

Comprehensive Economic
Development Strategy
(CEDS)
2023-2028



Cowlitz-Wahkiakum Council of Governments

Adopted August 24, 2023

Cowlitz-Wahkiakum Council of Governments

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Cowlitz-Wahkiakum Council of Governments

A Resolution Approving the)
2023-2028 Comprehensive)
Economic Development Strategy)

RESOLUTION NO. 23-18

WHEREAS, the Cowlitz-Wahkiakum Council of Governments is recognized as the Economic Development District Organization for the Cowlitz and Wahkiakum counties by the Department of Commerce, Economic Development Administration;

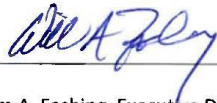
WHEREAS, the Cowlitz-Wahkiakum Council of Governments is required to develop a Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) for the region every five years;

WHEREAS, the initial CEDS Strategy for the District was approved in March of 2018;

WHEREAS, the CEDS provides a strategy to enhance the regional economic vitality and resilience of the region and its public sector partners;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Cowlitz-Wahkiakum Council of Governments approves the 2013-2028 Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy document as presented.

PASSED AND APPROVED on this 24th day of August, 2023.



William A. Fashing, Executive Director



David Olson, Chair

Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy

Pending Adoption by the Cowlitz-Wahkiakum Council of Governments Board of Directors

This document was prepared to meet the requirements of 13 CFR § 303.6(b)(3)(ii) and the terms of award ED22SEA3020025 from the Economic Development Administration, United States Department of Commerce.

The statements, findings, conclusions, and recommendations are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Economic Development Administration or the United States Department of Commerce.

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Summary Background

Introduction

A Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) is a locally driven planning process that engages community leaders and works to leverage the involvement of the private sector in order to form a strategy-driven plan for positive regional development. Economic-development planning through the CEDS is a key initiative of the Economic Development Administration (EDA), and the preparation and publication of a CEDS is a prerequisite for designation by the EDA as an Economic Development District (EDD). Economic Development District Organizations are required to update their CEDS at least every five years to qualify for EDA assistance under its Public Works and Economic Adjustment Assistance Programs.

Planning Area



Figure 1 Economic Development District
Map Source: CWCOG

The Economic Development District (EDD) encompasses Cowlitz and Wahkiakum Counties, spanning 14,303 square miles located in Southwest Washington. The two-county region contains six incorporated

jurisdictions, five cities in Cowlitz County (Castle Rock, Kalama, Kelso, Longview, and Woodland) and one town in Wahkiakum County (Cathlamet). Many more unincorporated, but locally known communities also lie within the EDD's planning area, including Ariel, Cougar, Lexington, Rose Valley, Ryderwood, and Toutle (all Cowlitz County); and Altoona, Brookfield, Dahlia, Deep River, Elochoman Valley, Grays River, Pillar Rock, Puget Island, Rosburg, and Skamokawa (all Wahkiakum County).

According to Census data, the counties skew older (population aged 60 years or older) than both the state (21.8%) and the nation (22.4%) with Cowlitz's 60+ population estimated at 26.3%, and Wahkiakum's estimated at 45.7%. The poverty rate in Cowlitz County is estimated at 12.8% and Wahkiakum's is estimated at 10.6%; however, there is a high margin of error for Wahkiakum County in particular due to its size. Poverty for Washington State is estimated at 10% and the nation's estimated rate is 12.6%. The region has a higher rate of disability among the population than the state and national averages, with Cowlitz County estimated at 19.2% and Wahkiakum at 24.7%; this is compared with 12.6% for the nation and 12.7% in the State. The regional population is significantly lower in its level of ethnic diversity than the state and nation, with the non-Hispanic, white-alone population accounting for around 80% in Cowlitz County and 86% in Wahkiakum, compared to 64% for the state, and 58% for the nation. The proportion of the population that claims Hispanic origin is 4.1% in Wahkiakum County and 9.8% in Cowlitz, compared to 13.8% in Washington State and 18.7% nationally. All data is derived from the US Census, American Community Surveys 2021 Five-year Data Profiles for consistency unless noted elsewhere.

Cowlitz County: Cowlitz County is in the southwestern part of Washington state. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the county has a total area of 1,166 square miles, of which 1,140 square miles is land and 26 square miles is water. The County is part of the Puget Sound-Willamette Depression, a geologic formation extending south from the Puget Sound to the Willamette Valley in Oregon. Census data show a population of 109,457.

The topography of Cowlitz County is varied and unique. The County includes four ecoregions: mountains, hills, valleys, and waterways. Each ecoregion gives Cowlitz County its distinctive character. Semi-rugged, mountainous hills abound through the County. Amid those hills, seven major rivers—the Columbia, Coweeman, Cowlitz, Green, Kalama, Lewis, and Toutle originate.

The largest river in the County, the Columbia, runs southeast to northwest and forms much of the western/southwestern county boundary. The Columbia River is a major commercial waterway through which international commerce is conducted. Three of Cowlitz County's largest port areas are located along the Columbia River near the cities of Woodland, Kalama, and Longview. The Columbia has a wide floodplain that has been diked and systematically ditched for drainage in several areas, which has created dry uplands that have successfully allowed for—and continue to support—urban and rural development as well as agricultural activities. Two of the remaining most fertile and active agricultural areas in Cowlitz County are located along the Columbia River—the Woodland Bottoms, to the west of the City of Woodland, and Willow Grove, to the west of the City of Longview. In the future, these agricultural areas may be lost to industrial or other development.

The Cowlitz River bisects the County, flowing from north to south, and runs through a valley which forms the southern tip of the Puget Lowlands. The Cowlitz River then empties into the Columbia after passing

adjacent to the cities of Castle Rock, Kelso, and Longview. As with most valleys that have major rivers running through them, the Cowlitz Valley is a magnet for residential and commercial development and serves a vital role in interstate commerce. Interstate 5 (I-5) and the Burlington Northern-Santa Fe (BNSF) Railroad mainline both run south to north through the valley. The Cowlitz River also has a wide floodplain on which many levees are located.

The 1980 eruption of Mount Saint Helens produced long-term ecological disruptions and long-term flooding issues impacting the downstream communities of Castle Rock, Kelso, and Longview. The cause of the challenges is the continued flow of sediment down into the Toutle River system, then into the Cowlitz River, and eventually into the Columbia River. Around 40 million tons of sediment entered the Cowlitz and Columbia Rivers in the first year following the eruption. According to recent reports from the United States Geological Survey, between 10 and 20 million tons of sediment have been delivered to the United States Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) Sediment Retention Structure between 2011 and 2017 annually. The system continues to be one of the most sediment-laden in the world. This sediment poses problems for fish passage, recreational uses of the river, water supply, and flooding, as the channels continuously fill with sand, ash, and silt.

Wahkiakum County: Wahkiakum County (estimated population: 4,500 people) is a small, heavily forested county located fifteen miles inland from the Pacific Ocean on the western edge of the county. The county lies on the broad tidal estuary near the mouth of the Columbia River in southwest Washington, has a total land area of 287 square miles, and is the smallest Washington county by total area. The southern border of the county is the Columbia River. The prodigious rainfall and immense rainforest trees have historically supported logging, which has served as a leading industry for a century. Forestry, fishing, and agriculture were central to the County's economy and way of life. As resource-based activities have declined in recent years, residents commute to, or retire from, urban areas in other counties and there is less dependence upon these sectors than in years past.

The County is isolated in terms of transportation infrastructure. The main thoroughfare is State Route 4 (SR 4) that runs east to west paralleling the Columbia River. SR 4 connects to the Longview area (eastward) in Cowlitz County, and Ilwaco (westward) in adjacent Pacific County. A portion of SR 4 is designated as a State Scenic Byway, and efforts by the CWCOG and others in Wahkiakum are underway to capitalize on this asset. In addition, the County operates a ferry from Cathlamet to Westport, Oregon. As a result of its overall position, the County has kept a rural feel, with much of its land devoted to forests.

Transportation Assets

In addition to administering the EDD, the CWCOG administers the Southwest Washington Regional Transportation Planning Organization (SWRTPO), which extends beyond the EDD region to include Lewis, Pacific, and Grays Harbor counties, and is the Longview-Kelso-Rainier Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) that includes Rainier, Oregon. Through SWRTPO efforts, CWCOG staff provide assistance and guidance on transportation elements of local comprehensive plans as they relate to economic development. The SWRTPO and MPO planning efforts are coordinated with the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) in terms of planning, funding, and oversight. The 2018 SWRTPO/MPO Regional Transportation Plan will consider this CEDS document in its development and approval in late 2023. The Regional Transportation Improvement Program, which shows the transportation projects in the region that are regionally significant or that include federal funding, is

updated yearly.

Roadways

The region's location, along major transportation routes with intermodal connections, provides economic opportunities for expansion into the import/export global trade arena. I-5 runs through Cowlitz County, and SR 4 runs from Cowlitz County through Wahkiakum County to the Pacific coast. Each of the cities in Cowlitz County are adjacent to the I-5 corridor. In addition, State Routes 432 and 433 serve the Longview industrial area, State Route 411 connects Longview and Castle Rock to the west of I-5, and State Routes 503 and 504 serve rural areas east of I-5 and serve as key access points to Mount Saint Helens' resources and recreation. The Lewis and Clark Bridge in Longview, as well as the aforementioned ferry, serve as interstate connections to Oregon. There are strong economic ties associated with the two river crossings in the region.

Particularly along the I-5 corridor, transportation connectivity offers superb tourist access to the area significantly and uniquely influenced by its proximity to Mount Saint Helens, which remains one of the most popular and spectacular tourist attractions in Washington State more than 40 years since its eruption. Issues moving forward for the transportation system include improving parallel routes along I-5 for emergency and everyday challenges and the replacement of the Lewis and Clark Bridge that is approaching its 100th year of operation. The bridge is a T1 (highest level) freight corridor and plays a key role in the industrial sector in the region.

Transit

RiverCities Transit serves the urban areas of Cowlitz County, while Wahkiakum on the Move serves Wahkiakum County with connections to the Longview/Kelso area. Lower Columbia Community Action Program (CAP) offers rural and senior van service, and Cowlitz Tribe Transit Services provides connections between southern Lewis and Cowlitz counties, with dial-a-ride service up to twenty miles off the I-5 corridor for both tribal members and non-members. Greyhound also provides service from Kelso to areas outside the region, with connections northward to Seattle and southward into Portland, OR.

Since the last CEDS was approved, the CWCOG has initiated a new mobility management program supporting public transportation. This program has ties to economic development as much of the work is directed at helping underserved residents without vehicles access public transportation to reach work locations. The program focuses on a number of equity issues and working to improve the resources available to the entire community to access jobs and other essential services.

Rail

The region is served by the Burlington Northern-Santa Fe (BNSF) and Union Pacific (UP) railroads. Since its 2010 acquisition of existing short-line services, Patriot Rail has operated the short-line Columbia and Cowlitz Railway and Patriot Woods (formerly Weyerhaeuser) Railroad, which connected and operated consolidated service in Cowlitz County. Patriot is seeking approval from the Federal Surface Transportation Board to abandon about 7.5 miles of its rail line through the Longview area and has already abandoned the line leading up to the former landfill in the Mount Saint Helens foothills. The community is actively pursuing the rail line for use for active and recreational transportation needs in the Longview/Kelso area. Patriot continues to serve the industrial needs of the Longview industrial area.

Freight-related rail continues to be a strong driver of economic activity in the region serving port activities in Cowlitz County.

In terms of passenger service, the City of Kelso has a station on the Amtrak Cascades Seattle-to-Portland route that runs four daily round trips, with broader connections to Vancouver (British Columbia), and Eugene, Oregon. Amtrak's Coast Starlight service, connecting to Los Angeles and points in between, also overlaps with this route and makes one daily round trip through the region.

Improving Amtrak Cascades performance has been a key WSDOT initiative for some years now, with capital-improvement projects being undertaken northward of the region. Three recent WSDOT rail projects improved conflicts between freight and passenger rail aimed at improving on-time performance of the Cascades trains. Eight new trainsets and two new locomotives will be delivered for use on the system by 2026.

Marine

The Ports of Kalama and Longview provide marine access for export/import activity. The Port of Kalama additionally provides a local marina for recreational use. Wahkiakum Port District No. 1 provides marina access, including recreational and commercial use. The Port of Woodland continues its drive toward establishing import/export marine facilities. Each of the ports continue to work toward the implementation of their respective Schemes of Harbor Improvements that support and drive the economic development of the region. Significant port investments are anticipated during the life of this plan. The Ports of Longview, Kalama, Woodland, Vancouver, and Portland work as non-federal sponsors to maintain the Columbia River navigation channel with the USACE. In addition, the Ports of Longview and Kalama are working in partnership on a turning basin to improve marine transport.

