

**BURNSVILLE TOWN COUNCIL  
AGENDA  
Regular Meeting - Thursday, December 1, 2022, 6pm  
Burnsville Town Center**

1. Adoption of Agenda
2. Public Comment
3. Consideration of Minutes
  - a. Regular Meeting held on November 3, 2022
4. Public Hearings
5. Presentations
  - a. Recognition of Jason Chandler
6. Manager's Update - Heather Hockaday
  - a. Project updates
    - i. Stream daylighting project update
    - ii. PD/PWD building update
  - b. Ratification of extension of audit contract
  - c. Discussion of lease proposal for Area C
  - d. Tax Report
7. Clerk's Update - Chad Fox
  - a. Christmas parade
  - b. Planning Board term updates
8. Department Updates
  - a. Public Works - Shane Dale
  - b. Finance - Leslie Crowder
    - i. Budget vs. Actual dated October 31, 2022, previously provided to Council
    - ii. Capital project ordinances
  - c. Fire Department - Niles Howell
  - d. Police Department - Brian Buchanan
  - e. Zoning/Code Enforcement - Brian Buchanan
  - f. Burnsville Town Center - Corbin Cooper
9. Council Members' Reports
10. Updates from Advisory Boards and Non-Profits
  - a. Economic Development Commission - Jamie McMahan
  - b. Yancey/Burnsville Chamber of Commerce - Christy Wood

c. High Country Council of Governments

11. Closed Session

12. Next Town Council Meeting - January 3, 2023, 6pm

13. Adjourn

**BURNSVILLE TOWN COUNCIL**  
**Regular Meeting - Thursday, November 3, 2022, 6pm**  
**Burnsville Town Center**

On Thursday, November 3, 2022, the Burnsville Town Council with Mayor Russell Fox and members Judy Buchanan, Denise Collier, Randy Ollis and Bill Wheeler present, held a regular meeting at the Burnsville Town Center. Also in attendance were town staff members Heather Hockaday, Shane Dale, Brian Buchanan, Leslie Crowder, Niles Howell, Chad Fox, and Corbin Cooper; and visitors, Former Mayor Danny McIntosh, Richard Gierloff, Lucy Doll, Jamie McMahan, Christy Wood, Melanie St-Jean, and Julie Wiggins and Corey Osborne from HCCOG, among others. Mayor Fox, who presided, called the meeting to order at 6:01pm and stated that the purpose of the meeting was to conduct business for the month of November 2022. The meeting was streamed live for the public on the Burnsville Town Center's YouTube Channel.

Adoption of Agenda - Randy Ollis moved to adopt the agenda as presented. Denise Collier seconded the motion, which carried.

Public Comment

- Danny McIntosh told a story about a conversation with long-time Burnsville attorney Staunton Norris about the first time he came to Burnsville in 1962. He ran into EL Briggs on the Town Square who said he had been waiting on him. Staunton asked for directions, EL replied, "you go around the square and turn up that street right there". Staunton said that when he got to the firetower, he'd gone too far.

Mr. McIntosh also noted that he'd recently seen a copy of the May 24th edition of the Yancey Record, featuring Burnsville business owner Jimmy Ray who, in the summer of 1965, was performing page services for his uncle Mark Bennett in NC General Assembly.

- Lucy Doll spoke about a new festival on May 20, 2023 called the Thomas Woof Festival, coinciding with National Adopt a Dog Day.

As Chair of the recent Literary Festival, Ms. Doll was made aware of feedback from attendees about the need for an elevator at Town Hall. Mayor Fox said that the Town has a contractor currently working on a price. Town Manager Heather Hockaday added that the inability to find a contractor was the primary hold-up as the funding and plans are complete and ready to go.

Consideration of Minutes - Minutes from a regular meeting held on October 6, 2022 were considered. Bill Wheeler made a motion to approve the minutes as read. Judy Buchanan seconded the motion, which carried. All were in agreement.

Public Hearings - There was no public hearing.

Presentations

- Julie Wiggins, Executive Director of the High Country Council of Governments (HCCOG) presented a brief overview on the organization, their history, and, as an extension of local governments, how they help with planning and channeling funds into their seven county region. She thanked the Town for the partnership and referenced several current projects. She updated the Council on the different HCCOG departments and highlighted programs such as family caregiver support, long-term care, fall prevention, and NC Works. Mayor Fox acknowledged how meaningful the partnership with High Country has been, saying that they are a key component to the operations of our Town.

Corey Osborne, Director of Recovery and Resilience, talked about the long relationship with Burnsville, work on the land use plan, successful grant applications, and upcoming projects. He mentioned the planning department, the services they provide, and a new department focused on federal funds, disaster recovery and long range planning. Mrs. Hockaday said that the HCCOG was a huge benefit to the town staff with the partnership being a key factor in getting recent grants. Mayor Fox said that the relationship with HCCOG, EDC, and town staff has proven to be successful.

- Melanie St. Jean updated the Council on how the first First Friday event in October went and two additional markets for November and December. She thanked all of the merchants that stayed open late, helping to make the evening a success. She was proud that the artisans benefited from sales and other commissions, then asked about the possibility of getting more lights on the square. The Council discussed the reason that some of the lights on the square were turned off and had a general agreement to look into lighting options.

She mentioned that, with the expense of additional advertising, she would like the Town to waive the fee for the stage. Randy Ollis moved to sponsor the stage for November and December if it's possible to set it up. Bill Wheeler seconded the motion, which carried.

Manager's Update - Town Manager Heather Hockaday  
Project updates

1. ARPA grants update - RFQs for engineering services were scored with McGill & Associates receiving the highest scores on three projects. Mrs Hockaday said that the price of the agreements were the same as the amount allowed in the grant budgets. Judy Buchanan moved to approve the selection of McGill & Associates to provide engineering service for the Bolens Creek raw water line project, the water system improvements project, and the Bakers Creek pump station project, and to authorize Mayor Fox to sign the agreements. Bill Wheeler seconded the motion, which carried. All were in agreement.
2. East Main Sewer Interceptor project - Mrs. Hockaday reported that the top score was WithersRavenel and she expects to receive the contracts soon.
3. FEMA update
  - a. Mrs. Hockaday reported that the drainage repairs at Bowditch Street and Reservoir Road were completed.
  - b. A kick-off meeting for the Azalea Lane project was held recently with engineers. She said that they expect a long lead time on the concrete box culvert, causing some concern for the March deadline. Other solutions were discussed to get the road opened as soon as possible.
  - c. Mrs. Hockaday, with Corey Osborne, is working on a RFQ for the Meadow Road project.
  - d. She is still waiting to hear about a second DEQ grant for daylighting the stream at the Town maintenance shed.
4. EDA/Little Leaf Farms update - Mrs. Hockaday was part of a kick-off meeting with EDA engineers, Yancey County, EDC, CDC, and Kelly Coffey of HCCOG.
5. PD/PWD N. Main building update - The architect has been onsite and is finalizing the plans, getting them permit ready.
6. East Main sidewalk - A grant application has been submitted to the Department of Commerce for funding.

Tax Report - Mrs. Hockaday reported that there is around \$6500 owed on the 20/21 levy, with 29% of the current levy collected so far.

#### Clerk's Update - Town Clerk Chad Fox

An *Electronic Records and Imaging Policy and Procedures for the Town of Burnsville* was presented, beginning the process of allowing the digitization of some town records. Mayor Fox moved to approve the document. Judy Buchanan seconded the motion, which carried. All were in agreement.

#### Department Updates

1. Public Works - Public Works Director Shane Dale reported that the sewer mapping has been completed. Public Works employees received several maps and map books, with access to them on their phones and soon a tablet. Marking for the water mapping project has begun.

Paving update - Mr. Dale updated the Council on several paving projects, saying that Bowditch Street has been paved, with more paving to be done next week. Randy Ollis mentioned pavement issues on South Main and East Main near the Buds Auto Parts. Mr. Dale said that repairs at those locations were already scheduled.

2. Finance - Finance Officer Leslie Crowder previously provided a budget vs. actual dated October 31, 2022, overtime report, and third quarter financial statement to the Council.

Budget amendment - Mrs. Crowder presented an amendment acknowledging money already received from a grant for the Fire Department. Randy Ollis moved to approve *Budget Amendment #4 FY 22/23*. Judy Buchanan seconded the motion, which carried. All were in agreement.

3. Fire Department - Fire Chief Niles Howell presented a call summary for the month of October, saying the department received thirty-one calls, with most being motor vehicle accidents and smoke alarms. They have received a total of 364 calls for the year. He also said that the department purchased a positive-pressure ventilation fan with a grant to help remove vapors from buildings.
4. Police Department - Police Chief Brian Buchanan passed out an activity log for the month of October and said that an officer has left the department to work for the ALE. A reserve officer has taken the position.
5. Zoning/Code Enforcement - Zoning Administrator Brian Buchanan said that a couple of issues are being worked on.
6. Burnsville Town Center - Town Center Manager Corbin Cooper updated the Council on events saying October was the most events he has had so far with November mostly booked as well. He highlighted upcoming crafts shows.

#### Council Members' Reports

- Mayor Fox mentioned a request that he received in the mail from a young lady named Brooklyn requesting the opportunity for citizens to make Christmas ornaments for a Town Christmas tree. Corbin Cooper and the Yancey Journal's Kayti Ledford agreed to work out the details and promote the idea.

#### Updates from Advisory Boards and Non-Profits

- ABC Board
  - ABC vacancy - Judy Buchanan moved to recuse ABC Board member Bill Wheeler from the discussion and any action on the ABC board vacancy. Denise Collier seconded the motion, which carried.

Six applications were previously viewed by the Council. Denise Collier said that, with the loan and building project, Erica Deaton would be a logical choice. Judy Buchanan commented that Mrs. Deaton would be helpful with the numbers and has experience with taxes. Randy Ollis was grateful for the great group of applicants. Mayor Fox said Mrs. Deaton's banking experience would be helpful with the new building. Mayor Fox moved to appoint Erica Deaton to fill the remainder of R.L. McIntosh's term. Denise Collier seconded the motion, which carried. All were in agreement.

- Consideration of distributions - Mrs. Hockaday said that after looking at the statutes and talking to the ABC Commission and auditor, it appears that the 3.5% bottle tax is a mandatory distribution that is in the budget and will not change. She said that since they are building a new building and getting a loan, the Burnsville ABC will need the Town to approve the opening of a capital improvement bank account for loan proceeds. This way the loan proceeds will not be considered working capital. The Town could take up a request to forgive anything over and above the working capital in the future, although there is none expected. Judy Buchanan moved to approve the opening of a capital improvement account. Randy Ollis seconded the motion, which carried. All were in agreement.
- Economic Development Commission - EDC Director Jamie McMahan said that lately the focus has been on procurement and the obligation of money for projects.
  - DEQ has approved an allocation of \$688,000 for the Bakers Creek public well project and \$1.2 million for the sewer line extension to Charlie Brown Road with RFQs due on November 14th.
  - He expects a notice of award from DEQ on the \$6.05 million for the Pine Swamp wastewater treatment plant improvements in the next week or two.
  - EDA grant/Golden Leaf funds for the Micaville waterline extension to Little Leaf Farms will go out for construction bids this quarter, maybe January.
  - The County has received bids on old library/Toe River Arts gallery space.
  - The Farmers Market has received timbers for the outdoor pavilion to be erected soon. The RFP's for design build have been put out for the two-story building portion.
- Yancey/Burnsville Chamber of Commerce - Chamber Director Christy Wood estimated that Trick or Treat Main Street had around 6000 people attend. She has been working with the tourism office on magazine and digital ads. She mentioned a *Building Outdoor Communities* stakeholder meeting, helping attendees be grant ready, preparations for Shop Small Saturday, the Christmas Parade, Merry Main Street event, Annual Chamber Gala, a new remote networking event, and an upcoming business after hours.

Closed Session - There was no closed session.

Next Town Council Meeting - December 1, 2022, 6pm

Adjourn - With there being no further business, Randy Ollis moved to adjourn the meeting at 7:18pm. Judy Buchanan seconded the motion, meeting adjourned.

