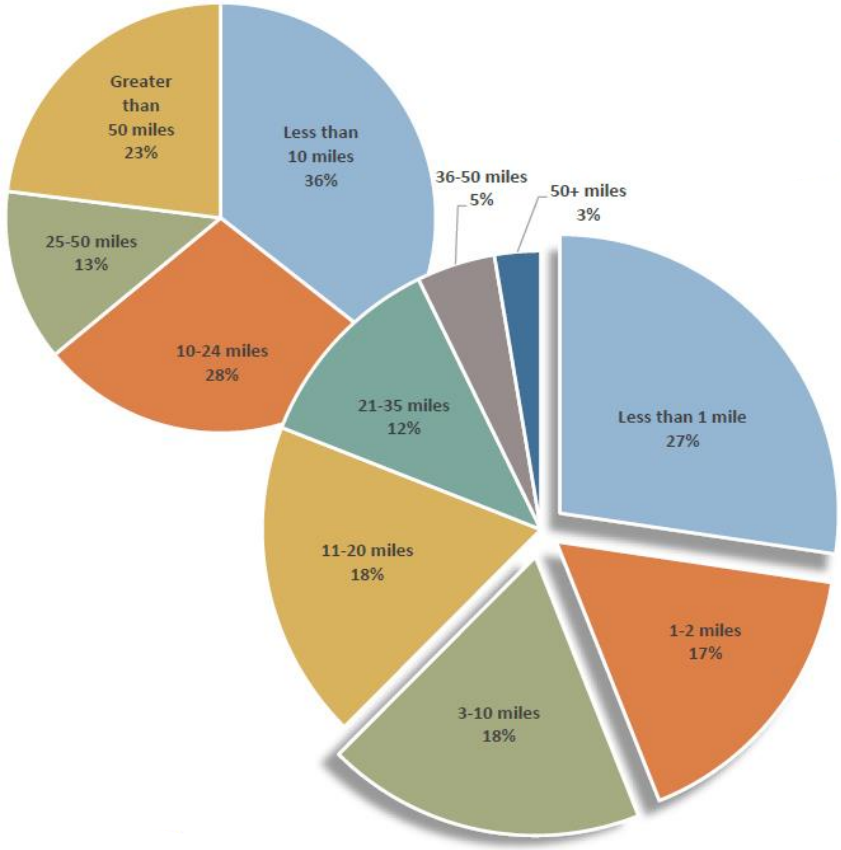


Table 13. Impact of commute costs on families with two parents working

Average 5-County travel time to work (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017)	20.2 minutes
Assumption: average miles to work (20.2 minutes @ 40 mph)	13.5 miles
Average distance per year (50 weeks)	6,750 miles
Average cost per year @ 57.1 per mile (AAA, 2016)	$3,854.25
Average cost per family given two people working	$7,708.50
% family income spent on work transportation @ $50,000	15.4%
% family income spent on work transportation @ $25,000	30.8%

Inflow/Outflow Breakdown:

There are 29,173 workers in the region, 29% of whom commute in from outside the region. Conversely, 42% of workers living in the region are employed outside the region. In all, 15,036 individuals live in the region but work outside of it (Source: U.S. Census, On the Map, https://onthemap.ces.census.gov/).

Commuting Distances:

According to the Census Bureau estimates, well over one third of workers (36%) travel less than 10 miles to work. The estimated number of people who travel more than 50 miles to work is also high at almost one in four (23%). Regional Transportation Plan survey results (shown on the right-hand side of Figure 7.) paint a more nuanced picture. 62% live 10 miles or less from work; 44% live two miles or less from work; and 27%—more than a quarter of respondents—live less than one mile from work. The last two represent distances that would be easily bicycled or walked by commuters (Source: RPA-1 2045 Transportation Plan, http://uerpc.org/transportation.html).

Transportation Costs:

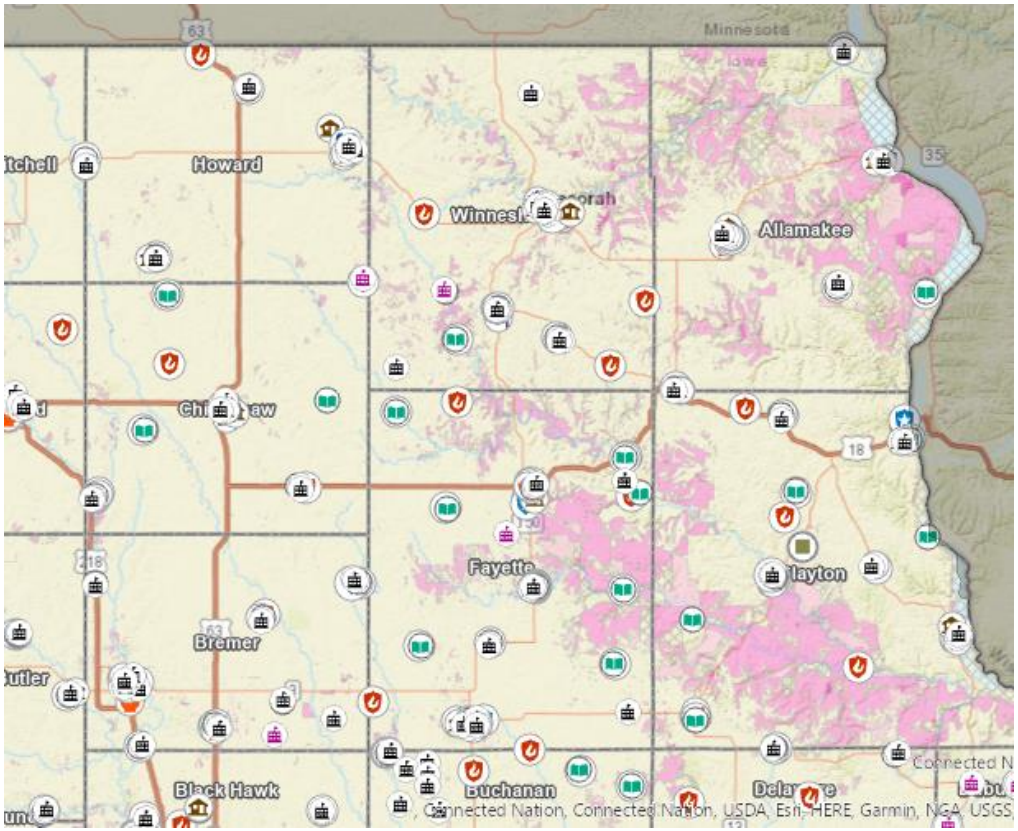
Of families with children under age 18 living at home in the five-county region, both parents are working in approximately four out of five households. According to AAA, the composite cost per mile to operate an average vehicle is 57.1 cents (AAA, 2016). Table 13. illustrates the possible costs of driving to and from work for families in the region and shows the disproportionately higher cost burden to lower-income families. A very low-income family with both parents working and commuting by car could pay over 30% of their income solely on work commuting—not including any other trips. (Source: RPA-1 2045 Transportation Plan, http://uerpc.org/transportation.html).