Air

Air service is provided by a general aviation regional airport, the Southwest Washington Regional Airport (SWRA) located within the bounds of the City of Kelso, with another small public state-run airfield in Woodland. The nearest commercial air service is via Portland International Airport (PDX) in Portland (about an hour drive) or Seattle Tacoma International Airport (about a two-hour drive). WSDOT estimated that the SWRA contributed over \$27 million to local business revenues in a report last published in 2018. The SWRA has recently updated its master plan and has acquired a new fixed-based operator. The airport currently has 78 hangars.

Utilities Assets

Water/Sewer

Cowlitz and Wahkiakum Counties, and their respective communities, are well-served by a variety of water sources including a deep-water well, Ranney wells, and many private and community wells throughout the two-county area. Services are provided by a variety of cities, towns, and special districts. New investments are anticipated in the coming years to enhance existing systems. The maintenance and operational costs of these utilities will continue to challenge local agencies as regulatory requirements cause the need for significant investments that are saddled upon a small number of rate payers in many cases.

Electricity

The region is served by two Public Utility Districts (PUDs): Cowlitz PUD and Wahkiakum PUD. Cowlitz PUD buys over 90 percent of its wholesale power from the Bonneville Power Administration (BPA). The rest comes from the Swift No. 2 hydroelectric facility on the Lewis River near the community of Cougar, and from the Columbia River hydroelectric projects owned by Grant PUD. According to a 2020 report from the Wahkiakum PUD, their portfolio is heavily weighted toward hydroelectric which carries about 85% of the total electric load. The remaining balance of the load is covered by nuclear energy (11%), and smaller, unspecified sources (4%).

Telecommunications

As a result of deregulation, a wealth of providers and service options are available in the region. They are hampered, however, by an incomplete fiber-optic system able to provide adequate coverage for broadband services. In the last CEDS document, the Washington State Broadband Office's 2013 Annual Report was quoted to say, "while broadband can enable improvements in the field of public safety, education, and health care, its biggest benefit to the people of Washington State may be the role it plays in job creation." This statement holds true today, and those services' reliance on broadband's capabilities makes a robust telecommunications network crucial to the long-term success of the region.

The Pandemic brought out new urgency and relevance of the overall importance of our base broadband infrastructure. The CWCOG recently completed Broadband Action / Digital Equity Plan Executive Summaries for both counties, with the intent of supporting efforts to provide fiber to the premises for all residents and area businesses. A combination of public and private providers is currently installing fiber within the region, but it will take several years to reach the long-term goal of fiber to the premises for all.

At this time, it appears that Wahkiakum County will be served with broadband the premises for county residents within the next two years. Wwest, a subsidiary of the local telecom Wahkiakum West, is moving forward with self-funded investments to provide broadband access for county residents. Cowlitz County may not be as fortunate. It has been more dependent upon large national providers that have thus far been inclined to serve the more rural areas of the county. The Port of Woodland is actively pursuing additional funding to expand their fiber network and Kalama Tel recently received funding to assist in providing fiber to their service area. Despite this investment and the possibility of additional federal funding, concerns linger that the federal and state funding will not be adequate to address the needs. It is crucial that the community continue to engage and push for both public and private sector investment leading to fiber to the premises for all residents.

Tax Climate

The region's businesses continue to benefit from Washington State's business-friendly tax environment and lower cost of real estate. There is no corporate income tax, no personal income tax, no unitary tax, and no tax on dividends, interest, or capital gains. In addition, there are no sales and use taxes on manufacturing machinery or equipment, including labor, installation, and repair services.

Cowlitz County has a relatively favorable tax climate compared to other counties in the state. The communities within the county have a sales tax rate ranging from 7.9% to 8.2% for 2023, which includes the state sales tax of 6.5%. The property tax rate in the county is moderate, with an average property

tax levy rate of \$9.87 per \$1,000 of value which matches the state average as of February 2023. Overall, Cowlitz County has a relatively low tax burden compared to other counties in the state, making it an attractive place to live and do business.

Similarly, the tax climate of Wahkiakum County is moderately favorable compared to other counties in the state based on numbers available in 2023. The county and the town of Cathlamet both have a sales tax rate of 7.8%, which includes the state sales tax of 6.5%. The average sales tax rate in Washington is 8.889%. The property tax rate in the county is relatively low, with an average levy rate of \$7.36 per \$1,000 of assessed value, which is below the state average of \$9.87. Wahkiakum County is the second lowest levy rate per \$1,000 assessed value in the state.

Educational Assets

According to the Census Bureau's American Community Survey (2021, five-year estimates), the educational attainment level of Cowlitz County shows that 89.9% of the population aged 25 years and over have at least a high-school diploma or higher, 17% have a bachelor's degree or higher, and 5.7% have a graduate or professional degree. For Wahkiakum County, the data show that 92.7% of the population aged 25 years and over have a high-school diploma or higher, 21.3% have a bachelor's degree or higher, and 8.8% have a graduate or professional degree.

Lower Columbia College (LCC), a community college located in Longview and serving southwest Washington including Cowlitz and Wahkiakum Counties, has a robust training curriculum that mirrors the area's dynamic, but developing, business climate. Working with local governments, business leaders, and public schools, the College provides vocational and professional training opportunities in response to the business community's employment needs. The College is planning a new \$42 million vocational skill center at the Longview Campus. The facility will include machining and computer labs, specialized classrooms, welding booths, fabrication labs, and other student resources. The College is also implementing new four-year degree programs to complement its University Center program that offers four-year degree opportunities through a number of universities.

General Update Since the Last CEDS

The region suffered through the pandemic as most regions did. For portions of the pandemic, the region's unemployment number almost matched that of the state. Historically we have seen an unemployment rate about two points higher than state unemployment. Since the end of the Pandemic, the region's unemployment rate has returned to the traditional two-point difference over the state. The region continues to struggle in many areas including overall employment rate, income rate, many health factors, and other related indicators.

The region is experiencing strong economic activity in certain sectors and has seen significant investment in the manufacturing sector via its major employers. Three of the most significant new investments discussed in the previous CEDS did not come to fruition due in large part to the failure to finalize permit approvals relating to anticipated carbon-footprint impacts. Wahkiakum County faces continuing challenges based on its limited economic base.

Housing has continued to stand out as a significant priority in the region. There are the traditional concerns on affordability and accessibility of housing for entry- through executive-level workers. Housing market pressures from the Vancouver area have provided new opportunities and challenges in

Cowlitz County and contributed to a significant increase in the cost of housing. The limited supply of housing units in both counties continues to challenge the economic vitality and is perceived to be slowing growth opportunities. The increase in new housing that was recognized in the last CEDS slowed dramatically during the pandemic but has rebounded in the last twelve months. The region (mostly in Cowlitz County) is seeing a significant uptick in housing starts, including multifamily development.

An additional challenge includes growing uncertainty related to the permitting process, with the perception for both public and privately led projects that the time, expense, and demands are growing beyond what is typical. New requirements related to stormwater and other areas are making small projects unviable except in rare situations. Greenhouse gas reduction will continue to challenge the region as our strong industrial and marine base works to address changing requirements. The process is also impacting the speed of broadband deployment, with the Washington State Department of Natural Resources reporting that it could take up to a year to process and approve poll attachments crossing fish-bearing streams.

We have also seen the emergence of environmental justice and equity planning requirements from state and federal agencies. These new requirements will likely slow down some projects as local agencies learn to address long-standing issues and needs with new lenses.

The Ilani Casino, located in Clark County, which includes a 368,000 square foot gaming facility has had an influence on the region over the last five years. Impacts have included new jobs as well as the quality-of-life benefits of a new concert and event facility. The Casino will be adding a new hotel with 300 guest rooms in 2023, which will once again provide a boost for jobs in the region. The casino is just outside of the district's service area in Clark County, Washington.

SWOT Analysis



SWOT Analysis

SWOT Analyses, Generally

SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) Analyses are tools commonly used in strategic planning exercises, like that of the CEDS. A SWOT Analysis helps to define the current context by assessing the area through its four constituent lenses. As conveyed by the EDA in their CEDS-related guidelines: a SWOT analysis helps provide a clear assessment of the current situation in an area by looking at competitive advantages (Strengths), juxtaposed against things that could keep the area from reaching its potential (Weaknesses and Threats), and identifying what could be leveraged to build capacity for growth (Opportunities).

About the CWCOG’s SWOT Process for the 2023-2028 CEDS

As aids in the development of this document (and particularly for the SWOT portion), the CWCOG used multiple information-gathering techniques to draft a strategic direction for the region through the CEDS process. Highlights of those techniques are noted below.

The Previously Adopted CEDS, CWCOG’s Resilience and Recovery Update, and Project Development

As the CWCOG has in place an adopted CEDS—as well as additional work through its Resilience and Recovery Update—Staff conducted research based on those plans to understand what the region’s priorities, goals, and objectives were during the time periods touched by those other planning efforts, as well as to gain an understanding of the projects that were in process at the time. The goal of this research process was to assess progress across all those items so that the contemporary context of the area could be better understood.

Project-level information was also gathered using the CWCOG’s regional project database (a member-CWCOG shared database named “CPLUS”), which contributed to the body of knowledge established by other research and supports project development.

Committee Meetings and Public-Engagement Sessions

The CWCOG hosted the CEDS Committee and other area stakeholders during a kick-off meeting for the 2023-2028 planning endeavor in September of 2022. Staff introduced the CEDS, provided an overview of the process, and outlined the proposed timeline.

During November and December, the CWCOG conducted public-engagement sessions throughout the region, which invited the public to learn about the planning process, meaningfully contribute to that process by having the opportunity to work through a SWOT analysis with staff and discuss their vision for their communities and the region as a whole. The in-person sessions were hosted in each locality that the Economic Development District serves and were hosted in the evening to increase the chance of the public attending. The CWCOG also hosted one of the sessions virtually to contribute to the process’s accessibility.

The CEDS Committee met again on December 8th, 2022, after the public-engagement sessions were conducted to discuss developments from those sessions and work through a SWOT exercise together.

Stakeholder Interviews

While some information that was garnered through those outlined methods proved valuable for purposes related to the SWOT analysis, the majority of the process's value was created by conducting individualized interviews with stakeholders from around the region. These interviews were approximately one hour in length and were composed of a SWOT-based exercise, as well as the asking of questions related to organization-level capacity, projects, strategies, and other items of interest.

The SWOT-based portion of the interview used collected findings from previous regional planning processes and positioned those items as bases for conversation around those topics (for example, the topic of available industrial property). There were two types of inquiries for each topic-item: the item's directionality and its intensity. Directionality refers to how that item has changed since the planning process in which it was identified (whether it has improved, declined, or had no meaningful change); its intensity is a subjective measure of the degree of change (rated on a scale of 1-5, with 5 being the highest intensity). Each item discussed, therefore, has both of those factors attached to it. This method allowed staff to assess the state of each item and its relative importance to each other item, therefore contributing to a prioritized strategic direction by the development of what are referred to below as *focus areas*.

Additionally, at the end of each component section anything not previously covered could be highlighted as a potentially new item in that section. However, the design of this exercise, while accommodating of new items in each component section, was mostly focused on measuring change across the range of previously identified items and assessing the updated context for new opportunities and a refreshed direction.

Focus areas were determined at the end of the interview process by looking at the top 25% of items discussed that ranked higher in intensity more frequently. This was done for each of the component sections. Some additional items were included in the focus areas as a result of staff conversations, as well as findings from the additional questions asked in each interview.

Findings

In general, many of the area's strengths, as well as its weaknesses, are deep-rooted and persistent. Although there was some discussion with stakeholders about items that were not previously identified, there were few items that were added to the SWOT analysis as a whole that were not already known.

Despite some of the area's challenges persisting, progress has been made across the four components of the SWOT analyses that were previously conducted. Some of this progress is highlighted in the SWOT Analysis and Strategic Direction sections of this CEDS. The component sections below are organized to provide a narrative overview of that component, highlight completed work that is related to the component and that has been completed in the interim between this CEDS process and the last and introduce the relevant focus areas that surfaced for that component during the SWOT analysis.