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J. Chad Fox, Town Clerk

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T. Russell Fox, Mayor

**Todd McNeill**  
Chair of the Board

**Doug Matheson**  
Vice-Chair



**Dennis Aldridge**  
Secretary

**Larry Fontaine**  
Treasurer

468 New Market Blvd.  
Boone, NC 28607

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**Executive Board Meeting  
November 21, 2022 | 7:00 p.m.  
HCCOG Board Room**

**I. CALL TO ORDER AND INVOCATION**

*Todd McNeill, Executive Board Chairman*

**II. CONSIDERATION OF OCTOBER 2022 MINUTES [ACTION]**

*Todd McNeill, Executive Board Chairman*

**III. FINANCIAL MATTERS**

*Julie Page, Finance Officer*

- Financial Highlights as of October 31, 2022 [ACTION]
- Budget Amendment #3 [ACTION]

**IV. 2022 CEDS PRESENTATION [ACTION]**

(10 minutes)

*Phil Trew, Planning and Development Director*

**V. WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT UPDATE**

(10 minutes)

*Misty Bishop-Price, Workforce Development Director*

**VI. AREA AGENCY ON AGING UPDATE**

(10 minutes)

*Zack Green, Area Agency on Aging Director*

**VII. REPORT FROM THE ADVISORY COMMITTEE & EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**

(10 minutes)

*Julie Wiggins, Executive Director*

- Update on Regional Programs, Projects, and Issues
- Other Business

**VIII. BOARD MEMBER COMMENTS**

**IX. CHAIRMAN'S COMMENTS**

**X. OTHER BUSINESS**

**XI. PUBLIC COMMENT**

**XII. ADJOURNMENT [ACTION]**

**HIGH COUNTRY COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS  
EXECUTIVE BOARD MEETING  
OCTOBER 17, 2022  
MINUTES**

The Executive Board of the High Country Council of Governments (HCCOG) met October 17, 2022, 7:00pm, at the High Country Council of Governments Office in Boone. The following members were present at the meeting: Charles E. Vines, Brenda Lyerly, Eddie Settle, Mike Inscore, Bill Osborne, Otis Church, Bill Wheeler, Dennis Aldridge, Larry Fontaine, Steve Pitman, Jim Blevins, Tom Hartman, Tim Futrelle, Doug Matheson, and Todd McNeill. The following staff and guests were present at the meeting: Julie Wiggins, Julie Page, Cory Osborne, Zack Green, Sarah Price, and Victoria Oxentine.

**CALL TO ORDER AND INVOCATION**

Chairman McNeill welcomed everyone to the High Country Council of Governments October Executive Board meeting. Chairman McNeill called on Dennis Aldridge to lead the invocation and Tim Futrelle to lead the board in the Pledge of Allegiance.

**CONSIDERATION OF MINUTES**

Charles E. Vines made a motion to approve the September 19, 2022 Executive Board minutes. Otis Church seconded the motion. Motion carried.

**FINANCIAL MATTERS**

**Financial Highlights**

Finance Officer, Julie Page presented the Financial Highlights as of September 30, 2022 (Attachment A) and reviewed year to date revenues versus expenditures and balances. Mrs. Page noted that the audit will hopefully be completed by October 31<sup>st</sup> and then will be presented at the December meeting. Mrs. Page is working with the auditors to ensure they have everything they need.

Mike Inscore made a motion to approve the Financial Highlights as of September 30, 2022. Otis Church seconded the motion. Motion carried.

**ECONOMIC RECOVERY AND RESILIENCE UPDATE**

Cory Osborne, Director of Economic Recovery and Resilience presented a handout (Attachment B) overviewing the work his department is involved in. Mr. Osborne announced new funding available from the Treasury called the Local and Tribal Consistency Fund (LATCF). Mr. Osborne noted that all seven of the High Country counties are eligible for the funding since they are classified as revenue sharing counties. Mr. Osborne announced that counties must apply for this funding through the Treasury Portal by January 31, 2023, or they will lose the money. Mr. Osborne also announced a new hire for the department, Sarah Price has stepped into the Resiliency Planner role from the Area Agency on Aging department. Mr. Osborne discussed department activity and work for the future.

**AREA AGENCY ON AGING UPDATE**

Zack Green, Area Agency on Aging (AAA) Director presented a slideshow (Attachment C) reviewing the recent work of the AAA department. Mr. Green discussed recent staff transitions and new hires in the AAA. Mr. Green reviewed the Home and Community Care Block Grant, and that this ARPA funding will go directly to service providers in the region. Mr. Green also discussed

the ACL Falls Prevention Grant the AAA was recently awarded. This grant will help to expand programs region-wide for three years. Mr. Green also reviewed FY21 annual report highlights and noted that the volume of work for older adults in the region is high. Mr. Green noted several engagement opportunities available.

### **REPORT FROM THE ADVISORY COMMITTEE AND EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**

Julie Wiggins, Executive Director thanked department heads for their updates/presentations and hard work. Ms. Wiggins noted that as of October 31, 2022 all HCCOG staff positions will be filled. Ms. Wiggins announced that the roof replacement will begin this week. Ms. Wiggins also announced that the salary study is still underway and extra employee interviews will be held tomorrow. The General Assembly is approaching long session, therefore the HCCOG Legislative Committee will begin working on priorities in the coming months.

### **BOARD MEMBER COMMENTS**

Bill Osborne told the board that Mayor Wes Brinegar had a heart attack last week and underwent surgery at Baptist in Winston. Mr. Osborne requested prayers for Wes and his family during his recovery.

### **CHAIRMAN'S COMMENTS**

Todd McNeill, Executive Board Chairman told the board that Kevin Reece has been sick and, in the hospital, and that is why he is not in attendance this evening. Chairman McNeill also noted that he is now serving as Committee Chair for the North Carolina Association of County Commissioners (NCACC) and Dennis Aldridge is now the NCACC District 14 Director. Chairman McNeill discussed an opening for a board of directors' member on the NCACC Risk Pool Board.

### **OTHER BUSINESS**

Victoria Oxentine, Communications Manager noted that the October 2022 ReCOGNition was now published and thanked everyone for their regional submissions.

### **ADJOURNMENT**

As there were no other comments or business, Otis Church made a motion to adjourn. Tom Hartman seconded the motion. Motion carried. Meeting adjourned at 7:46 pm.

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Chairman, Todd McNeill

---

Clerk to the Board, Victoria Oxentine

Date \_\_\_\_\_

**Todd McNeill**  
Chair of the Board

**Doug Matheson**  
Vice-Chair



**Dennis Aldridge**  
Secretary

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Treasurer

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## FINANCIAL HIGHLIGHTS November 21, 2022, Executive Board Meeting

<b>OCTOBER 31, 2022</b>					
		<b>2022</b>			
Total Fund Balance - Governmental Funds		\$ 1,889,108			
Restricted Fund Balance - GF		\$ 71,514			
Assigned Fund Balance - GF		\$ 517,457			
Unassigned Fund Balance - GF		\$ 1,300,137			
	<b>2023</b>				
Total Expenditures - YTD	\$ 1,755,501	\$ 6,027,586			
Total Fund Balance as % of General Fund Expenditures*	29.55%	31.34%			
Unassigned Fund Balance as % of General Fund Expenditures*	20.34%	21.57%			
<b>*FY2023 Budget Expenditures \$6,392,425</b>		<b>FISCAL YEAR 2022-2023</b>			
		<b>BUDGET</b>	<b>ACTUAL</b>		
<b>Total Revenue</b>					
General	\$ 395,137	\$ 292,913			
Planning/Development	\$ 905,947	\$ 292,627			
Area Agency on Aging	\$ 2,874,575	\$ 650,181			
Workforce Development	\$ 2,216,766	\$ 441,981			
	\$ 6,392,425	\$ 1,677,702			
<b>Total Expenditures</b>					
General	\$ 395,137	\$ 318,546			
Planning/Development	\$ 905,947	\$ 299,489			
Area Agency on Aging	\$ 2,874,575	\$ 704,080			
Workforce Development	\$ 2,216,766	\$ 433,386			
	\$ 6,392,425	\$ 1,755,501			
Revenues over (under) expenditures		\$ (77,798)			
<b>FY2023 PROJECT ORDINANCES</b>					
<b>DESCRIPTION</b>	<b>FISCAL YEAR</b>	<b>BUDGET</b>	<b>REVENUE</b>	<b>EXPENSE</b>	<b>VARIANCE</b>
AMERICAN RESCUE PLAN ACT (ARPA)	2022	\$ 593,750.00	\$ -	\$ 71,721.57	\$ (71,721.57)
CDC VACCINE GRANT	2022	\$ 41,765.00	\$ 32,481.00	\$ 39,940.23	\$ (7,459.23)
DISASTER RECOVERY NCARCOG	2023	\$ 331,250.00	\$ -	\$ 5,646.43	\$ (5,646.43)
DOGWOOD HEALTH TRUST	2023	\$ 100,000.00	\$ 100,000.00	\$ 2,031.30	\$ 97,968.70
ASU FALLS PREVENTION	2023	\$ 251,959.00	\$ -	\$ 1,067.88	\$ (1,067.88)
ARPA FCSP	2023	\$ 125,769.00	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
ARPA P&A		\$ 147,189.00	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
ARPA OMB		\$ 10,456.00	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
ARPA EBHP		\$ 39,013.00	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
ALLEGHANY COUNCIL ON AGING ARPA		\$ 58,120.00	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
GENERATIONS ASHE ARPA		\$ 114,666.00	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
AVERY SENIOR SERVICES ARPA		\$ 71,006.00	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
MITCHELL SENIOR CENTER ARPA		\$ 66,601.00	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
WATAUGA PROJECT ON AGING ARPA		\$ 146,001.00	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
BROC ARPA		\$ 154,860.00	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
WILKES SENIOR RESOURCES ARPA		\$ 107,181.00	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
RUBY PARDUE BLACKBURN ADC ARPA		\$ 13,792.00	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
YANCEY COMMUNITY CENTER ARPA		\$ 77,944.00	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
LEGAL AID OF NC ARPA		\$ 27,000.00	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
		\$ 1,159,598.00	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
<b>TOTALS</b>		<b>\$ 2,478,322.00</b>	<b>\$ 132,481.00</b>	<b>\$ 120,407.41</b>	<b>\$ 12,073.59</b>
<b>Cash Balances</b>					
Operating Account	\$ 287,339				
NCCMT Account	\$ 1,639,833				
	\$ 1,927,172				

The High Country Council of Governments will be the leader in initiating and providing solutions to regional and local challenges, supporting a bright future for the High Country.

**NOTES:**

- **Budget Amendment #3**
- **Audit will be presented at the December meeting**

*The financial information in the report reflects the HCCOG's overall financial position for the fiscal year through October 31, 2022 and is for the management discussion purposes only.*

Julie Page, Finance Officer

### BUDGET AMENDMENT #3

**BE IT RESOLVED** by the Board of High Country Council of Governments that the following amendment be made to the Budget Resolution for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2023.

#### **SECTION 1: REVENUES BY SOURCE**

##### **PLANNING/DEVELOPMENT FUND**

Local	\$ 50,000.00
TOTAL PLANNING/DEVELOPMENT FUND	\$ 50,000.00
<b>TOTAL REVENUES BY SOURCE</b>	<b>\$ 50,000.00</b>

#### **SECTION II: EXPENDITURES BY PROGRAM**

##### **SPECIAL REVENUE FUNDS**

Planning/Development Fund	\$ 50,000.00
TOTAL SPECIAL REVENUE FUNDS	\$ 50,000.00
<b>TOTAL EXPENDITURES BY PROGRAM</b>	<b>\$ 50,000.00</b>
<b>FY2022-2023 ORIGINAL BUDGET</b>	<b>\$ 6,811,162.00</b>
<b>Budget Amendment #1 7-18-2022</b>	<b>\$ 4,529.00</b>
<b>Budget Amendment #2 9-19-2022</b>	<b>\$ (423,266.00)</b>
<b>Budget Amendment #3 11-21-2022</b>	<b>\$ 50,000.00</b>
<b>TOTAL AMENDED BUDGET FY2023</b>	<b>\$ 6,442,425.00</b>

BY VOTE OF THE HIGH COUNTRY COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS UPON MOTION BY:

\_\_\_\_\_ AND SECONDED BY \_\_\_\_\_

THIS THE \_\_\_\_\_ DAY OF \_\_\_\_\_ 2022.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Todd McNeill, Chair of the Board

\_\_\_\_\_  
Dennis Aldridge, Secretary

# **2022 COMPREHENSIVE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY (CEDS)**



## **High Country Council of Governments Economic Development District**

Prepared for: US Economic Development Administration  
Prepared by: High Country Council of Governments  
468 New Market Blvd.  
Boone, NC 28607  
828-265-5434  
[www.regiond.org](http://www.regiond.org)

This document was prepared with financial assistance from the U.S. Economic Development Administration.



## ABSTRACT

Title: 2022 Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS)

Economic Development District: High Country Council of Governments

Member Local Governments:

Alleghany County	Town of Sparta
Ashe County	Town of Jefferson; Town of Lansing; Town of West Jefferson
Avery County	Town of Banner Elk; Town of Crossnore; Town of Elk Park; Town of Newland; Village of Sugar Mountain
Mitchell County	Town of Bakersville; Town of Spruce Pine
Watauga County	Town of Beech Mountain; Town of Blowing Rock; Town of Boone; Town of Seven Devils
Wilkes County	Town of North Wilkesboro; Town of Ronda; Town of Wilkesboro
Yancey County	Town of Burnsville

Author: Phillip Trew, AICP  
Director of Planning and Development  
High Country Council of Governments

Date: November 2022

Purpose: Pursuant to 13 CFR 303.6 and 303.7, High Country Council of Governments maintains a CEDS to address the economic development needs of the District.