Access to Vehicles: There are 1,574 households in the region without access to a vehicle (Source: U.S. Census, My Community Explorer, https://covid19.census.gov/).

Infrastructure: Broadband

Broadband is expanding, but many areas and facilities are still lacking in needed access & speeds.

Figure 8. Broadband Unserved Areas by Speed Combinations



Broadband Access and Speed:

An average of 75% of households in the region currently have access to broadband.

The Federal Communications Commission recommends 12 to 25 Megabits per second (Mbps) for a household of 3 people with moderate use of the internet (Source: Federal Communications Commission, Household Broadband Guide, https://www.fcc.gov/consumers/guides/household-broadband-guide), and the average household size in the region is between 2 – 3 people. Figure 8. illustrates areas lacking 25Mbps/3Mbps, in households per square mile lacking the service. In addition, the map shows key community institutions located in lacking areas, such as schools, healthcare, and public safety facilities. There are several community facilities in Fayette, Clayton and Allamakee counties located in underserved zones.

Source (map at left): Connected Nation, The Iowa Broadband Map, https://gis.connectednation.org/portal/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=2bf307adc3a34889900d33eddb8dae85

Table 14. % Households with Broadband

Allamakee	71.7%
Clayton	73.7%
Fayette	76.4%
Howard	73.4%
Winneshiek	81.7%
Region Average:	75%

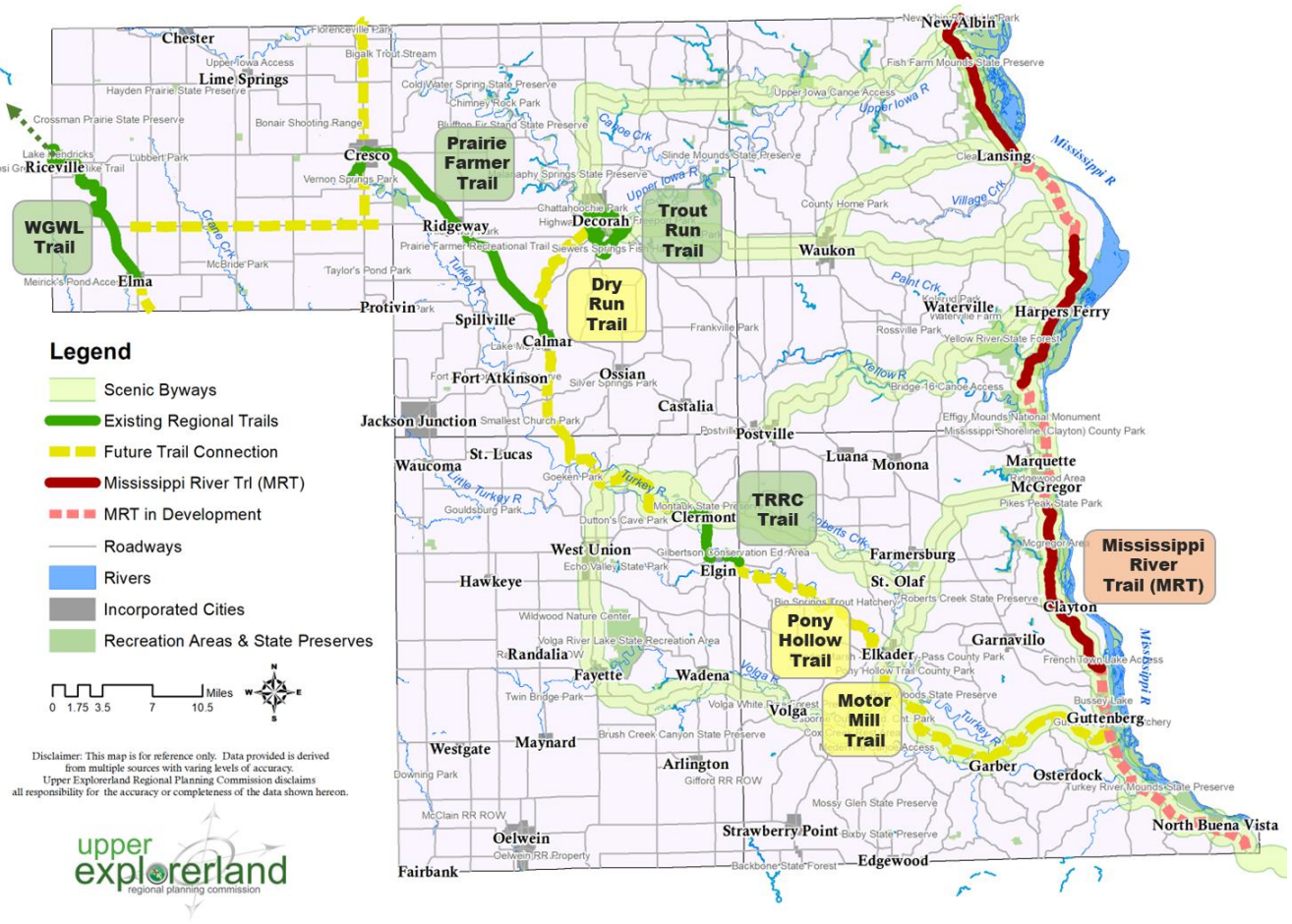
Source: U.S. Census, My Community Explorer, https://covid19.census.gov/.

