

SOUTH CENTRAL INDIANA TALENT REGION

POWERFUL.

PROSPEROUS.

RESILIENT.

Regional Development Plan

Bartholomew, Jackson, and Jennings Counties

February 16, 2024



**SOUTH CENTRAL INDIANA
TALENT REGION**
Powerful technologies. Prosperous communities. Resilient futures.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

THE PROJECT TEAM WOULD LIKE TO THANK THE SUPPORT OF THE REGION AND ALL THE PARTICIPANTS THAT HELPED MAKE THIS PLAN POSSIBLE.

STEERING COMMITTEE MEMBERS:

Kathy Oren, President & CEO
Community Education Coalition
Serving the EcO 21st Century Talent
Region & EGR9 Communities

Cindy Frey, President
Columbus Area Chamber of
Commerce
Bartholomew County

Jason Hester, President
Greater Columbus Economic
Development Corporation
Bartholomew County

Mary Ferdon, Mayor
City of Columbus
Bartholomew County

**Eric Frey, Executive Director of
Administration**
City of Columbus
Bartholomew County

Jim Lienhoop, Former Mayor
City of Columbus
Bartholomew County

Dan Davis, President
Community Foundation of Jackson
County
Jackson County

Matthew Nicholson, Mayor
City of Seymour
Jackson County

Jim Plump, Executive Director
Jackson County Industrial
Development Corporation
Jackson County

Jackie Hill, Workforce Director
Jackson County Industrial
Development Corporation

**Dr. Nicole Johnson,
Superintendent**
Jennings County School
Corporation
Jennings County

Kathy Ertel, Executive Director
Jennings County Economic
Development Commission
Jennings County

Shawn Gerkin, Mayor
City of North Vernon
Jennings County

Willie Harmon, Owner
Harmon Construction, Inc.
Jennings County

RESPONSIBLE ORGANIZATION:

Trena Carter, Interim Executive Director
Southern Indiana Housing and Community Development Corporation

PLAN WAS PREPARED BY:



HWC
ENGINEERING

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

The South Central Indiana Talent Region has long been a manufacturing powerhouse. Since the early 20th century, the region has been producing engines and other components for transportation and mobility applications. In our region today, 19,000 people (or 1 in 5 jobs) are employed in occupations that design, test, and build internal combustion engines (ICE) and related components. In fact, Columbus was recognized as the #1 Manufacturing Hub among all U.S. small metros by the Business Facilities Magazine in 2022. Our strength in manufacturing has led to growth and prosperity for the region. Two of our three counties are growing rapidly, with Jackson County being the fastest growing rural county in the state.

Once considered state-of-the-art, the manufacturing of internal combustion engines is undergoing radical transformation and will soon be the technology of the past, replaced by electric, fuel cell, and other next generation mobility technologies. To ensure that our region continues to prosper, we must embrace innovation and change to remodel our economy around these technologies. Key employers in our region, including Cummins, LHP Engineering, and Forvia, are leading the way through heavy investment in research and development. Our region's priority is to support their innovation efforts.

This shift in mobility technologies will require transformation of our workforce. Our region is known for its industrial and mechanical engineers. To support needed innovation, we must attract more computer and electrical engineers. Ultimately, much of our current automotive related workforce will need retraining to support the manufacturing of these new technologies. Educational attainment in the region, although on the rise, still lags the state. Building off successful programs in READI 1.0, regional partners are dedicated to increasing the attainment of certificates and college degrees, especially in STEM-related fields, while also expanding access to advanced training for incumbent workers.

To attract and retain skilled workers, we must also invest in housing. Since 2010, our region's population has increased by 6.6%; meanwhile, housing growth has stagnated. Further population growth will be limited unless we can expand housing in the region.

Finally, we recognize that attracting workers is not practical without continual investments in quality of place. Our communities have invested heavily in quality of place offerings, yet there are still significant opportunities to make the region even more competitive through downtown development, public space investments, and engaging recreation amenities.

THE VISION

POWERFUL. PROSPEROUS. RESILIENT. The vision of the South Central Indiana Talent Region is tied to three interdependent guiding principles: powerful technologies, prosperous communities, and a resilient future. Straightforward and ambitious, the guiding principles are intended to inspire and cultivate collaboration among the companies and communities in the region who support each other in conducting work to execute this vision. This vision aligns with the legacy of Cummins Inc., a global power leader headquartered in the region who has had a profound effect on south central Indiana through innovation, education, and quality of place investment for over 100 years.

REGIONAL ASSETS

The South Central Indiana Talent Region has demonstrated we have the capacity to dream big, leverage capital, implement projects, and work together to better the region. With this proven capacity, we are prepared to partner with the State of Indiana to take on the collective challenges facing the region. Here are key examples of how our collaborative spirit has created key regional assets.

OUR REGION RALLIES AROUND EDUCATION

Since the early 2000's, the AirPark Columbus College Campus, home to Ivy Tech, IU Columbus, and Purdue, has grown from four degree-granting programs to over 70 programmatic options – all of which are designed to align with workforce needs within our regions. The three institutions share the Columbus Learning Center and the Advanced Manufacturing Center of Excellence, where they collaborate on student success and employment strategies.

OUR REGION CULTIVATES TALENT

In 2019, we were designated as a 21st Century Talent Region. Additionally, the region was named a National Talent Hub by Lumina Foundation in 2018. This designation demonstrates the capacity of cross-sector partnerships to significantly increase the number of residents with high-quality, postsecondary credentials.

OUR REGION SHARES ECONOMIC PROSPERITY

For over 20 years, the local economic development organizations of Bartholomew, Jackson, and Jennings County have worked together to promote the region through foreign direct investment trade missions, site selector outreach, and shared business prospecting.

OUR REGION IS A POWERHOUSE FOR INDUSTRY

Over 31% of our region's employment is in manufacturing, four times the national average. Cummins has been an integral partner in providing approximately 8,000 jobs to our communities. Foreign direct investment trade missions led by local economic development organizations have introduced 52 foreign-owned enterprises to the region, employing more than 14,000 people in South Central Indiana.

REGIONAL GOALS

1 INNOVATION & ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Position the region's economy for a resilient future by advancing innovation and entrepreneurship around the region's existing powerful technologies and future opportunities.

2 EDUCATION & WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Build and retain a resilient workforce and enhance regional prosperity by expanding both local and regional access to degree and certificate programs directly linked to well-paying jobs in the region, while providing needed support services such as childcare to ensure an available workforce.