Strengths

Overview and Progress

The area is defined, in part, by its manufacturing and logistics operations. Related businesses that locate here rely on the area's extensive investment in its portfolio of infrastructures, including rail, road, and port infrastructure. The region hosts five publicly owned and directed ports of varying capacity: the three Cowlitz County ports have access to industrial land, highways, the navigable river system, and the rail network. Their work is complemented by a number of private port operations. The Port of Kalama has made significant investments to support the tourism of the region in recent years. The Wahkiakum County ports are currently more tourism-related, with marina and camping facilities; although Port District No. 2 in Wahkiakum has recently launched a business-resource facility, and Port District No. 1 of Wahkiakum is also exploring economic-development initiatives beyond tourism. Locationally, the region sits in a prime area between two nationally significant metros: Portland and Seattle and has direct ties through the waterways to the Pacific Ocean and its accompanying trade routes.

Another competitive, and locational, advantage the area has is its proximity to an abundance of recreational activities. There is sustained, regionwide interest in continuing to develop recreational opportunities through investments in infrastructure and programs going forward. Emphasis should continue to include further enhancement of the region's recreation opportunities to support quality of place and serve to attract additional visitors.

Strengths that had been previously identified (see Appendix) and reaffirmed through the 2023-2028 process pointed towards these competitive advantages, and organizations within the service area of the Economic Development District have been working to increase these advantages and build capacity to serve growing related needs. Since the last CEDS was published, a number of key projects have been completed, and others are underway that continue to deepen these strengths in the area. Some of the projects that were completed and contributed toward certain strengths outlined in the last CEDS process are noted below:

- Available Industrial Property and Related Improvements: The Beech Street Extension (City of Longview), which included EDA funding (City of Longview); Spencer Creek Business Park improvements, a floating light-industrial dock, building construction at the Kalama River Industrial Park (all Port of Kalama); Rose Way Industrial Park Phase 1 and Centennial Industrial Park, which also utilized EDA funding (both Port of Woodland); the Comprehensive Scheme of Harbor Improvements, the North Rail Connection, and a new industrial private connector roadway (All Port of Longview).
- Investments in Basic Infrastructure: Huntington Avenue pressure sewer and gas main extension (City of Castle Rock); Talley Way, Bridge Corridor and Runway Project (City of Kelso); Oregon Way sewer main replacement, a filter-plant production well, stormwater system enhancements, a pump station rehabilitation project at 46th/Olympia (all City of Longview); the Scott Hill booster station (City of Woodland); and a port sewer lift station (Town of Cathlamet).
- Investments that Contribute to a Stronger Transportation System: S.R.411/432 intersection improvements, multiple pavement-restoration projects, S.R.432/California Way intersection improvements (all City of Longview); Dougherty Drive rehabilitation project (City of Castle Rock); South Pacific Avenue road rehabilitation (City of Kelso). The loss of funding for the Industrial

Way Oregon Way interchange will initiate a new round of planning to address this major intersection serving as a major industrial and bi-state transportation network.

- Investments Related to Recreational Opportunities: Utilities upgrades for visiting RVs, marina upgrades, and County Line Park enhancements (Port No.1 of Wahkiakum County); Marina enhancements at the Port of Kalama; Willow Grove Park enhancements, including general renovations and improvements related to boat launches (both Port of Longview); Erickson Park, improvements to the Julia Butler Hansen Pool, a dock repair and replacement project, and a reconstructed footbridge over Birnie Creek (all Town of Cathlamet).

Focus Areas from the Analysis

Although some new strengths were identified in meeting with stakeholders through the 2023-2028 CEDS planning process (*increased opportunities for Pre-K, and high volunteerism in the community*, for example), a few focus areas were identified upon analysis that would continue to develop these advantages going forward, namely: increasing available industrial property; deepening the base of the area's skilled, trades-related workforce through increased access to vocational training (through Lower Columbia College and our local K-12 system); the improvement of access related to I-5 and parallel routes serving our communities; continued development at the ports, including improvements to rail and rail separation projects and enhancements to the Columbia River as related to trade; a focused approach to maintaining housing affordability; and continued development of recreational opportunities leading to enhance quality of place and community image.

Weaknesses and Threats

Overview and Progress

Many of the weaknesses and threats that were previously identified (see Appendix) will continue to be addressed going forward; although a couple new items were mentioned, such as one related to the supply of certain equipment, a perception of a lack of collaboration between regional leadership, and the mention of local jurisdictions being faced with a growing number of unfunded mandates, the frequency of response to those and similar new items was comparatively minimal. However, since the last CEDS process was conducted, there have been improvements to many items that were previously identified as weaknesses. For example: unemployment has decreased; a lack of broadband and a lack of understanding of the significance of the broadband issue has turned into expansive efforts at the federal, state, and local levels to improve access. The access to and need for quality broadband has been acknowledged as essential to modern-day living and community viability must continue to be addressed as a regional threat. Local agencies are moving to address the issue in separate ways with the installation of high-quality broadband accessible via public Wi-Fi in Cathlamet (Wahkiakum County), and efforts by the Port of Woodland in providing for broadband fiber installation along State Route 503 have contributed to improvements on this front. The long-standing situation relating to housing supply constraints and a lack of developers with capacity in the area has changed. We have seen improvement with housing starts well above the recent historical averages. Even with the improvements, housing-related efforts will continue to be a key focus for the region.

There have been other improvements as well. For example, improvements to local roads have eased some of the traffic congestion identified in the 2017-18 planning effort (signalization improvements on SR 4 as well as along Washington Way, both in Longview). An early learning childcare center was completed in the City of Kalama to contribute towards easing the regional challenge of available and affordable childcare; and as COVID made many areas aware of manifold issues (from workforce to critical systems, and supply-chain-related items), planning for a variety of forms of resiliency has increased in the area. For instance, the CWCOG collaborated with consultants through CARES Act funding to develop a regional Resiliency and Recovery Plan, and in one example of efforts from that plan, has been working with local partners to help increase small-business resiliency via better business planning through its toolkit, developed as a part of that planning process. The toolkit was recently translated into Spanish for distribution within the Hispanic business community.

Related to natural disasters, the CWCOG has assisted in the creation and development of the Spirit Lake/Toutle-Cowlitz River Collaborative which works to reduce the threat of damage related to sediment from Mount Saint Helens. However, the region continues to face flood risks in most areas (both related and unrelated to Mount Saint Helens). Much of the region's population is protected, in part, by levee systems, and it is crucial that this issue continues to be addressed—other parts of the region are plagued with regular flooding and work will continue to mitigate impacts and causes over time.

Focus Areas from the Analysis

Through the 2023-2028 planning process, the following focus areas were highlighted as needing continued and increased attention in the next five-year period that this CEDS will cover: an extensive permitting process; a lack of workforce availability (relating to the size of the pool of talent); challenges

surrounding a shrinking workforce due to an aging population; regional broadband limitations; a lack of funding to maintain and improve municipal facilities; the limited housing inventory; talent retention and attraction challenges; and a continuing lack of childcare (and/or affordable access to it). And for Threats: business closures; natural disasters (such as those arising from Mount Saint Helens, and the risk of flooding due to changing weather patterns); aging infrastructure and infrastructure costs; rising housing costs; COVID-related economic impacts; and new to list, the effects of the impending clean energy transition in the state.

Some of these items, although previously identified, became increased areas of focus because of changes elsewhere. For example, conditions related to rising infrastructure costs may be attributed in part to supply-chain challenges, and regulatory requirements. We could continue to see a tighter labor market that affects the cost of infrastructure, despite the positive development of robust funding opportunities currently available for infrastructure through recent Federal initiatives (such as the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) and the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA)). And although there is funding available, much of the region faces challenges relating to gathering matching funds based on the small population served or the overall capacity of the community.

Opportunities

Overview and Progress

Opportunities to develop capacity for public- and private-sector growth can arise from assessing any one of an area's strengths, weaknesses, or threats. During the 2023-2028 SWOT process, the question related to the opportunities' component was "*what did we capitalize on over the past five years,*" and, additionally, the questions asked related to the SWOT stakeholder interviews (previously outlined) were geared toward looking for new opportunities that may have emerged over that time period.

The value of some previously identified opportunities (see Appendix), such as the area having "less rigid regulations," and "affordability over Vancouver," have waned over the years as the regulatory environment has become increasingly uncertain, and development pressures pushing up from the South—coupled with prices generally rising—have worked toward decreasing that affordability gap with neighboring Clark County (As an aside, this has occurred without a corresponding increase in wages paid by many local businesses). However, certain opportunities that did present themselves during the 2018-2022 planning process were capitalized on with related completed projects, some of which are noted below.

- Supporting Startups, Entrepreneurship, and Lending Opportunities: The founding of CWCOG's Lower Columbia Investment Network (LCIN) and its work with area libraries to support the surfacing of business-related resources, as well as Lower Columbia College investing in its Business Achievement Center to support area entrepreneurs, have all contributed to improving the entrepreneurial ecosystem of the area. Economic Development partners throughout the region should continue to build partnerships to address financing, education and training for businesses and the workforce needs.
- Expanding Technology and Broadband Access: Through the CWCOG's Broadband Action Teams aforementioned, as well as area organizations supporting the delivery of devices to those in need (for example: Goodwill, Lower Columbia College, and Workforce Southwest Washington). As well as the creation of a free Wi-Fi access program that covers the downtown area in Cathlamet. Recent successes by the Port of Woodland and Kalama Tel have brought significant broadband investments to the region via federal funding.
- Efforts to Revitalize Downtown Areas: recent and planned projects throughout the region are focal points of improving the regional central business districts. Improvements have included volunteer engagement, sidewalk replacements, planters, and mural projects. Partners throughout the region should continue to build upon the core resources available in the downtown and adjacent areas to promote density and take advantage of the existing infrastructure available to serve growth opportunities.
- Rural Community Development Projects: Pedestrian improvements at Exit 49 and improvements along North Huntington Avenue (both in the City of Castle Rock); and parking enhancements in downtown Cathlamet have worked to address identified opportunities and local needs.
- Efforts to Diversify Industries and Business Climate: The 426-acre industrial site development feasibility study in the City of Woodland, and the feasibility study for Martin Bar by the Port of Woodland will in time provide significant new opportunities for the region.

Focus Areas from the Analysis

Items still seen as opportunities for continued focus identified through this analysis are: continuing to support startups, entrepreneurship, and lending opportunities in order to improve the entrepreneurial ecosystem of the area; to continue to actively diversify the economy; to continue to expand technology and broadband access (although local internet service providers (ISPs) have also increased development efforts to provide high speed broadband access to significantly more resident and businesses in the coming two years); to expand high-school career-development opportunities; to expand high-school and post high school vocational training; to improve the promotion of tourism-related recreational opportunities to take advantage of emerging and non-traditional tourism opportunities; and to improve transportation connectivity across the region. Attention should also be given to support efforts for the Associate Development Organization in each county and other agencies actively engaged with expanding the economic vitality of the region.

Strategic Direction



Strategic Direction

About the Strategic Direction

The Strategic Direction works to answer the questions “Where do we want to go?” and “How are we going to get there?” It contains a vision statement that seeks to capture the ultimate outcome of its range of goals and objectives, as well as an action plan, which is designed to address those goals and objectives through specific projects.

This planning process produced four interconnected topic sections that were the direct outcomes of the work done to understand the region’s contemporary context: Infrastructure; Workforce Development; Business Development and Entrepreneurship; and Community Development, Recreation, and Tourism. These sections and all goals and objectives within them are prioritized to meet the needs of the region as they are now, but they are also all forward-looking, driving the region toward a future of increased prosperity.

Vision

To develop a region characterized as a responsive, dynamic, and globally competitive force with small-town charm.

Infrastructure



Section Topic: Infrastructure

Section Overview

High-quality infrastructure allows the region's core industries to locate and thrive here and form a key component of what the area's economy is built on. Infrastructure in this section includes that which is related to ports, rail, highway, and local roads, as well as what is commonly referred to as "basic infrastructure," like that related to water, gas, sewer, and electric—and more newly recognized: broadband.

About the Collection of Goals and Objectives

The goals and objectives in this section work to recognize and sustain the value that quality infrastructure brings into the area; whether related to port operations, or to supporting daily activity in the region's many communities by improving the movement of people and things through the built environment. Infrastructure is a key strength of the area that local stakeholders are looking to improve upon, and having an adequate, and resilient, supply of land and buildings where businesses can tap into those infrastructural investments was a top priority identified through the planning process.

