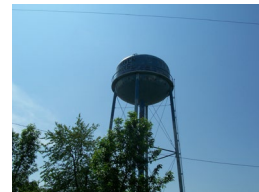




# **2026-2031**

## **Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy**



**Southeastern Illinois Regional Planning  
and Development Commission**

Prepared for  
United States Department of Commerce  
Economic Development Administration (EDA)



Pursuant to EDA grant #FED24CHI0G0331, this document is for the  
2024-2027 Planning Grant period.

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## SUMMARY AND INTRODUCTION

The 2026 Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) for the Southeastern Illinois Regional Planning and Development Commission functions as the primary strategic planning document for coordinated community and economic development within the five-county Economic Development District, encompassing Gallatin, Hamilton, Hardin, Pope, and Saline Counties. The district includes twenty-four incorporated municipalities.

The CEDS provides a detailed assessment of regional conditions, including physical and political geography, natural resources, environmental constraints, demographic and labor force characteristics, economic structure, infrastructure systems, public services, and ongoing planning and economic development initiatives. The document further evaluates existing conditions, competitive advantages, and potential constraints affecting regional growth and development.

The CEDS is utilized by local units of government and partner agencies as a decision-support tool for long-range and capital planning. It establishes the district's goals, objectives, development strategies, and implementation framework to guide policy development, investment prioritization, and programmatic actions.

### SIRP&DC DISTRICT MAP



## **DISTRICT ORGANIZATION AND MANAGEMENT**

The Southeastern Illinois Regional Planning and Development Commission serves the following five counties: Gallatin, Hamilton, Hardin, Pope, and Saline. The office is located at 230 West Poplar Street in Harrisburg, Illinois

The Southeastern Illinois Regional Planning and Development Commission was established in accordance with the Illinois Compiled Statutes, as amended, and was given authority under these enabling statutes by specific resolutions passed by each of the governing boards of the counties participating. The current by-laws stand as amended by the Commission on February 20, 2019.

### **Governing Body**

The Board of Commissioners serves as the policy-making authority for the Southeastern Illinois Regional Planning and Development Commission. The Board recognizes the Economic Development Administration as the Commission's cognizant agency. An Executive Director is appointed by the Board to oversee the administration of the Commission's operations and to manage its projects. The Board also determines the Executive Director's compensation. Additional staff may be hired as needed to fulfill the Commission's statutory responsibilities, with personnel selection and compensation set in accordance with Illinois law and the resolutions of the participating counties. Under the Board's direction, staff prepare an annual budget that includes planning grant support from the Economic Development Administration.

All Board members actively participate in decision-making. The Commission is composed of four representatives from each of the five counties, including one ex-officio member and four appointed members. The Chairman of each County Board or County Commission—or an elected designee—serves as an ex-officio voting member. Each County Board Chairman also appoints four residents to represent the county, subject to County Board confirmation. These four appointees include: one county board member or elected official from a unit of general local government; two individuals who hold no elected office and represent major citizen groups or have specialized knowledge in local issues such as housing, education, economic development, transportation, health, recreation/tourism, or environmental concerns; and one Village President, Mayor, or municipal board member selected by the County Board Chairman.

## THE COMMISSION'S GENERAL ACTIVITIES

### *Mission Statement:*

***Regional Planning and Development Commission is to provide professional quality service to the local governments and residents of our five-county region (Gallatin, Hamilton, Hardin, Pope and Saline counties) and to promote and foster growth, economic diversification, and prosperity within the region by securing and administering grants for public works, housing rehabilitation, economic development projects and operation of the Revolving Loan Fund. SIRP&DC will also research, develop and implement strategies that will fulfill the needs of sustainable development.***

The mission of the Southeastern Illinois Regional Planning and Development Commission reflects the region's key development challenges and priorities. Economic and community development remain central to achieving long-term sustainability. Established in 1968 to serve Gallatin, Hamilton, Hardin, Pope, and Saline counties, the Commission was designated an Economic Development District by the U.S. Department of Commerce's Economic Development Administration in 1969.

A primary responsibility of SIRP&DC is the preparation and implementation of the District's Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS), which evaluates regional strengths and weaknesses and outlines goals and objectives for growth. The CEDS Committee—comprising the Board of Commissioners and private-sector stakeholders—provides local insight and guidance throughout the development, maintenance, and adoption of the CEDS.

Since its formation, SIRP&DC has delivered a broad range of services to the region. The Commission functions as a repository for district data, statistics, and project information and serves as the regional clearinghouse for the five counties. Local governments rely on the Commission as a liaison to state and federal agencies involved in comprehensive planning and development, and SIRP&DC also maintains the region's census and demographic information.

The Commission's top priority is to encourage job creation and stimulate private investment by offering long-term, low down-payment, and competitively priced financing for capital projects. Through these efforts, SIRP&DC strengthens public-private partnerships and supports critical regional needs such as job creation, retention, and business expansion.

**Technical Assistance:** The Commission provides technical assistance, grant writing, and administrative support for numerous state programs, including the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) through the Illinois Department of Commerce & Economic Opportunity, the Small Business Administration, the Illinois Department of Natural Resources, and the Illinois Department of Transportation's Economic Development Program (EDP) and Truck Access Route Program (TARP). It also assists with federal programs such as the USDA Forest Service, USDA Rural Development, the Department of Justice, FEMA, the Delta Regional Authority (DRA), and EDA Public Works initiatives. Eligible projects include improvements to public facilities such as water and sewer systems, housing rehabilitation, workforce development, business retention and expansion, and broader community and economic development efforts.

**Revolving Loan Fund:** The Commission's alternative financing system supports business growth across the district by offering low-cost capital to new and expanding enterprises. The cornerstone of this system is the Revolving Loan Fund (RLF), established in 1984. Since its inception, the RLF has served as an effective tool for helping area businesses secure funding for startups, expansions, and job creation or retention.

The original fund was capitalized with \$500,000 from the Economic Development Administration and \$166,666 from the Illinois Department of Commerce and Community Affairs. Additional recapitalization followed, including a \$100,000 Industrial Development Grant from the Farmers Home Administration in 1990, another Industrial Development Grant of \$119,500 in 1992, an \$80,000 Rural Business Enterprise Grant from Rural Development in 1998, and a \$170,415 grant from the Economic Development Administration. The State of Illinois contributed an additional \$30,000, and the Commission invested \$43,035 of its own resources.

Through careful management, the RLF has generated more than \$1.2 million in program income. To date, over \$5 million has been loaned to 110 business startups and expansions, leveraging more than \$23 million in public and private investment. These efforts have resulted in the creation or retention of approximately 847 jobs. Since 1984, only \$709,650 has been written off across fifteen accounts—an approximate default rate of 14 percent.

Loan repayments continually replenish the fund, enabling ongoing lending activity. All loan applications are reviewed by the Loan Review Committee, consisting of five Board members and the Commission's Executive Director. SIRP&DC remains committed to maintaining a strong revolving loan program to serve small businesses within the District.

**Micro lending Program:** One of the Commission's most accessible lending options is its micro-lending program. The Commission established the Micro Loan Fund using \$30,000 from a Rural Business Enterprise Grant and a \$10,000 line-item grant from the State of Illinois. This program provides loans of up to \$10,000 for equipment purchases or working capital. It does not require job creation or retention and offers lower closing costs, making it an attractive option for startups, home-based or cottage businesses, and local entrepreneurs. The initial funding for this program has been fully loaned out, and the Commission has secured an additional \$43,700 in Rural Business Enterprise Grant funds to recapitalize the fund.

**Enterprise Zone:** The Commission provides ongoing technical support to the Saline County Industrial Development Company (SCIDCo) for the creation, operation, and expansion of the Saline County Enterprise Zone Program. Acting as the Zone Administrator, SIRP&DC assists with marketing efforts, boundary expansions, and the addition of new taxing districts. The Enterprise Zone program remains active through DCEO and is authorized to continue until 2034.

**Opportunity Zones:** There are five designated Federal Opportunity Zones within the SIRP&DC region. SIRP&DC has collaborated with other districts in the Delta Regional Authority to develop a prospectus for the Opportunity Zones located across the lower sixteen counties of Illinois. The Commission will continue to promote these zones as the latest Opportunity Zones are currently being drafted and will encourage investment from Opportunity Funds within the designated areas.