3 HOUSING

Grow the region's population through investments that stimulate and sustain housing in the region.

4 QUALITY OF PLACE

Encourage accelerated population growth and retention through intentional investment in high-impact quality of place initiatives.

BENCHMARK COMMUNITIES

We chose to compare our region to the other top-ranked small metros for manufacturing identified by Business Facilities Magazine in 2022. Columbus ranked first, followed by Sheboygan (WI), Lima (OH), and Decatur (IL). Of these peers, Sheboygan has the closest parallels to the region in terms of demographics and manufacturing legacy. The peer evaluation we conducted offered key lessons, the most important of which was that successful manufacturing hubs have diversified economies that include multiple manufacturing sectors – and seek employment opportunities beyond manufacturing.

REGIONAL COLLABORATION

With the announcement of READI 1.0, our region held meetings with elected officials, major employers, and representatives from economic development organizations, community foundations, and other non-profits. To advance the work of the South Central Indiana Talent Region, a 12-member Steering Committee was formed.

The engagement process for the READI 1.0 regional development plan included broad outreach including planning workshops in each county, a public website, stakeholder meetings and a community survey. Following the outreach phase, a regional workshop brought 70 key leaders together to review key findings and build consensus on the region's priorities.

Since the READI 1.0 plan was completed, our region has continued planning around our goals. Bartholomew County has worked on housing by adopting the CityView master plan for a mixed use healthcare and residential development of nearly 1,000 new housing units. Jackson County worked with the Brookings Institution to develop a plan for significant housing investment for the Burkhart Opportunity Zone. Jennings County also has advanced planning, including the adoption of a new North Vernon Comprehensive Plan.

With the launch of READI 2.0, we evaluated our goals and concluded they remained valid, but the strategies needed more detail. Our team updated the implementation strategies by incorporating key recommendations from recent plans, and by gathering additional input from key stakeholder groups. Concurrent with updating our strategies, we have built a project pipeline report which identifies key initiatives each community is working on to advance regional goals. In evaluating our project pipeline, we have identified that our region has the capacity to match and execute priority projects to leverage \$56 million in funding. Our pipeline report has also identified a series of aspirational projects that are also high-impact and high-priority, but where more time and money is needed to move them forward. With additional support from IEDC up to \$75 million in READI 2.0 dollars, our region could make a more significant impact and accomplish so much more.

REGIONAL OUTCOMES

1 INNOVATION WILL MULTIPLY

We would like to see an increase in per capita income, new business startups, and private investment across the region, with an emphasis on elevating rural counties.

2 EDUCATION WILL INCREASE AND EQUALIZE ACROSS THE REGION

We would like to see educational attainment and childcare capacity increase across the region, as well as greater attainment of STEM certificates and degrees.

3 HOUSING WILL BECOME AVAILABLE

We would like to see an increase in new single-family and rental housing units in the region, with an emphasis on housing growth in rural areas.

4 WE WILL USE QUALITY OF PLACE TO ATTRACT POPULATION

Two of our three counties are already growing. To accelerate regional growth, we would like to see Jennings County's population stabilize by 2027 and show growth from 2027 to 2032.

INTRODUCTION

PLAN PURPOSE

With the launch of the first round of the Regional Economic Acceleration and Development Initiative (READI) program in 2021, Bartholomew, Jackson and Jennings Counties rallied together to develop the region's first regional development plan. Stakeholders from across the region actively participated in that plan, which established top regional priorities that serve as the basis for regional investment decisions. That initiative proved successful, resulting in \$30 million in funding being awarded to the region, and leveraging a total investment of over \$240 million.

As the region approached READI 2.0, regional leaders re-evaluated the planning process and the priorities established during the first plan. Although the first plan completed under a tight schedule to meet deadlines, regional leaders and key stakeholders affirmed that the process had in fact reached consensus on the most important regional priorities. While the priorities remain valid, stakeholders gave us feedback that our plan needed to include more thorough strategies to address each priority. The Indiana Economic Development Corporation (IEDC), who is responsible the READI program, also encouraged the region to further detail out the strategies for READI 2.0.

Regional leaders launched initial planning for this updated plan in May 2023. Meetings were held with key stakeholders to detail out education, innovation, quality of place, and housing strategies. The resulting strategies are included in this plan.

These leaders also observed that the region's plan first plan was written specifically around the READI program requirements. Leaders saw the need for a stand alone regional plan to support regional initiatives beyond this single program.

The resulting plan is built from the foundation of the READI 1.0 plan. It includes a full description of READI goals, strategies, and actions in more detail than even allowed in the READI 2.0 application. Instead of pages of details on projects, the region collaborated to develop a regional priority pipeline report. This pipeline report is intended to be updated regularly and independently of this plan. Finally, the goal for the region was that this would be an abbreviated report, consolidating the information into a short-form, easy to use document.



THE VISION FOR SCITR

The vision of the South Central Indiana Talent Region (SCITR) is tied to three interdependent guiding principles: powerful technologies, prosperous communities, and a resilient future. Straightforward and ambitious, the guiding principles are intended to inspire and cultivate collaboration among the companies and communities in the region who support each other in conducting work to execute this vision. This vision aligns with the legacy of Cummins Inc., a global power leader headquartered in the region who has had a profound effect on south central Indiana through innovation, education, and quality of place investment for over 100 years.

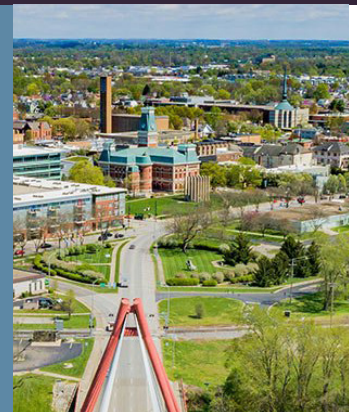
POWERFUL. (TECHNOLOGIES)

A new era of economic innovation is on the horizon for the South Central Indiana Talent Region. Advances in new and emerging technologies related to mobility, autonomous automobiles, hybrid power, hydrogen propulsion, energy solutions, vehicle electrification, and national defense will change the way people live around the world. The region is positioning itself to play a leading role in these emerging technologies by adapting the existing industrial footprint to align with this transformative future. Already underway, this transition is being built upon the region's long-standing history as a hub where entrepreneurs and innovators can connect, collaborate, and create. With this legacy of innovation cultivation, the region is ready to capitalize on the opportunities that a true technology development ecosystem can provide to transform the region and impact the State.