Organizations within the region are working to support the demand for industrial land by exploring the feasibility of site development and in some cases moving beyond shovel readiness for industrial properties. Examples include the case of a study underway for Barlow Point at the Port of Longview; by doing site infrastructural work, for example, related to Spencer Creek Business Park at the Port of Kalama; and by working to supply buildings in which new or growing businesses can take root, like the Rose Way Industrial Park buildings being constructed by the Port of Woodland. These are happening among other developments taking place in municipalities across the region, such as The Landing on the Cowlitz development project in Castle Rock which will provide for new industrial and commercial land to support job creation in the coming years. Work by a partnership of the area ports and the United States Army Corps of Engineers is contributing to more sustainable use of the Columbia River for trade and travel, and work is underway to complete new turning basins for large ships to better traverse the river.

Work by the CWCOG for many years has included issues around broadband. More recently the CWCOG has spearheaded the Broadband Action Team efforts in both counties to support partners in building out a quality telecommunications network. Agencies around the region are also working to build new infrastructure to accommodate increasing development pressures, including the installation of fiber-optic network infrastructure to ensure a robust broadband offering to all homes and businesses. Ongoing financial assistance will be necessary to support new infrastructure, as well as to upgrade and maintain aging infrastructure (as in the case of work by the Wahkiakum County Public Utility District, to harden the system to increase overall resiliency).

The work outlined contributes to the durability of the area's economy in both sustaining its core ability to trade competitively and by supporting the continued existence and growth of local communities; however, there are increasing challenges to that durability elsewhere in the region. Namely, sediment flows from Mount Saint Helens affecting the northern part of Cowlitz County, but increasingly in other communities throughout the region. This challenge presented an opportunity to gather a wide range of stakeholders at all levels of government, as well as area businesses and nonprofit organizations to form the Spirit Lake/Toutle-Cowlitz River Collaborative. The Collaborative, which named the CWCOG as the

administrative coordination CWCOG is working to protect the safety and welfare of the downstream population, improve cultural and ecological assets as well as rebuilding the tourism sector related to Mount Saint Helens.

Conversations about sustainability and resiliency presented themselves throughout the discussions. Local agencies will continue to address these issues in a growing number of projects they address each year. Growing complexity and coming regulatory changes will require attention from the area PUDs to maintain our strong energy position in the years to come. Specifically, we will need to address the Clean Energy Transition, which could have impacts on the existing industrial base.

As with many opportunities, the electrification of the transportation system will bring with it threats relating to fire and environmental risks in the system where crashes still occur. Work at the CWCOG will include efforts to better understanding of these opportunities and challenges.

In addition to some of the exploratory work outlined above, there are also more conceptually straightforward systemwide improvements needing to be made related to the movement of freight on and around the highways. But work related to roads is increasingly being asked to meet the needs of many users (for example, with the *Complete Streets* movement) and there are opportunities for the CWCOG (while also being the Regional Transportation Planning Organization) to seek improvements that can be widely shared across user types.

Goals and Objectives:

Goal I1: Continue to Support Work that Improves Opportunities for Industry to Locate and Expand Within the CWCOG Economic Development District.

Objectives:

- I1.1: Support Developments that Enhance the Region's Industrial Base.
- I1.2: Continue to Support Efforts that Improve the Columbia River Channel for Trade.
- I1.3: Promote Efforts that Improve the Region's Ability to Work with the State and Federal Government to Meet Permitting Needs and Multiple Stakeholder Goals.

Goal I2: Preserve and Enhance the Base Infrastructure of the Region.

Objectives:

- I2.1: Support Partners in Planning for and Finding Financing Opportunities to Maintain and Improve Infrastructure.
- I2.2: Continue to Work Through the Broadband Action Teams to Ensure Equitably Distributed and Accessible High-Speed Broadband to All Premises Throughout the Region.

Goal I3: Increase Regional Resiliency Through Improved Partnerships and Better Management of Natural Resources.

Objectives:

- I3.1: Continue to Improve the Mitigation of Sediment-Related Challenges Throughout the Region.
- I3.2: Work with Area Ports and Other Industry Stakeholders on Climate-Related Actions.

- I3.3: Support Efforts by Partners to Understand Needs, Challenges, and Opportunities Related to the Implementation of the Clean Energy Transition, Including the Exploration of Hydrogen as an Energy Source, and Topics Related to Energy Storage.
- I3.4: Explore the Electrification of Local Transportation with Local Utilities, Transit Providers, and Other Partners to Take Advantage of Robust Funding Mechanisms Available.
- I3.5: Support Local Agencies' Efforts to Address Flood Issues, Including Coordination with State and Federal Partners that Works to Address Causes of Flooding and impacts to the economy.

Goal I4: Enhance the Transportation System for All Users Throughout the CWCOG Economic Development District.

Objectives:

- I4.1: Improve the Regional Transportation System to Better Support Freight and Other Users.
- I4.2: Continue to Support Walkable and Better-Connected Communities.
- I4.3: Continue to Support and Build Transit Opportunities Throughout the Region.
- I4.4: Work to Better Coordinate Transportation and Economic Development Activities and Investments.
- I4.5: Explore Ways to Address Slide Risks Impacting the Regional Road and Highway Systems.

Workforce Development



Section Topic: Workforce Development

Section Overview

Workforce development, in part, is concerned with training pipelines available to members of the community; the total range of knowledge, skills, and abilities present in that community; as well as the cultivation of particular skill sets for employers extant or prospective. In this section, the term also includes the concept of talent retention and attraction—efforts related to keeping current employees in an area, bringing native residents back to the region after they have left and gained experience, as well as working to develop interest from those outside the area to locate within it.

About the Collection of Goals and Objectives

The goals and objectives in this section work together to approach the range of workforce development efforts from both within the region and externally. We will work to act internally through improvements in the educational system (K-12 and Higher Education), improvements in vocational training as separate from the educational system, improvements to coordination within the region (between related organizations, and between organizations and employers). Externally we will work to improve on methods to draw new employees into the area.

Educational Service District 112, School Districts, Lower Columbia College, and other organizations related to the educational pipeline are working to improve both their traditional educational offerings, as well as their career-related offerings (including vocational training). Some local schools, for example, are being staffed with individuals who can help students navigate potential career (or learning) paths that can contribute to local retention goals, as well as looking for new ways to connect interested students with local employers. As one example of the latter, the CWCOG and other local public agencies participated in a high-school-oriented career expo in October of 2022 that offered students from around the region a chance to interface with current employees and learn about the types of work done in each organization, as well as the skills and training required to get into particular fields.

At the higher end of the educational spectrum, Lower Columbia College (LCC) has been investing in its degree programs and offers multiple bachelor-level degrees, as well as a host of associate-level degrees that prepare students with critical-thinking skills needed for participation in the workforce. Additionally, LCC is planning significant expansions to its vocational offerings with major investments in buildings and equipment. While these efforts are widely lauded, one of the findings through the planning process was that there was an opportunity to explore the siting of additional training facilities for specialized workers (such as those in public safety), which could work to support local businesses during times of high training activity. The college is also working to boost the overall educational opportunities in the region through its University System which provides a number of options for area residents to earn a bachelor's degree without relocating or a lengthy commute.

Due to a combination of circumstances (a tighter labor market, a tight housing market, and a shrinking workforce due to the aging population, as examples) the region is finding that there are fewer workers in the area to take available jobs. This has spurred efforts undertaken by Workforce Southwest Washington (WSW) and the Cowlitz Economic Development Council (CEDC), for example, to collaborate more closely with employers to understand needs and work to support them; additionally, it has also brought to light questions about the current state of employment in the region. On this topic, WSW has worked to develop a guide that strives to improve the job quality in the area by highlighting for employers the contemporary considerations that need to be made to attract and retain workers within the current labor market. While these are appropriate responses to the current

situation, there was identified through the SWOT process another potential pathway into addressing some of the challenges. This alternative is a richer assessment of the total range of work that needs to be done in order to cut down on the staff time requirements. As the streamlining process could be something applicable to multiple organizations within the service area, this will be something the CWCOG will be exploring the value of going forward.

Work outlined above (for example, with understanding the contours of particular jobs) has also opened up new opportunities in assessing barriers to employment that may have previously been, or are currently, in existence. Conversations with staff at local nonprofit organizations (for example, Goodwill) revealed that there were wide-ranging efforts to improve the employment successes of traditionally marginalized populations. The CWCOG plans to assist in understanding the needs and opportunities related to these efforts through the exploration of a coordinating committee working to better connect local actors to serve more equitably everyone living within the region.

Goals and Objectives:

Goal W1: Continue to Improve the Range of Educational Offerings in the Region that Contribute to a Sustainable Source of Local Talent.

Objectives:

W1.1: Continue to Support Efforts that Connect Youth with Local Career Options.

W1.2: Continue to Support Efforts that Expand Opportunities Related to Acquiring Higher Education Throughout the Region.

W1.3: Support Partners in Efforts to Enhance the Local Vocational and Career Training Environment, Including Facilities.

Goal W2: Continue to Improve the Ability to Assess and Deliver Talent Needs Across the Region.

Objectives:

W2.1: Continue to Support the Development of Tools and Materials that Improve Talent Attraction and Retention in the Region.

W2.2: Continue to Support Efforts that Improve Coordination Between Education Providers and Workforce-Related Organizations.

Goal W3: Work to Enhance the Workforce-Related Environment for People and Businesses with Heightened Needs.

Objectives:

W3.1: Support Efforts to Address Challenges Associated with an Aging Workforce in Key Industries.

W3.2: Participate in the Regional Discussion on Childcare to Explore Challenges, Needs, and Opportunities Related to Workforce Development.

W3.3: Work with Partners in Addressing Demand for Digital Skills and Devices Related to Employment Opportunities.

W3.4: Work to Improve the Coordination of Services Related to Marginalized Populations, Including the Unhoused.

Business Development and Entrepreneurism



Section Topic: Business Development and Entrepreneurship

Section Overview

The work of an organization like an Economic Development District takes place in both the public and private spheres. It is tasked with both supporting current and prospective businesses as well as developing the capacity of an area to support sectors of the economy that may not yet exist there, or at all. It is part of the goal of the CEDS process to both explore how the economy, as a system, is currently operating, and to look for opportunities to alter the system such that it operates in new and better ways.

About the Collection of Goals and Objectives

The goals and objectives in this section work to address both the economic system as it currently exists—with its attendant businesses, networks, and infrastructures—and the system as it could be. What could be might include reinvigorated configurations that improve on the range of activities that can take place within the CWCOG Economic Development District, and the value of those activities in the marketplace. As these goals are prioritized, they are operationally ordered to work within the system to address current business needs first, with exploratory work as a secondary effort. The former includes work to make sure that there is a range of suitable land, lease arrangements, financing mechanisms, buildings, and zoning structures that make locating in the area feasible for the greatest array of businesses. In one example from the region, the Port of Kalama saw the opportunity to develop industrial buildings that would suit a smaller scale of business than typically found for that class of activity, which opens up new possibilities for entrepreneurs that are now able to locate in the area. A space that could host a start-up business that does not need a large industrial space, but still needs the land zoned accordingly so that they are operating within regulation. In a couple other examples, the CWCOG is working with Port District No. 2 in Wahkiakum County to support the development of a business incubator and co-working space hosted in port-owned facilities; and has consulted with Port District No. 1 (also in Wahkiakum) related to a potential business park in the County.

In learning about some of the challenges related to certain types of businesses locating here due to the acquisition of permits, staff were made aware that an opportunity may exist to collaborate with partners on efforts to pre-permit land for certain uses to ease this part of the process. Although permitting is only one part of the start-up phase for a business. Another part of a business's start-up and growth is related to acquiring capital. Although there are lenders in the area, some entrepreneurs may not want, or be able to, work with a traditional lender. Recognizing this gap, the CWCOG organized the Lower Columbia Investment Network, which is a Local Investment Network (LIN) that strives to link local entrepreneurs with local investors. As the LCIN has become a formal program of the CWCOG, work will continue on developing it to better serve both entrepreneurs and investors. In general, a primary goal for this CEDS period will be working to assess various portions of the area's processes or circumstances for what may be hindering entrepreneurial potential and evaluate the long-term possibilities for the LCIN concept.

Supporting both startups and expanding businesses meets a portion of the total need, but working to support existing businesses that do not fit those other characteristics was still a recognized need in the SWOT process. The COVID pandemic caused business closures across the country, some temporary, some permanent; however, one thing that was made apparent during the pandemic was the need to

improve the average ability of a business to withstand various kinds of challenges. Over the past few years, the CWCOG has provided, in cooperation with Cowlitz Economic Development Council and other partners, a variety of training sessions that business owners and entrepreneurs have attended. Additionally, work that was funded by the CARES Act helped the CWCOG create and distribute a business-resiliency toolkit aimed at small and medium-sized businesses.

