

Southern Vermont CEDS

A Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy
Executive Summary



2024



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The CEDS Strategic Direction builds on findings from the current and emerging trends analysis and incorporates elements from other regional plans and ongoing initiatives. The CEDS document identifies the overall themes and principles, priorities, goals, and strategies to guide the implementation of the CEDS.

✓ VISION STATEMENT

In 2030, the Southern Vermont Economic Development Zone will be home to a resilient, creative, and inclusive community in which businesses and people thrive and prosper.

✓ OUTCOMES OF THE STRATEGY

A coordinated effort to implement the CEDS will lead to progress towards the following outcomes:

- **POPULATION:** Increased population and expansion of the workforce
- **BUSINESS ENVIRONMENT:** Diversified economy that supports job creation, wealth creation, and a sustainable and vibrant economy
- **QUALITY OF LIFE:** Improved quality of life, including access to housing, health care, and recreation assets
- **WORKFORCE:** Expanded quantity and quality of workers in the region
- **CLIMATE RESILIENCE:** Enhanced investment and ability to adapt to climate change impacts
- **COLLABORATION:** Tighter integration of cross-region and cross-state efforts

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The objectives and strategies established for the CEDS are listed below and specific actions related to each initiative are detailed in the full report.

OBJECTIVE 1

ADDRESS CRITICAL POPULATION NEEDS FOR THE FUTURE

- A. Invest in community assets that are attractive to young people
- B. Create programs to train, retain, and attract people with needed skills
- C. Foster an increasingly diverse population
- D. Continue to support policies that improve and strengthen the care and education system

OBJECTIVE 2

EMPOWER BUSINESSES TO THRIVE LONG-TERM

- A. Enhance business potential for growth
- B. Strengthen the Southern Vermont entrepreneurial and innovation ecosystem
- C. Establish a collaborative regional workforce development system
- D. Increase access to industrial and commercial space

OBJECTIVE 3

FOSTER RESILIENT, ADAPTABLE COMMUNITIES

- A. Invest in infrastructure and system upgrades to reduce and mitigate climate change impacts
- B. Increase housing options for all
- C. Improve civic and community engagement
- D. Reinforce Southern Vermont's recreation and cultural opportunities

OBJECTIVE 4

PROMOTE GREATER REGIONAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ALIGNMENT

- A. Create and strengthen structures to support CEDS implementation
- B. Work regionally to address critical economic development issues

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INTRODUCTION

Southern Vermont is a truly special place that has attracted people for decades. The area's open vistas, agricultural heritage, recreational assets, cultural offerings, quaint village centers, and fierce independence have long been cherished by both visitors and residents alike.

The CEDS is a tool that everyone in Southern Vermont can use. This includes towns and villages looking to make improvements, nonprofit organizations looking to advance their programming, and private companies looking to transition toward the future. The 2024 CEDS has been designed to identify new opportunities, tackle challenges, and prepare the region for future disruptions. **The vision is to keep moving toward a more resilient economic future for all that aligns with the region's values.**

NEED FOR ADAPTATION

The path forward demands resilience, innovation, and unity. **This strategy is a roadmap for essential transformation, guiding the region toward a more robust, adaptive, and sustainable economic future.**

The rapid pace of innovation, continuing climate change impacts, and trending demographic shifts make it clear that an adaptive approach is needed in Southern Vermont. While this strategy presents a range of initiatives aimed at addressing specific concerns, the key message is about fostering a shared culture of adaptation. This vision looks to improve tomorrow, and twenty years in the future.



DEMOGRAPHIC SHIFTS: Recent in-migration has benefited population trends, but Southern Vermont remains older and less diverse than surrounding regions. Refugee resettlement and remote work have increased diversity, and continued efforts to be welcoming to all and to attract younger residents remain essential.



INCOME LEVELS: Despite rising costs of living, particularly housing, income levels in Southern Vermont remain below regional averages. Expanding economic mobility and improving housing accessibility are critical priorities for building a more resilient economy.



INDUSTRY GROWTH: Major industries in Southern Vermont have experienced significant job losses over the past five years. Supporting businesses in diversifying their products, markets, and customer bases will enhance long-term sustainability and economic resilience.



RESILIENCY: Recent challenges, including floods and a warming climate, loss of major employers, and the pandemic, have tested Southern Vermont's resilience. Strengthening regional infrastructure and support systems is crucial for reducing vulnerability to future disruptions.



WORKFORCE: Southern Vermont faces a critical shortage of qualified workers across multiple sectors. Expanding training programs and improving recruitment strategies are essential for continued business relocation, operation and growth.

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INFORMING ISSUES

Through the discussions, a series of informing issues rose to the top as critical to be addressed through the 2024 strategy:

WORKFORCE

The region faces a critical shortage of job-ready individuals with the skills and experience local industries require.

MIGRATION

As initial refugee resettlement efforts mature, they pave the way for family reunification and secondary migration, potentially bringing new skills, cultural diversity, and entrepreneurial spirit to the region.

HOUSING

Housing shortages and affordability issues have become critical impediments to economic progress in Southern Vermont.

COMMERCIAL AND INDUSTRIAL SPACE

The shortage of developable commercial and industrial space, coupled with inadequate infrastructure for additional development, presents a significant barrier to business expansion in Southern Vermont.

DIVISIVENESS

A climate of divisiveness can create uncertainty, impede decision-making processes, and discourage investments in the public and private sector.

DEMOGRAPHICS

An aging population strains the healthcare system and reduces the available workforce while simultaneously creating gaps in civic engagement and leadership roles.

CLIMATE CHANGE AND RESILIENCY

The region's vulnerability to heat and water-related issues poses significant risks to key economic drivers such as the hospitality and recreation industries, as well as to infrastructure and housing.

REMOTE WORK

While increased domestic migration can bring new talent and economic activity to the region, remote workers do not always have the same level of community integration.

PACE OF TECHNOLOGICAL CHANGE

Concerns about business and workforce readiness in the face of rapid change highlight the need for adaptive strategies and continuous learning initiatives.

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The Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy is intended to be implemented by everyone in Southern Vermont, not just economic development professionals.

The CEDS process facilitated important discussions about the region's future. Southern Vermont has identified opportunities for future growth and investment that leaders from all areas of the region can pursue, including:

MUNICIPALITIES & SCHOOLS:

- Utilize this document to align plans and initiatives with regional priorities and build resilience
- Enhance access to diverse funding and collaboration opportunities by networking and engaging with regional partners and submitting proposed projects to the CEDS

LOCAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ORGANIZATIONS:

- Engage in collaborative efforts with regional organizations to implement key strategies
- Access funding and partnership opportunities by participating in regional networks and submitting significant projects to the CEDS

NON-PROFITS & COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS:

- Identify opportunities for your organization to play a role in economic growth and resilience building
- Access funding and partnership opportunities by submitting significant projects to the CEDS

RESIDENTS & LOCAL VOLUNTEERS:

- Utilize this plan to understand the region's long-term economic vision
- Support and engage with initiatives that align with identified regional priorities
- Volunteer, participate, and contribute to local, regional, and state initiatives

BUSINESSES:

- Gain insights into regional opportunities, strengths, and priorities to align your organization with complementary efforts.
- Utilize this plan to understand regional goals and identify opportunities for your organization's role in economic growth and resilience building
- Access funding and partnership opportunities by participating in regional networks and submitting significant projects to the CEDS