PROSPEROUS. (COMMUNITIES)

To support the significant changes in advanced technologies, the South Central Indiana Talent Region recognizes that strategies must be in place to attract, develop, and retain talent. These strategies must produce a region in which employment is growing, unemployment is low, careers are well-paying and equitably distributed, and people are well-educated and trained. The South Central Indiana Talent Region is well-positioned for success, with a home-grown education and talent system that has been recognized on a state and national level. To build on this success, the South Central Indiana Talent Region will broaden access to higher education, equip our residents with tomorrow's skills, address persistent housing challenges, and add amenities to attract residents.



RESILIENT. (FUTURE)

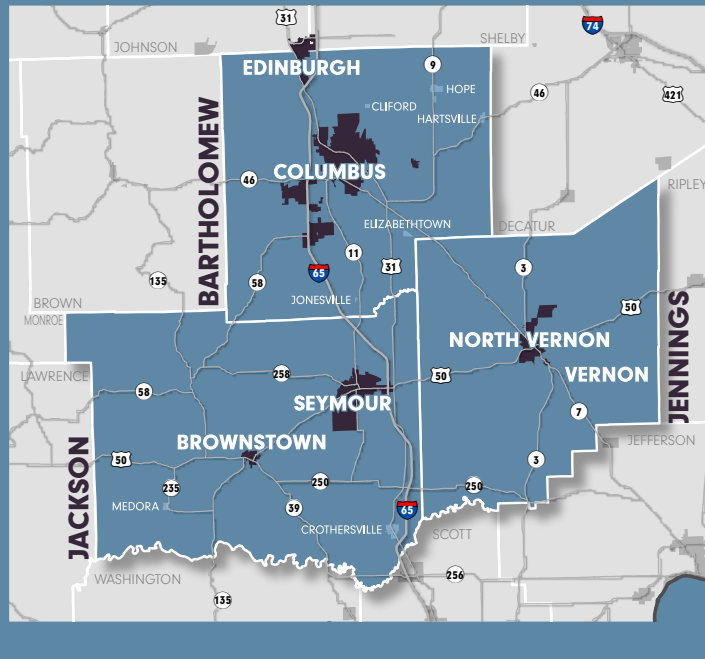
To prepare for a more prosperous future, the South Central Indiana Talent Region will cultivate an environment of resiliency. Regional resiliency is becoming increasingly important as regional economic prosperity is directly linked to an area's ability to prevent, withstand, and quickly recover from disruptions to its economic base. To cultivate resiliency, the South Central Indiana Talent Region will invest in quality of place, innovation, and education, and continue to be nimble, mindfully adapt, and carefully evolve to changing environments.



WELCOME TO OUR REGION!

INTRODUCTION

Varied and complex, the South Central Indiana Talent Region represents Indiana at its best, from its small towns full of charm, stunning architecture, vast natural resources, welcoming Hoosier hospitality, cutting-edge industry, and residents employing a strong work ethic.



BARTHOLOMEW COUNTY

Bartholomew County and the Columbus Metro Area is a significant hub within the South Central Indiana Talent Region. As a center for healthcare, retail, education, arts, and manufacturing, the area has a reputation of attracting young, educated people from around the world.

CITY OF COLUMBUS

Columbus is the largest city in the region, with a population of over 50,000 residents. It is the world headquarters for Cummins, Inc, which employs over 8,000 in the region.

TOWN OF EDINBURGH

Easily accessible from Interstate 65 and U.S. 31, Edinburgh offers a small-town atmosphere with a variety of amenities, including a strong industrial base and downtown specialty shops.

JACKSON COUNTY

As the crossroads of Interstate 65 and U.S. 50, Jackson County offers a highly productive work force and robust work ethic with a strong industrial base. Natural resources and outdoor recreation are a highlight of a county that features a scenic countryside of covered bridges and round barns, and numerous parks and protected forests.

CITY OF SEYMOUR

As a thriving industrial, commercial, and residential community, Seymour takes pride in its small-town, yet bustling atmosphere. Seymour offers industry, shopping, lodging, dining, and great festivals and events.

TOWN OF BROWNSTOWN

Brownstown is the county seat of Jackson County and hosts the award-winning county fair each year as well as numerous outdoor recreational sites.

JENNINGS COUNTY

Jennings County is home to the Muscatatuck Urban Training Center and the county has become a regional hub for defense, development, and cybersecurity public-private partnerships. Varied industries as economic drivers and affordable cost of living is appealing to the emergent workforce and young families.

CITY OF NORTH VERNON

From its designation as one of the first Stellar Communities in 2011, the City of North Vernon has focused on expanding its talent attraction footprint, workforce education and training, and parks and recreation amenities.