The CWCOG has also been working on a tool for entrepreneurs and business owners that strives to organize all locally available business-facing services provided by governments and nonprofits in the area to make entrepreneurs aware of the free and low-cost services available to them. Along these lines, the CWCOG has been working with local libraries making business resources more readily available. However, these efforts are designed to complement the presence of other actors working in this space such as the local Small Business Development Center; local Chambers of Commerce; and LCC. LCC has recently opened a physical space dedicated to serving business needs on their campus.

The last set of objectives in this section are exploratory in nature and are the result of conversations and research related to improving the economic system as a whole in the area, as aforementioned. Cluster-based-development efforts help firms working in similar parts of the economy to work better together; they also allow for scalable increases in efficiency from public-sector investments, for example, through certain specialized infrastructures that can be shared amongst multiple users. These efforts spread the gains of public investment and also work to improve resilience and innovation in portions of an area's economy. By taking note of certain investments being made by partners, we may yield positive economic results for the area, and may improve talent pipelines, innovation, and productivity. Examples of key work include the STEM-related work by our partners in Wahkiakum County at the Washington State University Extension (in advanced manufacturing, IT, and robotics in particular), as well as strategic investments by Lower Columbia College.

Goals and Objectives:

Goal B1: Continue to Enhance the CWCOG Economic Development District to Support a Robust Entrepreneurial Ecosystem.

Objectives:

- B1.1: Work with Partners to Encourage and Improve Land Readiness Across the Spectrum of Business Needs.
- B1.2: Support the Development of Commercial and Industrial Land for Startups and Smaller-Footprint Businesses.
- B1.3: Explore and Work to Improve the Landscape of Financing Mechanisms Available to Businesses in the Region, Including the Continued Development, and Implementation of the Lower Columbia Investment Network.
- B1.4: Explore Potential Barriers to Entrepreneurship in the Region and Continue to Work to Remove Them.
- B1.5: Explore Programs and Tools to Nourish Entrepreneurship Through Youth Programs.

Goal B2: Continue Efforts to Sustain the Local Business Environment.

Objectives:

- B2.1: Continue to Support Entrepreneurs Through the Hosting and Sponsoring of Relevant Trainings and Networking Opportunities that Increase Business Resiliency.
- B2.2: Work to Improve the Business Community's Understanding of Local Resources Available to Them.
- B2.3: Support Efforts of Downtown Revitalization Groups in Effort to Reduce the Threat of Business Closures.

Goal B3: Continue Efforts to Diversify the Economic Base.

Objectives:

- B3.1: Explore the Potential for the Development and Nourishment of a Health Care-Centered Cluster.
- B3.2: Explore the Need and Feasibility for the Development and Nourishment of a Local Industrial-Tech Hub.
- B3.3: Explore the Existence and Development of an Ancillary Business Subcluster to Support the Regions Major Employers.
- B3.4: Continue to Build the Capacity for Strategic Economic Development Within the CWCOG Economic Development District.

Community Development, Recreation and Tourism



Section Topic: Community Development, Recreation, and Tourism

Section Overview

Community Development, Recreation, and Tourism are three planning concerns that are grouped together in this CEDS because investments in any one of them can easily support positive development for another. These subjects work together to support a high quality of place, which can bolster a local economy from within, as well as work towards drawing in new sources of revenue through increases in tourism.

About the Collection of Goals and Objectives

The goals and objectives in this section are concerned with finding ways to enhance amenities throughout the region to support residents and visitors alike. The CWCOG has provided technical planning services to municipal members over the last few years (such as parks planning, comprehensive planning, zoning-code updates, and GIS-related work), and will work to support local cities and towns as they face new population and business development pressures from neighboring areas. One example of a desire taking shape in some communities around the region is community planning in accordance with Main Street principles—generally meaning compact and walkable downtown areas with high levels of street landscaping and enhancing a mixed-use approach to zoning (for example, allowing businesses to locate on the ground-level floor of a building that has living spaces on higher floors).

Additionally, the CWCOG has been working on multiple trail-related projects that course through local communities and support residents' and tourists' access to recreational opportunities (such as the Rails-to-Trails project, and the Six Rivers Trail). As recreational access is a highly desired attribute by people who typically move to the area, these efforts are expected to continue during the course of the CEDS planning horizon.

Because of the region's inherent geographical traits, and its proximity to larger touristic draws—like the Pacific Ocean, fish bearing streams and Mount Saint Helens—the second set of objectives work to capitalize on efforts in motion around the region, as well as spur new ones. Work by the Mount. Saint Helens Institute in reimagining the visitor experience at their Coldwater Campus is one example of a large-scale project that will take advantage of the international appeal of the mountain; however, there is more work to be done in providing for extended experiences in the region. The Port of Kalama's tourism-related work in building their interpretive center, cruise-ship dock, and synergistic infrastructure connecting the Port's property with downtown Kalama are examples of the types of efforts that could be reproduced elsewhere in the region.

Our partners in Wahkiakum County are looking to capitalize on the region's affiliation with the Expedition of Meriwether Lewis and William Clark. Efforts will include marketing the state designated scenic byway (SR4) through the county, as well as the exploration of potential ferry-related development that ties Oregon and Washington together via the Columbia River. Port District No. 2 is exploring the potential of nearby land for recreational and touristic purposes.

Items to consider and build upon are the need for a regional marketing and advertising program that promotes the entire region. Much of the weight of the tourism development approach has been placed on Mount Saint Helens resources, but the region offers significant opportunities beyond the mountain.

One thing that was exposed during the SWOT process related to the topic of tourism was the potential for a coordinated approach to it throughout the region, which would work to deliver a consistent and high-quality experience connecting all the area has to offer. The CWCOG will be investigating the feasibility of this approach with its partners during the five-year life of this plan.

Goals and Objectives:

Goal C1: Support Efforts that Create Dynamic Communities that Deliver an Exceptional Quality of Place.

Objectives:

- C1.1: Provide Support for Improving the Quality and Quantity of Housing Throughout the Region.
- C1.2: Support Partners in Meeting New Needs for Services as Housing Developments Come Online.
- C1.3: Continue to Plan for and Develop the Region's Trails Systems.

Goal C2: Expand the CWCOG Economic Development District's Capacity to Draw Tourists by Enhancing Coordination and Tourism-Related Development.

Objectives:

- C2.1: Explore the Viability and Support for Cooperative, Tourism-Related Marketing Throughout the Region.
- C2.2: Support Regional Efforts Related to Heritage-Based Tourism.
- C2.3: Continue to Support the Development of Tourism-Related Anchor Projects.
- C2.4: Support the Hosting of Large-Scale Events Around the Region.
- C2.5: Support the Improvement of Community Assets as they Relate to Regional Tourism Efforts.

Economic Resilience



Economic Resilience

About the Section

Although the topic of resiliency has been interwoven throughout the CEDS, this section will serve as an overview of the concept of resiliency. Resilience, in the context of economic development, is a region's ability to anticipate, withstand, and "bounce back" to its previous state after experiencing a disruption. An area can improve its responsiveness by understanding risks that may accrue to key assets (those with the potential to more broadly affect the economy) and work to mitigate that risk before a crisis occurs.

When disruptions to the economic base of an area occurs, they usually manifest in three ways:

"Downturns or other significant events in the national or international economy which impact demand for locally produced goods and consumer spending; Downturns in particular industries that constitute a critical component of the region's economic activity; and/or other external shocks (a natural or man-made disaster, closure of a military base, exit of a major employer, the impacts of climate change, etc.)"

(page 18, U.S. Economic Development Administration, CEDS Content Guidelines 2023)

The EDA defines two initiatives that are imperative to maintaining resilience: "Steady-State" and "Responsive" initiatives.

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

(page 18, U.S. Economic Development Administration, CEDS Content Guidelines 2023).

Vulnerabilities

The CEDS and CWCOG have identified several vulnerabilities within the region, and fall under four major sectors:

- Infrastructure – Permitting, increased stormwater regulation, aging roads/highways/ports, lack of broadband, etc.
- Workforce Development/Demographics – Aging workforce, lacking talent retention/attraction, outmigration of younger generations, lack of preparation for employment of students (K-12), etc.
- Business Development/Entrepreneurship – Limited economic base, lack of workforce availability, business closures, slow revitalization of businesses due to the pandemic, etc.
- Community Development/Environmental Crises – COVID-19 pandemic, potential loss of agricultural land, flooding, landslides, etc.

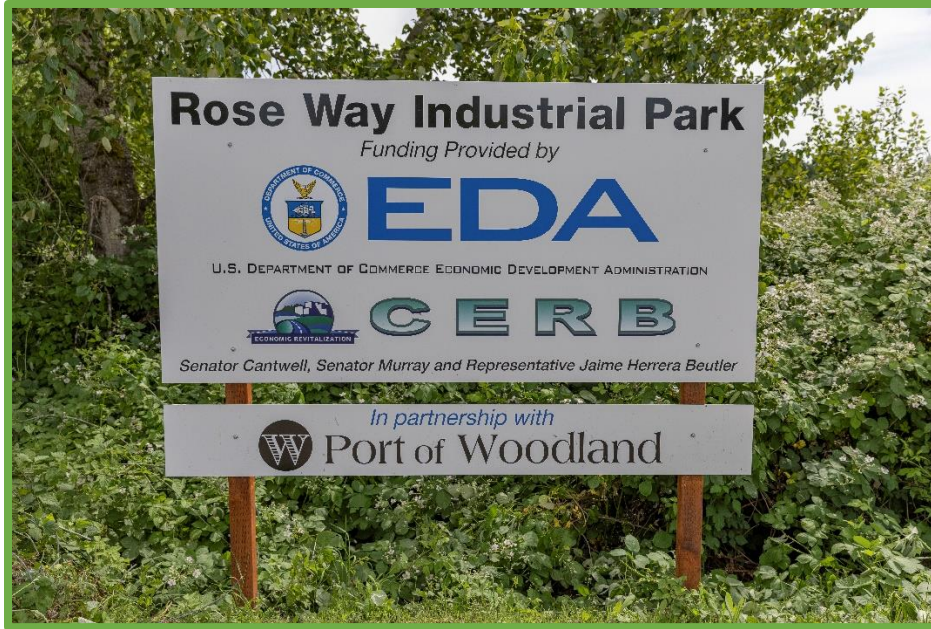
Planning for and Implementing Resilience

The CWCOG is improving the region's resilience through several steady-state initiatives. One is the CEDS itself, a long-term, recurring strategy plan. By identifying the region's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats, the CEDS document allows for a better visualization of the region's situation and supplies potential actions by the local leadership to be undertaken to bolster resilience. The CWCOG also developed a "Small Business Resiliency" toolkit – to provide access to better business planning – helped lead the formulation of Spirit Lake/Toutle-Cowlitz River Collaborative (SLTCRC), is increasing the accessibility of business resources through local libraries, acts as the Longview-Kelso-Rainier Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) and as the Southwest Washington Regional Transportation Planning Organization (SWRTPO) lead agency, amongst others.

The CWCOG also acts as a source of information and a convener of regional stakeholders, providing responsive initiatives for recovery following a crisis. In acting as a source of information, the CWCOG provides the regional update business resource list, gives information useful in response to a crisis such as COVID-19 Information, Legislative Updates, resources for reopening shut-down businesses, and grant, loan, financial relief, and capital information/resources, to name a few. The CWCOG has also increased transparency and local communication through its efforts, such as the Annual Report which supplied information on COVID-19 relief projects, broadband access, and Geographic Information Systems (GIS). In acting as a convener, the CWCOG provides, but is not limited to, the SLTCRC, the CEDS committee, and the region's Transportation Technical Advisory Committee.

The strengthening of resilience is vital to the region's health and growth. Due to climate change, the region is facing increased risks with flooding, wildfires, changing weather patterns that alter rain and wind beyond traditional norms; combined with the potential disasters of Mount Saint Helens and earthquakes, any of these natural disasters – despite being sparse – will cause catastrophic damage to the ecosystem of the region. To counter the effects of these potential disasters, it is imperative to research and formulate plans preemptively and to ensure long-term economic stability. Currently, and moving forward, the CWCOG will work with emergency management services, environmental disaster agencies, and other agencies, to prepare for crises that may come. To achieve this, the CWCOG will continue to strive for recurring open community discussions of preventative measures and to foster innovative ideas.

Action Plan



Action Plan

About the Action Plan

The projects described below are the highest-priority projects that were identified and outlined through the CEDS Process. This Action Plan includes both CWCOG- and partner-led projects that work to address key issues and focus areas from the SWOT Analysis and Strategic Direction portions of this document. This CEDS also includes an overview of additional projects (that are in process or will be started during this planning horizon) that work to address the priorities in this document. Those are located in the Appendix.