Content: CEDS development process  
Summary background data  
Resources for economic development  
SWOT analysis  
Action plan  
Implementation plan  
Evaluation framework

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# **1. CEDS Development**

## **Introduction**

High Country Council of Governments (HCCOG) is one of sixteen multi-county planning districts in North Carolina. The North Carolina Department of Administration designated HCCOG as the Lead Regional Organization (LRO) for the seven counties of Alleghany, Ashe, Avery, Mitchell, Watauga, Wilkes, and Yancey in 1974.

High Country COG was designated an Economic Development District (EDD) by the Economic Development Administration (EDA) on March 23, 1976. The Council has also been designated a Local Development District (LDD) by the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC). The purpose of the Economic Development District and the Local Development District designations is to provide the administrative capacity to establish a continuous economic development planning process which identifies problems and potentials, creates goals and strategies, and provide an implementation organization where necessary and feasible.

Other designations for HCCOG include Area Agency on Aging (AAA), administrator of the High Country Workforce Development Board, and Lead Planning Agency (LPA) for the High Country Rural Transportation Planning Organization (RPO).

The HCCOG Executive Board is the EDD's Governing Body.

## **CEDS Strategy Committee**

The High Country Workforce Development Board (HCWDB) serves as the HCCOG CEDS Strategy Committee.

HCWDB members are:

Jeff Dreyer (CHAIR), American Emergency Vehicles (AEV)  
Edward Hinson (VICE-CHAIR), SkyLine/SkyBest  
Jill Austin, Jill's Hairport  
Jessica Auten, Courtyard by Marriott  
Stacey Barker, Carolina Farm Credit  
Cathy Barr, Ashe County Economic Development  
Michael Birkmire, NC Vocational Rehabilitation Services  
Whitney Brasington, Mountain Electronics  
Tara Brossa, Hampton Inn & Suites  
Sherry Carpenter, Goodwill Industries of Northwest NC  
Felicia Culbreath-Setzer, NC Department of Commerce  
Ben Garrett, Dreamwalls/Gardner Glass Products, Inc.  
Jason Nunn, Wilkes County Fraternal Order of Police  
Lynette Orbovich, State Employees Association of NC  
Scott Reece, The Quartz Corporation

Jennifer Shaffer, Appalachian State University  
Curtis Taylor, BRP  
Rich Voisinet, Interflex Group  
Amber Westall Briggs, Avery-Mitchell-Yancey Library System  
Debbie Woodard, Wilkes Community College

## **CEDS Development Process**

HCCOG staff developed the 2022 CEDS. Various methods of gathering input were utilized. Below is a timeline of major meetings/tasks related to the CEDS development:

- September 10, 2020 – initial meeting with CEDS Strategy Committee to discuss 2022 CEDS purpose, process, and timeline
- October 18, 2021 - meeting with HCCOG Executive Board to discuss 2022 CEDS purpose, process, and timeline
- October/November 2021 – distribution of Economic Development Survey to stakeholders in the district
- July 14, 2022 – meeting with CEDS Strategy Committee to refine CEDS development process and content
- July 12, 2022 – Mitchell County Stakeholder meeting \*
- July 19, 2022 – Ashe County Stakeholder meeting \*
- July 20, 2022 – Avery County Stakeholder meeting \*
- August 2, 2022 – Watauga County Stakeholder meeting \*
- August 3, 2022 – Yancey County Stakeholder meeting \*
- August 4, 2022 – Alleghany County Stakeholder meeting \*
- August 9, 2022 – Wilkes County Stakeholder meeting \*
- November 10, 2022 - meeting with CEDS Strategy Committee to review/refine draft CEDS document
- November 21, 2022 - meeting with HCCOG Executive Board to adopt 2022 CEDS

\* County stakeholders included:

- Town and County Managers
- County Economic Development Commission Directors
- Chamber of Commerce Directors
- Tourism Development Authority Directors
- Electric Membership Cooperative staff
- NC State University Cooperative Extension Directors
- Community College staff
- UDSA Rural Development staff
- Commercial lenders
- Appalachian State University staff

- Non-profit Directors
- Private business owners
- HCWDB (CEDS Strategy Committee) members

Other stakeholders consulted for input on the CEDS included:

- NC Department of Commerce
- Economic Development Partnership of NC
- NC State University Industry Expansion Solutions
- NC Broadband Infrastructure Office

A draft 2022 CEDS document was distributed to stakeholders and made available to the public for comment on October 20, 2022

Additionally, HCCOG staff reviewed existing County, Municipal, and Regional plans to gather input on the CEDS. Plans included Economic Development Plans, Comprehensive Transportation Plans, Farmland Preservation Plans, Downtown Master Plans, the High Country RPO's Priority Needs List, and the High Country Workforce Development Board's Strategic Plan.

HCCOG's ongoing project-level work with local governments also provides input on the CEDS.

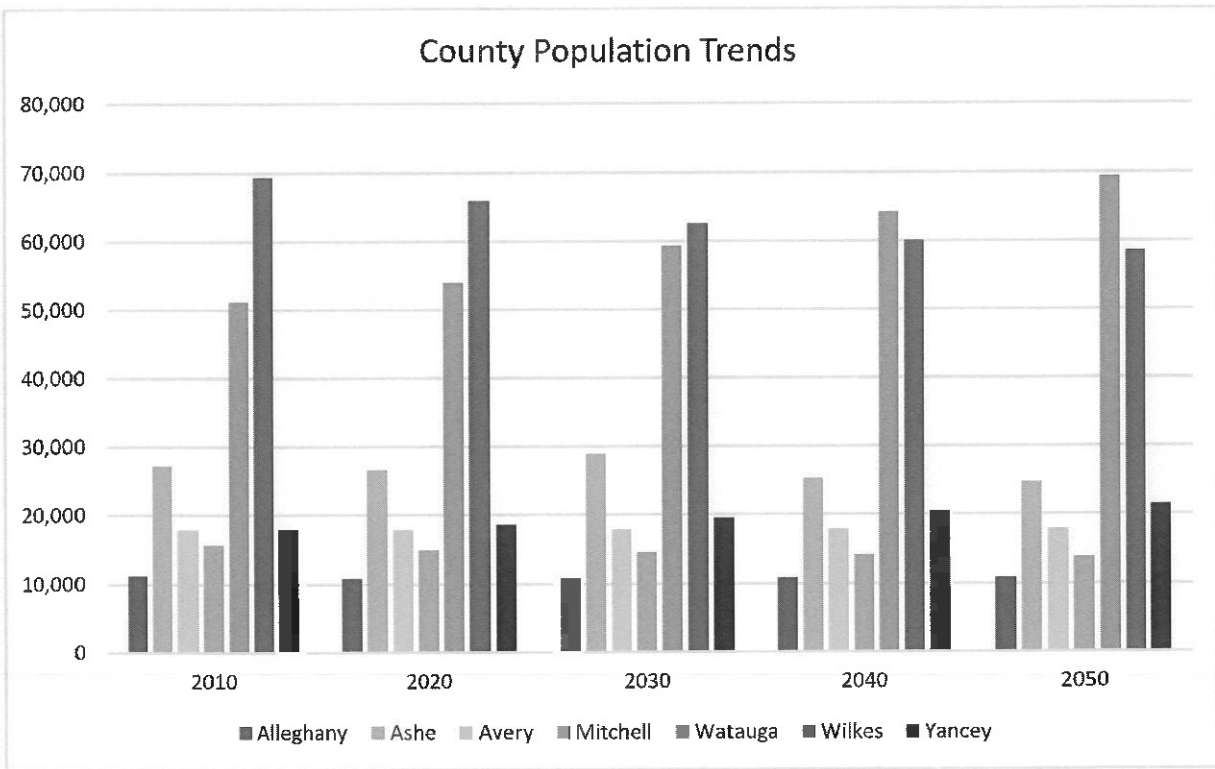
## 2. Summary Background

### Data

Population Trends by County

County	2010	2020	2030	2040	2050
Alleghany	11,150	10,876	10,811	10,812	10,811
Ashe	27,239	26,533	25,858	25,245	24,630
Avery	17,805	17,807	17,756	17,757	17,756
Mitchell	15,581	14,902	14,479	14,120	13,784
Watauga	51,061	53,909	59,284	64,159	69,258
Wilkes	69,311	65,827	62,490	59,941	58,483
Yancey	17,817	18,491	19,444	20,454	21,460
HC Region	210,018	208,345	210,122	212,487	216,182

Source: NC Office of State Budget and Management



### Median Age Statistics

	Alleghany	Ashe	Avery	Mitchell	Watauga	Wilkes	Yancey	North Carolina	USA
<b>Median Age</b>	50.6	48.6	45.4	47.2	32.7	45.1	47.9	38.9	38.2

Source: 2020 American Community Survey

### Urban/Rural Representation

- 24.0% urban
- 76.0% rural

### Income and Poverty

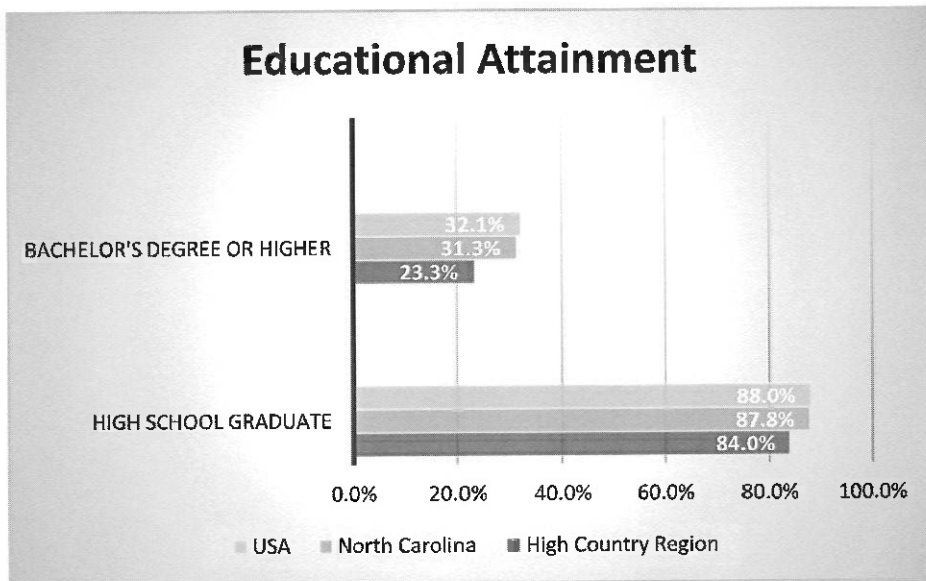
	2020 MHI	2020 PCI	Poverty Rate
Alleghany	\$37,158	\$26,026	18.1%
Ashe	\$43,030	\$25,282	14.5%
Avery	\$42,695	\$24,036	15.8%
Mitchell	\$48,841	\$26,975	14.0%
Watauga	\$46,453	\$27,962	15.8%
Wilkes	\$44,980	\$25,634	14.4%
Yancey	\$44,554	\$25,767	14.9%
North Carolina	\$56,642	\$31,993	12.9%
USA	\$64,994	\$35,384	11.4%

Source: 2020 American Community Survey

### Education

	High School Graduate	Bachelor's Degree or Higher
High Country Region	84.0%	23.3%
North Carolina	87.8%	31.3%
USA	88.0%	32.1%

Source: 2019 American Community Survey



**Employment Share and Wages, NAICS Code – 2nd Quarter 2020**

NAICS Sector		High Country Region	NC	Wage High Country	Wage NC
1011	Natural Resources and Mining	1.91%	0.73%	\$47,658.52	\$39,863.20
1012	Construction	5.61%	5.51%	\$43,017.00	\$55,348.28
1013	Manufacturing	12.10%	10.60%	\$39,485.16	\$60,227.96
1021	Trade; Transportation; Utilities	20.38%	20.20%	\$33,287.28	\$45,922.24
1022	Information	1.02%	1.79%	\$47,253.96	\$89,499.28
1023	Financial Activities	3.35%	6.07%	\$49,912.20	\$86,032.44
1024	Professional Service	7.76%	14.96%	\$43,114.24	\$67,054.00
1025	Education and Healthcare	27.60%	23.36%	\$46,426.64	\$51,855.96
1026	Leisure and Hospitality	10.91%	8.46%	\$19,844.76	\$21,095.36
1027	Other Services	2.55%	2.38%	\$29,790.80	\$39,463.32
1028	Public Administration	6.81%	5.94%	\$41,255.24	\$54,763.80

*Source: NC Department of Commerce*

### Top Employers (Annual, 2020)

County	County Rank	Company/Institution
<b>Alleghany</b>		
	1	Alleghany Board of Education
	2	Parkdale Mills Inc.
	3	Alleghany County
<b>Ashe</b>		
	1	American Emergency Vehicles
	2	Ashe County Board of Education
	3	County of Ashe
<b>Avery</b>		
	1	Department of Public Safety
	2	Avery County Schools
	3	County of Avery
<b>Mitchell</b>		
	1	Sibelco North America, Inc
	2	Mitchell Board of Education
	3	MH Blue Ridge Medical Center
<b>Watauga</b>		
	1	Appalachian State University
	2	Appalachian Regional Health Care System
	3	Samaritan's Purse
<b>Wilkes</b>		
	1	Tyson Farms, Inc.
	2	Wilkes Board of Education
	3	Lowes Home Centers, Inc.
<b>Yancey</b>		
	1	Altec Industries, Inc.
	2	County of Yancey
	3	Ingles Markets, Inc.