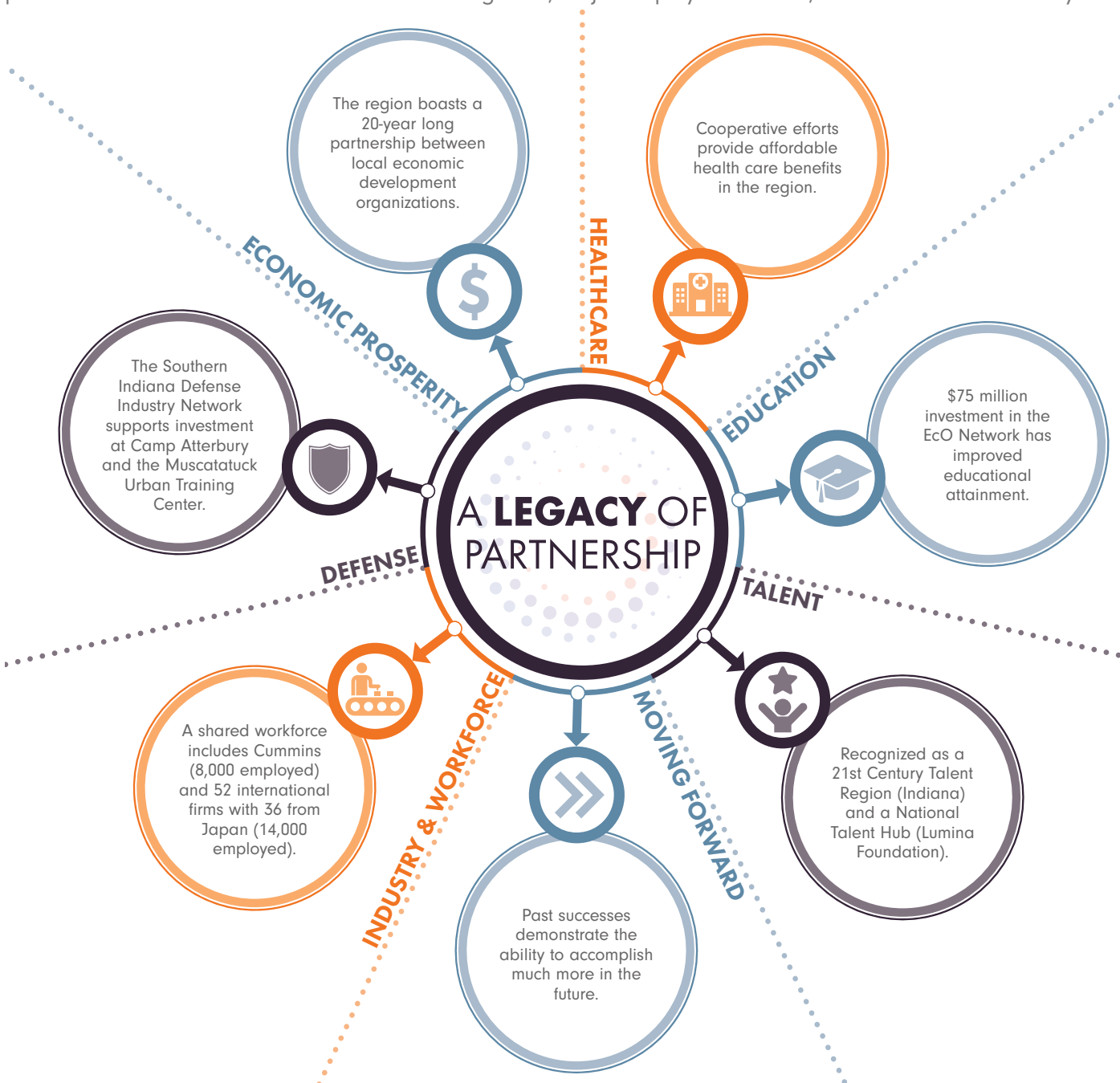
TOWN OF VERNON

The charming, historic Town of Vernon is on the National Register of Historic Places. Vernon is the smallest county seat in the State of Indiana, yet attracts numerous visitors with its wealth of arts, culture, and historical attractions.

OUR LEGACY

A LEGACY OF PARTNERING

With true Hoosier grit and determination, the South Central Indiana Talent Region has worked hard together over the decades to develop a team that boasts the best and brightest of Bartholomew, Jackson, and Jennings Counties. The region is one of talent, being recognized nationally and statewide. The collaborating entities have worked together over twenty years to improve educational and employment opportunities across the three-county footprint, and their collective success in cultivating talent has been recognized both nationally and statewide. Through this resilient partnership, partners of the South Central Indiana Talent Region have learned that opening doors for one another provides a host of mutual benefits: national recognition, major employer retention, and increased community success.



OUR REGION...

RALLIES AROUND EDUCATION

The Community Education Coalition in Columbus has had a substantial impact on the Region and focuses on aligning and integrating the region's learning system with economic growth and improved quality of life. The most successful regional initiative of the Community Education Coalition is the Economic Opportunities through Education (EcO) Network. Born from \$43 million in investments by Lilly Endowment Inc., the network connects residents within the region to better economic opportunities through education.

CULTIVATES TALENT

The communities of the region were a core component of the area's designation as a 21st Century Talent Region by Governor Eric Holcomb in 2019. Strategic priorities and projects are helping communities in the region create a better quality of place, develop and skill up its workforce, and connect talented Hoosiers with businesses seeking to fill high-demand, high-wage jobs. Additionally, the region was named a National Talent Hub by Lumina Foundation in 2018.

BOLSTERS DEFENSE

Home to both Camp Atterbury near Edinburgh (Bartholomew and Johnson Counties) and the Muscatatuck Urban Training Center (Jennings County), this region is home to the military's most unique training and testing facilities in the country. To capitalize on these assets, the region formed the Southern Indiana Defense Industry Network. This network actively supports private sector investment at these facilities in defense and national security interests.

IS CREATIVE ABOUT HEALTHCARE

To improve access to quality care and reduce the trend of rising health care costs, members of the SCITR helped to establish SIHO Insurance Services. Hospitals and healthcare systems within all three counties work regularly with IUPUI Columbus and Ivy Tech. Some of these opportunities are augmented through the EcO Healthcare Network, which helps align healthcare education and career opportunities in the region.

IS A POWERHOUSE FOR INDUSTRY & WORKFORCE

Our region was named the #1 small metro for manufacturing by Business Facilities Magazine in 2022. Over 37% of our region's employment is in manufacturing, four times the U.S. average and double Indiana's average. SCITR has built a strong relationship with Cummins Inc., an American multinational corporation headquartered in Columbus. As a leader in the development of technologies that propel the future, Cummins employs approximately 8,000 people. Foreign direct investment trade missions led by SCITR local economic development organizations led to 52 foreign-owned enterprises employing more than 14,000 people.

MOVES THE NEEDLE FORWARD

This decades-long partnership has a natural aptitude to excel in areas that help move the talent development and retention needle forward. SCITR has not only demonstrated they can work together, but that they have the capacity to dream big, leverage capital, and implement projects and programs to better the region. With this proven capacity, the Region is prepared to partner with the State to take on collective challenges, including workforce attraction, workforce education, housing development, quality of place investments, and broadband investment.

REGIONAL COLLABORATION

THE PLANNING PROCESS

TARGETED & FOCUSED APPROACH

The South Central Indiana Talent Region took intentional steps in the formation of this regional development plan. Although past planning efforts served as a foundation for the South Central Indiana Regional Development Plan, this plan addresses the climate of the region and the state today. The key regional strategies identified are targeted and focused to respond to the needs of the region.

STEERING COMMITTEE

With the announcement of READI 1.0, a series of meetings were held with potential partners from South Central Indiana. These partners turned to associates in the EcO Network to facilitate the conversation. These discussions included more than 20 elected officials at the city and county level, executives from economic development organizations, major employers, and leaders from community foundations and other non-profits. Conversations collectively focused on the economic prosperity of the region through business

support, educational attainment, workforce development, tourism, talent attraction, and more. To advance the work of the South Central Indiana Talent Region, a Steering Committee of twelve representatives from among the three participating counties was formed. This Steering Committee met weekly through the formation of the regional development plan. The Steering Committee designated the Southern Indiana Housing and Community Development Corporation as the organization responsible for managing and updating the plan.