**Miscellaneous Applications:** The SIRP&DC provides technical assistance in the preparation of grant applications and administration for the following: Illinois Department of Natural Resources Boat Access, IDNR Open Spaces & Land Acquisition, USDA Forest Service Economic Recovery Program Wildlife Protection Plans, FEMA Assistance to Firefighters Program, Homeland Security Assistance to Firefighters, Secretary of State Illinois State Library, IDOT Enhancement Program, Delta Regional Authority and Department of Commerce & Economic Opportunity Program applications. The staff is assisting various municipalities and counties in the administration of legislative-assisted grants.

**Other Development Activities:** The Saline County Industrial Development Company operates and maintains the three industrial parks in Saline County and serves as the lead organization for the Saline County Enterprise Zone. The Hamilton County Economic Development Commission is composed of volunteers and serves as the lead organization for the Rural Partners Program in Hamilton County and operates the Enterprise Zone Program in Hamilton County. The Chambers of Commerce in the area are composed primarily of volunteers and part-time clerical staff. The following localities have Chambers of Commerce: Saline County and Hamilton County.

## **REGIONAL ECONOMIC PROFILE**

**Background Information:** The Southeastern Illinois Regional Planning and Development Commission serves the counties of Gallatin, Hamilton, Hardin, Pope, and Saline—an area facing persistent economic hardship, underemployment, and unemployment.

The region's rural and isolated geography contributes to many of its challenges. It has a disproportionately large elderly population with increasing unmet needs, limited access to quality healthcare, and a shortage of childcare options. In the most remote areas, residents may be as much as 45 minutes from any medical facility. The region also suffers from a lack of hospitals, nursing homes, and assisted living facilities, while daycare options are just as scarce. Because existing childcare facilities operate only during standard daytime hours, many single working mothers—who represent a substantial share of the population—cannot take jobs requiring shift work or irregular hours.

Economic decline has been compounded by the loss of several major employers in recent years, resulting in significant reductions in both household income and local government tax revenue. This loss has limited local governments' ability to maintain even basic public services. School districts, facing declining enrollments, are struggling to remain viable and provide essential educational services.

Additionally, deteriorating infrastructure has become a critical barrier to economic development, as well as a risk to public health and safety. Water and wastewater systems are aging, and local governments and water districts do not have the financial resources needed to properly maintain or upgrade these systems.

**General Description of Area:** The Southeastern Illinois District is made up of five rural counties—Gallatin, Hamilton, Hardin, Pope, and Saline. Together, these counties cover 1,711 square miles and include twenty-four incorporated municipalities with a combined population of 44,433. The Ohio River forms the region's eastern and southern boundaries, separating it from Indiana and Kentucky. Gallatin, Hardin, and Pope Counties lie directly along the river.

The region encompasses three distinct physiographic areas: the Mount Vernon Hill Country, the Shawnee Hills Section, and the Coastal Plain Province. Mount Vernon Hill Country covers the northern half of the district and marks the southern limit of glaciation in Illinois. The terrain consists of broad, level to gently rolling landscapes with drainage paths and modest slopes. The area contains sandstone, shale, coal, limestone, and clay formations originating from the Pennsylvanian Period.

The Shawnee Hills Section makes up most of the southern half of the district, extending across Saline and Gallatin Counties and all areas southward except the southern tip of

Pope County. Dominated by the Shawnee National Forest, this region features rolling hills underlain limestone, sandstone, shale, clay, and small deposits of dolomite and limestone from the Devonian and Silurian periods. The Coastal Plain Province, located at the southernmost tip of Pope County, consists of unconsolidated materials over older Paleozoic rock, creating a low, flat landscape with limited drainage.

The five-county region experiences a humid continental climate with significant temperature variations. Precipitation is even year-round, with slightly higher levels in March and April, ranging from 38 to 46 inches annually and increasing toward the south. Weather changes are typically driven by east-moving low-pressure systems. Summers are often warm, with temperatures frequently exceeding 90°F, while winters tend to be mild, with the coldest conditions occurring in December and January. The region benefits from long growing seasons—185 to 190 days in northwest Hamilton County and up to 205 to 210 days in southern Pope County—supporting diverse agricultural production.

**Natural Resources:** The region contains a wide range of natural resources, including coal, natural gas, oil, limestone, sand, zinc, lead, fluorspar, and timber. More recently, Illinois' shift toward reducing reliance on traditional energy sources has accelerated the decline of the coal industry, resulting in additional mine closures. Oil and natural gas exploration, once common in Gallatin, Hamilton, and Saline Counties, has also decreased. Fluorspar deposits remain concentrated in Hardin County, with smaller amounts in Pope County. Historically a leading supplier of fluorspar for the U.S. market, the region has seen many mines close due to intense competition from international producers.

Forestry remains an important economic asset. The Shawnee National Forest attracts significant tourism, and its extensive timber reserves provide opportunities for local revenue. The Forest's amended management plan calls for harvesting approximately 3.4 million board-feet of hardwood, six million board-feet of pine, and 600,000 board-feet of pin oak. However, reduced harvest levels and increased wilderness protections have limited available resources. The Shawnee National Forest includes fifteen commercial forest types, with oak-hickory making up about 65% and pine about 15%. Local employment in timber, recreation, minerals, and government services is closely tied to forest management decisions.

The region's distinctive natural features and historic sites support ongoing tourism potential, much of it centered within the Shawnee National Forest. Notable attractions include the Garden of the Gods Recreation and Wilderness Areas, Williams Hill, Rim Rock Recreation Trail, Pounds Hollow Recreation Area, the Cave-in-Rock Ferry, the Rose Hotel, and the Golconda Marina. The Forest encompasses 144,228 acres across Gallatin, Hardin, Pope, and Saline Counties, with 17,365 acres designated as wilderness. Four wilderness areas lie within the five-county region: Burden Falls, Garden of the Gods, Bay Creek, and Lusk Creek.

Listed below is the breakdown of the most recently documented Shawnee National Forest land in the Southeastern District.

COUNTY	ACRES IN COUNTY	ACRES WITHIN PROCLAMATION BOUNDARY*	TOTAL # OF SNF ACRES IN COUNTY	% SHAWNEE NATIONAL FOREST
GALLATIN	200,601	54,242	11,296	6.00%
HAMILTON	276,480	0	0	0.00%
HARDIN	115,200	98,820	27,501	24.00%
POPE	261,120	218,617	91,372	35.00%
SALINE	241,920	31,020	14,059	6.00%
DISTRICT	1,095,321	402,699	144,228	13.00%

The agriculture base continues to decline due to farmland consolidation and innovative technology. The statistics listed below are taken from the 2022 U.S. Census of Agriculture:

	# OF FARMS	AVERAGE FARM SIZE In ACRES
GALLATIN	162	1,077
HAMILTON	552	418
HARDIN	128	267
POPE	332	233
SALINE	393	405

**Shawnee National Forest & Economic Opportunities:** The Shawnee National Forest plays a significant role in the economic, environmental, and recreational landscape of the Southeastern Illinois region. The Forest is managed under the 2006 Shawnee National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan, which remains the governing framework for land use, conservation, and multiple-use activities across the Forest’s federally managed acreage. In recent years, the U.S. Forest Service has issued targeted amendments to the 2006 Forest Plan to ensure compliance with updated federal planning requirements. The most recent amendment updates Chapter 6 – Implementation, Monitoring, and Evaluation, aligning the Forest’s monitoring procedures with the 2012 Forest Service Planning Rule, which emphasizes ecological sustainability, adaptive management, and transparent performance reporting. This amendment strengthens the Forest’s ability to track environmental conditions, assess project impacts, and incorporate updated scientific information into future management decisions.

The Shawnee National Forest’s planning and monitoring framework is supported by a series of Monitoring and Evaluation Reports, including the 2018–2023 Monitoring and Evaluation Report, which evaluates land conditions, resource trends, and compliance with the Forest Plan over the multi-year period. These reports help regional partners

understand environmental changes, recreation impacts, and the effects of federal land management on local economies.