Source: NC Department of Commerce

### Community Investment in the High Country 2020

County	Project	Jobs Created	Investment Amount (\$ Thousands)
Mitchell	The Quartz Corporation	10	\$3,550.35
Yancey	Bakersville Community Medical Clinic	16	\$455.57
Watauga	ECR Software	31	\$1,126.16

Source: NC Department of Commerce

### Unemployment Rates (Unadjusted)

	May 2021	May 2020	May 2019	May 2018
High Country Region	4.5%	11.3%	3.8%	3.6%
North Carolina	5.2%	11.9%	3.9%	3.9%
USA	5.5%	13%	3.4%	3.6%

Source: NC Department of Commerce

## Effects of COVID-19 and Recovery

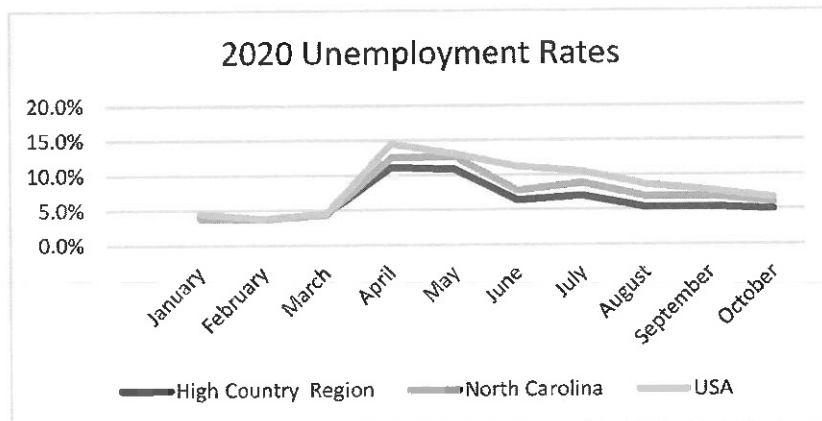
### 2020 Unemployment Rates (Unadjusted)

	January	February	March	April	May	June	July	August	September	October
High Country Region	4.2%	3.8%	4.5%	11.1%	10.9%	6.3%	7.0%	5.2%	5.3%	4.9%
North Carolina	3.8%	3.7%	4.3%	12.5%	12.7%	7.7%	8.8%	6.8%	6.9%	6.0%
USA	4.5%	3.8%	4.5%	14.4%	13.0%	11.2%	10.5%	8.5%	7.7%	6.6%

Source: NC Department of Commerce

	2019 Unemployment	2020 Unemployment	2021 Unemployment
Alleghany	4.6%	7.1%	4.6%
Ashe	3.6%	6.1%	4.0%
Avery	3.6%	6.1%	3.9%
Mitchell	4.5%	7.5%	5.1%
Watauga	3.4%	6.1%	3.7%
Wilkes	4.0%	6.6%	4.7%
Yancey	3.7%	6.4%	4.3%
High Country Region	3.8%	6.4%	4.2%
North Carolina	3.8%	7.1%	4.8%
USA	3.7%	8.1%	5.3%

Source: NC Department of Commerce

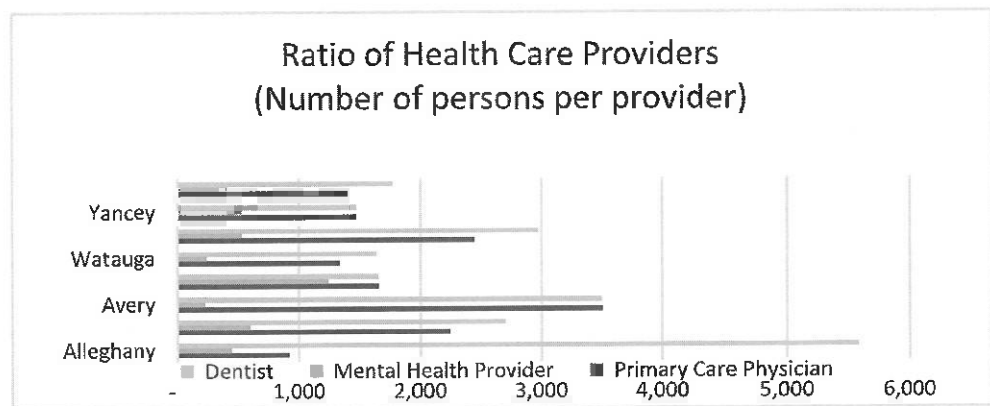


## Health

### Social Determinants of Health

	Health Ranking in State	% of Adult Pop. that Smokes	% of Adult pop. that is obese	Adequate Access to Exercise	Teen Births per 1000	% Not Insured	Persons for every Primary Care Dr.	Persons for every Mental Health Provider	Persons for every Dentist	% of unsafe homes
Alleghany	46	17%	26%	27%	43	18%	920	450	5,580	13%
Ashe	18	17%	26%	59%	29	16%	2,250	600	2,710	12%
Avery	32	17%	27%	100%	22	20%	3,510	240	3,500	13%
Mitchell	39	16%	27%	100%	33	14%	1,670	1,250	1,670	14%
Watauga	10	18%	17%	92%	5	14%	1,340	250	1,650	26%
Wilkes	65	18%	43%	74%	39	16%	2,450	530	2,980	14%
Yancey	31	17%	30%	100%	34	15%	1,480	530	1,480	13%
North Carolina		17%	31%	74%	24	13%	1,410	410	1,780	16%

Source: County Health Rankings – University of Wisconsin



## Housing

### Housing Characteristics

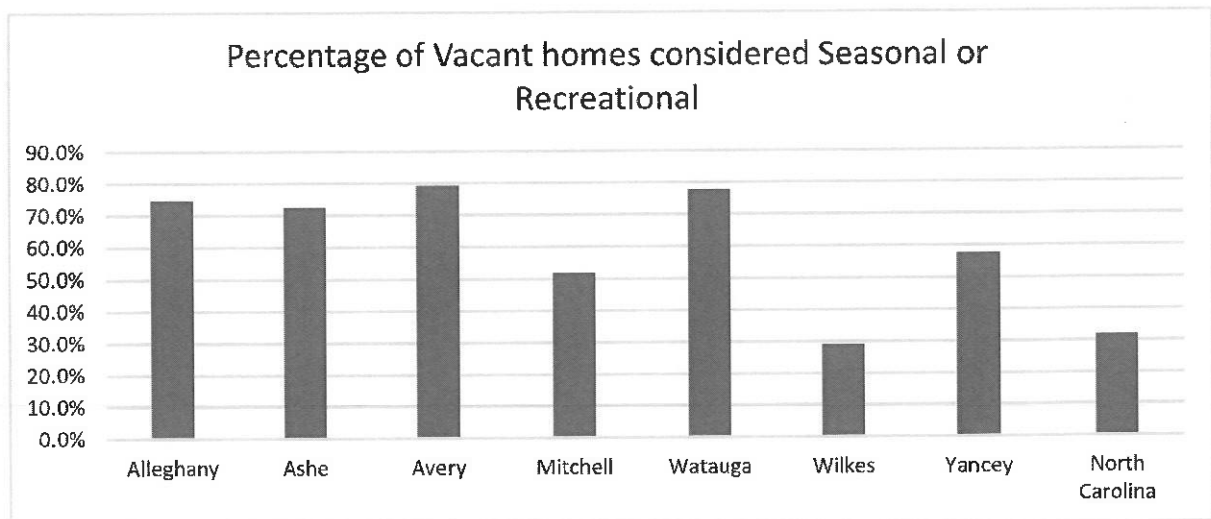
	Median Home Value	Occupied Units	Vacancy Rate	Rental Rate (occupied units)	Average Monthly Rent
Alleghany	\$150,500	5,001	39.0%	24.5%	\$626
Ashe	\$158,200	11,885	33.4%	21.0%	\$657
Avery	\$151,800	6,569	54.0%	22.3%	\$759
Mitchell	\$164,200	6,402	27.6%	20.4%	\$620
Watauga	\$246,000	21,453	37.0%	39.1%	\$925
Wilkes	\$129,200	28,902	14.1%	24.1%	\$642
Yancey	\$166,900	7,466	33.8%	27.1%	\$642
North Carolina	\$182,100	4,031,592	14.0%	34.3%	\$932

Source: 2020 5-year American Community Survey

### Status of Vacant Units

	For Rent	For Sale	For Seasonal, Recreational, or Occasional Use
Alleghany	2.9%	3.1%	74.6%
Ashe	3.2%	2.8%	72.4%
Avery	6.6%	2.2%	79.2%
Mitchell	6.8%	6.5%	51.5%
Watauga	3.8%	4.4%	77.6%
Wilkes	9.5%	3.8%	29.0%
Yancey	4.5%	7.6%	57.3%
North Carolina	1.5%	7.1%	31.7%

Source: 2019 5-year American Community Survey



## **Outdoor Recreation**

### **North Carolina State Park Land in the High Country**

<b>Park</b>	<b>County</b>	<b>Acreage</b>	<b>Trails (miles)</b>
Elk Knob	Watauga	4,303	5.40
Grandfather Mountain	Avery	2,456	12.80
Mt. Jefferson	Ashe	1,188	6.25
Mt. Mitchell	Yancey/Buncombe	4,789	15.90
New River	Alleghany/Ashe	750	12.27
Stone Mountain	Alleghany/Wilkes	14,100	23.50

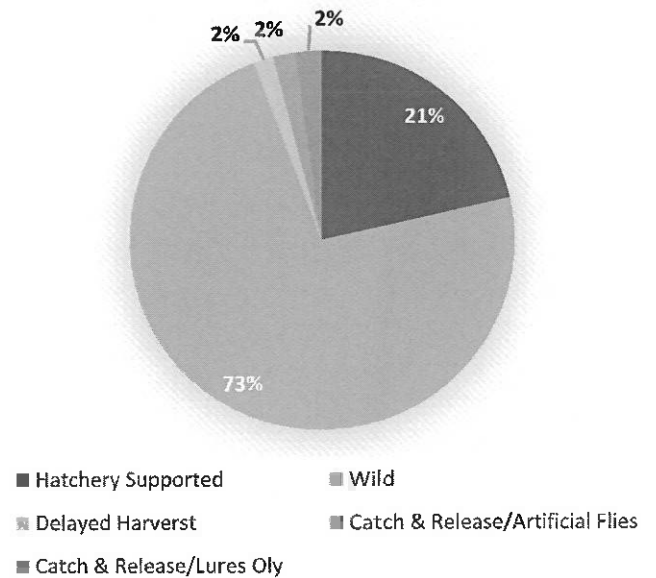
*Source: NC State Parks*

### **Trout Streams**

	<b>Number of Hatchery Supported Trout Waters</b>	<b>Number of Wild Trout Waters</b>	<b>Total miles of Classified Trout Streams</b>
Alleghany	10	1	52.2
Ashe	11	2	105.1
Avery	9	14	105.5
Mitchell	7	4	102.4
Watauga	13	7	94.6
Wilkes	14	3	88.7
Yancey	4	4	129.6

*Source: NC Wildlife Resource Commission; NC DEQ*

### **Trout Waters By Classification In the High Country**



# **Regional Situation**

## **Overview**

Due to factors such as steep terrain, distance to Interstates, and the relatively small labor pool, the High Country District has historically trailed much of North Carolina in manufacturing. Over the past two decades the manufacturing sector of the district's economy has been in decline; however, technological innovations and specialized products have helped stabilize the manufacturing base. Government jobs account for approximately 20% of employment in the district, with healthcare, retail trade, and hospitality industries also providing large shares of employment.

Interest in expanding the local food economy continues to grow throughout the district, with potential for entrepreneurial development strong in the agricultural sector. Fine arts and crafts production occurs in the district, primarily in Yancey, Mitchell, and Ashe Counties.

All of the counties in the district have become tourist destinations for North Carolina and the Southeast, and tourism is a major component of the regional economy. Major tourist attractions include three ski resorts, Tweetsie Railroad, and annual events such as the Merlefest music festival and the Grandfather Mountain Highland Games. Outdoor recreation opportunities exist in six State Parks, portions of Pisgah National Forest, and along the Blue Ridge Parkway. US Forest Service and National Park Service lands total 177 square miles (7% of the district's land area). While private attractions and public lands serve as draws to tourists, the downtowns in the district provide support services (retail, lodging, dining). Water, sewer, and pedestrian facility maintenance/improvements in downtowns are necessary to support the tourism sector of the economy.

Agriculture remains a major component of the district's economy, specifically Christmas Tree and livestock production. Valuable mineral resources are present in Mitchell County, including quartz, feldspar, and mica.