Image Source: HWC Engineering



Image Source: HWC Engineering

COUNTY WORKSHOPS

A series of county workshops were held in July and August that involved city, town, and county elected officials, key businesses, and other community leaders. The purpose was to identify priorities for each entity, gauge interest in participation, and identify areas of overlap between local, county, and regional priorities. A total of four county workshops were held in Jennings, Jackson, and Bartholomew Counties. These workshops gathered input from over 120 participants. During these workshops, a series of exercises helped meeting participants identify values and priorities on the local level, as well as the county level.



County workshops were held in Jennings, Jackson, and Bartholomew Counties to engage stakeholders.

Image Source: HWC Engineering

REGIONAL WORKSHOP

After the county workshops, a regional workshop brought together leaders and members of the public from all three counties to compare notes on what was learned. Participants were able to see how local values and priorities aligned, and how these common values and priorities could be used to develop regional goals. Over 70 representatives participated in this regional workshop, which resulted in consensus on the four regional goals included in the READI 1.0 plan.

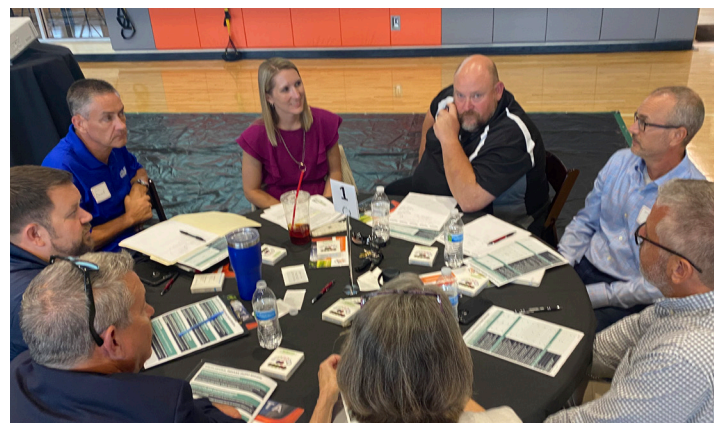


At the county workshops, participants identified values and priorities at the local level, as well as at the county level.

Image Source: HWC Engineering

GOALS AND STRATEGIES MEETINGS

For READI 2.0, our Steering Committee reviewed the goals and strategies formed in READI 1.0 and sought input from regional leaders and key stakeholders. It quickly became apparent that the goals from READI 1.0 remained priorities for the region. Based on this initial feedback, the project team launched stakeholder work sessions around education, childcare, innovation and entrepreneurship, and related topics to dig deeper into the goals and build out complete strategies around each. These meetings were held in the fall of 2023.



A regional workshop was held with local leaders and members of the public from all three counties to reach consensus on regional goals.

Image Source: HWC Engineering

NEEDS & ACTION

NEEDS

The South Central Indiana Talent Region has long been a leader in innovation and advanced manufacturing related to vehicular mobility. The recent change in U.S. policies that focus on cutting carbon emissions and promoting the use of electric and hydrogen powered vehicles is having an impact on the manufacturing world. This includes companies in the region like Cummins, who are pursuing strategies that include hydrogen and electric propulsion. With this transition, the South Central Indiana Talent Region will need to ensure regional employers have the local infrastructure needed to foster new technologies.

“With one in five jobs at stake, the South Central Indiana Talent Region will need to ensure regional employers have facilities, people, and technologies necessary to adapt to the coming disruption.”

TRANSITION TO ALTERNATIVE ENERGY

On August 5, 2021, President Biden signed an executive order setting a national goal that by 2030 half of all cars and trucks to be sold in the U.S. should be zero-emission vehicles.¹ These vehicles will include pure electric vehicles (which require no engines or exhaust systems), hybrids, and hydrogen fuel cell vehicles. All major automakers have announced plans to shift from internal combustion engines to electric or other power solutions. As examples, Toyota has announced plans to launch 60 new hybrid, electric, or fuel-cell vehicles by 2025; Subaru has plans for 40 percent of its worldwide sales to come from electric vehicles by 2030; and General Motors has pledged to stop selling gasoline and diesel powered light duty vehicles all together by 2035.² In our region today, 19,000 people (or 1 in 5 jobs) are currently employed in occupations that design, test, and build engines and components for internal combustion engine (ICE) vehicles. The shift away from ICEs to electric vehicles and other alternative technologies is both a major concern and opportunity.



The change in U.S. policies that promotes electric and hydrogen powered vehicles is impacting the region.

Image Source: Cummins Inc.



Education around advanced manufacturing skills in the region needs to be recalibrated.

Image Source: Forvia

¹ Biden Signs Order Aiming for Half of New Vehicles to be Electric by 2030, NBC News, 8/5/2021

² Here Are All the Promises Automakers Have Made about Electric Cars, Car & Driver, 6/26/2021

INDUSTRIES ARE TRANSFORMING

To secure their place as industry leaders, and continue to drive innovation, South Central Indiana's top employers are embracing alternative mobility technologies. In 2020, Columbus-based Cummins Inc. announced the formation of a new Electrified Power division to be headquartered in the region. Forvia, who previously designed, tested, and built exhaust systems, is transitioning too.

THE TALENT PIPELINE MUST ADJUST

The shift to electric vehicles means the region needs more electrical engineers, robotics engineers, and precision manufacturing specialists on top of the talented mechanical engineers who already call this region their home. Talent in advanced manufacturing needs cultivating, specifically the skills to adapt to changing production environments. As such, the South Central Indiana Talent Region needs to ensure the education system is recalibrated to rapidly support modern automotive engineering, electrical engineering, control systems, and cybersecurity.

ENHANCE QUALITY OF PLACE

To attract talent, the South Central Talent Region must boast prosperous communities with activated, inclusive public spaces. The region should be inviting, with defined character, and enhanced connectivity. Place-based investment was a priority for the region in READI 1.0 and continues to be a priority for READI 2.0. In READI 1.0, the region intentionally selected projects that would build off one another and catalyze change. Projects included riverfront redevelopment and the NexusPark health and wellness facility in Columbus, as well as the Quarry Adventure Park in North Vernon. As the region's population continues to grow, quality of place amenities must expand, and new amenities should be introduced.