In addition to Forest Plan amendments, broader federal actions may influence future management of the Shawnee National Forest. A nationwide proposal initiated by the U.S. Department of Agriculture in 2023 seeks to amend all National Forest System plans to establish consistent standards for the conservation and stewardship of old-growth forest conditions, with draft environmental impact analysis anticipated in 2024 and final actions expected in 2025. If adopted, this initiative would apply to the Shawnee National Forest and may require further updates to its land management framework.

Recognizing the role of the Shawnee National Forest as a major economic driver—supporting recreation, timber management, habitat conservation, and tourism—the region will continue to coordinate closely with the U.S. Forest Service during future planning processes. Ongoing monitoring, public engagement, and federal rulemaking efforts will remain key factors in shaping how the Forest can support economic development while protecting sensitive natural resources and maintaining ecological integrity.

Approximately 13% of all land in the five-county District is part of the Shawnee National Forest. This ownership structure carries significant economic, environmental, and community implications.

### **Economic Impacts Shawnee National Forest Has on the Five-County District:**

**Tourism & Recreation:** The Forest provides a major foundation for tourism across Gallatin, Hardin, Pope, and Saline Counties. It supports outdoor recreation, draws visitors, and helps sustain local hospitality businesses. Tourism is identified as a primary regional economic opportunity.

**Employment & Federal Payments:** Shawnee National Forest directly contributes to the local economy through:

- Recreation-related spending
- Timber, minerals, and other natural resource activities.
- U.S. Forest Service payroll
- Federal payments to counties (e.g., PILT and 25% revenue sharing)

These sources provide consistent, though modest, revenue streams to county governments.

**Land-Use Constraints:** Because such a large share of land is federally managed, counties have:

- Limited taxable land base
- Reduced ability to expand private-sector development.
- Heavier reliance on tourism and public-sector employment

These constraints shape long-term economic diversification efforts.

**Infrastructure & Public Service Implications:** Large amounts of federally owned land reduce local governments' property-tax collections, which impacts:

- Road and bridge maintenance
- Local service delivery
- Emergency services funding

The Forest Service contributes to road maintenance and cooperative law-enforcement programs, which helps offset some local cost burdens.

**Environmental & Resource Benefits:** Federal management ensures long-term conservation of:

- Water resources
- Forest ecosystems
- Wildlife habitat
- Scenic landscapes

These environmental protections support the region's quality of life and reinforce tourism potential.

**Resource-based Opportunities:** The Forest provides opportunities in:

- Sustainable timber harvest
- Recreation development
- Habitat and watershed projects
- Outdoor-based business creation (guides, outfitters, lodging)

**Policy and Governance Considerations:** Having 13% of district land under federal control affects:

- Local economic autonomy
- Long-term planning
- Eligibility for federal partnerships, grants, and conservation programs

Coordination with the U.S. Forest Service remains essential for any major development, infrastructure, or recreation planning.

**Overall Effect:** The Shawnee National Forest is both an economic anchor and a land-use constraint. Its presence helps sustain tourism, recreation, ecosystem services, and federal revenue streams. At the same time, it limits the expansion of taxable private land and requires close collaboration with federal agencies to meet regional development goals.

**Political Geography:** The Region consists of five counties and twenty-four municipalities. Three counties—Gallatin, Hamilton, and Saline—operate under the township form of government, while Hardin and Pope Counties use a precinct-based system. As a result, each county maintains at least three levels of local government: township or precinct, municipal, and county. The Region also includes the Shawneetown River Port District, the Saline Valley Conservancy District, which serves portions of all five counties and Rides Mass Transit District that serves all five counties.

**Population and Labor Force:** Since the 1960s, the decline of employment opportunities in the district’s primary industries—coal and agriculture—has driven much of the region’s population loss. A brief increase occurred in the 1980s, largely due to hiring within the coal and fluorspar industries. However, during the past four decades, population decline has accelerated significantly. The growing share of residents over age 65 further reduces the available labor force, placing greater pressure on younger populations to support future economic growth. Historical population patterns for the district are shown below.

**10 Year Population Comparisons: 2014 - 2024**

County	2014 Population	2024 Population	10-Year Change	% Change
Gallatin County	5,279	4,690	-589	-11.2%
Hamilton County	8,313	7,818	-495	-6.0%
Hardin County	4,146	3,550	-596	-14.4%
Pope County	4,382	3,703	-679	-15.5%
Saline County	24,496	22,826	-1,670	-6.8%

**Summary of Regional Trends 2014 – 2024:** All five counties lost population. Each county experienced measurable decline over the decade. The heaviest declines occurred in Pope and Hardin, both above -14%.

The largest numerical loss was Saline County, and the smallest was Hamilton County. This decline aligns with regional challenges, and these losses reflect issues with aging population, loss of major employers and outmigration of younger workers.

**Current Employment Structure:** The district's private-sector employment is concentrated in agriculture, mining, retail trade, and service industries. While manufacturing, trade, and service sectors dominate statewide employment patterns, the Southeastern Region's service-sector jobs are frequently seasonal or part-time. This creates instability, limits upward mobility, and undermines long-term economic diversification.

**Workforce Characteristics and Challenges:** The region benefits from a manually skilled labor force and comparatively low wage rates, which support the attraction of low-technology manufacturing operations. However, a sizable portion of the workforce lacks formal educational credentials and marketable job skills. As labor market demands shift, this skills gap increasingly restricts the region's ability to compete for new employment opportunities. Wage rates remain well below statewide averages, further limiting household resilience.

**Implications for Policy Action:** These structural dynamics underscore the need for targeted interventions that:

- Expand workforce training and re-skilling pathways aligned with emerging industry needs.
- Support job creation in sectors capable of providing stable, year-round employment.
- Address educational attainment gaps that restrict long-term economic mobility.
- Encourage investment in industries suited to the region's labor profile, including valued manufacturing and logistics.

Strengthening the regional workforce will be essential to advancing economic diversification and improving long-term economic resilience.

**Education: Education** is a social characteristic that affects the labor force and economic levels of the Region's residents. The annual enrollment for part-time and full-time students at Southeastern Illinois College is approximately 3,099 as reported by Community College Review for 2026.

County	School	Elementary	Jr/High - High School	Total Enrollment
Gallatin	Gallatin CUSD 7	312	382	694
Hamilton	Hamilton Co CUSD 10	522	471	993
Hardin	Hardin County CUSD 1	234	300	534
Pope	Pope Co CUD 1	305	173	478
Saline	Galatia CUSD 1	164	210	374
Saline	Carrier Mills-Stonefort CUSD 2	296	109	405
Saline	Harrisburg CUSD 3	801	999	1800
Saline	Eldorado CUSD 4	682	334	1016
Total		3,316	2,978	6,294

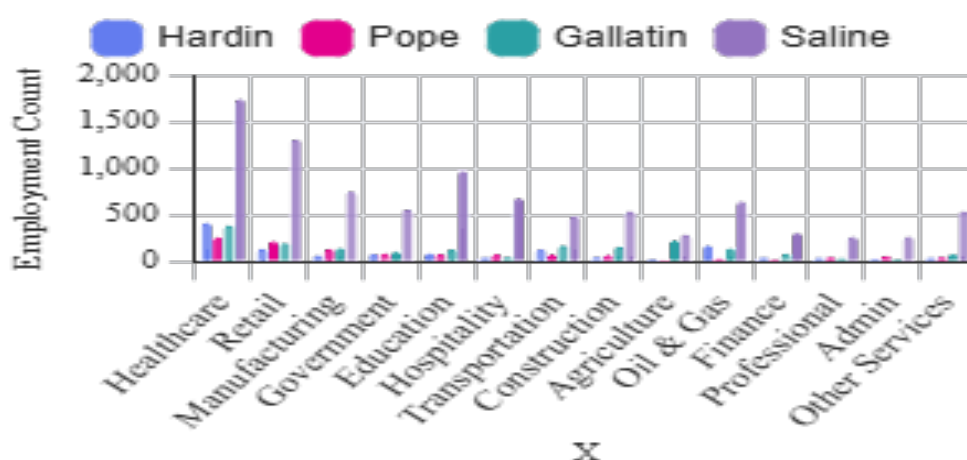
**Economy & Industry Sectors:** The five-county region's primary economic sectors include retail trade, healthcare, and social assistance. Emerging industries, particularly recreation, accommodation, and food services—continue to expand as tourism grows throughout the area. Four counties (Gallatin, Hardin, Pope, and Saline) lie within the seven-county Ohio River Scenic Byway and the Southernmost Illinois CVB region, positioning them to benefit significantly from tourism-driven economic development. Employment by sector, based on 2020 data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, is summarized below.