The service industry plays a dominant role in the economy of the High Country Council of Governments district. Encompassing retail trade, health services, food service, lodging, business services, finance, and real estate, the service industry represents the largest employment sector in all seven counties. The tourism economies of all seven counties contribute significantly to the district's service economy. Appalachian State University, with an enrollment of 20,000, contributes to the service economy of Town of Boone, Watauga County, and (to a lesser degree) the district.

## Physical Infrastructure

### Water and Sewer Systems

System	Water Demand/Supply	Wastewater Treatment Demand/Capacity
<b>Alleghany County</b>		
Sparta	57%	40%
<b>Ashe County</b>		
Jefferson	1%	41%
Lansing	19%	18%
West Jefferson	29%	69%
<b>Avery County</b>		
Banner Elk	60%	38%
Crossnore	52%	53%
Elk Park	44%	62%
Linville Land Harbor	71%	80%
Newland	29%	33%
Sugar Mountain	23%	21%
<b>Mitchell County</b>		
Bakersville	17%	n/a
Spruce Pine	43%	39%
<b>Watauga County</b>		
Appalachian State University	12%	8%
Beech Mountain	197%	60%
Blowing Rock	98%	50%
Boone	25%	42%
Seven Devils	29%	n/a
<b>Wilkes County</b>		
Blue Ridge Water Association	34%	n/a
Broadway Water Association	40%	n/a
Moravian Falls Water Works	61%	n/a
Mulberry Fairplains Water Association	45%	n/a
North Wilkesboro	17%	65%
Ronda	25%	n/a
West Wilkes Water Association	41%	n/a
Wilkesboro	31%	97%
<b>Yancey County</b>		
Burnsville	51%	73%

Source: NC Department of Environmental Quality – 2020 Local Water Supply Plans

### **Natural Gas**

Natural gas service is provided by Piedmont Natural Gas in Avery, Mitchell, and Yancey Counties, and by Frontier Natural Gas in Ashe, Watauga, and Wilkes Counties. No natural gas service is available in Alleghany County. Additionally, service does not extend to Town of Beech Mountain, Town of Elk Park, Town of Crossnore, Town of Seven Devils, Town of Blowing Rock, Town of Lansing, and Town of Ronda.

### **Electric**

Electric service is provided in the district by different utilities, primarily electric cooperatives.

### **Telecommunications**

#### **Residential/Commercial**

Broadband internet service is provided in the district by a large variety of companies and technologies. Fiber service has been enhanced in the district since 2010 with significant federally-funded middle-mile and last-mile projects. Current local initiatives involve extension of Broadband service to unserved and underserved areas.

#### **Public Wi-Fi**

Free public wi-fi access is expanding in the region. Libraries, NCWorks Career Centers, and most Fire Departments in the district provide free access to the internet via wi-fi. In addition, the Towns of Bakersville, Banner Elk, Burnsville, Spruce Pine, West Jefferson, Lansing, Seven Devils, and Wilkesboro offer free wi-fi access in their downtown areas.

### **Transportation**

The High Country district's transportation network is predominantly highway. No Interstate highways are located within the district, but there are efforts underway to designate a portion of US 421 in Wilkes County as Interstate. If successful, the designation would benefit recruitment of new industry to eastern Wilkes County. Alleghany and Avery Counties have no four-lane highways, but recent widening projects to US 421, US 321, and US 19E have all improved commuter and freight access in and out of the district.

Commercial rail lines serve eastern Wilkes County, Mitchell County, and Yancey County, but serve primarily through-traffic. No commercial airports exist in the High Country district. Nearby commercial air service is located in Asheville, NC, Greensboro, NC, and Tri-Cities Airport in Tennessee. General aviation services are provided at four local airports in the district. Ashe, Avery, and Wilkes Counties operate and maintain public airports, while Watauga has a private airport with few facilities.

The highway transportation network is especially important to the economy of the district because of the large laborsheds. Due to the relatively small workforce and the distances between employment centers, workforce commuting of 50 miles is common and spans neighboring counties in NC, Tennessee, and Virginia.

## Clusters

A cluster is a regional concentration of related industries in a particular location. Clusters are a striking feature of economies, making regions uniquely competitive for jobs and private investment. They consist of companies, suppliers, and service providers, as well as government agencies and other institutions that provide specialized training and education, information, research, and technical support.

Regional economies are made up of two types of clusters, each with different patterns of geographic presence and different competitive dynamics. **Traded clusters** are groups of related industries that serve markets beyond the region in which they are located. They are free to choose their location of operation (unless the location of natural resources drives where they can be) and are highly concentrated in a few regions, tending to only appear in regions that afford specific competitive advantages. Since traded clusters compete in cross-regional markets, they are exposed to competition from other regions. Examples of traded clusters include Financial Services in New York City, Information Technology in Silicon Valley, and Video Production and Distribution in Los Angeles. Traded clusters are the "engines" of regional economies; without strong traded clusters it is virtually impossible for a region to reach high levels of overall economic performance.

**Local clusters**, in contrast, consist of industries that serve the local market. They are prevalent in every region of the country, regardless of the competitive advantages of a particular location. As a result, a region's employment in local clusters is usually proportional to the population of that region. Moreover, the majority of a region's employment comes from jobs in local clusters. Since local clusters are tied to the regions in which they are located, they are not directly exposed to competition from other regions. Examples include Local Entertainment such as movie theaters, Local Health Services such as drug stores and hospitals, and Local Commercial Services such as auto repair shops and drycleaners.

The table below illustrates the dominant traded clusters and local clusters in the High Country district. The traded clusters are reflective of major industries/employers in the respective counties, and the consistency of the local clusters depict the uniformity of employment sectors within the district.

COUNTY	TRADED CLUSTERS	LOCAL CLUSTERS
Alleghany	Textile Manufacturing	Local Health Services
	Wood Products	Local Real Estate, Construction, and Development
	Hospitality and Tourism	Local Hospitality Establishments
Ashe	Automotive	Local Health Services
	Information Technology and Analytical Instruments	Local Real Estate, Construction, and Development
	Lighting and Electrical Equipment	Local Hospitality Establishments
Avery	Hospitality and Tourism	Local Health Services
	Education and Knowledge Creation	Local Real Estate, Construction, and Development
	Business Services	Local Hospitality Establishments
Mitchell	Production Technology and Heavy Machinery	Local Health Services
	Nonmetal Mining	Local Real Estate, Construction, and Development

Watauga	Recreational and Small Electric Goods	Local Hospitality Establishments
	Business Services	Local Hospitality Establishments
	Hospitality and Tourism	Local Health Services
	Distribution and Electronic Commerce	Local Real Estate, Construction, and Development
Wilkes	Business Services	Local Health Services
	Livestock Processing	Local Hospitality Establishments
	Wood Products	Local Real Estate, Construction, and Development
Yancey	Production Technology and Heavy Machinery	Local Health Services
	Textile Manufacturing	Local Real Estate, Construction, and Development
	Upstream Metal Manufacturing	Local Hospitality Establishments

SOURCE: US Cluster Mapping Project, Institute for Strategy and Competitiveness

## Relationship to Larger Region

The High Country district is located between several metropolitan statistical areas (MSAs) in NC and TN. While there is significant daily commuter traffic within and outside the district, there is not a dependency upon any MSA. Neighboring MSAs (Asheville, NC, Hickory, NC, Winston-Salem, NC, Charlotte, NC, and Johnson City/Bristol, TN) provide specialized healthcare services, specialized retail, and job opportunities for High Country residents, but do not serve as employment centers or labor pools for the High Country district. Also, neighboring MSAs are not close enough to spin off supply-chain businesses in the High Country district.

However, the High Country district is located close enough to a large population to serve as a tourist destination. This tourism includes day-trips, weekend trips, and second home residency. The five neighboring MSAs listed above have a total population of 4.4 million.

## Impacts of COVID-19 Pandemic

The High Country NC district suffered similar economic impacts of COVID-19 as the rest of the State and nation, but recovered quicker and more completely. Following business closures and unemployment spikes in April 2020, most counties in the district experienced increases in sales tax and occupancy tax from increased visitation to the district.

Appalachian State University conducted an economic impact analysis of the COVID-19 pandemic focused on five counties (Ashe, Avery, Caldwell, Watauga, and Wilkes). The study analyzed impacts to restaurants and bars for the month of April 2020 resulting from NC Governor's EO 121 requiring closure of all bars and restaurants. Results indicate that COVID-19-related closures and operation interruptions to the

region's restaurant and bar businesses during the month of April 2020 decreased gross regional product by \$52.4 million. This translates into the annual equivalent of losing 675 full-time jobs (annual FTE) or a reduction in full-time equivalent employment of 8,112 (one-month FTE) during the month of April 2020, and corresponding foregone labor income of \$17.2 million. The impact of the extension of the Governor's EO 121 was not included in the analysis.

The longer-term impacts of the COVID-10 pandemic in the High Country NC district include:

- Lack of rental housing as property-owners converted units from long-term to short-term rentals due to high demand from tourists coming to the district from urbanized areas
- Increased volume of emergency response calls; difficulty in retaining EMTs
- Loss of employees at two State prisons located in the district
- Increase in building permit applications
- Shortage of workers due to:
  - Increase in retirements
  - Increased demand for lodging, food services, and retail

### **3. Resources for Economic Development**

#### **Federal**

The primary federal resource for economic development in the High Country district is the US Department of Commerce - Economic Development Administration (EDA). EDA provides funding to the High Country Council of Governments, as well as to local governments and community colleges for individual economic development projects.

USDA Rural Development also offers grants for businesses development projects, as well as programs for housing. The High Country district is served by the USDA Asheville Area Office, the Jefferson Sub Area Office and the Spruce Pine Local Office.

The US Small Business Administration (SBA) offers loans to eligible small businesses, and disaster recovery programs. The US SBA also supports the Small Business Technology Development Center (SBTDC) housed at Appalachian State University in Boone. The SBTDC provides counseling and training to small businesses including working with the SBA to develop and provide informational tools to support business start-ups and existing business expansion. The SBA's State Trade Expansion Program (STEP) provides financial awards to state governments to assist small businesses with export development.

The Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) is an economic development agency established by Congress in 1965. The ARC provides matching funds to local governments, non-profits, and educational institutions for projects that increase job opportunities and incomes.

#### **State**

The NC Department of Commerce (Commerce) and the Economic Development Partnership of NC (EDPNC) coordinate on economic development activities at the State level. Commerce provides economic and community development funds to local governments through a variety of grant programs, and EDPNC works with private business to provide State incentives based on job creation.

Additionally, NC Department of Environmental Quality provides grants to local governments for public water and sewer projects that alleviate environmental and public health threats, which indirectly support business activity.

Three Community Colleges serve the High Country district – Wilkes Community College (WCC, serving Alleghany, Ashe, and Wilkes Counties); Mayland Community College (MCC, serving Avery, Mitchell, and Yancey Counties); and Caldwell Community College and Technical Institute (CCC&TI, serving Watauga County). All three community colleges operate Small Business Centers that provide technical assistance to local businesses.

Appalachian State University (ASU) is located in Town of Boone. In addition to housing the SBTDC mentioned above, ASU operates the Center for Entrepreneurship which helps students and recent graduates launch new businesses. ASU also operates the Center for Economic Research and Policy Analysis (CERPA), which conducts research in the areas of economic development, environment and energy, and experimental economics.

NC State University operates the Industry Expansion Solutions (IES) which assists industry with a variety of services, including Cybersecurity, Lean Manufacturing, OSHA Training, etc. Also under IES, The North

Carolina Manufacturing Extension Partnership (NCMEP) provides manufacturing extension services that enhance the productivity, innovative capacity and technological performance of North Carolina based manufacturing firms. They also work to strengthen the global competitiveness of small- and medium-sized manufacturers.

UNC Chapel Hill houses NCGrowth, a university center that helps businesses and communities create jobs and equitable opportunities through applied research and technical assistance. In partnership with other universities and community organizations, NCGrowth provides technical assistance to businesses and governments on economic development and entrepreneurship projects.

## **Regional**

The High Country Workforce Development Board administers and oversees services related to the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) through its sub-recipients (currently Goodwill industries of NC and Mayland Community College). The WDB is composed of local private sector businesses and employers, along with those in the public sector. The local WDB, along with partners through the NCWorks Career Center's, help advance the needs of workers and employers in NC through a variety of services such as career guidance, access to training and education, job search assistance, and work based learning opportunities.

Carolina West is a seven-county economic development partnership that includes Mitchell and Yancey Counties of the High Country district. Carolina West is comprised primarily of county Economic Development Commission Directors who work on business retention and business recruitment efforts.

## **Local**

Local economic development efforts are primarily coordinated at the county level. The local structures are listed below:

Alleghany County – Alleghany Chamber for Economic Development; full-time President

Ashe County – County department; full-time Director

Avery County – Avery Economic Development Committee; volunteer

Mitchell County – county economic development commission; full-time Director

Watauga – county economic development commission; part-time Director

- Starting January 2023, Watauga County will contract with the Boone Area Chamber of Commerce for economic development activities

Wilkes County - county economic development commission; full-time Director

Yancey County - county economic development commission; full-time Director

Additionally, six counties and four municipalities in the district have Chambers of Commerce that operate independently from the local government.

