

# Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy:

## Strengthen Economic Development Fundamentals & Support Leading Industry Sectors

Northern Somerset County's comprehensive economic development strategy is two-fold. It addresses fundamental economic development issues critical to the success of the region as a whole such as workforce, support for small business, broadband access, etc. At the same time, it responds to specific challenges faced by the region's leading industry sectors and puts forward strategies to capitalize on the region's strengths.

Projects and action items are organized into the following initiatives:

- Strengthen Marketing for Tourism & Recreation
- Protect Access & Quality of Natural Resources
- Support Manufacturing & Making Industries
- Advance Healthcare & Healthy Communities
- Invest in Connectivity
- Prepare the Workforce for Tomorrow
- Foster a Culture of Entrepreneurship and Small Business Development

Each initiative begins with a brief summary of current conditions based on the research and analysis. The next section explains why the initiative is critical for strengthening the regional economy, followed by a short bulleted list of top opportunities and challenges pertaining to each initiative. Strategies outlining what will be achieved and how are detailed in the third section, followed by a list of stakeholders whose involvement is necessary for successful implementation.

## Catalysts for Implementation

The following section of this report contains detailed initiatives and action items developed as part of the overall comprehensive plan. As the project team, steering committee, and their partners' transition from planning to implementation, the following action items have been identified as catalytic projects that must be completed prior to moving forward with other aspects of the strategy. The purpose of these catalyst projects is to establish the organizational structure with implementation capacity and/or obtain technical information necessary for decision-making about how to proceed:

- **Marketing Capacity** - Establish organizational capacity for marketing and business sustainability efforts through increased collaboration between tourism organizations and other entities directly and indirectly responsible for marketing the region.
- **Recreational Trail Collaborative & Asset Inventory** - Establish a recreational trail collaborative to enhance and increase planning, coordination, implementation, and communication among stakeholder groups. The first task of this collaborative is to inventory existing assets and quantify the investment required for necessary upgrades.
- **Wood Supply Analysis** - Conduct a wood and forest products industry cluster analysis specifically focused on understanding existing and projected wood supply and the current and future needs of existing manufacturers to determine if there is enough supply to support additional growth. *cell*
- **Telecommunications Infrastructure Assessment** - Initiate a connectivity assessment to identify existing conditions of broadband infrastructure and willing partners and develop a detailed improvement plan for system upgrades.
- **Targeted Workforce Assessment** - Identify the workforce needs of key sector employers and gather owner/managers with key educators to develop a plan to meet deficiencies.

Catalyst projects are described within their respective initiatives in the following Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy. Specific action items for these projects are outlined in the implementation plan.

## Targeted Industry Cluster Analysis

After an exhaustive review of county employment data by industry sector, coupled with conversations and interviews with local officials, businesspeople, residents, and other stakeholders, four industry clusters were identified that are most vital to the economy of the county.

Each cluster is comprised of a group of related industry sectors that play a critical role in Somerset County's economy.<sup>1</sup> Given the high concentration of employment in these industries, stability or growth, high wages, unique assets they promote, and/or essential services they provide, these industry clusters are critical to promoting the future economic health of the county.

Northern Somerset County Targeted Industry Clusters

	High Job Concentration	Job Level Stability	High Wages	Builds off Unique Assets	Essential Services
	<i>Represents at least 10% of all jobs in county</i>	<i>Job growth was flat or increased between 2003-2013</i>	<i>Average industry wage is greater than regional average wage</i>	<i>Capitalizes on resources unique to the region</i>	<i>Necessary for supporting Quality of Life and economic growth</i>
Forestry & Wood Products			X	X	X
Construction	X		X		X
Health Care	X	X			X
Tourism	X	X		X	X

<sup>1</sup> We use the term "Cluster" in this analysis to mean a grouping of related industry sectors that when taken together represent a high proportion of the county's employment, past growth, or projected future growth. We are not using it in the manner typically used in economic theory to mean economic activity encompassing sectors with deep connections, networks, support functions, and supply chains.