Recreation & Natural Resources

Extensive natural resources exist in the region and create unique conditions and opportunities.

The UERPC region is part of the "Driftless Region," which includes Southwest Wisconsin and Southeast Minnesota, covering 24,103 square miles. This area is called Driftless as a result of a continental glacier ice flow 790,000+ years ago, which left rolling hills, underground water sources, caves, bluffs, and made way for the Mississippi and surrounding rivers and creeks to flourish (Source: Under the Radar, https://www.travelundertheradar.com/driftless-region-northeast-iowa/).

Figure 9. Backbone Trail System Map



Recreational Amenities:

According to Iowa DNR's Recreation Lands dataset, there are 287 recreation units in the region, including state forests, parks and preserves, wildlife management areas, wildlife areas, parks, prairies, streams, bluffs, wildlife refuges, the Mississippi River, fish hatcheries, conservation areas, lake accesses and more. These features attract and serve residents and visitors, and also come with their own set of unique challenges. Flooding is common in the region, related to significant topography and an extensive river and stream network. In addition, things like sinkholes, landslides, and protection of the karst geology that is predominant needs to be a consideration for development and land use.

Regional Trails:

There are over 135 miles of completed trails of different types within the five-county region, including 76 miles of paved regional trails. A recent economic impact analysis by UERPC estimated the economic impact of four trails in the Regional Backbone Trail System to be $14,810,406, and the potential economic impact to be more than $60.6 million should the full proposed trail system buildout occur.

Energy

Both household and transportation energy burden is higher for families in the region.

Household Energy Burden:

Table 15. Household average energy burden based on Area Median Income

County:	% AMI	Cost ($)
Allamakee	6%	$3,679
Clayton	5%	$3,457
Fayette	6%	$3,520
Howard	5%	$3,385
Winneshiek	4%	$3,158
Region Average:	5.2%	$3,440
State Average:	3%	$2,277

Table 16. Family average energy burden (below 150% poverty)

County:	% income
Allamakee	20%
Clayton	19%
Fayette	19%
Howard	18%
Winneshiek	17%
Region Average:	19%
State Average:	12%

Source: US Office of Energy Efficiency & Renewable Energy, Low-Income Energy Affordability Data Tool, https://www.energy.gov/eere/analysis/energy-analysis-data-and-tools-state-and-local-energy-planning

Transportation Energy Burden:

Table 17. Household Fuel Energy Affordability

County:	% families paying 3% of income	% families paying 6% of income	% families paying 9% of income
Allamakee	48%	9%	4%
Clayton	53%	10%	5%
Fayette	53%	10%	5%
Howard	45%	7%	4%
Winneshiek	63%	11%	6%
Region Average:	52%	9%	5%
State Average:	41%	9%	5%

Household Energy Burden Based on Median Income:

The Area Median Income (AMI) is the midpoint of a region's income distribution – half of families in a region earn more than the median and half earn less than the median. Based on AMI, households pay an average of 5.2% of income on energy. This is a 73% increase above the state average of 3%. The average cost of energy for the region based on AMI is $3,440, a 51% increase above the state average.

Family Energy Burden Based on Poverty Level:

The Federal Poverty Level (FPL) is a measure of income used by the U.S. government to determine who is eligible for subsidies, programs, and benefits. 2,659 families in the region (13% of the population) are considered at below 150% of the federal poverty level. Those families pay an average of 19% of their income on energy costs, a 58% increase above the state average of 12%.

Transportation Energy Burden:

Transportation energy burden is the % of annual household income spent on household vehicle fuel costs. Fuel costs depend on the vehicle miles traveled (VMT), fuel price, and vehicle fuel efficiency. VMT tends to be higher in rural areas, and all fuel cost variables tend to be more burdensome as household income goes down. 27% more families in the region have a minimum 3%-of-income energy burden in comparison to the state (3% is the national average). However, this data was based on a statewide average fuel price of only $2.35/gallon in 2020, an amount that has increased considerably recently, indicating that transportation energy burden for the region will have gone up as well.

Source: US Office of Energy Efficiency & Renewable Energy, State & Local Energy Profiles, Transportation Energy Affordability, https://openei.org/wiki/StateAndLocalEnergyProfiles

Regional Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities & Threats (SWOT) Analysis

Assessing the state of the regional economy, including opportunities and threats posed by internal and external forces

Regional Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities & Threats (SWOT) Summary

STRENGTHS:

- Job availability from aging workforce
- Some increase in diversity happening
- Many women-owned small businesses
- Cost of living is lower
- Recent growth in real average wages
- Free / low-cost business training available
- STEM engagement
- School / business relationships, sector boards & connection with job opportunities
- Diversity of industries in region
- People bought local / stayed local during the pandemic
- Recent housing price appreciation
- Low housing costs overall
- Some expansion of broadband / fiber
- County hazard mitigation plans
- Outdoor recreation / tourism
- Natural scenic beauty attracts visitors & appeals to residents

WEAKNESSES:

- Low racial diversity
- Older population + declining population
- Higher poverty rates in some areas
- Per capita income lower than state
- Lack of government finances
- Lack of diversity on city commissions & councils
- Cost of infrastructure for small cities
- Lack of skilled workforce
- Labor shortage coming out of pandemic
- Essential workers shifting for better pay
- Some businesses can't increase wages
- High levels of retirement
- Childcare system isn't sustainable
- Variable access to high-speed internet / difficult terrain of region
- Low number of city mangers
- Transportation & household energy costs are higher in region
- Lack of zoning ordinances & enforcement
- Lack of training / onboarding for officials
- Losing business due to lack of employees
- Financial planning & practices needed
- Marketing planning & assistance needed
- Transition / succession planning needed
- Losing employees due to lack of housing
- Slow growth in housing inventory
- Slow rates of new home construction
- Aging housing stock + lower value homes

OPPORTUNITIES:

- Retirees returning to work to supplement their incomes
- Attracting workers by offering better job flexibilities
- Trend of people working remotely
- Community college presence / partnerships
- Joint efforts to address supply chain issues
- The Soul of Iowa Marketing Campaign
- Cross market our region/visit our region
- Great marketing groups for tourism / economic development
- Catalyst / upper story housing grants
- Low housing = opportunities to build
- Childcare grant funds starting to come
- More broadband sold in rural network
- More fiber expansion
- Renewable energy & electric vehicle initiatives
- Outdoor recreation as a steady, growing industry (uptick in visitors)
- Trend of people moving back to small communities for quality of life