## 4. Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats

### SWOT ANALYSIS

- Strengths
  - Hospital system
    - Local facilities
    - Partnerships with larger neighboring healthcare systems
  - Fiber connectivity
    - 1:1 device program at County Schools
  - Affordable internet service
  - Local School Systems
    - Strong CTE programs
    - High graduation rates
  - Community Colleges
    - Wilkes Community College's Education Promise scholarship
    - Customized training
    - Satellite campuses in each county
    - Mayland Community College's Anspach Center
  - Universities
    - Appalachian State University
    - Lees-McCrae College
  - Natural Beauty
  - High quality of life
  - Increased 4-lane highway access
  - Strong year-round tourism industry
    - Attractions (golf courses, ski resorts, North Wilkesboro Speedway)
    - Well-established arts and crafts sector
  - Outdoor recreation facilities
    - Blue Ridge Parkway
    - Pisgah National Forest
    - NC State Parks
    - Local parks
- Weaknesses
  - Workforce housing
    - Conversion of long-term rentals to short-term rentals
    - Not enough building contractors
  - Limited geographic scope of centralized water and sewer systems
  - Aging water and sewer infrastructure
  - Lack of commercial property
  - Labor shortage
  - Childcare

- Lack of facilities
    - Lack of workers
    - No option for 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> shift workers
  - Lack of hotels
- Opportunities
  - Telework
    - Remote Tech Outposts
  - Call centers
  - Strong construction market
  - Maximize occupancy tax
  - Establishment of manufacturing operations based on natural resource extraction
  - Attraction of retirees and second homeowners
    - Increased tax base
    - Talent pool
  - Tourism
    - Outdoor recreation
  - Attract sports tournaments
  - Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act
  - Increase in agricultural activity
    - Value-added agricultural products
  - Undeveloped property in certain parts of the district
- Threats
  - Lack of workforce housing
  - Lack of daycare
  - Aging population
    - Declining numbers of children
  - Declining school enrollment
  - Increasing dropout rates
  - Lack of workers in construction trades
  - Loss of farmland to development
  - Consolidation of health care services could result in local facility closures
  - Overuse of recreation facilities
  - Strain on emergency services from increased visitor numbers
  - Reliance on tourism industry jobs

## **5. ACTION PLAN**

### **Goals**

1. Connect employers to a skilled workforce
2. Maintain and improve the district's infrastructure (utilities, transportation, housing) to meet future demand
3. Increase tourist visitation to the district
4. Increase industrial and commercial activity in the district
5. Expand entrepreneurial activity in the district
6. Increase agricultural output

### **Economic Development Foundations**

#### **1. Workforce**

The High Country Workforce Development Board (HCWDB) is the designated entity in the district for delivery of workforce services funded through the US Department of Labor's Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA). WIOA-funded activities are provided through three-year contracts. Current contractors are Mayland Community College (MCC) and Goodwill Industries of Northwest NC. All three Community Colleges in the district (MCC, Wilkes Community College, and Caldwell Community College and Technical Institute) provide customized industry training and continuing education. Other partners in workforce development in the High Country district include the County School Systems, Appalachian State University, and Lees-McRae College.

The following workforce initiatives planned or underway in the district support the CEDS goals:

- Mayland Community College (MCC)'s development of the former Pinebridge property in Town of Spruce Pine
- MCC's development of a commercial kitchen
- MCC's Dual Enrollment Program at Avery, Mitchell, and Yancey High Schools
- MCC's Early College High School
- MCC's Meat Processing program at the Yancey County campus
- MCC's Paramedic to Associated Degree in Nursing bridge program
- MCC's Customized Industry Training Program
- Enhancement of the Science Pod at Avery High School to incorporate STEM and IT programs
- Construction of new Middle School in Mitchell County
- Career and Technical Education (CTE) internship program at Mountain Heritage High School (Yancey County)

- Trade Up Program in Watauga County – effort between Watauga High School and Caldwell Community College and Technical Institute (CCC&TI) in which students receive construction and trades training, and work with local contractors in paid internships
- Development of the Innovation Campus at Appalachian State University (ASU)
- NC Tech Paths - a local non-profit dedicated to helping people access technology jobs and making Northwest North Carolina a nationally recognized hub for rural tech workers
  - Development of Rural Tech Outpost in downtown North Wilkesboro (The Masthead)
- Lost Province Center for Cultural Arts – craft and culinary arts school in Town of Lansing
- Avery County Cooperative Extension Service's apprenticeship program for Christmas Tree growers

### **Workforce Strategies**

- 1-A Establish formal, paid work-based learning programs (OJT, internships, apprenticeships) at the County High Schools and Community Colleges in the district
  - Specifically, in the CTE programs, diesel mechanics, welding, and hospitality sectors
  - Integrate High School CTE programs with Community College construction technology programs
- 1-B Develop programs to expose County School System students, teachers, and guidance counselors to local business and industry (company visits, job fairs, presentations at schools, etc.)
- 1-C Achieve Work Ready Community designation for all Counties
- 1-D Increase dual-enrollment programs at County High Schools
- 1-E Apply for inclusion of ASU in EDA's University Center program - for purpose of commercialization, product development, technology transfer, and research
- 1-F Expand treatment for substance abuse and developmental disabilities
- 1-G Expand Associates Degree and Certification offerings at MCC, WCC, and Caldwell Community College and Technical Institute
- 1-H Develop NC Tech Paths Rural Tech Outposts in Alleghany and Ashe Counties
- 1-I Develop additional NC Tech Paths Rural Tech Outposts in Wilkes County
- 1-J Expand welding program at WCC
- 1-K Expand and integrate CTE programs at Alleghany High School and WCC's Alleghany campus
- 1-L Develop industrial sewing training program at WCC
- 1-M Develop Industry Growth Analysis for the High Country district to identify industry sectors that pay above-average wages and are anticipated to grow
- 1-N Expand the MCC Anspach Advanced Manufacturing Center in Yancey County

## 2. Physical Infrastructure

Public water and sewer systems are regulated by the NC Department of Environmental Quality (NC DEQ). County Health Departments regulate private well and wastewater disposal systems. Electric, natural gas, and telecommunications service is customer-demand driven. Transportation planning in the High Country district is coordinated by the High Country Rural Planning Organization (RPO), a collaboration of local governments and the NC Department of Transportation.

The High Country RPO's current Transportation Priorities are included in the following table:

### 2020 - 2029 STIP High Country Rural Planning Organization Priority Needs List

SCORE	COUNTY	PROJECT	DESCRIPTION	RANK
85	Watauga	Boone Multi-Use Path (B170742)	Multi-Use Path from Grove St. to Brookshire Rd.	1
83	Watauga	US 421 (H090163-A)	Widen to Multi-Lanes from US 421/321 Junction in Vilas to Tenn. State Line	2
76	Wilkes	NC 268 (H090173)	Modernize Roadway from Airport Rd. to Elkin Bypass	3
75	Watauga	Middle Fork Greenway Sec. 5 (B170760)	Multi-Use Path from Niley Cook Rd. to Jordan Cook Rd.	4
75	Wilkes	Reddies River Bridge (B170765)	Yadkin River Greenway Bridge Over Reddies River	4
70	Ashe	US 221/Beaver Ck. Sch. Rd. Int. (H150358)	Construct Superstreet Intersection	6
68	Mitch./Avery	US 19E (H090110-A)	Widen Existing Roadway from East Spruce Pine to Mullen Hill Rd.	7
63	Watauga	NC 194 (H090314)	Widen Existing Roadway from US 421 to Howards Creek Rd.	8
59	Watauga	105 Bypass (H111016)	Widen Existing Roadway from NC 105 to US 421/321	9
59	Ashe	US 221 (H170854)	Widen Existing Roadway from US 221 Business to NC 16	9
57	Watauga	US 421/Boone Bypass (H170838)	Construct Freeway on New Location	11
57	Avery	NC 184 (H090169)	Widen Existing Roadway from NC 105 to Hickory Nut Gap Rd.	11
56.77	Yancey	Yancy Transit Facility (T170739)	Design and Construction of New Office and Maintenance Facility	13
56	Wilkes	North Wilkesboro Bypass (H090048)	Construct Roadway on New Location	14

56	Avery	NC 194/US 19E Intersection (H170957)	Improve Intersection	14
56	Wilkes	US 421 Business (H170846)	Widen Existing Roadway from US 421 to CBD Loop	14
55	Wilkes	Yadkin River Greenway Bridge (B170763)	Yadkin River Greenway Bridge Over Yadkin River	17
55	Wilkes	New Route (H090193)	Construct New Facility, Part on New Location from US 421 to NC 268	17
52.7	Wilkes	Airport Runway Extension (A170738)	Extend Runway to Facilitate Larger Aircraft	19
52	Wilkes	Wilkesboro Ave. (H171412)	Widen Existing Roadway from NC 18 (Wilkesboro Blvd. to NC 18 (Main St.))	20
50	Mitchell	NC 226 (H170834)	Upgrade Roadway from NC 197 to NC 261	21
49	Avery/Wat.	NC 105 (H090921-A)	Widen to Multi-Lanes from US 221 to Clarks Creek Rd.	22
49	Watauga	US 321 (H172180)	Modernize Roadway from Payne Branch Rd. to Fairway Dr.	22
49	Alleghany	NC 18/Sparta Parkway Int. (H170959)	Improve Intersection	22
48.62	Wilkes	Airport Access Road (A170736)	Construct Access Road	25
48	Wilkes	NC 16 (H150294)	Widen Existing Roadway from US 421 to Pleasant Home Church Rd.	26
47.38	Wilkes	Airport Taxiway (A170733)	Construct Eastside Taxiway	27
46	Avery	NC 181/Avery High Sch. Rd. (H141043)	Improve Intersection	28
46	Ashe	NC 194 (H150440)	Modernize Roadway from US 221 Business to NC 88	28
45	Ashe	Beaver Creek School Rd. (H170858)	Modernize Roadway from US 221 Business to Ray Taylor Rd.	30
44	Alleghany	US 221/NC 113 Intersection (H141040)	Improve Intersection	31
43	Wilkes	NC 115 (H150297)	Modernize Roadway from Fishing Creek Rd. to US 421	32
42	Wilkes	Brown Ford Rd. (H170850)	Modernize Roadway from US 421 to NC 268	33
40	Yancey	US 19W (H090645)	Modernize roadway from US 19E to Tenn. State Line	34
39	Yancey	NC 80 N (H170802)	Modernize Roadway from US 19E to Mitchell County Line	35

39	Wilkes	Boone Trail Rd. (H140146)	Modernize Roadway from Curtis Bridge R. to US 421 Business (D Street)	35
38.35	Wilkes	Airport Taxiway and Hanger (A130280)	Construct Taxiway and 10 Bay Hanger	37
37	Watauga	Deerfield Rd./Bamboo Rd. Int. (H170956)	Improve Intersection	38
37	Watauga	US 321/Meadowview Dr. Int. (H171760)	Realign Offset Intersection	38
36	Watauga	US 421/Old 421 Int. (H170872)	Upgrade at Grade Intersection	40
34.22	Wilkes	Airport Terminal (A170731)	Construct New Terminal Building	41
34	Ashe	Mt. Jefferson Road (H170866)	Widen Existing Roadway from Oakwood Rd. to Campus Dr.	42
32	Watauga	US 421/Poplar Grove Conn. Int. (H171686)	Improve Intersection	43
20	Yancey	Jacks Creek Rd. Bridge (H170829)	Replace One Lane Bridge with Two Lane Bridge to Align with Road	44

In addition to the 44 priority projects listed above, the following transportation projects have been identified as supporting the CEDS goals and economic development at the local and/or regional level:

- Streetscape improvements to Main Street in Jefferson
- Streetscape improvements to East Main Street in Burnsville
- Streetscape improvements to 2<sup>nd</sup> Street, Main Street, and Back Street in West Jefferson
- Improvements to US 221 from Linville Falls to Linville in Avery County
- Improvements to NC 226 in McDowell County
- Improvements to NC 226 from US 19E to Blue Ridge Parkway in Mitchell County
- Improvements to NC 194 from Howards Creek Road to Castle Ford Road in Watauga County
- NC 105 improvements in Town of Boone
- Construction of US 421 Bypass (Boone Bypass)
- Completion of Middle Fork Greenway in Watauga County
- Improvements to NC 80 in Yancey County
- Improvements to the Micaville Loop in Yancey County
- Paving of NC 197 in Buncombe County
- Intersection improvements at NC 105/NC 194 in Avery County
- Improvements on US 19E from Mullins Hill Road to Town of Elk Park in Avery County
- Improvements to NC 93 in Alleghany County from US 221 to Virginia State Line
- Safety improvements to the NC 18/Sparta Parkway and Grandview Drive/Sparta Parkway intersections in Town of Sparta
- Improvements to US 19E from NC 194 to Town of Elk Park in Avery County