Industry	Hardin County (%)	Saline County (%)
Healthcare & Social Assistance	29.1	17.9
Retail Trade	9.8	13.5
Education	6.5	10.0
Manufacturing	4.8	7.7
Hospitality (Accommodation & Food)	3.3	7.0
Oil & Gas / Mining	12.2	6.7
Government	6.2	5.8
Construction	3.5	5.6
Transportation	9.4	5.0
Finance & Insurance	3.2	3.2
Agriculture	2.1	3.0

*Employment by Sector Type (% of employed), Pope, Gallatin, and Hamilton Counties*

Sector	Pope County (%)	Gallatin County (%)	Hamilton County (%)
Private Sector	70.4	69.3	68.2
State Government	10.9	4.4	5.0
Local Government	7.3	8.0	5.4
Non-Profit	5.5	5.4	7.6
Sole Proprietor	3.0	8.7	8.2
Federal Government	2.2	2.8	2.6
Self-Employed	0.8	1.6	3.0

Industry Employment by Sector – Hardin, Pope, Gallatin, Saline Counties

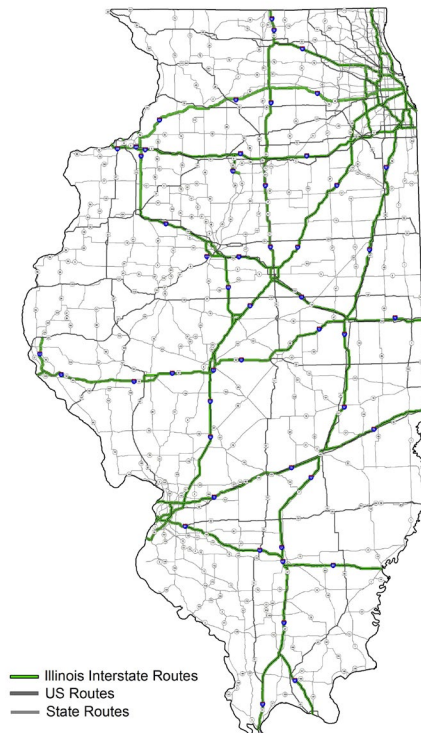


**Infrastructure:** A community’s infrastructure is fundamental to sustaining growth and ensuring long-term vitality. Core systems—including water, sewer, transportation, police, and fire protection—require ongoing investment to meet regional needs. Water and sewer improvements remain a top priority for the district due to their direct impact on economic and community development. Rural fire districts currently operate in Pope County and in the Dahlgren area of Hamilton County, but additional establishment and expansion of these districts are needed. Law enforcement coverage provided by municipalities and county sheriff’s departments is limited by budget constraints, although state and federal agencies maintain a presence in, or are readily accessible to, the region.

The Southeastern Region is served by one conservancy district and twelve water districts, including the Saline Valley Conservancy District, Hamilton County Water District, Illinois American Water Company, Prospect Water District, Dale Water District, Hardin County Water District, Liberty–Ledford Water District, Mitchellville Water District, Corinth Water District, Gallatin–White Water District, Fort Massac Water District, Raleigh Water District, and Millstone Water District. Approximately half of the Region’s twenty-four municipal water systems maintain their own water sources, while the remaining systems purchase water from external providers. Of the twenty-four

municipalities within the Region, only Junction, Macedonia, Omaha, and Old Shawneetown lack sewer service. None of the other communities are listed on the EPA restricted list. Despite this, many individual systems require upgrades or improvements to ensure long-term reliability and compliance with regulatory standards.

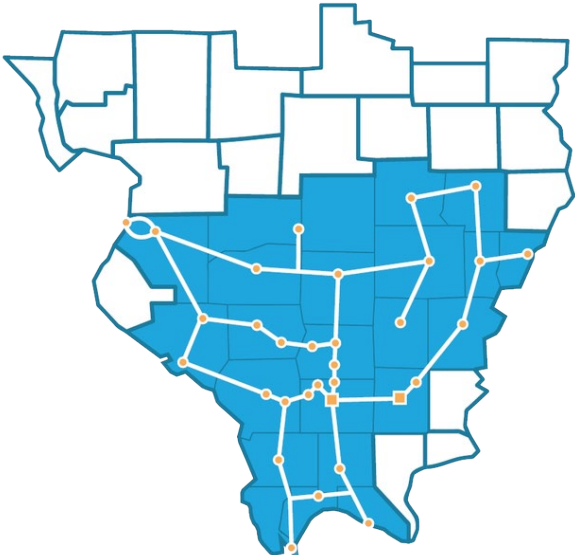
**Transportation:** Four main highways surround the Region. They are Interstate 57 to the west; Interstate 64 to the north; Interstate 24 to the south; and U.S. 41 to the east. These main highways are easily accessible from the area on state highways that are in good to fair condition. Illinois Route 13, which cuts through the region into Williamson County, is one of the major highways for persons moving in and out of the district. Route 13 was recently converted to a four-lane to the Saline County line. Illinois Route 1 runs north and south through Gallatin and Hardin Counties. Illinois Route 45 is also a high traffic highway in the district. The Ohio River provides a natural vein of a transportation system. The nearest SMSA's to the Region are St. Louis, Missouri at 130 miles; Evansville, Indiana at 50 miles; Nashville, Tennessee at 180 miles; Louisville, Kentucky at 140 miles; and Chicago, Illinois at 350 miles; The Shawnee Hills on the Ohio National Scenic Byway winds through the beautiful scenery and historical attractions in Saline, Gallatin, Hardin, and Pope Counties.



**Communications:** *The* five-county region knows and understands the role technology plays in the economic development of the region. The quality of life that its citizens enjoy and come to expect. Access to future technology is critical and tied to the ability to send and receive information. As broadband capabilities become critical infrastructure in the region, the five-county region has a strong backbone in voice, broadband and fiber network to generate additional economic growth in the region.

Telecommunication Service Provider: Clearwave Communications - Clearwave Communications, has played a significant role in expanding broadband capacity within the Region. As a facilities-based provider, Clearwave owns and operates its network equipment, allowing it to deliver comprehensive telecommunications services to both residential and business users. The resulting infrastructure improvements have facilitated direct broadband connections for colleges, K–12 schools, libraries, health care providers, and public safety agencies throughout southern Illinois. Since 2013, the Illinois Broadband Opportunity Partnership – Southern has installed more than 740 miles of fiber across twenty-three counties and connected 232 community anchor institutions to next-generation broadband systems.

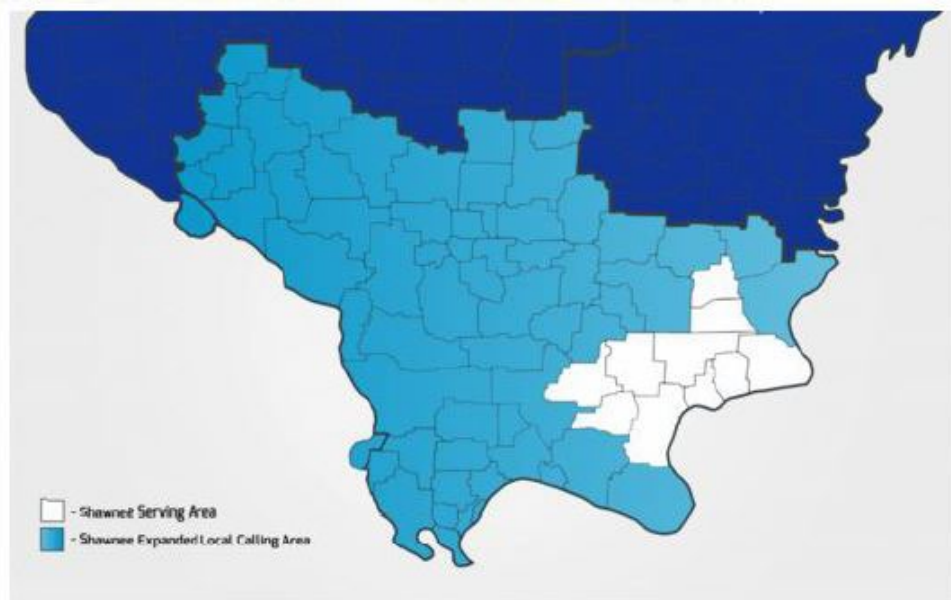
Hamilton and Saline Counties are serviced by Clearwave.