THREATS:

- Rural to urban migration
- National labor shortage
- Government mandates impacting hiring
- Supply chain issues / high shipping costs
- Inflation impacts to downtown retail
- State level funding down for Main St. organizations
- General lack of local or state level resources for childcare
- More broadband options needed
- Inflation in general

SWOT Background Surveys and Plans

Community surveys and plans referenced in the discussion of SWOT for the region:

University of Northern Iowa (UNI), Business & Community Services, COVID-19 Business Impact Survey (Spring 2021)

- 301 respondents from UERPC region. 82% for-profit businesses, 77% small businesses (fewer than 25 employees), 57% small businesses (fewer than 10 employees)

UERPC COVID-19 Government Impact Survey (Spring 2021)

- Approximately 50% of governments in region (29 governments)

Northeast Iowa Business Network (NIBN) Report & Action Plan - A data study by Iowa State University Extension and Outreach titled "Workforce Attraction and Housing Needs for Six Northeast Iowa Counties" was completed then reviewed in a NIBN action planning session. This resulted in the vision, priorities and strategies detailed in the NIBN Action Plan: https://uerpc.org/uploads/PDF_File_93345256.pdf

RPA-1's Long Range Multimodal Transportation Plan 2045 – The plan is intended to guide transportation investments and policy in the five-county region in support of a transportation system that is safe for all users and modes, and that facilitates the efficient movement of people and goods. https://www.dropbox.com/s/8pvk479oizwkr8k/2019_0919_RPA-1%20LRTP%202045_Digital%20Viewing_Final.pdf?dl=0

Demographic & Socio-Economic

Economic Resiliency Meeting Takeaways:

- At the state level, those whose employment was most impacted by the pandemic were low-wage earners, workers with less education, minorities, youth & women. This may have partially related to part-time work & the type of occupation (e.g. care type positions, education, etc.)
- Food insecurity increased as workers were laid off during pandemic (low-income and senior populations were more vulnerable).

Survey Findings:

No applicable survey findings.

Related Plans or Policies:

NIBN Workforce Report: Region's population is less diverse in terms of race, ethnicity, & nativity, and trails reference regions in population growth.

NIBN Action Plan: Increased diverse populations; stop population decline; develop connections to enhance immigrant recruitment.

SWOT List:

STRENGTHS:
Job availability from aging workforce
Some increase in diversity happening
Many women-owned small businesses
Cost of living is lower

OPPORTUNITIES:
Retirees returning to work to supplement income

WEAKNESSES:
Low racial/ethnic diversity
Older population + declining population
Higher poverty rates in some counties
Per capita income lower than state
Lack of government finances
Lack of diversity on city boards/councils
Cost of infrastructure for small cities

THREATS:
Rural to urban migration

Economic Resiliency Summary:

Lower diversity, lower wages, and an aging workforce are all weaknesses in the local economy. Increasing diversity and wages in the workplace are a place to start, and some businesses are making progress, however addressing issues surrounding falling populations and an aging workforce pose a challenge. Solutions may need to focus on creatively filling gaps in the workforce and creating local quality of life and amenities that retain and attract young families.

Goal / Objective Connections:

None

Action Connections:

None

Labor Force & Employment

Economic Resiliency Meeting Takeaways:

- Labor shortage after pandemic could relate to ongoing health risks, the childcare shortage, retirements, career shifts & workers re-evaluating work/life priorities.
- Increasing wages/benefits could influence workers decision to return to work.

Survey Findings:

NIBN Workforce Survey: Competitive wage rates were rated of highest importance by 96% of respondents, & 96% said they were lacking; work benefits in order of importance were: healthcare, paid holidays/vacation, retirement plan, wage increases, paid time off, disability, life insurance, development, flex time, & bonuses; respondents reported that primary school (91%), high school (91%) & job training (75%) were the most important education sectors; job training was rated to be important but lacking or not available.

Related Plans or Policies:

NIBN Workforce Report: Wage levels and employee benefit packages can influence worker choices regarding residence & workplace location.

NIBN Action Plan: Happy employees; employers of choice; investment in workforce; competitive benefits package; partner with Employers Council of IA; wellness programs; employers buy into lifelong development for employees; develop/host local leadership program; continue & expand STEM festival/camps; connect with NICC CEO network & pilot innovative work programs.

SWOT List:

STRENGTHS:
Recent growth in real average wages
Free/low-cost business training available
School/business relationships
STEM engagement

WEAKNESSES:
Lack of skilled workforce
Labor shortage coming out of pandemic
Essential workers shifting for better pay
Some businesses can't increase wages
High levels of retirement
Lack of training/onboarding for officials

OPPORTUNITIES:
Consider options for filling workers gaps
Attract workers w/better job flexibility
Trend of people working remotely
Community college presence/partnerships

THREATS:
National labor shortage
Government mandates impacting hiring

Economic Resiliency Summary:

Major employers are struggling to fill positions with skilled workers (particularly the education, health care & social assistance industries). Small businesses, lenders, ag coops, downtown commercial businesses, small production, custom product shops, grocery stores, retail and restaurants are in desperate need of workforce as well.

A labor shortage is a serious ongoing workforce vulnerability. Addressing this will require a multi-faceted approach, such as improving worker incentives/flexibilities, creatively filling worker gaps, and more.

Training and education are important factors in filling worker gaps, building a skilled workforce, and providing development for businesses & employees. Partnerships are key to implementing effective training that serves employers and employees.

Goal / Objective Connections:

Workforce Resilience G1
Workforce Resilience G3

Action Connections:

Action 4
Action 7

Industries / Business General

Economic Resiliency Meeting Takeaways:

- Top industries impacted by unemployment during the pandemic were Education, Health Care & Social Assistance, & contractor workers/self-employed.
- Essential businesses struggled with staying open safely during pandemic.
- Online capabilities & remote work options improved business/employee resilience
- Flexibility in delivering goods, services & marketing improved economic resilience
- Lack of pre-existing financial & disaster planning was a vulnerability
- Supply chain issues were a top vulnerability for businesses

Survey Findings:

ISU Business Survey: Non-profits were more vulnerable to economic downturn from the pandemic (76% impacted negatively); a decrease in demand for products / services & a shortage of supplies / inputs were the greatest pandemic impacts.