The American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) included allocations to NC DEQ (\$1,586,375,000) that were subsequently provided to local governments through competitive grants and direct allocations. Direct allocations in the High Country District in Session Law 2021-180 include:

- Town of Bakersville - \$2,000,000
- Town of Beech Mountain - \$1,000,000
- Town of Blowing Rock - \$4,800,000
- Town of Sparta - \$1,300,000
- Town of North Wilkesboro - \$500,000
- Town of Seven Devils - \$700,000
- Yancey County - \$13,000,000

Additionally, the following appropriations have been made by the State of NC after the passage of Session Law 2021-180:

- Town of Banner Elk - \$2,000,000
- Town of Newland - \$3,200,000
- Town of Ronda - \$3,500,000
- Town of West Jefferson - \$1,500,000
- Town of North Wilkesboro - \$15,000,000
- Yancey County - \$3,050,000

The following physical infrastructure initiatives planned or underway in the district support the CEDS goals:

- Water intake on the Yadkin River to serve the Town of Wilkesboro
- Sewer system improvements in Town of Bakersville
- Wastewater treatment plant improvements in Town of Burnsville
- Waterline relocation along NC 226 in Spruce Pine
- Skybest's broadband infrastructure expansion in eastern Watauga County
- Development of Infrastructure Master Plan for Yancey County/Town of Burnsville

#### **Physical Infrastructure Strategies**

- 2-A Pursue funding from NCDEQ for water, wastewater, and stormwater projects
- 2-B Develop Capital Improvement Plans and Asset Management Plans to increase competitiveness for funding from NCDEQ
- 2-C Maintain and upgrade aging water and sewer infrastructure to ensure compliance with State regulations, protection of water supplies, and adequate service to support existing and future users
- 2-D Improve public transportation opportunities within and between towns
- 2-E Improve cell service in underserved areas throughout district

- 2-F Develop additional water supply for Towns of Wilkesboro, North Wilkesboro, Blowing Rock, Beech Mountain, Banner Elk, and Wilkes County Water Associations
- 2-G Extend fiber telecommunications service to unserved areas
- 2-H Connect the Towns of Bakersville and Spruce Pine's water system for emergency supply
- 2-I Connect the Towns of Burnsville and Spruce Pine's water system to facilitate commercial development along US 19E
- 2-J Extend public water service to the Roaring River Community to serve Louisiana-Pacific, Certainteed, and Tyson Feed Mill
- 2-K Conduct feasibility studies to gauge demand for natural gas service in unserved areas
- 2-L Establish Wi-Fi networks in all downtowns
- 2-M Include installation of fiber conduit in all road, water, or sewer projects where road crossings occur - to facilitate future fiber extensions
- 2-N Market the availability of fiber infrastructure in all economic development promotion materials
- 2-O Extend public water and sewer service from Town of Burnsville into western Yancey county
- 2-P Construct new wastewater treatment plant in Town of Lansing
- 2-Q Construct new water supply well Town of Lansing
- 2-R Construct new interchange on US 421 in Wilkes County to serve the North Wilkesboro Speedway
- 2-S Extend public water and sewer service along US 421 in Wilkes County to serve future industrial sites and the North Wilkesboro Speedway
- 2-T Implement recommendations from the seven county-level Digital Inclusion Plans currently being developed
- 2-U Pursue Interstate designation for US 421 from Town of Wilkesboro in Wilkes County to I-77 in Yadkin County
- 2-V Upgrade the Town of Sparta's wastewater treatment plant

### 3. Tourism

Tourism promotion in the High Country is currently conducted primarily by local Chambers of Commerce and Tourism Development Authorities (TDAs). TDAs are typically the fiscal agents responsible for expenditure of local occupancy tax revenues.

The table below provides the most recent data from NC Department of Commerce on economic impact of tourism.

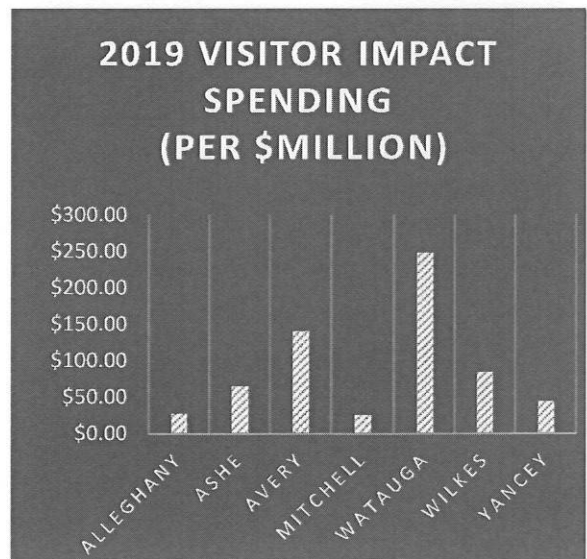
2020 Visitor Impact Spending

	Expenditures (\$ Millions)	Tax Revenues (\$ Millions)	Tourism Employment (Thousands)	Statewide Rank (expenditures)
Alleghany	\$35.73	\$3.30	0.265	74
Ashe	\$82.15	\$7.60	0.552	46
Avery	\$164.02	\$13.9	1.298	29
Mitchell	\$29.35	\$2.40	0.2	80
Watauga	\$320.88	\$26.40	2.738	14
Wilkes	\$73.96	\$6.00	0.583	49
Yancey	\$53.47	\$5.50	0.331	58

Source: 2020 Economic Impact Studies - Visit North Carolina

Analysis of tourism impact data from 1990 to 2019 indicates that the impact of tourism (expenditures, jobs, payroll, and tax receipts) has steadily increased for all seven counties except for brief declines in 2008-09 and 2001-02. Most Counties have experienced tourism growth between 150% and 400% over the 29-year period.

Local occupancy taxes are enacted separately for counties and municipalities in NC, with total occupancy tax rate capped at 6%. Typically, use of revenues is dictated by the enabling legislation. The table below provides details on local occupancy taxes for FY 2018-19.



Local Government	Rate	Net collections, 2019	Allocation to Tourism Promotion	Allocation to Tourism Related Expenses	Allocation to Non Tourism Related Expenses
Alleghany County	6%	\$80,471	2/3	1/3	
Ashe County	3%	\$300,956	1/3		2/3
Town of West Jefferson	3%	\$72,400	2/3	1/3	
Town of Banner Elk	6%	\$497,665	2/3	1/3	
Village of Sugar Mountain	6%	\$287,054	2/3	1/3	
Mitchell County	3%	\$66,331	unspecified	unspecified	
Watauga County	6%	\$1,837,552	2/3	1/3	
Town of Beech Mountain	6%	\$405,461	2/3	1/3	
Town of Blowing Rock	6%	\$1,078,877	2/3	1/3	
Town of Boone	6%	\$1,516,945	2/3	1/3	
Town of Seven Devils	6%	\$166,344	2/3	1/3	
Town of Wilkesboro	3%	\$172,755	2/3	1/3	
Yancey County	3%	\$102,959	100%		

Source: NC Department of Revenue

### Tourism Strategies

- 3-A Create a regional brand/marketing strategy to promote the High Country district to visitors
  - Focus on outdoor recreation and the arts and crafts industry
  - Include uniform Visitor Center appearance for High Country Host and all local Chambers of Commerce
  - Include uniform welcome sign appearance
- 3-B Promote fishing, canoeing, kayaking, and tubing by development of maps indicating points of river access and parking
- 3-C Develop additional outdoor recreation infrastructure (trails, river access points, parking, restrooms)
- 3-D Construct kiosk at Mt. Mitchell State Park promoting Yancey County and Town of Burnsville
- 3-E Support second-home development by doing the following:
  - Support local hospitals to help ensure their viability
  - Adopt subdivision regulations that ensure safe, sanitary, and orderly second-home community development
  - Maintain attractive community appearance, especially along major thoroughfares
- 3-F Promote the district's cycling resources, both mountain biking and road cycling

- 3-G Support organized runs, bike rides, and other events by providing traffic control, aid stations, participant transportation, etc.
- 3-H Promote the district for film, television advertisement, and print advertisement production
- 3-I Promote the district's arts and crafts industry by commissioning artwork placed in public road and street rights-of-way and other public property
- 3-J Develop permanent location for the Mineral and Gem Festival in Mitchell County
- 3-K Renovate the Daniel Boone Park/Horn in the West Outdoor Drama facility in Town of Boone
- 3-L Improve cell service in underserved areas throughout the district
- 3-M Establish Wi-Fi networks in all downtowns
- 3-N Maximize occupancy tax in all jurisdictions
- 3-O Develop/implement outdoor recreation plans for each county in the district
- 3-P Develop Coffey House in Boone as Visitor Center
- 3-Q Construct public restroom facilities in downtowns
- 3-R Implement recommendations in the following trail plans/trail initiatives:
  - Yadkin River Greenway Master Plan
  - Middle Fork Greenway Master Plan
  - Northern Peaks Trail
  - Appalachian High Route
  - Alleghany-Sparta Trail Association
- 3-S Implement recommendations in the following outdoor recreation plans:
  - Great State of Wilkes Outdoor Action Plan
  - Mitchell County Outdoor Recreation Economy Plan
  - Imagine Watauga Action Plan
- 3-T Develop new fishing access (parking, restroom, trail) in Town of Spruce Pine
- 3-U Participate in the Blue Ridge Parkway Foundation's Gateway Communities Initiative
- 3-V Develop Greenway Master Plan for Yancey County and Town of Burnsville

#### **4. Industry**

Industrial recruitment is currently a function of the individual Counties, typically the County Economic Development Commissions (EDCs). The County EDCs also are the lead entities on small business recruitment, business/industry retention efforts, and business/industry expansion projects. The Economic Development Partnership of North Carolina (EDPNC) has a Regional Industry Manager serving all seven High Country Counties. The EDPNC Regional Industry Manager works with companies to

facilitate recruitment and expansion, and is the point of contact for State incentives (One NC Fund, Job Development Investment Grant, Building Reuse Grant).

Due to the district's steep terrain and limited infrastructure (water/sewer, rail, 4-lane highways), there are not extensive large-scale industrial parks. Existing industrial sites that are either local-government controlled or actively marketed by the local governments include:

- Ashe County - Ashe County Industrial Park, West Jefferson, ~40 acres, vacant
- Wilkes County – various sites, 2-20 acres, primarily located in and around Wilkesboro and North Wilkesboro
- Watauga – Watauga County Industrial Park, Boone, full
- Yancey – West Burnsville Industrial Park, Burnsville, ~40 acres, vacant  
NC

The following industry initiatives planned or underway in the district support the CEDS goals:

- Construction of the Wilkes Commercial Business Center
- Development of the Ashe County Industrial Site
- Development of the West Burnsville Industrial Park in Yancey County

#### **Industry Strategies**

- 4-A Develop Regional Industrial/Business Park along US 421 in the Deep Gap Community
- 4-B Develop Industrial Site in Alleghany County, or in conjunction with Grayson County VA
- 4-C Develop and maintain an ArcGIS Online web application detailing available industrial/business sites and buildings
- 4-D Develop Regional Business and Industry Support Network to engage local businesses
  - Members to include EDC, Chamber of Commerce, Local Government, Community College, HCWDB
  - Purpose is to bring all resources together, and efficiently engage business
- 4-E Identify Brownfield sites and develop plans to assess, remediate, and market them for redevelopment
- 4-F Improve appearance, access, and infrastructure at existing marketed industrial/business sites
- 4-G Develop local regulations to address condition and appearance of vacant commercial/industrial properties
- 4-H Increase exports by holding regional workshops that connect High Country companies with the NC Department of Commerce, the EDPNC, and US Commercial Service export-assistance staff
- 4-I Create/maintain full-time Economic Developer positions in all seven High Country Counties

- 4-J Convene meeting of local EDC Directors and NCSU Industry Expansion Solutions (IES) staff to introduce local economic developers to IES services, including the Minerals Research Laboratory, Lean Healthcare, Advanced Manufacturing, Lean Manufacturing, etc.
- 4-K Develop additional industrial sites in Watauga County
- 4-L Develop industrial sites along US 421 in Wilkes County
- 4-M Obtain NC Certified Industrial Site designation for Ashe County Industrial Site

## **5. Small Business and Entrepreneurship**

Currently, small business services are provided in the High Country district by Appalachian State University (ASU), Wilkes Community College (WCC), Mayland Community College (MCC), and Caldwell Community College and Technical Institute (CCC&TI). All three Community Colleges operate Small Business Centers, which support the development of new businesses and the growth of existing businesses by providing training, counseling, and referrals for other services. Additionally, Watauga County operates the Appalachian Enterprise Center which provides leasable office space and access to professional services, and the Small Business and Technology Development Center (SBTDC) which provides direct counseling, planning, and financial management assistance to businesses.

Local Chambers of Commerce promote their member businesses, and provide networking and educational events.