Clearwave Service Area

Telecommunication Service Provider: Shawnee Communications - Also In 2010, an additional telecommunications supplier in the district, Shawnee Telephone Company, received grant and loan funds through USDA's Rural Utility Service and USDC's National Telecommunications Information Administration to upgrade broadband capability in Hardin County. Through the ARRA/BTOP stimulus grant, they were able to build fiber throughout the community. Additionally, the counties of Hardin, Pope and Gallatin have many pockets of dead cellular service. For most of the county the voice and internet services provided by Shawnee Telephone Company are the only reliable source of connectivity. Shawnee Telephone Company (RUS Designation, IL-538) was originally incorporated in 1948 under the name of Equality Telephone Company (RUS Designation, IL-557). In 1966 Equality Telephone purchased Hardin County Telephone, and since inception Shawnee initiated its long and prosperous relationship with the Rural Electric Administration (REA) and Rural Utility Service (RUS). This long partnership between Shawnee and RUS continues to ensure an important level of service quality and commitment to telecommunication access to the citizens in one of the most remote areas of the country.

Hardin, Pope, and Gallatin are serviced by Shawnee Communications.



Shawnee Communications Service Area

## **SIRP&DC District SWOT**

The CED's committee evaluated six (6) individual capital categories to develop the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT)

### **1) Social/Cultural:**

#### **Strengths:**

- Large network of community organizations, churches, schools, and foundations with many volunteers
- Strong resilient communities
- Lots of history in the region
- Quality of life (small hometowns)
- Centrally located within driving distance of larger metro areas

#### **Weaknesses:**

- Lack of funding to help organizations and communities provide additional services to their patrons
- Population decline in the region
- Lack of funding to create cultural experiences
- Lack of local ownership
- Lack of lodging for tourist and visitors to the region
- Apathy of residents toward any growth or progress
- Volunteer and/or manpower to conduct projects

#### **Opportunities:**

- Enhancement of local emerging tourism industry
- Enhancement of local chambers and remaining CVB's
- Attract more upscale lodging establishments (hotels and bed & breakfasts)
- Seek funding for rehabilitation for vacant/deteriorated buildings for new use

#### **Threats:**

- Lack of prioritization of resources for the region
- Communities competing for the same resources (human and capital)

### **2) Natural:**

#### **Strengths**

- Abundance of natural resources including land, water, air, aggregate rock, and coal
- Scenic beauty
- Miles and Miles of hiking and equestrian trails in the Shawnee National Forest

#### **Weaknesses:**

- Maintenance of facilities in Shawnee National Forest and state park locations within the five-county region
- Lack of IDNR/State budget for improvements at state-owned facilities
- Underutilization of regions tourism sites

#### **Opportunities:**

- More markets for aggregate rock
- Marketing of locally grown produce to institutions such as colleges, hospitals, nursing homes, and others
- Agricultural diversification within the region's farming community
- Processing plants for locally grown foods
- Shawnee National Forest tourism opportunities
- Tourism within the region's forests, state parks, and Ohio River

- Search for alternative cleaner uses for fuel/coal/petroleum
- Have more involvement in Shawnee National Forest plans

**Threats:**

- Legal restrictions on usages of the Shawnee National Forest areas
- Over reliance on few water systems
- Downturn of coal industry and regulations
- External businesses from out of the region

**3) Individual/Intellectual:**

**Strengths:**

- Availability of services through local hospitals, rural health clinics, and health departments
- Local Community College (Southeastern Illinois College)
- Access to broadband mostly throughout region

**Weaknesses:**

- Lack of well-trained workforce with strong work ethics
- Lack of job opportunities for highly educated individuals
- High number of populations with no high school/ GED diplomas
- Lack of quality transportation for healthcare
- Drug and substance abuse in rural areas
- Access to specialized mental health services
- Few outlets for local entrepreneurs

**Opportunities:**

- Expanding access to public transportation
- Rehabilitation facilities for drug and substance abuse
- Recruitment of higher skilled medical specialists for local hospitals, clinics, and centers
- Encourage more involvement with local leadership training for younger population
- Develop more classes for small business and low-income students with emphasis on online/internet sales
- Develop more fiber/broadband connections for fringe areas within district
- Create more job opportunities for unemployed/underemployed work force
- Promote work training programs to develop soft skills and work ethics for employment

**Threats:**

- Lack of stable funding/adequate funding for medical services
- Surrounding states providing greater incentives for businesses and college graduates

#### **4) Financial:**

##### **Strengths:**

- Many large financial institutions

##### **Weaknesses:**

- Not enough local opportunities to invest in small communities
- Impoverished region of the state
- Communities lack funds to leverage grant opportunities

##### **Opportunities:**

- Access to capital through other avenues such as philanthropic and Capital investors

##### **Threats:**

- High poverty levels and individuals with low wages
- Restrictions on loan job creations/retention

#### **5) Political:**

##### **Strengths:**

- Communities work well with local state representative and elected officials
- Strong elected official presence in the region

##### **Weaknesses:**

- District boundaries with one representative for one large geographic area. Distance and location prohibit long visits to communities.
- Low population density gives us little political power state-wide and federally

##### **Opportunities:**

- Encourage region to collectively care about legislation that improves district
- Close relationships within district means issues can be brought to state and federal legislators

##### **Threats:**

- Other areas have more political pull for resources

#### **6) Built:**

##### **Strengths:**

- Good broadband/fiber networks in some communities
- Many communities with TIF and Enterprise Zones

##### **Weaknesses:**

- Declining available buildings due to lack of use and deterioration
- Declining populations for repayment of loans for infrastructure upgrades
- Aging infrastructure in all communities
- Lack of sidewalks (walkable communities)
- Non-ADA compliant buildings within district
- Rural areas still lacking water / sewer / broadband

##### **Opportunities:**

- Seek funding for replacement of aging infrastructure through federal EDA, EPA, USDA, DRA, and state resources
- Enhance bike paths and trails
- Enhance public transportation in rural communities. (Larger transit providers have forgotten their rural roots)

##### **Threats:**

- Declining population in all counties in the district
- Old unusable buildings for new development

## **REGIONAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT GOALS AND OBJECTIVES**

The following list of goals, objectives and policies have been identified and adopted by the CEDS committee which are used to guide the district's community and economic development programs.

### **PRIMARY GOALS**

#### **GOAL 1: MODERNIZATION AND EXPANSION OF COMMUNITY FACILITIES, INFRASTRUCTURE AND TRANSPORTATION**

**OBJECTIVE:** Expand and/or upgrade existing or nonexistent water and sewer systems, assist in obtaining funds for the construction of community buildings, sidewalk repairs, parking facilities, courthouse renovations, and jail facilities and assist local governments and water districts to comply with the Promote upgrades to the Region's transportation network.

Further improvement planning in the region, providing county and city governments the technical assistance needed to develop and maintain the region's essential infrastructure and transportation system. Work with cities, municipalities, counties, and rural districts to help access financing to address the needs of roads and bridges along with water and sewer systems.

#### **POLICIES:**

1. Identify the essential water and sewer systems in each member county.
2. Identify the essential roads and bridges present in each member county.
3. Prioritize and promote the development and improvements of all infrastructure that serves counties, cities, and multiple locations.
4. Improve municipal water systems, rural water district systems, sewage treatment facilities.
5. Work with communities to construct community and civic centers, or multi-purpose buildings and/or improvements.
6. Work with communities to improve flood control procedures and develop flood control projects.
7. Promote and encourage necessary repairs of the Regions state highways and secondary roads.
8. Promote regular maintenance of the Regions secondary roads and promote cooperation agreements with counties, cities, villages and United States Forest Service.
9. Promote public transportation systems for the elderly, students, and low-income residents of the district.
10. Promote cooperation between county road officials and district road officials to coordinate a long-term road maintenance program.
11. Promote runway enlargements and other improvements for Harrisburg-Raleigh Airport.