NIBN Workforce Survey: The top 3 important business sectors according to respondents were grocery stores (96%), dining places (89%), & local banks (83%); businesses currently found lacking were chain retailers (73%), downtown shopping (69%), & dining places (56%).

Related Plans or Policies:

NIBN Action Plan: Vision of business-school connections strengthened, planned business expansions occurring, & enabling young professionals to gather.

SWOT List:

STRENGTHS: Sector boards, business/school relationship, & connection with job opportunities Good diversity of industries in region	**WEAKNESSES:** Losing business due to lack of employees Financial planning & practices needed Marketing planning & assistance needed
OPPORTUNITIES: Joint efforts to address supply chain issues	**THREATS:** Supply chain issues/high shipping costs

Economic Resiliency Summary:

Some industries suffered more during the recent economic disaster and are having a harder time recovering. We need to address vulnerabilities in the business community.

Supply chain issues are an external threat proven to have a serious impact on the operations of local businesses.

Diversification of the regional industrial mix should be encouraged to build resilience of the economic base during economic downturns.

Businesses should be made more resilient through retention and expansion support.

Business resilience and recovery planning is lacking and may have resulted in greater economic impacts during the pandemic.

Goal / Objective Connections:

Business Resilience G1, G2
Workforce Resilience G3
Disaster Resilience G1

Action Connections:

Action 1
Action 2

Small Businesses

Economic Resiliency Meeting Takeaways:

- Lack of redundancy in duties/cross-training caused issues when workers were sick during pandemic (a vulnerability for small businesses & governments)
- Small businesses struggle with time & resources to plan (financial, disaster, etc.)
- Small businesses have limited reserves so grant assistance was critical for them
- Small businesses need help in understanding/pursuing funding assistance options

Survey Findings:

ISU Business Survey: 65% of respondents (largely small businesses) were negatively impacted by pandemic; ½ of respondents were concerned about revenue loss.

UERPC Government Survey: The top need exacerbated by the pandemic was support for local business (62% of respondents)

NIBN Workforce Survey: Respondents rated promoting local business to attract new residents as a top priority for their community; downtown shopping was a top community amenity that was found lacking.

Related Plans or Policies:

NIBN Action Plan: Successful business succession; new entrepreneurs; vibrant downtowns; pool resources; create "How to Start a Business" manual; create a shared human resource network for local businesses; develop pull-up and other promotional items on business community; sponsor community tourism programs.

SWOT List:

STRENGTHS:
People bought local / stayed local during the pandemic

WEAKNESSES:
Losing business due to lack of employees
Financial planning & practices needed
Marketing planning & assistance needed
Transition/succession planning needed
Lack of city mangers/administrators

OPPORTUNITIES:
The Soul of Iowa Marketing Campaign
Cross market our region/visit our region
Joint efforts to address supply chain issues
Great marketing groups for tourism/ED

THREATS:
Inflation impacts to downtown retail
State level funding down for Main St. orgs
Supply chain issues/high shipping costs

Economic Resiliency Summary

Local and regional planning efforts and collaborations are needed to address a number of resiliency issues for local business, such as promoting and marketing regional businesses, providing start-up supports/entrepreneur opportunities, downtown revitalization, and more.

Goal / Objective Connections:

Business Resilience G1, G2

Workforce Resilience G1, G3

Action Connections:

Action 1

Action 2

Action 6

Housing

Economic Resiliency Meeting Takeaways:

- Flexibility to work from home increased business resilience during pandemic
- Need for affordable, decent housing is exacerbated need following the pandemic

Survey Findings:

NIBN Workforce Survey: Quality rental units & single-family homes rated as needed; issues impacting attracting residents were well-maintained homes, renovating homes, availability of rentals, neighborhood condition, nuisances, availability of energy efficient homes/1-story homes/elderly housing & housing costs & age.

UERPC Government Survey: 34% said need for affordable, decent SF housing is more pressing, & 31% said need for affordable, decent rental housing is more pressing

Related Plans or Policies:

NIBN Report: Region's housing tends to be older, & housing values & rents are lower; gains in housing prices may signal growing demand pressure related to local supply which could encourage investment in construction or rehab; housing prices influence family's decisions regarding residence & workplace location.

NIBN Action Plan: Expanded housing solutions for different ages & needs (right homes for right people); affordable rentals & units for purchase; promote CDBG housing, housing trust fund & rehab programs; create inventory of available lots/homes; regional workshop for contractors; work w/Homes for Iowa; work on school rehabs; housing funds to secure builders down payment for spec loans.

SWOT List:

STRENGTHS:
Recent housing price appreciation
Low housing costs relative to income

WEAKNESSES:
Losing employees due to lack of housing
Slow growth in housing inventory
Slow rates of new home construction
Aging housing stock + lower value homes
Lack of zoning ordinances & enforcement

OPPORTUNITIES:
Catalyst / upper story housing grants
Low housing = opportunities to build

THREATS:
None

Economic Resiliency Summary:

Many barriers exist for home ownership in the region, even as employers continue to state the urgent need for housing for existing and desired workers. These challenges include not enough homes being available for purchase and limited new construction, the challenge of home maintenance and age, housing costs exceeding recommended levels of household income, competition as housing gets used for short-term rentals and other temporary housing, and limited rental options.

We need to improve housing quality and options to support workers and their families.

Goal / Objective Connections:

Workforce Resilience G4

Action Connections:

Action 4
Action 5
Action 6

Childcare

Economic Resiliency Meeting Takeaways:

- Limited access to childcare negatively impacts workers; the pandemic stressed this further as centers limited operations.
- Lack of care impacted parents during pandemic, who had to balance working from home, watching children, & guiding children through at-home learning

Survey Findings:

ISU Business Survey: 11% of business respondents, and 15% of non-profits identified childcare challenges for employees as a top concern during pandemic.

UERPC Government Survey: Almost 50% of governments identified access to childcare as a need exacerbated by the pandemic.