CWCOG Economic Development District-Led Projects (Not Yet Initiated):

- **Project: Permitting Workgroup**
 - Description: Permitting difficulties related to businesses locating in the area have been consistently identified as a regional weakness. This project would be centered on finding new ways to convey the economic harm that this situation has inflicted upon the region.
 - Related Goal/Objective: Goal I1/Objective I1.3: Promote Efforts that Improve the Region's Ability to Work with the State and Federal Government to Meet Permitting Needs and Multiple Stakeholder Goals.
 - District's Role: The CWCOG would initiate this workgroup to better understand and catalog the challenges faced. The CWCOG would also serve as the point of contact and the entity that would administer contracts with consultants as needed.
 - Partnership: This initiative would solicit participation from agencies across the region and would rely on close coordination to better convey the region's story to the appropriate authorities.
 - Budget and Funding Sources: A rough estimate of \$200,000 to hire a consultant for related work. No funding source yet identified.
 - Timeframe: Start in 12-18 months.
- **Project: Childcare Workgroup**
 - Description: The CWCOG has been made increasingly aware of the difficulties in the area related to accessible and affordable childcare through this planning process. As related to workforce development and coinciding with Workforce Southwest Washington's work on their quality-job initiatives, the district saw an opportunity to leverage its organizational structure and network to understand the issues and find ways for the region to respond to them.
 - Related Goal/Objective: Goal W3/Objective W3.2: Participate in the Regional Discussion on Childcare to Explore Challenges, Needs, and Opportunities Related to Workforce Development.
 - District's Role: The CWCOG would organize and lead this effort.
 - Partnership: Partners working in the workforce-development space would be asked to take a more significant role in the workgroup, however, as it is a challenge many organizations and individuals are contending with, the district is expecting to cast a wide net.

- Budget and Funding Sources: Local funding that matches economic-development efforts would be the source of funding. No budget yet outlined.
- Timeframe: The District will plan on hosting listening sessions within six months and have a tentative action plan for the next steps within one year.
- **Project: Comprehensive Recreational-Tourism Plan**
 - Description: Both recreation and tourism were mentioned many times during the planning process, and there are many individual actors working independently in the area within both spaces; however, the region lacks a focused approach that may be beneficial district wide. This project would seek to develop a plan to capitalize on the recreational opportunities available, and work to create a high-quality region-wide experience, highlighting tourism opportunities year-round.
 - Related Goal/Objective: Goal C2: Affiliated with the Entirety of the Goal.
 - District's Role: The CWCOG would initiate and lead this project.
 - Partnership: Many people are involved with tourism in the area and the District Organization would seek to work with a wide range of partners.
 - Budget and Funding Sources: Traditional sources of the district's economic-development funding could be applied to efforts. A budget has not yet been outlined.
 - Timeframe: The CWCOG is expecting to host initial discussions with public-sector stakeholders within nine months and creating a plan for moving forward in the first half of 2024.

CWCOG Economic Development District-Led Projects (In Progress):

- **Project: Spirit Lake/Toutle-Cowlitz River Collaborative (SLTCRC)**
 - Description: The SLTCRC is a group of public- and private-sector stakeholders working to address sediment-related challenges stemming from the Mount Saint Helens eruption of 1980. This was identified as a continuing need in the planning process as it touches on so many aspects of the area's continuing development. The entities that are a part of this collaborative effort strive to provide information and contribute expertise, bring issues of shared concern to the table; identify and share planning timelines as appropriate, participate in subcommittees as appropriate, and assist with meetings (such as leading related tours).
 - Related Goal/Objective: Goal I3/Objective I3.1: Continue to Improve the Mitigation of Sediment-Related Challenges Throughout the Region.
 - District's Role: the CWCOG is the Administrative Coordinating Entity for this collaborative and is responsible for leading the effort.
 - Next Steps: The next undertaking the group will focus on will be cooperative project development addressing sediment concerns farther upstream.
 - Partnership: The collaborative is a partnership of the United States Army Corps of Engineers, the United States Forest Service, NOAA Fisheries, the Cowlitz Indian Tribe, Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation, The United States Federal Emergency Management Administration, the United States Geological Survey, The Washington State Department of Ecology, the Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife, the Washington State Department of Natural Resources, The City of Kelso, The

City of Castle Rock, The City of Longview, Cowlitz County, The Cowlitz County Public Utility District, the Port of Longview, the Cowlitz Conservation District, the Consolidated Diking Improvement District No. 1, the Cowlitz-Wahkiakum Council of Governments, and the Lower Columbia Fish Recovery Board.

- Budget and Funding Sources: The Collaborative previously received funding through the Washington State Legislature, and staff time is supported by the district’s traditional funding sources.
- Timeframe: This work will be ongoing to continue to meet the need in the region.
- **Project: Grant Intelligence Program, Continuing Development**
 - Description: The Grant Intelligence Program is an initiative of the CWCOG to provide information on strategic grant funding opportunities to entities throughout the region. It currently provides this information in two ways: via a newsletter that is typically published quarterly, and by responding to grant inquiries from area organizations. This continues to be a high need in the area where many local organizations do not have the capacity to do grant research or application-related tasks. Also related are the grant workshops that the CWCOG has hosted and will continue to host. The program has sourced a wide array of grant information for partners in the area—some related to infrastructure, as needed, and some related to other efforts.
 - Related Goal/Objective: Goal I2/Objective I2.1: Support Partners in Planning for and Finding Financing Opportunities to Maintain and Improve Infrastructure.
 - District’s Role: The CWCOG has developed and continues to host this service.
 - Next Steps: The next phase of the Grant Intelligence program will be a streamlining of its catalogue of private-sector grant opportunities to make finding applicable grants faster.
 - Partnership: While this is a program of the CWCOG, it does rely on feedback from organizations which have used the service from time to time. An outreach initiative may be conducted within the next year related to future needs for the program.
 - Budget and Funding Sources: This work is funded by the district’s traditional economic-development program funding.
 - Timeframe: This work will be ongoing to continue to meet the need in the region.
- **Project: Lower Columbia Investment Network, Continued Development**
 - Description: The Lower Columbia Investment Network (LCIN) is a program of the CWCOG that seeks to connect local entrepreneurs with local investors in efforts to launch or expand business endeavors in the region. The program also strives to improve the entrepreneurial network of the area. The LCIN has hosted multiple events and has had success linking entrepreneurial ideas with capital. Continuing to find ways to develop the entrepreneurial ecosystem by supporting startups and others with these kinds of opportunities was identified as a continuing need through the SWOT process.
 - Related Goal/Objective: Goal B1/Objective B1.3: Explore and Work to Improve the Landscape of Financing Mechanisms Available to Businesses in the Region, Including the Continued Development, and Implementation of the Lower Columbia Investment Network.
 - District’s Role: This is a program of the CWCOG and is housed within the organization.

- Next Steps: Staff work in the near future will be focused on designing and implementing processes that help to build the overall quality of the business-idea pipeline.
- Partnership: The CWCOG's work is supported by local stakeholders including the City of Kelso, the City of Longview, and Lower Columbia College.
- Budget and Funding Sources: Work related to the LCIN is supported by local economic development funding from member jurisdictions.
- Timeframe: This work will be ongoing to continue to meet the need in the region.

Partner-Led Projects (In Progress):

Listed in Order of Goal/Objective Pairing, Projects with Similar Pairings then Listed Alphabetically.

- **Project: Landing on the Cowlitz (Mixed-Use Development)**
 - Description: The Landing on the Cowlitz is a 118-acre, master-planned, mixed-use development that envisions 54 acres of industrial land and 11 acres of commercial land, creating opportunities for hundreds of living-wage jobs. It is also planned to host much-needed multifamily residences and an RV park. This development project will meet many of the growing needs the region is facing and that were identified and reaffirmed through the SWOT process.
 - Related Goals/Objectives: Goal I1/Objective I1.1: Support Developments that Enhance the Region's Industrial Base; Goal B1/Objective B1.1: Work with Partners to Encourage and Improve Land Readiness Across the Spectrum of Business Needs; Goal C1/Objective C1.1: Provide Support for Improving the Quality and Quantity of Housing Throughout the Region.
 - Responsible Entity: The City of Castle Rock
 - District's Role: The CWCOG has supported this development by providing a letter of support; through administering funding for infrastructure to support the development; and by identifying potential recreational areas for the development in the City's parks plan that the CWCOG updates on behalf of the city. The CWCOG will continue to support the development going forward with additional technical planning services as needs arise.
 - Partnership: Other organizations involved include Cowlitz County, and the Cowlitz Economic Development Council.
 - Timeframe: The development is in process. Site grading began in the fall of 2022.
- **Project: Austin Point Rail Overpass**
 - Description: This project is related to the rail and road feasibility study which determines what infrastructural improvements are needed to support future marine development at the Port of Woodland. The study is part of an exploration of the continued development of Austin Point, a property of the Port that will allow it to engage in export-import related commerce via the Columbia River. If the ultimate development of the site is pursued, it will deepen the region's logistical competitiveness, an asset that was highly valued as a strength in the SWOT analysis.

- Related Goal/Objective: Goal I1/Objective I1.1: Support Developments that Enhance the Region's Industrial Base.
- Responsible Entity: Port of Woodland
- District's Role: The CWCOG has provided contract GIS work related to the development of Austin Point as well as a letter of support for the project. Additionally, this project was forwarded to the State Freight Mobility Strategic Investment Board as a highly ranked project in the Regional Transportation Planning process, and the CWCOG has administered initial funding for a study of alternative routes related to the project.
- Partnership: Other organizations involved include Cowlitz County, and the City of Woodland.
- Timeframe: This project is currently in design.
- **Project: Industrial Rail Corridor Expansion (IRCE)**
 - Description: The IRCE will expand the existing two-track rail corridor to an eight-track rail corridor with inspection roadways. The current phase of the project will construct the full six-track rail bed embankment and two of the six tracks at 8,500 feet in length and extend the corridor's existing two tracks by another 1,000 feet. The addition of two new tracks will lessen congestion throughout the Longview rail network and provide needed storage. The construction of the rail bed will allow the Port to quickly scale when additional capacity is needed. This project will allow the railway to adequately serve growing industrial uses at and around the Port of Longview and works toward meeting the need of being able to offer competitive industrial property.
 - Related Goal/Objective: Goal I1/Objective I1.1: Support Developments that Enhance the Region's Industrial Base.
 - Responsible Entity: Port of Longview
 - District's Role: The CWCOG participated in feasibility discussions and has provided a letter of support for the project. This project was also forwarded to the Washington State Freight Mobility Strategic Investment Board as a high-ranking project through the CWCOG's Regional Transportation Plan. The CWCOG expects to continue to be involved in the project as it will impact other high-profile transportation projects in the immediate area.
 - Partnership: Other organizations involved include the City of Longview, Cowlitz County, multiple private-sector entities, and State and Federal agencies.
 - Budget and Funding Sources: This project has an estimated total cost of \$69,400,000. A portion of the total cost has been funded from the Port.
 - Timeframe: The project is expected to begin construction in 2024.
- **Project: Rail Expansion at TEMCO Site**
 - Description: This project is a major investment of both the Port and TEMCO (a joint venture between Cargill and CHS), which will expand rail capacity to meet growing demand for exports. The rail project will double rail capacity and triple product throughput at the TEMCO site. TEMCO operates an export terminal at the Port of

Kalama, which stores and handles grains for export from the Pacific Northwest. The site receives products for export primarily via the railways.

