



I. Executive Summary

Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy

The Big Sandy Region's development of the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) is the evolution and enhancement of a body of work initially developed through the Kentucky 2001 Strategic Area Development Plan established in 1993, which challenged Area Development Districts to create a comprehensive, community based strategic planning process to foster and guide growth in a manner so as to capitalize on the region's potential, ensuring that the region and its residents have the maximum opportunity to reap positive benefits and see sound economic growth and community development.

While the formal KY 2001 process was not used this year in the development of this Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS), the gathering of information, the same participatory grass-roots effort, and the diverse coordination of various "players" interested in community & economic development were employed for the preparation of this initial document. The acceptance of the initial document as a foundation upon which to build, partnered with a strong commitment to continue the use of this strategic planning process during future years, will be key to the development of a common vision and common strategy for the social and economic growth and well being of the region. Acceptance of the plan will also work to reduce or solve common barriers that obstruct the region's progress locally, regionally and statewide.

The results of the District's planning effort offers a practical approach to development and strategies to overcome barriers that impede development and progress. A strategic tactic tied to specific outcomes, it looks at both short and long-range objectives and future goals for the region. It is meant to be a driving force to coordinate efforts and to move the region on a competitive tract for economic growth.

In an effort to move aggressively forward we recognize the need to continue to address some "barriers" from the past. Issues need to be addressed as part of short-term objectives that can affect, or are critical components for development and growth. The issues that come to the forefront for additional work include water, sewer, connectivity, housing, construction & reconstruction of major transportation arteries, and the development of marketable sites, land and buildings. In addition, the need for the continued development and availability of workforce development training and education opportunities, to prepare individuals for the challenging technological workforce of the "New Economy". A focus on diversification, tourism development, enhancement of airports, better jobs with higher wages and benefits for workers, community preparedness for industrial recruitment and the availability of employment opportunities designed to encourage our best and brightest to return to the area and to retain those who are already here.

At this time the region has seen progress, and advancements have been made. Area hospitals are expanding, improvements to roads have occurred or are underway, water and sewer projects have been completed or are in progress, new housing has been constructed, and new industrial parks and buildings have been developed. Regional approaches and coordinated development efforts have increased with stronger collaborative efforts and networking among educational systems and among human service providers. Efforts have increased for economic development through recruitment of new industry, the expansion and retention of existing industry and the development of local entrepreneurial opportunities.

However, this acknowledgment of our successes does not detract from the on going deficiencies of the area. For continued community development and economic growth the region needs to leverage its progress and build upon it to generate greater long-range accomplishments and economic growth in the future. It is imperative that the region is successful in its efforts, particularly given the fact that local, state and federal funding is becoming increasingly difficult to obtain. It is also the hope that through the District's strategic planning a more efficient utilization of resources and funding as well as more cost effective development will occur.

The Big Sandy "Progress Kentucky 2002 Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy" provides direct information about the status of the region, its accomplishments, the existing needs, and most important it is the strategy embraced by the region as the template for future economic development.

This plan's strategic guiding premise is to generate a single driving force that will facilitate economic development and strong sustainable communities within the region through planning, idea sharing and a collaborative effort among all the "stake holders" at the local level. It is a long range goal to build a diverse, sound economy, with vast employment opportunities, strong education systems, a safe and nurturing environment, good housing, accessible and affordable health care and communities driven by local individuals working together to achieve their full potential.

The strategy/plan encourages the coordination of and building upon other strategic plans. The Governor's Appalachian Advancement Plan and the strategies of the various economic development groups/organizations within the area and other community interests have been reviewed in an effort to avoid duplication. It further encourages the coordination of community goals with that of the major "players"/ "stake holders" in economic development and the linking of efforts and individuals to avoid conflict with development initiatives.

Our Strategy is to focus on core areas such as improving the overall quality of life for the residents of the region, improving infrastructure in the region, effective community development, fostering growth of existing business/industry and new entrepreneurial activities, recruitment of new industry into the area and improving educational, workforce development, improved health and human services within the area.

The approach is not singular in focus, it is not just about recruitment of new industry as “economic development”, it is not just about bringing in jobs or the number of new jobs created, although these are of high priority. It is about building all of the components for strong viable communities for the citizenry recognizing that some of those very same components enhance economic growth and development and sustains it.

The guiding principles are:

- Developing and marketing the area as a good place to live and work.
- Assist organizations, local governments, development authorities and others in their development efforts.
- Build a foundation for progress by developing a trained workforce of educated individuals who can compete in the economic reality of the twenty-first century.
- Public sector investment in infrastructure.
- Targeting and recruitment of new industry into the region.
- Assisting and supporting existing business/industry within the region.
- Development and support of new entrepreneurial activity within the region.
- Regionalism - not just a concept but also a reality in action.
- Broad, diverse economic growth and achievements and a variety of personal employment opportunities are key to improving social, demographic and economic and the overall quality of life within the region.
- Strategic planning at the local level with broad collaborative involvement is most effective.
- Local people, their capacity and their commitment are the strongest “drivers” for progress.
- Planning efforts should focus on solving problems of the area and provide solutions whenever possible.

The strategic focus categories are:

- Growing a diverse economy.
- Development & expansion of the region’s infrastructure.
- Promoting and supporting workforce development and education to capitalize on our investment in a “human resource based economy”.
- Development & expansion of access into the region, through all means of transportation.
- Health Care and capitalizing on the potential economic opportunities related to health care and related technologies.
- Development and expansion of human services within the region.
- Development and expansion of housing within the region
- Develop an environment that promotes and nurtures entrepreneurial opportunities and small business development.
- Responsible resource conservation

In 2002, with the direction from the Department for Local Government (now Governor's Office for Local Development) and the Economic Development Administration (EDA), the BSADD began the process and adoption of the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy as the necessary prerequisite to access future EDA funding. This document is an addendum to the 2002 Progress Kentucky: Big Sandy Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy. This addendum, an annual update, only reflects "significant" changes to the original planning document and a report and evaluation of our progress related to the established goals and outcomes. Changes include updates to the organization and governance, organizational structure, demographic information & statistics, project listings, progress updates, and strategy reporting and evaluation. Although the CEDS committee's subgroups met to continue the planning process and to re-evaluate the information set forth in the original 2002 CEDS document all changes and modifications are not included in this update.