12. Encourage improved maintenance of township roads.
13. Work with County Engineers to pursue various grant programs.
14. Work with County Engineers to upgrade portions of the designated National Scenic Byway
15. Work with communities and providers to ensure quality fiber and broadband connections to all residents.

## **GOAL 2: SUPPORT NEW JOB GENERATION AND BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT**

**OBJECTIVE:** Create an environment in which existing businesses and aspiring entrepreneurs can access the ideas, services, capital, labor, and infrastructure needed to achieve success in their business ventures. Utilize the Revolving Loan Fund and Micro Lending Programs to lower the Region's unemployment rate.

### **POLICIES:**

1. Promote the use of training programs as economic development incentives.
2. Address the need for unskilled and semi-skilled labor in Southeastern Illinois by collaborating with the local community college and Small Business Development Center in offering services to the region and local economic development organizations related to business assistance services. Make SBDC staff and local development groups aware of the various programs SIRP&DC has in place for funding small businesses.
3. Identify the business service limitations of the SBDC and seek to establish or implement other programs that address those gaps.
4. Promote the retraining of the Region's coal miners for other job classifications. Work with the coal industry to utilize existing reserves and to create/retain jobs in the region.
5. Use the regional and local Revolving Loan Fund Programs, Business Community & Development Loan Program, Micro Lending Program and other state and federal business loan programs to induce economic development within the district. Encourage localities to include regional loan funds in local economic development proposals and to pursue additional funds for business development.
6. Interact with other economic development groups both in and out of the district. Coordinate and cooperate with other Economic Development Districts in Southern Illinois and in the State of Illinois to promote state funding for Economic Development Districts and Southern Illinois Regional Planning and Development Commissions. Participate with the tourism groups for economic development and tourism projects for the region.
7. To work with and provide technical assistance to the district's chambers of commerce and the economic development groups of the district.
8. To collaborate with the representatives of utility companies to increase economic development expertise and to combine economic development resources.
9. Use the Administrative Services Program to induce local economic development. To expand the Lender Commitment Program throughout the District. To encourage District banking institutions to consider longer financing terms for economic development projects.

## **GOAL 3: STRENGTHEN MUNICIPAL AND COUNTY GOVERNMENTS**

**OBJECTIVE:** Assist local units of government to stay abreast of new legislation and assist in the promotion of new technical improvements to provide the district's residents with up-to-date police and fire protection. Provide technical assistance to units of local government concerning state and federal legislation. Provide technical assistance to units of local government on the process of formulating goals and capital improvement plans and budgets. Provide training for elected and appointed officials of the Region on relevant topics. Increase capacities of local communities to support and survive economic development shifts.

### **POLICIES:**

1. Encourage local elected officials to attend workshops relating to the operation of municipal governments and other regulatory topics such as solid waste management.
2. Promote the adoption of personnel policies and safety plans to limit the liability exposure of local governments.
3. Work with local governments to obtain state and federal funding for community facility projects.
4. Assist local governments in the budgeting process and inform local officials on new government financing techniques and of the opportunities involved with privatization of local government services.
5. Function as a liaison agency to promote local needs at the state and federal level.

**OBJECTIVE:** To help protect the residents of the region.

### **POLICIES:**

1. Promote county-wide 911 communications systems and networking possibilities for multi-county systems.
2. Increase police protection in the district communities and counties.
3. Promote the modernization of local firefighting equipment.
4. Promote the establishment of county-wide fire districts and intra-county networking.
6. Promote the establishment of centralized dispatching.
7. Promote the establishment of fire hydrants in rural areas.
8. Promote Emergency Management Services and encourage the exploration of grant funds for equipment, etc. Work to secure and develop Hazard Mitigation Planning grants and project funds.
9. Work with fire departments to address potential legislation affecting equipment and training requirements.
10. Assist fire districts in the application processes for grant funds.

## **GOAL 4: IMPROVE QUALITY AND QUANTITY OF HOUSING**

**OBJECTIVE:** Promote the quality and quantity of housing in the Region to meet the needs of the Region's residents. Increase the quality and/or quantity of housing in the Region.

### **POLICIES:**

1. Promote utilization of public housing to meet the housing needs throughout the region for low-income and senior residents.
2. Promote private development of housing units and subdivisions.
3. Promote housing rehabilitation projects for low-to-moderate income persons utilizing the Illinois Community Development Block Grants, Illinois Housing Development Authority, Rural Development housing programs, Illinois Housing Trust Funds, etc.
4. Work with the Illinois Housing Development Authority and others to develop programs to assist first-time homeowners, etc.

## **GOAL 5: PROMOTE NATURAL RESOURCES AND TOURISM INDUSTRY**

**OJECTIVE:** Expand the job opportunities of the area through the promotion of tourism. Assist local governments to promote businesses to utilize the natural resources of the district and promote the diversification of the agriculture and agri-business industries.

### **POLICIES:**

1. Promote large scale tourism development in southeastern Illinois.
2. Promote the increase of signage of the Shawnee National Forest.
3. Work with Southern Illinois Now, Southern Illinois Tourism and Convention Bureau and Southern Illinois Tourism to promote Southeastern Illinois.
4. Encourage development of brochures and other advertising measures to promote tourism.
5. Encourage development and/or improve water access facilities at the following:
  1. City of Rosiclare
  2. Village of New Haven
  3. Village of Cave-in-Rock
  4. Village of Elizabethtown
  5. City of Golconda
  6. Village of Old Shawneetown
6. Promote historical preservation from the State at the following sites within the region:
  - a. McCoy Library in McLeansboro
  - b. Saline County Historical Museum
  - c. Riverview Mansion in Golconda
  - d. Marshall House Bank and First National Bank in Old Shawneetown
  - e. Rose Hotel in Elizabethtown

- f. St. James Episcopal Church in Hamilton County
  - g. Dahlgren Depot
  - h. Dam 51 Houses in Golconda
  - i. Westwood Cemetery in Gallatin County
  - j. Cave-in-Rock
  - k. Battery Rock in Hardin County
  - l. Camp Mather/Camp Logan near New Shawneetown
  - m. Crenshaw House (Old Slave House) in Gallatin County
7. Promote recreational facilities to compliment the Golconda Marina and other sites in Gallatin, Hardin, and Pope Counties.
  8. Work with other agencies in promoting tourism and encourage local tourism groups to utilize public dollars to develop brochures and response centers to receive information requests for prospective visitors.
  9. Provide technical assistance and seek funding for the establishment of and/or improvements to parks within the Region utilizing the state Land and Water Conservation Fund Program.
  10. Promote the development of additional lodging facilities throughout the five-county region.
  11. Promote the Ohio River Scenic Byway in its promotion of the river region.
  12. Promote the National Civil War Trail development and the development of the Lewis & Clark Trail.

**OBJECTIVE:** To provide information on regulation of local natural resources and to coordinate development activities with citizens and governmental agencies. To sustain and further develop the agriculture industries to further coordinate agriculture opportunities and government policies to District citizens.

**POLICIES:**

1. Encourage development of business/industry for alternative uses for coal, Fluorspar, oil, and other minerals and at the same time protect the environment.
2. Use environmental conservation efforts to protect and preserve the existing environment.
3. To promote good forest management and multiple forest uses for the Shawnee National Forest.
4. To promote the natural resources of the area by soliciting secondary natural resource processors.
5. Promote efficient and profitable production of traditional crops and livestock with an environmentally sound management system.

## **GOAL 6: STRENGTHEN THE REGIONS ECONOMIC RESILIENCY**

**OBJECTIVE:** Assist local governments, communities, business, and organizations to develop goals, strategies and actions that can mitigate the effects of an economic incident, natural disasters, healthcare emergencies.

### **POLICIES:**

1. Encourage expansion of healthcare systems to change their methods of delivery during natural disasters and healthcare emergencies.
2. Engage and undertake appropriate community planning for pre-disaster recovery and mitigation planning.
3. Participate and encourage implementation of business succession / rebuilding efforts.
4. Participate and assist in planning for educational changes with all levels of education (primary, secondary, and post-secondary)
4. Provide communication between local government and the local business community and healthcare providers.
5. Assist local government in efforts to restore all sectors of the community, including critical infrastructure, essential services, business retention, and the redevelopment of damaged housing units.
6. Coordinate services between local, state, and federal resources

## **GOAL 7: IMPROVE HEALTH CARE SYSTEMS**

**OBJECTIVE:** Promote the expansion of health care facilities in the Region. Provide health care facilities to the Regions residents. To strengthen the districts' health care systems and health care providers. To expand and upgrade the districts' ambulance services.