- Related Goal/Objective: Goal I1/Objective I1.1: Support Developments that Enhance the Region's Industrial Base.
- Responsible Entity: Port of Kalama
- District's Role: The CWCOG has provided a letter of support for this project as well as having it be a part of the CWCOG's Regional Transportation Plan's highly ranked projects within the five-county Regional Transportation Planning Organization's service area.
- Partnership: Other organizations involved include the City of Kalama, Cowlitz County, the Cowlitz Public Utility District, as well as multiple State and Federal agencies.
- Timeframe: The project is currently underway.
- **Project: Vocational and Transitional Studies Building**
 - Description: The proposed Center will replace three smaller and older buildings with a single building and will house the welding, machining, manufacturing, and IT programs. These are all high-wage and high-demand occupations within the district. Additionally, the building will also host the College's high-school and college-preparation programs, which support a career-pathways approach to workforce development. This building would work toward addressing multiple needs identified through the SWOT analysis.
 - Related Goals/Objectives: Goal W1/Objective W1.1: Continue to Support Efforts that Connect Youth with Local Career Options; Goal W1/Objective 1.2: Continue to Support Efforts that Expand Opportunities Related to Acquiring Higher Education Throughout the Region; Goal W1/Objective W1.3: Support Partners in Efforts to Enhance the Local Vocational Training Environment, Including Facilities.
 - Responsible Entity: Lower Columbia College
 - District's Role: The CWCOG will assist with an EDA funding request, as well as support, and promote the work of LCC.
 - Partnership: Businesses and K-12 facilities within the region support the effort for LCC to provide additional career-education opportunities for trades and manufacturing.
 - Budget and Funding Sources: The State Legislature funded the pre-design and design phases for the project in their last biennium and have included a funding measure in their proposed budget.
 - Timeframe: Dependent on funding.
- **Project: Business Incubator and Digital Skills Space**
 - Description: This project will create a new space for co-working, business-idea incubation, and learning in the facilities of Port District No. 2 of Wahkiakum County. The facility, when complete, will also be the site of a Digital Navigator effort, helping to spread knowledge of digital skills across the state of Washington. The facility is anticipated to have computer bays, a community learning space, and areas designed for co-working. It will also be another point in Wahkiakum County where high-speed broadband will be available for community use. The development of this site by the

district's partners at the Port will help to address multiple items identified through the CEDS planning process, such as broadband limitations, supporting spaces for entrepreneurs, building high-quality and dynamic communities, digital skill acquisition, technology access, and the diversification of the business climate.

- Related Goals/Objectives: Goal B1: Continue to Enhance the District to Support a Robust Entrepreneurial Ecosystem; Goal W3/Objective W3.3: Work with Partners in Addressing Demand for Digital Skills and Devices Related to Employment Opportunities.
 - Responsible Entity: Port District No. 2 of Wahkiakum County
 - District's Role: The CWCOG anticipates this site becoming a part of related entrepreneurial-ecosystem programming (for example, hosting Lower Columbia Investment Network events), and will become a part of the fabric of the Broadband Action Team's approach to ensure that efforts are spread equitably throughout the two-county region.
 - Partnership: Other organizations involved include Wahkiakum County.
 - Timeframe: The project is currently underway, demolition of parts of the facility are in process to make the space appropriate for updated uses.
- **Project: Waterfront Park**
 - Description: The waterfront park will be a premier space in Wahkiakum County located at the river's edge in the Town of Cathlamet. The park will occupy the last piece of town-owned waterfront property and is the former site of the Town's sewer lagoons. It will be transformed into a 7-acre recreational space for residents and tourists to the area. The development of the park was a point of conversation during the CEDS planning process, where it was described as a key project in a larger recreational tourism effort.
 - Related Goal/Objective: Goal C2/Objective C2.5: Support the Improvement of Community Assets as they Relate to Regional Tourism Efforts
 - Responsible Entity: The Town of Cathlamet
 - District's Role: The CWCOG supported this project early in its development during a plan that it worked on related to parks in Wahkiakum County and will continue to support the Town's efforts related to the development.
 - Partnership: Other organizations involved include Wahkiakum County.
 - Budget and Funding Sources: \$500,000 in funding has recently been awarded to the Town of Cathlamet by the State Recreation and Conservation Office. The total cost is estimated at around \$700,000.
 - Timeframe: The Town is looking toward the possible completion of phase 1 of the park by 2024.

Evaluation Framework



Evaluation Framework

About the Framework

Success with implementing a Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy can be defined in many ways. As a community-building exercise, for example, one could look at various angles of the process's ability to draw the community together to collaboratively plan for their future; as a plan that contains projects to implement, one could look at how many of the projects had been completed and review those projects against the objectives and goals; as a process designed to bring about the circumstances for a local economy to flourish through the capacity-building efforts of the public sector, one could look at various measures of the economy and the programs of attendant public institutions; and as a tool to improve life in a community over time, one could look at relevant socioeconomic indicators. This evaluation framework attempts to outline and capture metrics that speak to some of those ways that the success of the implementation of a CEDS can be described.

Related to improving general economic conditions over time, the table below relays typical measures such as unemployment and per-capita income. It also captures readily available metrics that relate to issues the CWCOG is trying to reverse through this program (such as what is known as "brain drain," or people with higher levels of education leaving an area). It provides a partial window into a measure of job quality, with a metric related to health-care coverage in the region. Because any one individual CEDS process has little influence on these items, as they are typically associated with a multitude of circumstances that do not get evenly impacted over the five-year planning horizon, the table notes the desired trends that can be followed over time.

For metrics that relate to the implementation of a CEDS as a collection of projects and goal-objective pairs, CWCOG staff will be working with the CEDS Committee and other partners on gathering data and assessing progress in ways that best speak to the particular item of focus. Additionally, the CWCOG will be assessing the success of the CEDS process as a whole by looking at engagement in Committee meetings, at public-engagement sessions, and by outreach efforts related to the CEDS endeavor.

Metric	EDD Statistic	National Statistic	Gap	Desired Trend
Unemployment	7.00 %	3.86%	3.14 points	Decrease Over Time
Per Capita Income (Census)	\$32,254	\$37,638	\$5,384	Decrease Gap Over Time
Per Capita Income (BEA)	\$54,461	\$58,892	\$4,431	Decrease Gap Over Time
Proportion of Young Adults (25-44)	24.1%	26.6%	2.5 Points	Decrease Gap Over Time
Educational Attainment (Associate’s or Higher)	29.4%	42.4%	13 Points	Decrease gap Over Time
Percent Without Health Insurance	5.8%	8.8%	3 Points	Decrease Over Time
No H.S. Graduation Or Equivalent	11.3%	11.7%	0.4 Points-	Decrease Over Time
Percent in Poverty	11.7%	12.6%	0.9%	Decrease Over Time

Sources: NERDE (Argonne National Laboratory); United States Bureau of Economic Analysis; United States Census Bureau; StatsAmerica.

Notes: Unemployment: The average unemployment rate as of the January 2023 Report, numbers from NERDE; Per Capita Income (Census): Calculated as a weighted average for the two-county EDD, numbers from the American Community Survey (ACS) (national numbers are from the 2021 five-year estimates); Per Capita Income (BEA): Calculated as a weighted average for the two-county EDD, numbers are from the Bureau of Economic Analysis (national numbers from the March 2023 Release); Young Adults, as a proportion of the population, taken from StatsAmerica using the Census Bureau’s ACS 2021 5-year estimates; Educational Attainment: Numbers from StatsAmerica using the Census Bureau’s ACS 2021 five-year estimates; Estimate of Those Without Health Insurance Coverage as a Percent of the Population: CWCOG Economic Development District numbers from NERDE, national numbers from the Census Bureau’s ACS 2021 5-year estimates; Percent without a High-School Education or Equivalent: Numbers from NERDE; Percent of Population in Poverty: District numbers from NERDE, national numbers from the Census Bureau’s ACS 2021 5-year estimates.

Appendix

SWOT Analysis: Strengths

From the 2018-2022 CEDS Process:

Available Industrial Property	Regional Airport (Infrastructure)	Recreational Opportunities
Available Commercial Property	Deep Water Port	Diversity of Resources
Less Rigid Regulations	Rail Access	Strong Backbone System
No State Sales Tax	Water Access	Strong River Highway and Port System
No State Income Tax	Interstate Access	Airport (Transportation)
No Growth Management Regulations	Pacific Rim Access	Elder Services and Facilities
Skilled Labor and Trades	Vocational Training at LCC	Housing affordability
Lower Columbia College	K-12 Schools	

From the Resilience and Recovery Planning Process (2021):

Global Trade	Proximity to Seattle and Portland	Ports
Natural Resource Amenities	Climate	Recent Infrastructure Investments
Collaboration among Economic Development and Workforce Development Partners	Higher Education (LCC)	-

From the 2023-2028 CEDS Process:

Diversity of Resources	Safety	High Civic Engagement
High Volunteerism	Headstart/Pre-K	FamilyLink/SafeFamilies
Marina Upgrades	Campsite Upgrades	Tax Going Towards Emergency Services

SWOT Analysis: Weaknesses

From the 2018-2022 CEDS Process:

Commercial Building Blight	Extensive Permitting – Time/Cost	Skills Gap
Lack of Workforce Availability	Aging Workforce	Broadband Limitations
Permitting Costs/Uncertainty	Low 4-Year Degree Attainment	K-12 Not Prepared for Employment
Funding to Maintain and Improve Facilities	Traffic Congestion	Traffic Infrastructure
Lack of County Public Transit	High Poverty	High Unemployment
High Substance Abuse	Health Care Affordability	Limited Housing Inventory
Limited Housing Land Supply	Residential Building Blight	Builder/Developer Supply and Capacity

From the Resilience and Recovery Planning Process (2021):

Access to Capital	Lack of Childcare	Topography Makes Development Costly and Challenging
Broadband/Telecom Service	Resiliency Planning and Readiness	Lagging Employment Growth
Skills Mismatch Between Employer Needs and Workforce	Talent Retention and Attraction	-

From the 2023-2028 CEDS Process:

Supply of Staff	Supply Chain for Products	Cost of Big Buses
Permitting	Lack of Collab. Btw. Leadership	Sustainable Funding for Rec. Facilities
Unfunded Mandates	-	-

SWOT Analysis: Opportunities

From the 2018-2022 CEDS Process:

Support Startups, Entrepreneurship, and Lending Opportunities	Diversify Industries and Business Climate	Aggressively Market Available Industrial Land
Less Rigid Regulations	No State Sales Tax	No State Income Tax
No Growth Management Regulations	Continued Partnerships with Labor and Business	Skill Center
Expand Technology and Broadband Access	Promote Life-Skills Training	Expand High-School Career Development
Expand High-School Vocational Training	Promote Tourism Opportunities	Promote Recreational Opportunities
Improve Transportation Planning and Connectivity	Federal Transportation Funding	Increase River Transportation Usage
Increase Civic Engagement	Improve Behavioral Health Care Services	Strong Demand for Housing
-	Affordability over Vancouver	-

From the Resilience and Recovery Planning Process (2021):

High Proportion of HS Grads and Residents with “Some College”	LCIN	Downtown Revitalization
Commercial Land Development	Rural Community Development	Remote Workers
Airport Runway Expansion/Improvements	Opportunity Zones	-

From the 2023-2028 CEDS Process:

Make the Most of Retirees’ Skillsets	Vocational Improvements, Not Just at High School Level	Building More Community/ Coworking/Incubator Spaces
-	Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion	-

SWOT Analysis: Threats

From the 2018-2022 CEDS Process:

Business Closures	Natural Disasters	Regulatory Constraints on Resource-Based Economy
Slide and Road Closures	Availability of Labor for Agriculture	Out-Migration of Younger Generation
Rain and Flooding	Teacher Supply	Funding of Base Services
Facilities	Maintenance Funding	Infrastructure Costs
Land Slides	Substance Abuse Issues	Lack of Childcare
Lack of Housing	-	Age and Quality of Housing

From the Resilience and Recovery Planning Process (2021):

Low-Wage Jobs	Lack of Multifamily Housing	Aging Housing Stock
Rising Housing Costs	Aging Infrastructure/Transportation Systems	Industrial Permitting and Regulations
Trade Policy Uncertainty	COVID-19 Economic Impacts	Stormwater Regulations

From the 2023-2028 CEDS Process:

Challenges of Electrification (Transit)	Ridership Challenges (Transit)	Connections with Community in Responsive Way (Transit)
Climate Challenges	Mistrust of Government	State-Level Regulations Around Building Codes

Action Plan: Primary Projects Related to the 2023-2028 CEDS Planning Process

Note: Bracketed Project Text Denotes that the CWCOG is Anticipating Being a Partner in an Effort and Not in a Leadership Role.