NEW HOUSING IS NEEDED

Across the region, new homes are not being built at the rate they were prior to 2000. Existing single-family homes and multi-family units are of mixed quality, and only 17 percent of the existing housing stock has been constructed in the past twenty years - approximately 10 percent lower than decades prior. From 2020 to 2022, housing development stagnated. The total number of housing units in the region stayed approximately the same with a growth rate of 0%. If unaddressed, the lack of supply will have a negative impact on population growth and talent attraction within the region.

CHILDCARE IS LAGGING

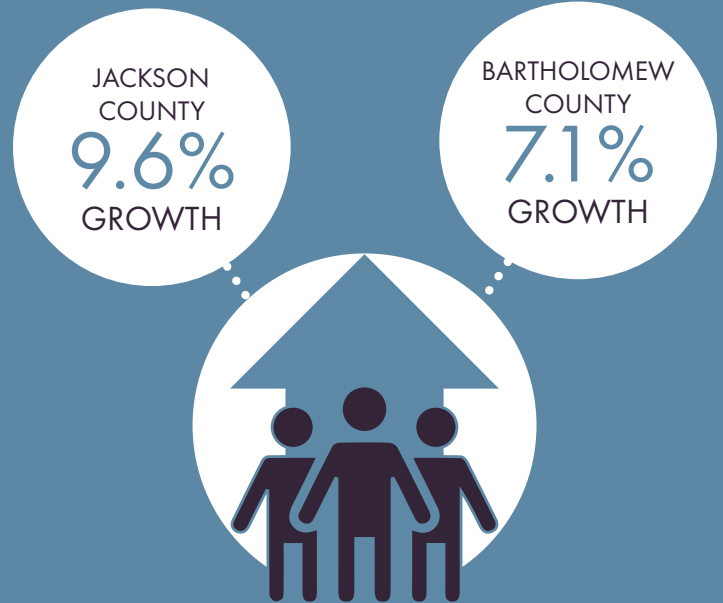
The region faces significant challenges with childcare. One such challenge pertains to capacity. According to data from Brighter Futures Indiana collected in January 2024, approximately 7,571 children under the age of six may need care. Licensed capacity can only support 4,467 of those children, or 59%. Our region also struggles to balance the affordability of childcare with fair wages. Workers are discouraged from pursuing a career in childcare since low wages threaten their financial stability. The region is working to find solutions that could offset fixed operating costs so that providers can afford to pay childcare workers more, while keeping care affordable for working families. Finally, as the Hispanic population in the region grows, there is increased demand for Spanish-speaking staff and language programming at childcare centers.

The South Central Indiana Talent Region is aware that future success hinges on the implementation of strategic actions today and embraces the opportunity to participate in READI on bold, coordinated, public-private initiatives that address community need and will have a significant impact on the region, individual communities, and the State of Indiana.

CURRENT STATE OF THE REGION

OUR REGION IS GROWING

- ◆ Growth in the region is fueled by population gains in Jackson and Bartholomew Counties.
- ◆ Jackson County, home to the City of Seymour, is the fastest growing rural county in Indiana. The county's population grew by 9.6% since 2010.
- ◆ Bartholomew County, home to the City of Columbus, grew by over 7% since 2010.
- ◆ Population in other parts of the region, however, has stalled or declined.



OUR REGION IS BECOMING MORE DIVERSE

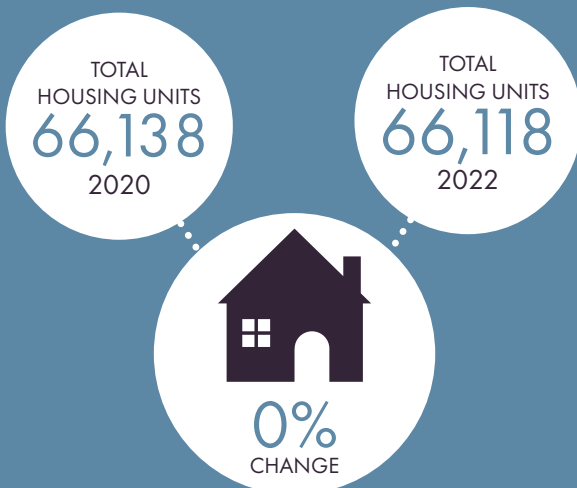
- ◆ Between 2020 and 2022, the Hispanic population in the region grew by over 11%. The greatest increase was in Jackson County at 17.1%.



11.3%
GROWTH IN THE
REGION'S HISPANIC
POPULATION

HOUSING REMAINS A PRIORITY

- ◆ Housing growth has stagnated. From 2020 to 2022, the total number of units in the region stayed approximately the same.



EDUCATION IS ON THE RISE

- ◆ From 2010 to 2020, the population aged 25+ with a bachelor's degree or higher increased by 43.9%.
- ◆ Even so, our region continues to lag behind. Only 26.3% of residents hold at least a bachelor's degree, compared to 28.2% for Indiana.



26.3%
WITH A
BACHELOR'S
DEGREE OR MORE

ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY

LEADING THE REGION

For the second round of the READI initiative, the Southern Indiana Housing and Community Development Corporation (SIHCDC) will serve as the regional organization for the South Central Indiana Talent Region. The SIHCDC contracts with the Administrative Resources association (ARa) to provide staffing for the Community Development Corporation.

The ARa has served the South Central region for over 50 years, providing planning and administrative services to member communities. It is a not-for-profit governmental association owned by cities and towns in the South Central region, including Columbus, North Vernon, and Seymour. The organization has developed, acquired funding for, and administered more federal, state, and private community development projects than any other organization in Indiana. With a staff of five community development professionals, they have been and will continue to be a trusted partner to the cities and counties of this region.

The ARa's operations are currently supported by project administrative fees, as well as membership fees. To date, administrative fees through READI have supported its role as the lead regional organization. The organization has been able to utilize existing staff to cover its regional role and other pre-existing responsibilities. However, the region recognizes that there is an increasing need for one or more staff members dedicated to regional responsibilities. The region also recognizes that a dedicated funding stream may be needed to fund regional activities. The plan is to evaluate the level of services needed to continue regional obligations through the course of 2024, and then evaluate whether dedicated staff and/or alternate revenue streams are needed.



The Southern Indiana Housing Community Development Corporation serves as the regional organization for the Southern Indiana Talent Region.



The Administrative Resources association provides staffing for the Southern Indiana Housing Community Development Corporation, and has served the region for over 50 years.