### **POLICIES:**

1. Pursue grants for the Harrisburg Medical Center, Hamilton Memorial Hospital, Hardin County Hospital and Ferrell Hospital.
2. Promote the establishment of a regional hospital system with networking capabilities to serve rural counties.
3. Encourage development of and/or expand home health care services.
4. Encourage cooperation among health planning organizations.
5. Support expanded emergency room service and ambulance services throughout the Region.
6. Encourage changes in legislation to stabilize insurance rates for health care personnel and facilities.
7. Support and encourage adequate health care and emergency services for residents of the Southeastern Region.
9. Encourage and foster quality health care at a reasonable cost.
10. Encourage the upgrade and expansion of the Regions nursing homes, adult day care and assisted living facilities.

11. Increase public/private partnership programs for disease, chemical and physical abuse victims to improve the general well-being of residents and reduce stress and all kinds of abuse throughout the Region.

## **GOAL 8: DEVELOPMENT OF HUMAN RESOURCES AND EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITY EXPANSION**

**OBJECTIVE:** Prepare residents to successfully compete for employment opportunities, both inside and outside of the Region, including retraining to meet the new and changing demands in business and industry. Increase the educational level of the Region's residents. To place the region's unemployed and underemployed in classroom and work-site training programs and to increase the overall employee skill level which will encourage economic development. Provide the labor force with educated and trained workers. To strengthen the districts school systems and junior college to increase the basic education and skill level of the district.

### **POLICIES:**

1. Promote programs which can draw into the labor force the untapped, unskilled, and semi-skilled persons in the region.
2. Support the efforts of agencies which have the mission and resources to implement the necessary educational/training and job placement activities to create a more skilled labor force.
3. Promote labor management groups to increase open communications and increased job opportunities.
4. Promote the diversification of available technical training.
5. Encourage the development of additional trade school offerings to certificate, journeyman and/or associate degree level at Southeastern Illinois College.
6. Encourage the region's high schools to upgrade and expand vocational training programs.
7. Promote the programs offered by the SIC Small Business Development Center.
8. Promote vocational training to targeted industries of the district.
9. Provide technical assistance for the modernization and expansion of the Region's educational and vocational facilities.
10. Promote programs to reduce the number of high school drop-outs.
11. Create a climate within the school which will decrease negative environmental influences and allows students to reach their educational potential.
12. Provide educational opportunities to create a skilled workforce.
13. To offer educational programs that will enhance the economic development of the Southeastern Illinois Region.
14. Increase the education level of all citizens in the Region to enhance basic education, improve learning ability, and improve the Southeastern Regions labor market.

## **REGIONAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IMPLEMENTATION PLAN**

The following strategies correspond with the stated and adopted goals and objectives of the Southeastern Illinois Regional Planning and Development Commission and outline the implementation of the economic development program of the Southeastern Illinois Regional Planning and Development Commission.

The Southeastern Illinois Regional Planning and Development Commission staff and board will participate in a joint effort with other local and statewide agencies toward achieving the goal of decreasing the unemployment rate of the region. The staff will pursue funding for the development of industrial parks and sites as locations for industrial development. The Southeastern Illinois Regional Planning and Development Commission will utilize the regional and local revolving loan funds and other incentive programs to induce economic development. The availability of funds will be publicized through personal contacts, newspaper articles, and interaction with economic development groups. District staff will continue efforts to recapitalize the District Revolving Loan Fund. Staff will continue to work with local tourism groups to expand the tourism market of Southeastern Illinois.

The Southeastern Illinois Regional Planning and Development Commission will work with local municipal and county governments to obtain funding for community facility improvements through the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity, Illinois Department of Natural Resources, Economic Development Administration, Rural Development, Delta Regional Authority, Illinois Rural Bond Bank, Department of Justice, FEMA, and Illinois Development Finance Authority. Community facility projects include water, sewer, public buildings, and public safety and flood control projects.

The Southeastern Illinois Regional Planning and Development Commission will participate in a joint effort with local, state, and federal agencies to meet the housing needs of the Region's residents, promote increased funding for homeless problems in rural areas, assist local units of government in pursuing housing rehabilitation grants and work with District financial institutions to establish loan programs to encourage housing rehabilitation and development. Funds will be pursued through the Illinois Housing Development Authority and the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity.

The Southeastern Illinois Regional Planning and Development Commission will work with local governments to strengthen the local units of government and will function as a consultant to assist the local units of government to establish standard operating procedures in personnel and safety. SIRP&DC will provide technical assistance to local units of government pertaining to legislation, contact with our legislators and in formulating capital improvement plans for water and sewer improvements.

The Southeastern Illinois Regional Planning and Development Commission will collaborate with local officials, state, and federal agencies in the promotion of the district as a tourism destination. Specific tourism development projects have been identified, and funding will be pursued for the implementation of these projects. The Commission will work with Main Street Golconda, Inc., Saline County Tourism, Southernmost Tourism, and Southern Illinois Tourism and other entities to promote the National Scenic Byway and Ohio River Scenic Byway, Shawnee National Forest, and other tourist destinations within the region to spur economic development.

The Southeastern Illinois Regional Planning and Development Commission will participate with other local, area wide and statewide agencies toward achieving the development of the human resource base of the district. The Southeastern Illinois Regional Planning and Development Commission will develop economic development information concerning the educational institutions of the area, involve job training officials with economic development location clients to provide job-training needs, encourage legislation to prohibit drop-outs under the age of 18 from obtaining a driver's license, promote drug and alcohol abuse programs in the schools, promote education in local schools aimed at the prevention of teenage pregnancy, promote day care centers at local high schools to encourage teenage parents to stay in school and to teach other students the responsibilities of being a parent, promote additional social counseling programs, promote vocational training in local high schools, vocational centers and junior colleges, encourage educators to work with area industries to determine labor force requirements, promote work/study programs, promote literacy programs and encourage adults to utilize the junior college system to expand educational opportunities.

The Southeastern Illinois Regional Planning and Development Commission will work with local, state, and federal agencies to improve and upgrade the transportation network of the district. The Commission will work with the County Engineers to take advantage of potential funding sources.

The Southeastern Illinois Regional Planning and Development Commission will work with the health care facilities of the Region, state and federal agencies and local governments to achieve the expansion and upgrades of health care facilities in the district. SIRP&DC will encourage state legislation that will decrease the financial risk of providing medical services in rural areas and support regional health department programs and clinics for rural areas.

The Southeastern Illinois Regional Planning and Development Commission will work with local, state, and other officials to provide the Districts residents with up-to-date police and fire protection, promote the federal surplus equipment program and fire equipment grant programs, promote the establishment of rural fire districts, and promote the upgrade of equipment in existing municipal fire and police departments and County Sheriff's offices.

The Southeastern Illinois Regional Planning and Development Commission will promote the utilization of the natural resources of the Region, encourage strong working relationships between local, state and federal environmental officials, encourage the development of Shawnee National Forest potential for recreation, tourism, timber and other multi-use purposes, support agricultural infrastructure, encourage the development and utilization of agricultural services and centers, support farm credit system and encourage financial institutions to make credit available to farmers and agri-business, support agricultural production research and diversification and work with local farming communities.

The Scope of Work for the District is composed of projects that are both short and long-term and on an ongoing basis. The planning process includes the establishment of goals and objectives and an evaluation of the process. Listed below is the Scope of Work:

## **I. Planning Projects**

### **A. Business Programs**

1. Continue to aid municipalities and counties to develop formal economic development industry expansion and retention programs.
2. Continue to work with other local, state, and federal agencies in the development and promotion of economic and community development policies and strategies for regional development.
3. Continue to work with various tourism groups to promote the National Scenic Byway and Ohio River Scenic Byway.

### **B. Preparation of Community Profiles**

1. Continue to prepare and update community profiles of District localities.
2. Continue to prepare and update Enterprise Zone documents.
3. Continue to update and maintain a building and site information file.
4. Continue to work with tourism groups to develop brochures.
5. Maintain a website.