Category	Project	Related Objective
Infrastructure	[Continue to Support the Development of Martin Bar and Austin Point]	I1.1
Infrastructure	[Support the TEMCO Rail Expansion Project]	I1.1
Infrastructure	Conduct Exploration of Possible Enhancement of Barge Travel to Wahkiakum and Cowlitz County Ports	I1.2
Infrastructure	Explore Reimplementation of JARPA	I1.3
Infrastructure	Convene Working Group (Permitting)	I1.3
Infrastructure	Continue to Develop the Grant Intelligence Program to Deliver Timely Funding Opportunities for Local Partners	I2.1
Infrastructure	Engage in the Next Rule-Making Process for Grant and Loan Determination at State Level Related to Required Utility Rates	I2.1
Infrastructure	Explore the Need and Feasibility of Developing a Stormwater-Related Planning Program to Improve Long-Term Regional Resilience	I2.1
Infrastructure	Continue to Work Through the SLTCRC to Address Sediment Concerns Related to the Eruption of Mount Saint Helens	I3.1
Infrastructure	Convene Working Group (Climate)	I3.2
Infrastructure	[Participate in Regional Discussion on the Development of Alternative Distribution Systems for Transportation Fuels and Other Alternative Energy Needs]	I3.3
Infrastructure	Explore the Need for Increasing Alternative Transportation Routes Throughout the Region	I4.1
Infrastructure	Explore the Potential for a High-Speed Rail Connection Linking Kelso to Portland and Seattle	I4.3
Infrastructure	[Facilitate Conversation with Tribal Service Providers to Better Meet Transportation Needs of Residents in Region]	I4.3
Infrastructure	[Study Demand for Increasing Commuter Use of Transit]	I4.3
Infrastructure	[Explore Need for Countywide Transit System with Transportation Partners]	I4.3
Infrastructure	[Work with Transit Providers to Assess Demand for Route Changes that Increase Access to Critical Facilities]	I4.3
Workforce Development	Host a Forum with Recognized Speakers on How to Best Support Youth Career Exploration	W1.1
Workforce Development	[Continue to Support the Vocational and Transitional Studies Building]	W1.3
Workforce Development	Explore the Creation of a Local Training Hub for Public-Sector Services, Such as Fire and Police	W2.1
Workforce Development	Interview Local Companies About Training Needs	W2.2
Workforce Development	Survey of Business Community for Integrated Training Programs	W2.2
Workforce Development	Work With Companies to Better Articulate Skills Needs	W2.2
Workforce Development	Exploration of Multi-Craft Trades Program	W2.2
Workforce Development	Convene Working Group (Childcare)	W3.2
Workforce Development	Continue to Work Through the Broadband Action Team to Increase Broadband Access Throughout the Area	W3.3
Workforce Development	Explore the Need for a Coordinating Committee to Assist in the Coordination of Personnel and Other Resources	W3.4
Business Development and Entrepreneurship	Develop One-Page Industry Overviews for Prospective Businesses	B1.1
Business Development and Entrepreneurship	Explore the Development of, and Work to Develop, Financing Mechanisms for the Development of Industrial Land	B1.1
Business Development and Entrepreneurship	Explore the Feasibility of the Industrial and Commercial Land Expansion Project in Wahkiakum County	B1.1
Business Development and Entrepreneurship	Explore the Feasibility of Pre-permitted Industrial and Commercial Landbanks Throughout Region	B1.1

Business Development and Entrepreneurship	Work to Improve Entrepreneurs' Abilities to Develop Viable and Fundable Business Pitches	B1.3
Business Development and Entrepreneurship	Assist Businesses with the Development of Continuity Plans	B2.1
Business Development and Entrepreneurship	Continue to Work with Libraries to Improve Access of Business-Related Resources	B2.2
Community Development, Recreation, and Tourism	Explore the Usage of Land Trusts in the Area to Increase Affordable Housing Inventory	C1.1
Community Development, Recreation, and Tourism	Track Housing Developments and Work with Partners to Ensure Range of Affordability Across the Income Spectrum	C1.1
Community Development, Recreation, and Tourism	Explore Usage of Low-Income Housing Tax Credits in Area	C1.1
Community Development, Recreation, and Tourism	Host a Housing Forum to Build Understanding of Housing Needs, Challenges, and Opportunities in the Area	C1.1
Community Development, Recreation, and Tourism	Continue Work on Regional Trails Projects	C1.3
Community Development, Recreation, and Tourism	Develop an Outline for a Comprehensive Recreational Tourism Planning Effort	C2.1
Community Development, Recreation, and Tourism	[Support Efforts Related to the Enhancement of the Julia Butler Hansen House for Tourism Purposes]	C2.2
Community Development, Recreation, and Tourism	Explore the Development of a Regional Heritage/Cultural Council	C2.2
Community Development, Recreation, and Tourism	[Continue to Support MSHI's Coldwater Campus as a Regional Draw to the Area]	C2.3
Community Development, Recreation, and Tourism	Explore the Need for, and Support the Updating of, Plans Related to the Mount Saint Helens Volcanic Monument	C2.3
Community Development, Recreation, and Tourism	[Support Efforts Around the 100th Anniversary of the Wahkiakum Ferry (2025)]	C2.4
Community Development, Recreation, and Tourism	Continue to Work with State Byways Group to Improve Local Scenic Byways and Integration with State Byway System	C2.5
Community Development, Recreation, and Tourism	Explore the Integration of Ferry-Related Transportation Concerns into Economic Development and Transportation-Related Planning Processes	C2.5

Action Plan: Secondary Projects Related to the 2023-2028 CEDS Planning Process

Note: Below are Other CEDS-Related, Partner-Led Projects (Alphabetically by Entity, then by Project Name) - Phase is Current as of Last Update Cycle of Each Entity.

Project Title	Entity	Phase
North County Sports Complex Playing Fields/Court Expansion	City of Castle Rock	Construction/Implementation
The Landing on the Cowlitz - Mixed-Use Development	City of Castle Rock	Planning
Design and Construction of Water Pump Station	City of Castle Rock	Planning
Exit 48 Industrial and Commercial Infrastructure Improvements	City of Castle Rock	Construction/Implementation
SR411 Raise with Pedestrian and Bike Improvements	City of Castle Rock	Study
SR411 Bridge Improvements	City of Castle Rock	Construction/Implementation
Water Main Improvement State Route 411 Bridge Deck Replacement Project	City of Castle Rock	Construction/Implementation
Development of Community Center and Housing Facility	City of Kelso	Planning
Senior Center Repairs	City of Kelso	Planning
Spray Park Complex Upgrades	City of Kelso	Planning
Train Station Roof Repairs	City of Kelso	Planning
Allen Street Corridor Transportation Study	City of Kelso	Study
Hazel Street Overpass	City of Kelso	Planning
Talley Way Corridor & Bridge Replacement Project	City of Kelso	Planning
Kelso Potable Water Replacement Project	City of Kelso	Planning
Cowlitz River Water Trail Access	City of Kelso	Planning
Community Building and housing project	City of Kelso	Planning
Brownfields Cleanup project/American Legion	City of Kelso	Construction/Implementation
Alternative Water System Supply Analysis	City of Kelso	Planning
Filter Plant Equipment Storage Building	City of Longview	Planning
Golf Course Pro Shop Siding Replacement	City of Longview	Study
Martin's Dock Replacement	City of Longview	Study
Mint Valley Golf Fuel Tank Replacement	City of Longview	Planning
Park Restroom Replacements	City of Longview	Planning
46th Avenue Reconstruction	City of Longview	Construction/Implementation
Beech Street Storm Drain Replacement	City of Longview	Planning
Clark Creek Master Pump Station	City of Longview	Study
Columbia Heights Road Safety Improvement Project	City of Longview	Study
Downtown Rapid Rectangular Flashing Beacons	City of Longview	Planning
Downtown Streetscape Project	City of Longview	Study
Downtown Traffic Signal Upgrades	City of Longview	Planning
Filter Plant Hypochlorite Tank	City of Longview	Planning
Fishers Lane Treatment Plant Demo	City of Longview	Planning
Indian Creek Culvert	City of Longview	Study
Madrona Waterline	City of Longview	Planning
Neimi Booster Pump Station Replacement	City of Longview	Planning
Parks Maintenance Building Waterline	City of Longview	Study

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Reservoir No.5 Roof: Seal and Clean	City of Longview	Construction/Implementation
Sewer Pump Station Rehab 2600 42nd	City of Longview	Planning
Sewer Pump Station Rehab 38th/Oak	City of Longview	Planning
Sewer Pump Station Rehab 38th/Penn	City of Longview	Planning
Sewer Pump Station Rehab 4014 Oak	City of Longview	Planning
Trella Booster Station Re-Plumb	City of Longview	Planning
Utility Operation Center Upgrades	City of Longview	Study
Water Main Replacement	City of Longview	Planning
Water System Plan Update	City of Longview	Study
Scott Hill Park and Sports Complex	City of Woodland	Construction/Implementation
Woodland Tourism Office	City of Woodland	Study
Exit 21 Improvements	City of Woodland	Engineering
Kunis Road Lewis River Bridge I-5 Parallel Route	City of Woodland +	Planning
S Pekin Pedestrian and Bicycle Facility	City of Woodland	Planning
SR 503 Pedestrian Safety Project	City of Woodland	Planning
SR 503 Safety Project	City of Woodland	Planning
Scott Avenue Reconnection Bike and Pedestrian Crossing	City of Woodland	Planning
SR432/433 Industrial Way/Oregon Way Intersection Improvements	Cowlitz County	Construction/Implementation
Bay to Bay: Sea Level Rise Resilience in the Columbia River Study	Marine Resources Committee	Study
Fish Cleaning Station Re-Siting and Improvements	Port 1 of Wahkiakum	Construction/Implementation
Utilities Upgrade at Campsite	Port 1 of Wahkiakum	Construction/Implementation
Kalama River Industrial Park Light-Industrial Building	Port of Kalama	Planning
Riverfront Public Market and Business Incubator	Port of Kalama	Construction/Implementation
Spencer Creek Business Park Buildings	Port of Kalama	Planning
Spencer Creek Business Park Commercial Buildings	Port of Kalama	Study
Spencer Creek Business Park Light-Industrial Buildings	Port of Kalama	Planning
Spencer Creek Business Park Retail Buildings	Port of Kalama	Study
Central Port Oak/Hendrickson Interchange Improvements	Port of Kalama	Planning
Central Port Utility Installation	Port of Kalama	Study
North Port Stormwater System Enhancement	Port of Kalama	Planning
Oak Street Overpass Modification	Port of Kalama	Study
Pedestrian Rail Crossing	Port of Kalama	Planning
Spencer Creek Business Park Infrastructure	Port of Kalama	Planning
Spencer Creek Business Park Road Improvements	Port of Kalama	Study
Spencer Creek Business Park Utility Improvements	Port of Kalama	Study
Tradewinds and East Wind Road Improvements	Port of Kalama	Planning
Dredge Material Management Plan	Port of Kalama	Planning
Barlow Point Development	Port of Longview	Study
Berth 4 Silo Removal and Redevelopment	Port of Longview	Construction/Implementation
New Warehouse/Covered Bulk Storage Building	Port of Longview	Planning
"S" Curve Rail Expansion	Port of Longview	Study
Berth 2 Fender System Upgrade	Port of Longview	Planning

Berth 4 Terminal Development	Port of Longview	Study
Berth 8 Mooring Dolphin	Port of Longview	Study
East Rail Manifest Loop	Port of Longview	Study
Industrial Rail Corridor Expansion	Port of Longview	Planning
International Way Grade Separation Project	Port of Longview	Planning
Multi-Cargo Modernization Project	Port of Longview	Study
Port Rail Infrastructure Improvements	Port of Longview	Planning
West Unit Train Rail Loop	Port of Longview	Study
Climate Action Strategy	Port of Longview	Study
Rose Way Industrial Park Building #1	Port of Woodland	Construction/Implementation
Rose Way Industrial Park Building #2	Port of Woodland	Construction/Implementation
Austin Point Dockside Feasibility Study	Port of Woodland	Study
Austin Point Rail Loop 10% Plan	Port of Woodland	Study
Austin Point Rail PE NEPA	Port of Woodland	Planning
Austin Point Terminal Development 30% Engineering	Port of Woodland	Study
Dark Fiber Ariel to Cougar Phase 1	Port of Woodland	Construction/Implementation
Dark Fiber Ariel to Cougar Phase 2	Port of Woodland	Construction/Implementation
Dark Fiber Yale Residential Expansion	Port of Woodland	Construction/Implementation
Butler Street Parking Lot Upgrade	Town of Cathlamet	Planning
Queen Sally's Park	Town of Cathlamet	Planning
Strong Park Trail	Town of Cathlamet	Planning
Waterfront Park	Town of Cathlamet	Planning
Marina Improvements	Town of Cathlamet	Planning
Sidewalks for School Campus	Town of Cathlamet	Study
80 Division Street Improvements	Wahkiakum County	Study
Courthouse Upgrades	Wahkiakum County	Construction/Implementation
Living Well Center	Wahkiakum County	Study
River St. Building	Wahkiakum County	Construction/Implementation
Wahkiakum Family Clinic	Wahkiakum County	Construction/Implementation
SR4 Pedestrian Crossing	Wahkiakum County	Study
Steamboat Slough Road Safety and Access Preservation Project	Wahkiakum County	Planning



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