MEASURING OUR SUCCESS

KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

As part of the READI 2.0 program, the IEDC Board of Directors established Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) designed to help achieve state economic development priorities. Key performance indicators set targets for a range of focus areas, from population growth to childcare capacity. The table below tracks the change in KPIs over the last decade in the South Central Indiana Talent Region.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- ◆ The South Central Indiana Talent Region contributes to the state's population growth aspirations. Since 2020, the region's population has increased by 0.8%, with most of that growth driven by population gains in Jackson County. The region has demonstrated its ability to attract and retain residents, and will continue to do so as new opportunities arise.
- ◆ Per capita income continues to increase in the region, although it still lags behind the state. Since 2020, per capita income has increased by 11.1%, or over \$5,000. The Bureau of Economic Analysis predicts that South Central's per capita income is approximately \$53,492, compared to \$58,323 for Indiana.
- ◆ Education is on the rise, but there is still room to improve. Since 2020, the population with a bachelor's degree or higher increased by 3.8%, or over 1,000 residents. Approximately 26.3% of residents have at least a bachelor's degree, compared to 28.2% at the state level.
- ◆ Housing development has stagnated. Since 2020, the total number of housing units has remained approximately the same, although there is hope that the situation will improve. There are plans for new housing developments in the region that will promote population growth.
- ◆ The region is experiencing a boom in new business start-ups. Since 2020, there has been a 36.6% increase in new business applications, outpacing the rest of the state at 20.2%.

KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS	SOUTH CENTRAL INDIANA TALENT REGION		
	2010	2020	2022
TOTAL POPULATION ¹	147,227	154,996	156,193
TOTAL EMPLOYMENT ¹	68,708	75,476	76,234
PER CAPITA INCOME ²	\$33,631	\$48,150	\$53,492
TOTAL POPULATION WITH BACHELOR'S DEGREE OR HIGHER ¹	18,790 or 19.3%	27,034 or 25.6%	28,055 or 26.3%
TOTAL HOUSING UNITS ¹	62,997	66,138	66,118
TOTAL RENTAL UNITS ¹	15,563	16,584	16,498
TOTAL OWNER-OCCUPIED UNITS ¹	42,053	42,887	44,310
NUMBER OF NEW BUSINESS START-UPS ³	951	983	1,343

¹ Data from the U.S. Census Bureau

² Data from the Bureau of Economic Analysis

³ Data from the U.S. Small Business Development Center

OUR STRATEGY & GOALS

OUR REGIONAL STRATEGY

To support the State of Indiana in its efforts to accelerate the state's economic growth and advance the powerful, prosperous, and resilient vision of the South Central Indiana Talent Region, a series of key strategies were identified. These strategies promote initiatives and projects that are critical to retain talent and to attract workforce in the South Central Indiana Talent Region.

SOUTH CENTRAL INDIANA TALENT REGION GOALS



1

INNOVATION & ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Position the region's economy for a resilient future by advancing innovation and entrepreneurship around the region's existing powerful technologies and future opportunities.



2

EDUCATION & WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Build and retain a resilient workforce and enhance regional prosperity by expanding both local and regional access to degree and certificate programs directly linked to well-paying jobs in the region, while providing needed support services such as childcare to ensure an available workforce.



3

HOUSING

Grow the region's population through investments that stimulate and sustain housing in the region.



4

QUALITY OF PLACE

Encourage accelerated population growth and retention through intentional investment in high-impact quality of place initiatives.

GOALS & STRATEGIES

INNOVATION & ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Position the region's economy for a resilient future by advancing innovation and entrepreneurship around the region's existing powerful technologies and future opportunities.

STRATEGY 1.1: PROMOTE INVESTMENTS IN NEXT GENERATION MOBILITY

We will support research, development, testing, and certification of new mobility technologies to transition away from an economy focused on internal combustion engines. A key component of this strategy is creating a Vehicle Innovation Center to promote the development of next generation mobility technologies and encourage collaboration among local businesses and entrepreneurs.

STRATEGY 1.2: ATTRACT FOREIGN DIRECT INVESTMENT

We will continue to promote investment in existing foreign-owned companies in the region and promote new foreign direct investment.

STRATEGY 1.3: SUPPORT SMALL BUSINESSES

We will diversify the region's economy by supporting small business growth with entrepreneurial support programming. Initiatives will include promoting innovation and entrepreneurship through the Catalyst program offered through the Columbus Chamber of Commerce. We will also continue to provide small business coaching through the SCORE South Central Indiana program.

STRATEGY 1.4: DEVELOP SHOVEL-READY SITES

We will develop infrastructure and buildings to provide expedited and shovel-ready employer sites. These sites are essential to be able to accommodate growth associated with strategies outlined in this plan.

STRATEGY 1.5: IMPROVE COLLABORATION

We will improve access to and collaboration among organizations promoting innovation and entrepreneurship. A key component of this will be developing a joint innovation and entrepreneurship center in Bartholomew County to house local and regional programs, including SCORE South Central Indiana, Indiana Small Business Development Center, Catalyst (regional entrepreneurship coaching), TIME (minority small business development), Columbus Chamber, and the Greater Columbus Economic Development Corporation.



GOALS & STRATEGIES

INNOVATION & ENTREPRENEURSHIP

READI 1.0 HIGHLIGHT PROJECT PROPELLER (BARTHOLOMEW COUNTY)



READI 2.0 FEATURE PROJECT VEHICLE INNOVATION CENTER (BARTHOLOMEW COUNTY)



GOALS & STRATEGIES

EDUCATION AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Build and retain a resilient workforce and enhance regional prosperity by expanding both local and regional access to degree and certificate programs directly linked to well-paying jobs in the region, while providing needed support services such as childcare to ensure an available workforce.

STRATEGY 2.1: EXPAND STEM POST-SECONDARY CREDENTIALS AND DEGREES

We will support the AirPark Columbus College Campus and the Jackson County Learning Center (JCLC) as regional education hubs. Through communication and collaboration, we will ensure these institutions provide STEM education pathways that meet the workforce needs of the Advanced Manufacturing, Technology, and Healthcare industry sectors. Priorities include expanding engineering and technology degree programs, health sciences lab facilities, and student housing.

STRATEGY 2.2: EXPAND K-12 STEM AND CAREER TECHNICAL EDUCATION PATHWAYS

We will support K-12 STEM and CTE Education Pathways, providing seamless transitions from high school to programs at the AirPark Columbus College Campus and JCLC. These programs will connect students to high demand, well-paying jobs with local employers.