NIBN Workforce Survey: 80% of respondents identified quality childcare as an important service, & 50% identified childcare availability as currently "lacking".

Related Plans or Policies:

NIBN Workforce Report: Childcare options & cost can influence family decisions regarding residence & workplace location;

NIBN Action Plan: Expanded childcare options; benefit packages including childcare; reduce daycare deficit (write grants, collect data on business needs, collect data on number of kids, identify barriers to employer provided daycare).

SWOT List:

STRENGTHS: None	**WEAKNESSES:** Childcare system isn't sustainable
OPPORTUNITIES: Childcare grant funds starting to come	**THREATS:** General lack of local or state level resources for childcare

Economic Resiliency Summary:

The availability of childcare is having an impact on the workforce. According to the Iowa Women's Foundation 2019 Policy Brief, because of childcare issues parents quit jobs, refrain from taking jobs, change jobs, do not accept full time work, take more time off of work, or arrive late/leave early from work. This all results in lost earnings, productivity and revenue impacts, hurting not just parents, but also employers and taxpayers. Local childcare demand is exceeding supply by 600+ spaces.

We need to improve childcare access, quality and options to support workers and their families.

Goal / Objective Connections:

Workforce Resilience G2

Action Connections:

Action 4

Action 6

Transportation

Economic Resiliency Meeting Takeaways:

- Cost of transportation is a vulnerability during economic downturns
- Public transportation was impacted by social distancing needs during pandemic

Survey Findings:

NIBN Workforce Survey: A local public transportation system was identified as an important community amenity found lacking.

RPA-1 Transportation Survey: Improving walking/bicycling (36%), safety (traffic calming, etc.) (30%), improving rural roads/bridges (27%), improving passenger transportation (25%) & improving city streets (24%) were top respondent priorities

Related Plans or Policies:

RPA-1 Transportation Plan: Provide safe, comfortable, convenient walking & bicycling access for all ages and abilities; build out regional trail system; streets, roads & bridges are in good repair; infrastructure enhances the integrity of the natural environment; transportation brings economic prosperity; transportation for non-drivers is available & convenient.

NIBN Workforce Report: ½+ of residents commute to jobs outside their county; commuting logistics can influence decisions regarding residence/workplace location.

NIBN Action Plan: More transportation businesses (e.g. taxi/Uber); leverage recreational potential of trails; creating a reliable & inexpensive transportation network; coordinate w/partners on regional trails.

SWOT List:

STRENGTHS:
None

WEAKNESSES:
Multi-modal transportation options aren't prioritized in many communities
Limited public transit/passenger transportation options

OPPORTUNITIES:
Alternative Fuel Vehicles - Regional Electric Vehicle Project/Workgroup
Local & regional walkability/bikability initiatives and improvements

THREATS:
None

Economic Resiliency Summary:

Many in the region commute to work alone in a car. Because of this, workers are impacted by availability and costs of vehicles & fuel. Expanding public transportation and alternative vehicle options (e.g. electric vehicles) could decrease costs & increase choice for workers.

At the same time, with workers in high demand and a greater selection of jobs, workers may be able to be more selective in where they work, allowing more people to work closer to their homes or even from home. Shorter commute distances make alternative & active forms of transportation more feasible and attractive.

We need to improve the sustainability of the region's transportation system, and address how it can better serve all modes and mobility types, with a focus on walkability, bikability, safety, and increasing transportaton affordability.

Goal / Objective Connections:

Community Resilience G4

Action Connections:

Action 6

Infrastructure, Energy & Natural Disasters

Economic Resiliency Meeting Takeaways:

- Need for broadband/fiber was exacerbated with remote work & schooling needs
- Remote workers struggled with online security, privacy, & broadband quality
- Businesses that increased online marketing & sales were more resilient
- Lack of public internet access leads to vulnerabilities for low-income groups
- When government finances are threatened, infrastructure and facility maintenance and upgrades will be impacted negatively
- Transportation fuel costs are increasing with inflation (these already had an impact on workers)

Survey Findings:

NIBN Workforce Survey: 94% of respondents said high speed, reliable internet service was an important service in their community but was given only 50% availability for surveyed workers.

UERPC Government Survey: Almost 50% of governments identified high speed, reliable internet as a need exacerbated by the pandemic.

Related Plans or Policies:

NIBN Action Plan: Easy low-cost internet; improve leverage with utilities.

SWOT List:

STRENGTHS:
Some expansion of fiber/broadband
County hazard mitigation plans

WEAKNESSES:
Variable access to high-speed internet across region
Difficult terrain of region
Transportation & household energy costs are higher in region

OPPORTUNITIES:
More broadband sold in rural network
More fiber expansion
Renewable energy & electric vehicle initiatives and planning

THREATS:
More broadband options needed
Inflation

Economic Resiliency Summary:

The pandemic showed that online capabilities made communities more resilient. Quick and reliable access to the internet support flexible delivery of goods and services, remote work & learning, provides means for communications and marketing, and more.

Household and transportation energy costs are higher in the region due to type of fuel or vehicle used, longer commute times, inflation and more. This impacts family finances, particularly low-income.

Meeting community infrastructure needs becomes challenging when government finances are impacted. Communities require ongoing assistance in planning for, funding, and implementing infrastructure work.

Adequate infrastructure is needed to entice new businesses into the community, & for others to grow.

Natural disasters, especially flooding, can have a significant financial impact on communities. These threats will grow in the future with the affects of climate change.

Goal / Objective Connections:

Business Resilience G3

Community Resilience G1, G2, G3, G4

Disaster Resilience G1

Action Connections:

Action 4

Action 6

Recreation & Natural Resources

Economic Resiliency Meeting Takeaways:

- Many communities benefitted from available outdoor recreation and tourism options during the pandemic. While indoor tourism and entertainment struggled, many outdoor tourism locations thrived, or even grew, also benefitting other nearby businesses.

Survey Findings:

NIBN Workforce Survey: Top 3 recreation services found important were outdoor recreation (89%), youth activities (86%), & indoor gyms (79%); community amenities perceived to be important but found lacking were nightlife, arts & culture, & youth activities.