Financial assistance to High Country businesses is provided by local banks, the MAY Coalition (serving Avery, Mitchell, and Yancey Counties), and Mountain BizWorks (a CDFI located in Asheville).

### **Small Business and Entrepreneurship Strategies**

- 5-A Increase access to capital for small business through promotion of the MAY Coalition and Mountain BizWorks
- 5-B Use the Region D Development Corporation as the fiscal agent for raising funds and providing financial assistance to local businesses
- 5-C Develop a Makers Space facility in Ashe County
- 5-D Promote the district's excellent broadband coverage to attract new business
- 5-E Host a regional meeting of NC Main Street Program staff and the seven designated Main Street municipalities in the district
- 5-F Support NC Tech Paths curriculum and plans to develop Remote Tech Outposts
- 5-G Develop the Resource Center for Entrepreneurs at the new MCC facility in Town of Spruce Pine
- 5-H Connect entrepreneurs with planning support offered by the Community Colleges' Small Business Centers

- 5-I Expand offerings from ASU's Center for Entrepreneurship (currently limited to students and alumni)
- 5-J Develop/maintain inventories of available commercial real estate in downtowns
- 5-K Encourage commercial development in downtowns through:
  - Update of development regulations to accommodate greater density
  - Maintenance of adequate infrastructure capacity
  - Establishment of fixed-route transit service
  - Provision of financial incentives
- 5-L Implement the Town of Wilkesboro Downtown Master Plan as a model showing relationship between economic and community development
- 5-M Support ASU's Economic Development Council designed to broaden the university's business, entrepreneurial and government partnerships
- 5-N Promote UNC-Chapel Hill's Anchor Institutions Create Economic Resilience program (AICER), that works with anchor institutions such as universities, local governments, and hospitals to source their goods and services from local suppliers
- 5-O Increase staffing at WCC's Small Business Center
- 5-P Promote Appalachian Regional Commission's Opportunity Appalachia Program, which provides feasibility studies, engineering plans, and access to capital to increase "investor readiness" for downtown redevelopment projects
- 5-Q Implement recommendations in the Creative Manufacturing Sector Development Plan

## 6. Agriculture

The table below provides the most recent county-level data from USDA on agricultural activity.

Agricultural Activity

	Farms	Farmland (in acres)	Value of Agricultural Products sold in 2017 (in Millions)
Alleghany	448	70,593	\$31.4
Ashe	864	109,790	\$57.1
Avery	351	28,679	\$20.1
Mitchell	250	33,521	\$2.4
Watauga	520	49,614	\$16.7
Wilkes	932	106,710	\$335.1
Yancey	369	30,824	\$6.8

Source: USDA - 2017 Census of Agriculture

Agricultural Activity changes from 2012 to 2017

	Farms	Change From 2012	Farmland (in acres)	Change from 2012	Value of Agricultural Products sold in 2017 (in Millions)	Change from 2012
Alleghany	448	-21.0%	70,593	-22.4%	\$31.4	-13.5%
Ashe	864	-24.2%	109,790	-2.4%	\$57.1	4.8%
Avery	351	-27.3%	28,679	1.6%	\$20.1	16.9%
Mitchell	250	-12.6%	14,802	-23.4%	\$2.4	-4.0%
Watauga	520	-14.6%	49,614	-11.0%	\$16.7	9.2%
Wilkes	932	-4.1%	106,710	-4.0%	\$335.1	17.6%
Yancey	369	-18.0%	30,824	-0.6%	\$6.8	19.3%

Source: USDA - 2017 Census of Agriculture

The major commodities are fairly consistent across the district – cattle, cut Christmas trees, ornamentals, and silage. Wilkes County is also a major producer of poultry.

#### Forestry Impacts

The seven High Country Counties contain approximately 6.02% of all the designated Timberland in the State and does not harvest timber at rates comparable to other parts of the State. The table below shows the timberland in each County and harvest rates (in million green tons).

#### Available Timberland and Harvest Rates

	Private & Public Timberland (acres)	Percentage of land designated "Timberland"	Growth (Million Green Tons)	Harvest (Million Green Tons)	Growth to Harvest Ratio
Alleghany	70,079	46%	0.2	0.1	1.77
Ashe	175,938	64%	0.6	0.4	1.31
Avery	126,960	80%	0.3	0.3	1.04
Mitchell	98,061	69%	0.3	--	--
Watauga	122,639	61%	0.3	--	--
Wilkes	342,831	71%	0.8	0.2	3.41
Yancey	151,299	75%	0.3	0.1	2.00
North Carolina	18,082,711	57%	59.5	35.0	1.71

Source: NC State University College of Natural Resources

The High Country district has relatively low economic impact from forestry (total effects of all forest products and wood-based industry sectors). The High Country contributes 1.63% of the total forestry jobs in the State; 1.41% of the Labor Income; and 1.62% of the Industry Output, as detailed in the following table.

#### Economic Impact of Forestry in the High Country

	<b>Employment</b>	<b>Labor Income (\$ Millions)</b>	<b>Output (\$ Millions)</b>
Alleghany	238	\$9.79	\$43.39
Ashe	115	\$5.05	\$15.02
Avery	58	\$1.23	\$7.84
Mitchell	89	\$3.57	\$14.89
Watauga	218	\$8.18	\$30.13
Wilkes	1,453	\$78.07	\$390.44
Yancey	286	\$10.76	\$41.96
North Carolina	150,417	\$8,280.00	\$33,599.00

Source: NC State University College of Natural Resources

All seven Counties in the district have Voluntary Agricultural Districts (VAD) to preserve and protect existing farmland. The table below contains data on local VADs.

<b>County</b>	<b>Farms Enrolled in VAD</b>	<b>Acres Enrolled in VAD</b>	<b>Farms enrolled in Enhanced VAD</b>	<b>Acres enrolled in Enhanced VAD</b>
Alleghany (2021)	228	12,569	0	0
Ashe (2021)	145	9,930	0	0
Avery (2020)	56	1,154	71	1,649
Mitchell (2018)	34	4,600	0	0
Watauga (2021)	130	8,013	0	0
Wilkes (2021)	170	7,621	0	0
Yancey (2017)	0	0	0	0

Source: NC Department of Agriculture

Additionally, all seven Counties in the district operate Future Farmers of America programs to prepare students for successful careers in agriculture.

#### Agriculture Strategies

6-A Promote the following cost share programs to farmers throughout the district to address natural resource conservation:

- North Carolina Agriculture Cost Share Program (NCACSP)
- Community Conservation Assistance Program (CCAP)
- Agricultural Water Resources Assistance (AgWRAP)
- Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP)

- 6-B Expand Farmers Markets (hours, facilities, parking, etc.) in the district
- 6-C Ensure adequate seasonal housing supply for agricultural workers
- 6-D Support Mayland Community College's effort to develop a butchery program
- 6-E Develop/maintain Farmworker Health Programs to improve health and safety of seasonal farm workers
- 6-F Promote WNC Farmlink ([wncfarmlink.org](http://wncfarmlink.org)) to match aspiring farmers to fallow or underutilized land
- 6-G Recruit meat processing business to the southern part of the High Country district.
- 6-H Promote Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) operations in the High Country district
- 6-I Support new and existing agricultural product aggregation, transportation, and brokering operations in the High Country district
- 6-J Conduct the following improvements to the High Country Food Hub:
  - Facility expansion
  - Additional loading docks
  - Additional cooler and freezer space
  - Additional satellite pick-up locations
  - Economic Impact Study
- 6-K Develop the Watauga County Livestock Slaughter facility, including:
  - Building
  - Water and sewer extensions
  - Access road
- 6-L Obtain permanent location for the TRACTOR facility in Yancey County
- 6-M Use Avery County's Farmer Apprenticeship program as example for other counties in the district
- 6-N Develop livestock aggregation and sales facility in Ashe County

## **Priorities**

### **1. Increase availability of workforce housing**

- Review development regulations to ensure properties are available to accommodate multi-family, manufactured home, and small-lot residential development
- Conduct housing studies to quantify demand/supply of workforce housing
- Expand public water and sewer systems to serve development of workforce housing
- Take advantage of State programs to fund housing repairs
  - NC Housing Finance Agency (Urgent Repair program, Essential Single-Family Rehabilitation program)
  - NC Commerce (CDBG-Neighborhood Revitalization program)

### **2. Increase availability and affordability of daycare**

- Use Ashe County School System program as model for other counties
- Use “Elevate Watauga” program as model for other counties
- Pursue grant funds to subsidize cost of daycare
- Incentivize employer-provided daycare

### **3. Increase outdoor recreation opportunities**

- Develop county-level outdoor recreation plans to guide facility improvements
- Improve local parks to serve both residents and visitors
- Improve emergency response capacity

### **4. Improve availability and access to broadband**

- Extend last-mile connectivity to unserved areas in the district
- Construct wi-fi networks in downtown areas
- Implements county-level digital inclusion plans to address access, affordability, and proficiency of internet use

### **5. Leverage exceptional assets of the High country district – through marketing, and development of supply-chain/support businesses**

- Blue Ridge Parkway
- Arts and Crafts Industry
- Music Events
- Mayland Community College’s Dark Sky Observatory
- Outdoor Recreation Resources
- Mining Resources
- Christmas Tree Industry

### **6. Expand agricultural output through:**

- Increased timber management and harvesting

- Diversification of commodities
- Recruitment of processing facilities (i.e., slaughterhouse, cannery)

**7. Increase stock of available, marketed industrial/business sites**

- Vicinity of US 421/US 221 intersection (Deep Gap Community)
- Along US 19E between Spruce Pine and Burnsville
- Along US 421 in Wilkes County

**8. Expand local colleges and universities roles in regional economic development**

- Apply for inclusion of ASU in EDA's University Center program
- Expand offerings from ASU's Center for Entrepreneurship
- Expand certification offerings in high-demand occupations

**9. Use existing programs as models to improve workforce development**

- Skybest apprenticeship program
- Wilkes Community College "Education Promise" scholarship program

## **Resiliency**

This section is intended to build upon the findings of previous sections and to take into account economic weaknesses and deficiencies in the region. A number of initiatives is then identified to address these deficiencies. These initiatives are a way to help the region be proactive and prepared for economic disruptions and to implement resilience strategies.

### **Resilience Strategies**

1. Invest in downtowns to support commercial base
2. Diversify agricultural commodities
3. Increase timber management
4. Improve healthcare availability throughout the district
  - Increase telehealth capabilities at local schools and health departments
  - Develop mobile health and dental care systems
  - Develop/expand migrant labor healthcare systems
5. Increase availability and affordability of daycare
  - Use Ashe County School System program as model for other counties
  - Use “Elevate Watauga” program as model for other counties
  - Pursue grant funds to subsidize cost of daycare
  - Incentivize employer-provided daycare
6. Convert more firefighters to paid, full-time positions
7. Improve emergency management communications systems
8. Increase Associates Degree and Certifications offerings at Community Colleges
9. Expand water supply and wastewater treatment capacity of systems where average use exceeds 50% of permitted capacity
10. Accommodate the district’s increase in outdoor recreation visitors by:
  - Expanding parking and restroom facilities on public lands
  - Educating visitors on sustainable recreation and “leave no trace” ethics
  - Increase EMS/1<sup>st</sup> responder capacities
    - Additional staff
    - Swift-water rescue infrastructure (boats, training, river access points)
11. Increase size of workforce in high-demand fields
  - Use Watauga County Schools/CCC&TI “Trade Up” program as model

## **6. IMPLEMENTATION**

The CEDS contains a total of 80 recommended strategies within six Economic Development Foundation areas. While the CEDS provides eight Priorities, the Priorities are broad, long-term, and regional. Achievement of the Priorities will come through many individual projects and efforts. It is recommended that a CEDS Implementation Committee be formed to regularly discuss projects, share information, and work toward regional economic development initiatives. The composition of the CEDS Implementation Committee should be:

- The seven County Economic Development Commission Directors
- The Economic Development Partnership of North Carolina's Northwest Regional Industry Manager
- Mayland Community College President
- Wilkes Community College President
- Caldwell Community College Watauga Campus Director
- Appalachian State University designee

The CEDS Implementation Committee will review strategies and identify schedules, lead entities, and funding mechanisms for individual initiatives.

The CEDS will be used as support for project funding applications where applicable.

## **7. EVALUATION**

The CEDS will be evaluated annually, during preparation of the CEDS Annual Performance Report (APR). APRs will be reviewed by the CEDS Strategy Committee (the High Country Workforce Development Board), and approved by the High Country Council of Governments Executive Board. The CEDS will be available for review and comment permanently on the High Country Council of Governments website. APR development will consider comments received during the year.

### **Performance Measures**

- Announced job creation
- Announced private-sector investment
- Increases in average household wages and income
- Number of new businesses
- Federal, state, and local investment in the district
- Educational attainment
- Work Ready Community designations
- Number of self-employed
- Retail sales
- Tourism revenue
- Agricultural impact
- Number of CEDS strategies advanced or accomplished