STRATEGY 2.3: TRAIN EXISTING WORKERS FOR ADVANCEMENT

We will train existing workers for advancement, with a focus on marginalized populations in diversifying rural communities. This will involve expanding access to degree and certificate programs, and strengthening partnerships with local community colleges, universities, and employers to ensure that programs are directly related to local career opportunities.

STRATEGY 2.4: EXPAND EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

We will support childcare expansion strategies to create a more equitable and sustainable early learning ecosystem centered on families, caregivers, professionals, and children. Access to quality early childhood education is a vital supporting mechanism without which economically successful communities are not possible. This system-wide approach will serve as a model for other regions. A key component of this strategy is to commission a regional childcare plan to quantify needs and identify solutions.



GOALS & STRATEGIES

EDUCATION AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

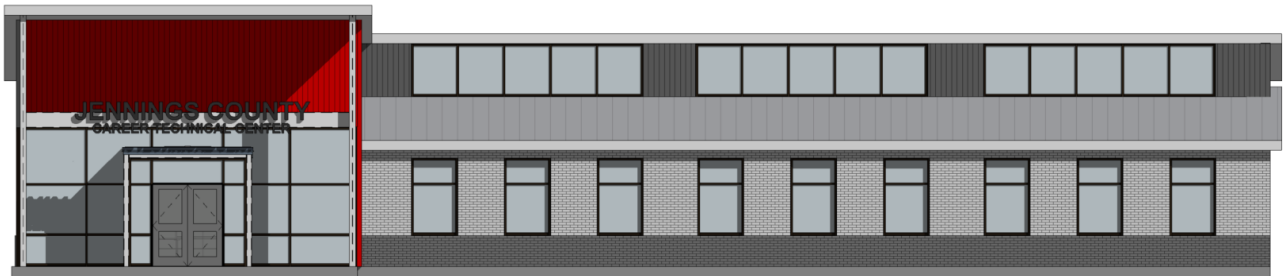
READI 1.0 HIGHLIGHT PROJECT

JACKSON COUNTY LEARNING CENTER (JACKSON COUNTY)



READI 2.0 FEATURE PROJECT

PANTHER TECH PHASE 2 (JENNINGS COUNTY)



GOALS & STRATEGIES

HOUSING

Grow the region's population through investments that stimulate and sustain housing in the region.

STRATEGY 3.1: EXPAND HOUSING AVAILABILITY AND CHOICE

We will support the development of a full range of housing products to address the severe lack of housing in the region. This includes the development of single-family (detached) housing, but also townhomes, duplexes, triplexes, small multi-family units and apartments. A mix of both rental and owner-occupied units are needed. In downtown districts, mixed-use, infill development will be encouraged to grow the supply of housing without extending infrastructure.

STRATEGY 3.2: CREATE NEW HOUSING NEIGHBORHOODS

Each county in the region has proposed bold housing investments. In North Vernon, a 60-unit mixed-use development is planned at the site of a devastating downtown fire. Both Columbus and Seymour have proposed large-scale housing investments, including the City View and the Freeman Village housing project. These new housing investments will be critical to attracting and retaining residents in the region. New neighborhoods should emphasize walkability and connectivity to jobs and services.

STRATEGY 3.3: EXTEND INFRASTRUCTURE TO SUPPORT HOUSING

The region lacks developable sites that are already served by adequate infrastructure. Water, sewer, storm, electric, street, and broadband investments are all needed to serve priority development sites in the region.

STRATEGY 3.4: SUPPORT HOUSING AFFORDABILITY

There is a need for housing designed to meet the needs and preferences of first-time homebuyers, and middle-income, essential workers in the region. To meet this need, communities should allow a broader range of housing products in their neighborhoods.

STRATEGY 3.5: COMPLETE NEIGHBORHOOD BLIGHT ABATEMENT

We will pursue blight abatement to support reinvestment in neighborhoods, rural areas, and mixed-use districts. Blight abatement programs will focus on revitalizing downtown areas and supporting ongoing projects from READI 1.0.



GOALS & STRATEGIES

HOUSING

READI 1.0 HIGHLIGHT PROJECT HERITAGE ESTATES SUBDIVISION (JENNINGS COUNTY)



READI 2.0 FEATURE PROJECT CITY VIEW (BARTHOLOMEW COUNTY)



READI 2.0 FEATURE PROJECT BURKHART OPPORTUNITY ZONE (JACKSON COUNTY)



GOALS & STRATEGIES

QUALITY OF PLACE

Encourage accelerated population growth and retention through intentional investment in high-impact quality of place initiatives.

STRATEGY 4.1: PROMOTE DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION

We will encourage downtown revitalization through blight elimination, redevelopment, mixed-use development, and placemaking programs. In our historic downtowns, this means continuing façade and structural improvements, activating parks and public spaces, investing in arts and cultural amenities, and re-using or removing blighted structures.

STRATEGY 4.2: CONNECT PEOPLE TO WORK AND PLAY

A key recommendation of the Brookings-LISC Study for Seymour is to connect people to work and play, supporting communities with satisfying job opportunities and abundant recreation amenities. These connections are supported by investments in parks, trails, and sidewalks in communities across the region.

STRATEGY 4.3: BUILD VIBRANT ATTRACTIONS

We will encourage the development of attractions that promote tourism and excite residents. Tourism in the region will be further supported through efforts to increase the supply of hotel rooms in the region and establish a regional conference/event center.

STRATEGY 4.4: DEVELOP INDOOR RECREATION AMENITIES

Too many of the region's indoor recreation amenities have closed, leaving residents with few recreation options in inclement weather. To address this, the region will prioritize the creation of new places for recreation and socializing, including the creation of new indoor recreation facilities.

STRATEGY 4.5: WELCOME NEW IMMIGRANTS

With so many new immigrants coming to the region for employment opportunities, more needs to be done to welcome immigrant families and incorporate them into the social and support structures of the community. A key component of this strategy is developing an immigrant welcome center in Seymour per the recommendations of



GOALS & STRATEGIES

QUALITY OF PLACE

READI 1.0 HIGHLIGHT PROJECT NEXUS PARK (BARTHOLOMEW COUNTY)



READI 2.0 FEATURE PROJECT DOWNTOWN THEATER & IMMIGRANT WELCOME CENTER (JACKSON COUNTY)