Related Plans or Policies:

NIBN Action Plan: Build social capital; nurture new leadership; attractive neighborhoods; places to congregate; trails & events, pocket parks, dog parks; invest in amenities; leverage recreational potential; promote block parties/neighborhood gatherings; rebrand & rejuvenate old service orgs; arrange visits to thriving communities to learn from them.

SWOT List:

STRENGTHS: Outdoor recreation/tourism amenities Natural scenic beauty attracts visitors & appeals to residents	**WEAKNESSES:** None
OPPORTUNITIES: Outdoor recreation is a steady, growing industry (uptick in visitors) Trend of people moving back to small communities for quality of life	**THREATS:** None

Economic Resiliency Summary:

It is important to support projects that have the potential to capitalize on competitive advantages of the region, such as outdoor recreation and tourism. These industries remained steady, or grew, during the pandemic.

The natural resources and scenic beauty that appeals to residents and visitors needs to be protected for its own sake, and also so that the attraction, tourism, and use it supports can continue.

Goal / Objective Connections:

Business Resilience G3

Action Connections:

Action 4

Action 6

Strategic Direction & Action Plan

The region's economic vision, goals, and measurable objectives

STRATEGIC DIRECTION

The Strategic Direction includes goals and objectives that respond to the analysis of the area's development potential and problems (i.e., SWOT analysis). They provide a strategic framework for public and private decision-making and serve as the basis for the formulation and focus of the action plan.

Business **Resilience:**

Goal 1. Further diversify the regional business/industrial mix to build resilience in the economic base.

Objective 1. Encourage an economic development environment that endorses existing businesses and attracts new business
Objective 2. Improve access to small business development resources and incubators
Objective 3. Support entrepreneurial opportunities; identify and pursue grant funding for entrepreneurial development
Objective 4. Assist jurisdictions in downtown planning and encourage collaboration to pursue downtown revitalization; identify and pursue funding mechanisms for downtown revitalization
Objective 5. Provide technical assistance in developing industrial parks and/or commercial centers
Objective 6. Work with the business community to build more resilient supply chains

Goal 2. Support business retention & expansion through planning, technical assistance, training & marketing.

Objective 1. Provide technical assistance as requested by communities and counties
Objective 2. Engage in economic development and community planning meetings
Objective 3. Provide technical assistance to area businesses in helping them to expand and retain business
Objective 4. Work with partners to develop marketing strategies that engage networks of small businesses
Objective 5. Support and promote the efforts of educational institutions and their business programs
Objective 6. Address exit strategies & succession planning for businesses; support businesses dealing with expanding ownership

Goal 3. Capitalize on the competitive advantages of the region.

Objective 1. Promote the region's physical and cultural environment as an affordable and attractive place to live, work, and play
Objective 2. Create and implement regional recreation plans
Objective 3. Promote and enhance the scenic byways (3 within region)
Objective 4. Enhance and expand the region's recreational tourism activities and facilities
Objective 5. Support natural resource protection
Objective 6. Promote regional attraction (e.g. Soul of Iowa Marketing Campaign)

Workforce Resilience

Goal 1. Address employee and workplace vulnerabilities.

Objective 1. Engage employers in understanding and serving the needs of an evolving workforce, including providing flexibilities to support families, investing in the workforce, providing competitive wages and benefits, and supporting employee development
Objective 2. Address ways communities can support workers in vulnerable or challenging situations
Objective 3. Build a more diverse workforce
Objective 4. Fill workers gaps creatively (e.g. retirees, work visas, etc.)
Objective 5. Support communities and businesses trying to address the labor shortage

Goal 2. Improve childcare access, quality and options to support workers and their families.

Objective 1. Support the work of communities attempting to improve childcare availability and quality
Objective 2. Assist with research, analysis, and partnership building on the childcare issue
Objective 3. Assist in pursuing funding and resources for childcare expansion & improvements

Goal 3. Leverage partnerships in support of building a stronger workforce.

Objective 1. Support applications for financial & technical assistance directed at workforce attraction, development, and training
Objective 2. Strengthen business/school connections
Objective 3. Work with local high schools and community colleges to provide skill training to meet local employer needs

Goal 4. Improve housing quality and options to support workers and their families.

Objective 1. Conduct city and county housing needs assessments to understand housing issues and priorities
Objective 2. Expand regional development capacity, including builders, financing, and investors
Objective 3. Increase and diversify workforce housing options (single family, multifamily, lots, & rental units) throughout the region
Objective 4. Promote efforts to expand affordable housing options
Objective 5. Provide owner-occupied housing rehab programs to aid low-to-moderate homeowners and improve housing stock
Objective 6. Explore grant opportunities to diversify housing options, and help apply for and administer housing grants
Objective 7. Support municipalities with tax increment financing and abatement options
Objective 8. Assist communities with incentives for encouraging infill development of vacant lots and blighted areas

Community Resilience

Goal 1. Pursue joint planning and collaborations to foster a resilient regional economy.

Objective 1. Assist in expanding regional attractions and public amenities
Objective 2. Assist with planning, facilitation, and partnership building for regional economic development opportunities
Objective 3. Engage with county boards and city councils to determine, and support, economic and community development needs

Goal 2. Improve infrastructure resilience.

Objective 1. Assist communities in long-range planning, strategic planning and goal setting to prioritize infrastructure needs
Objective 2. Continue to assist communities in procuring funding to repair, upgrade and expand infrastructure & facilities
Objective 3. Identify and address regional aging infrastructure needs, or gaps in the provision of infrastructure
Objective 4. Assist the regional effort to expand broadband infrastructure and fiber optics throughout the region

Goal 3. Support communities needs in enacting sustainable plans, policies & projects.

Objective 1. Support energy efficiency and renewable energy programs and projects in the region
Objective 2. Engage in community planning initiatives focused on sustainable policy and project development
Objective 3. Update community codes and ordinances to support sustainable development & land use

Goal 4. Improve the sustainability of the region's transportation system, and address how it can better serve all modes and mobility types.

Objective 1. Enhance and expand walking, biking, running, and other multi-modal transportation & recreational facilities
Objective 2. Support beneficial sustainable transportation practices, such as mechanisms for reducing vehicle miles traveled (e.g. micro-mobility, passenger transportation, etc.) and electric vehicles and charging infrastructure
Objective 3. Research and pursue funding opportunities for alternative modes of transportation

Disaster Resilience

Goal 1. Improve disaster mitigation, preparedness, response and recovery.