## **II. Planning Activities**

A. Continue to promote the goals and strategies of the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDs).

B. Continue to help county and municipal governments in the areas of planning, implementation, guidelines, legislation interpretation and grant application preparation and administration.

C. Continue to help economic development groups, tourism groups, and special purpose districts.

D. Continue to provide grant alerts to local units of government.

### **III. Administrative Planning:**

A. Staff will continue to prepare and submit an annual CEDS Update.

B. Staff will prepare one Annual report for submittal to the Economic Development Administration for required submittal periods.

C. Staff will prepare Financial Reports for submittal to the Economic Development Administration and will have an annual audit as required by Planning Grant and Office of Audits, Inspector General's Office.

D. Staff will continue to administer the Revolving Loan Fund.

E. Staff will supply information concerning plant closings and the status of industrial development within the district annually and as requested by the Economic Development Administration.

F. Staff will continue to prepare grant applications and administer grants on behalf of district local units of government, special district, and not-for-profit organizations.

G. Staff will continue to administer the Micro loan Program and the Business and Community Development Fund.

### **PERFORMANCE MEASURES EVALUATION**

The Southeastern Illinois Regional Planning and Development Commission have identified goals and objectives and will evaluate the accomplishments of the district on the following levels:

1) Increase in the employment level of the region.

2) Increase in the average wage of the region.

3) Increase in per capita income levels of the region.

4) Increase in public and private sector investments in the region.

5) Level of technical assistance provided to local governments and organizations in the region.

For items 1 through 4, documentation can be gathered to show the increases in employment, average wage, per capita incomes, and the amount of public and private sector investments.

Increases in the employment levels and average wages are tracked through the various loan programs that the agency operates and through the input data from the Illinois Department of Employment Security.

Increases in per capita income levels can be tracked through census data.

For public and private sector investments, levels are tracked through the various grants and projects that the agency prepares and administers. Private sector investments can also be tracked to determine increases in property tax valuations.

Technical assistance is provided to local governments and not-for-profit groups in the five-county region and can be tracked by the number of inquiries and responses.

The SIRP&DC realizes that not all evaluation methods can show the benefits and for some items, the evaluation process is subjective and cannot be quantified. Many projects that the agency is involved with improve the quality of life for the residents which in many ways is difficult to quantify. These items will be used to evaluate the activities of the district on an annual basis.

2026  
Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy

*Appendix*

## **Federal, Regional and State Partners**

Illinois Department of Commerce & Economic Opportunity

Delta Regional Authority

Saline County Industrial Development Company

Saline County Chamber of Commerce

Small Business Development Center at Southeastern Illinois College

Southeastern Illinois College

Egyptian Health Department

Southern Seven Health Department

Hamilton County Economic Development

Ameren Utilities

Southeastern Illinois Electric Cooperative

Clearwave Communications

Shawnee Communications

U.S. Department of Agriculture – Rural Development

U.S. Forest Service – Shawnee National Forest

Southernmost Illinois Convention and Visitors Bureau

Golconda Main Street

Ohio River Scenic Byway

University of Illinois Extension Services

Rides Mass Transit District

Ferrell Hospital

Hardin County General Hospital

Harrisburg Medical Center

Hamilton County Memorial Hospital

## NAMES AND AFFILIATIONS OF BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

Chairperson – John Chapman, Hamilton County  
 First Vice-Chairman – Scott Trovillion, Pope County  
 Second Vice-Chairman – Justin Travelstead, Saline County  
 Secretary – Rhonda Belford, Hardin County  
 Treasurer – Deanna Bryant, Gallatin County

Name	County	Economic Interest
Deanna Bryant	Gallatin	Public Official
Andrew Wargel	Gallatin	Private Sector / Manufacturing
Mark York	Gallatin	Public Official / Retired Teacher / Tourism
Tyler Hall	Gallatin	Private Sector - Agriculture
Chad May	Hamilton	Public Official / IT
John Chapman	Hamilton	Private Sector - Insurance
Terry Drone	Hamilton	Private Sector - Banking
Vacant	Hamilton	
Rhonda Belford	Hardin	Private Sector - Medical / Tourism / Political Figure
Michael Johnsey	Hardin	Private Sector - Corrections
David Robinson	Hardin	Private Sector – School Bus Transportation Provider
Charles Soward	Hardin	Private Sector – Retired Finance
Scott Trovillion	Pope	Private Sector - Retired Insurance Adjuster
Chris Walker	Pope	Public Official / Natural Resources
Neil Wagner	Pope	Private Sector - Higher Education / Workforce
Randy Switzer	Pope	Private Sector – Public Utilities
Ollie Brown	Saline	Private Sector – Retired Business Owner
Justin Travelstead	Saline	Public Official - Construction
Kim Gibbs	Saline	Private Sector – Business Owner
Lucinda Rogers	Saline	Private Sector - Community Service Organizer

## COMPREHENSIVE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY COMMITTEE MEMBERS

	Member	Area of Interest
1	Angie Hampton – CEO Egyptian Health Dept. (618) 273-3326 ext 2119	Public, Behavioral, and Environmental Health – Ms. Hampton is the CEO of a three county Health Department that offers over thirty different programs in the fields listed above. She currently supervises 140 employees and has a budget of over \$6M
2	Lori Cox 618-252-5400	Associate Dean of Workforce and Community Education Southeastern Illinois College
3	John McPeek	Public Sector – Mayor of Harrisburg, IL Local Business Owner
4	Brad Housewright	Economic Developer – Saline County Industrial Development Company
5	Todd Carr Quality Improvement Officer – Hardin County General Hospital 618-285-6634	Chief Quality Officer / Assistant Administrator Hardin County General Hospital - a 25-bed critical access hospital in Hardin County, Illinois  Chairman of Hardin County Historical Society
6	Susan Odum Extension Educator	University of Illinois Extension Educator – Community & Economic Development Stronger Economies Together Group
7	Mark York, SIRP&DC	Economic Development – Appointed County Official
8	Chad May, SIRP&DC	Economic Development – Appointed County Official

## PUBLIC NOTICE

The 2026-2031 Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) for Gallatin, Hamilton, Hardin, Pope, and Saline counties has been completed by Southeastern Illinois Regional Planning and Development Commission (SIRP&DC) as pursuant to the U.S. Department of Commerce Economic Development Commission Grant Award #FED24CHI0G0331. A copy of the CEDS is available for review on the SIRP&DC website at [www.sirpdc.org](http://www.sirpdc.org). If you would like a paper/digital copy of the CEDS, please call SIRP&DC at 618-252-7463 or email your request to [acarr@sirpdc.org](mailto:acarr@sirpdc.org). Comments regarding the CEDS will be received at SIRP&DC, Attn: Alene Carr, Executive Director, P.O. Box 606, Harrisburg, Illinois 62946, until April 24, 2026.

On March 18, 2026, the CEDS was adopted by the Southeastern Illinois Regional Planning & Development Commission.

The Public Notice was issued in the Dollar Saver on March 24, 2026, providing opportunity for public viewing and commenting on the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy. A copy of the CEDS was delivered to each of the following County Clerks: Gallatin, Hamilton, Hardin, Pope, and Saline. When comments were received, the CEDS would be reviewed and comments would be addressed. A written response will be sent to the individual/organization commenting.

As of April 24, 2026, there were no comments received regarding the 2026-2031 Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy.





## RESOLUTION

2026-01

WHEREAS, the Southeastern Illinois Regional Planning and Development Commission, in order to participate in the benefits of the Public Works and Economic Development Act of 1965, as amended, is required by said act to prepare a Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy for the counties of Gallatin, Hamilton, Hardin, Pope and Saline, and

WHEREAS, the Southeastern Illinois Regional Planning and Development Commission has undertaken planning and development activities on behalf of the region, as provided by the State of Illinois Compiled Statutes, and

WHEREAS, the Southeastern Illinois Regional Planning and Development Commission has incorporated individual county plans into a five-county district document, and

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED AS FOLLOWS that the Southeastern Illinois Regional Planning and Development Commission concurs with the District Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy and will use the program to support future planning and development strategies and activities.

Passed this 18<sup>th</sup> day of March 2026.

John Chapman, Chairperson

Rhonda Belford, Secretary