Objective 1. Connect communities and businesses with disaster and resiliency planning resources, including the UERPC Resilience Toolkit for Small Business

Objective 2. Engage in collaborations with emergency management, government, community service and economic development partners to provide community & business support during and following disasters

Objective 3. Support communities with hazard mitigation planning

Objective 4. Research and pursue funding opportunities for hazard mitigation projects

ACTION PLAN

Upper Explorerland Regional Planning Commission will coordinate the CEDS projects with local, regional and state economic development agencies as appropriate. The plan of action will implement the goals and objectives of the Strategic Direction as follows:

Action 1. Assist with planning for the expansion and creation of business lots and industrial parks.

Goals Addressed: Business Resilience G1
Timeframe: Ongoing
Lead: UERPC Director, county economic developers

Action 2. Assist local businesses in retention, expansion, marketing, financial assistance and resiliency planning.

Goals Addressed: Business Resilience G2; Disaster Resilience G1
Timeframe: Ongoing
Lead: UERPC Director, Regional Planner, Economic Development Head & Regional Economic Development Specialist, county economic developers

Action 3. Actively participate in the meetings of the Iowa Councils of Government (ICOG) a statewide association for the Iowa Councils of Government.

Goals Addressed: Community Resilience G1
Timeframe: Ongoing
Lead: UERPC Director

Action 4. Utilize the NIBN Workforce Action Plan and carry out various projects noted in the plan.

Goals Addressed: Workforce Resilience G1, G2, G3, G4
Timeframe: Ongoing
Lead: UERPC Director, Regional Planner, county economic developers

Action 5. Market Upper Explorerland Regional Planning Commission services & expand public awareness of its programs (via newsletter, website, social media -- FB, Twitter -- and public notifications).

Goals Addressed: All Goals
Timeframe: Ongoing
Lead: UERPC Director, Regional Planner

Action 6. Visit various cities and counties to assist with project needs (grant writing, infrastructure, business development, etc.)

Goals Addressed: All Goals
Timeframe: Ongoing
Lead: UERPC Director, Regional Planner, Economic Development Head & Regional Economic Development Specialist, county economic developers

Action 7. Increase public and private institutional capacity in partnership with UERPC, such as hosting or partnering on regional clerks meetings, legislative events, Iowa Association of Municipal Utilities trainings, city/county employee trainings, and more.

Goals Addressed: Business Resilience G2; Workforce Resilience G1; Community Resilience G1
Timeframe: Ongoing
Lead: UERPC Director

Action 8. Participate in CEDs planning process; review CEDS plans for annual & 5-year updates

Goals Addressed: All Goals
Timeframe: Ongoing
Lead: UERPC Director, Regional Planner

Evaluation Framework

Criteria and performance measures for evaluating the implementation of the strategic direction and progress toward goals and objectives

EVALUATION FRAMEWORK

UERPC has set several performance metrics to work toward under this Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS). These measures track progress made on the CEDS planning program and the effectiveness of goals and objectives within the plan. The measures will be monitored over the life of the CEDS and included in annual reports.

Action 1. Assist with planning for the expansion and creation of business lots and industrial parks.

- Deliverable: Market the 19 business/industrial parks in the region, for expansion and recruitment of business
- Outcomes: Grow the industrial/commercial parks by 5%, employees, land or businesses.

Action 2. Assist local businesses in retention, expansion, marketing, financial assistance and resiliency planning.

- Deliverable: Provide technical assistance to businesses/governments with the Resilience Toolkit for Small Business, through the elements of Preparing, Managing, Marketing & Financing to be resilient.
- Outcome: Assist 4 businesses/governments per county per year
- Deliverable: Number of local business retentions or expansion
- Outcome: An increase in retentions and expansions, versus a decrease

Action 3. Actively participate in the meetings of the Iowa Councils of Government (ICOG) a statewide association for the Iowa Councils of Government.

- Deliverable: Attend monthly ICOG meetings
- Outcome: Network with other COGs across the state for interagency assistance as well as successful project ideas. Gain statewide funding from statewide projects.

Action 4. Utilize the NIBN Workforce Action Plan and carry out various projects noted in the plan.

- Deliverable: Promote housing programs for rehabilitation and new housing; educate contractors on various programs, create reliable multi-modal transportation options for workforce, support regional trail system expansion and enhancement, identify and relay workforce needs, train workforce, host STEM event, enable young professionals to gather, assist daycare center growth and improvements, host leadership trainings, assist in broadband/fiber expansion
- Outcome: By assisting the region with workforce housing, daycare and transportation, the efforts laid out will increase the overall workforce and laborshed area.

Action 5. Market Upper Explorerland Regional Planning Commission services & expand public awareness of its programs (via newsletter, website, social media -- FB, Twitter -- and public notifications).

- Deliverables: Complete monthly e-newsletter to businesses, counties & cities; promote UERPC's knowledge, experience & projects to residents, businesses, cities & counties; send notifications and photos to area media
- Outcome: Educate public and clients on UERPC projects and services; visit and assist as many businesses, cities and counties as staff are able to.

Action 6. Visit various cities and counties to assist with project needs (grant writing, infrastructure, business development, etc.)

- Deliverables: Provide research and technical assistance to cities and counties for infrastructural and community needs.
- Outcome: Assist as many cities and counties as staff can handle with their various needs

Action 7. Increase public and private institutional capacity in partnership with UERPC, such as hosting or partnering on regional clerks meetings, legislative events, Iowa Association of Municipal Utilities trainings, city/county employee trainings, and more.

- Deliverables: Host three or four Northeast Iowa Clerk's Association meetings; Host annual legislative forum with all state and federal representatives. Invite our area partners.
- Outcome: Train the region's clerks/administrators on the various tasks they need to complete their work; Gather a priority list for legislators. Educate legislators on the topics and bills important to our region.

Action 8. Participate in CEDs planning process; review CEDS plans for annual & 5-year updates

- Deliverable: Update of 5-year CEDS by September 2022, and each five years following
- Outcome: Updated document meeting requirements of IEDA and guiding regional economic development goals for five years. Document will be available to help guide and support local economic development initiatives.

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