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WHAT IS THE CEDS?

The Capital District Regional Planning Commission (CDRPC) as a designated Economic Development District (EDD) for the Capital Region consisting of Albany, Rensselaer, Saratoga and Schenectady counties, has prepared the following Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) for 2023-2027.

This CEDS provides for a locally-based, regionally-driven economic development process with an analysis and prioritization of economic development actions. We highlight information on the region’s history, demographics, strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats, strategic goals, and economic development initiatives. In an active planning environment in New York State, it is also important to note that the CEDS does not occur in a vacuum but instead is a complement to strong regional efforts led by New York State, Center for Economic Growth, and other partners. One of the most significant and continued changes to our region’s approach to economic development has been the state’s Regional Economic Development Councils. This CEDS is not a replacement, but instead a complement, to that strategy. As the work of the REDC directly connects to the priorities of the State of New York, this CEDS focuses on a direct connection to the priorities of the federal government. Together, the state REDC strategy and the CEDS provide a complete and unified vision for economic development for the Capital Region. This CEDS considers important parallel efforts and includes reference to many of these efforts to further lift up and support these efforts important to our region’s economic development.

How to use the CEDS for EDA or other federal funding applications
Projects seeking EDA funding must display how their proposal reflects the overarching CEDS goals. For many grants available through the EDA, applicants must detail how the proposed project will support economic development needs and objectives outlined in their region’s CEDS and provide a copy of the planning document (either via an attachment or weblink for the document).
WHAT IS CDRPC?

The Capital District Regional Planning Commission (CDRPC) is a regional planning and resource center serving the upstate New York counties of Albany, Rensselaer, Saratoga and Schenectady. CDRPC was established in 1967 as a regional planning board with the original purpose to perform and support comprehensive planning, and sound, coordinated development of the entire region. CDRPC serves the best interests of both the public and private sectors by promoting intergovernmental cooperation; communicating, collaborating, and facilitating regional initiatives; and sharing information and fostering dialogue on solutions to regional problems. CDRPC provides objective analysis of data, trends, opportunities and challenges relevant to the Region’s economic development and planning communities, and provides added capacity to municipalities, many without dedicated Planning staff.

Today CDRPC leads and coordinates robust and focused programming including Sustainable Communities, Regional Data Analytics and Mapping, Economic Development, Water Quality, and Human Services (serving as administrator for the Capital Region Youth Detention Center).

CDRPC has served as the region’s Economic Development District (EDD) since 1984 and works to fulfill EDA’s mission in our region to “create and retain jobs and to help stimulate industrial and commercial growth in distressed rural and urban communities.” CDRPC administers the Capital Region’s Foreign Trade Zone—(FTZ-121)—an important federal program providing significant incentives for international trade activity. CDRPC also serves as the Local Development District (LDD)—connecting and providing technical assistance for eligible projects to Northern Border Regional Commission funding opportunities.
CDRPC PROGRAMS

EDA Investment
CDRPC works to connect priority projects within our region to funding and other opportunities provided by EDA.

Foreign Trade Zone 121
CDRPC manages the 10-county FTZ-121, a federal incentive program that aims to encourage international trade, promote job creation and investment.

Northern Border Regional Commission
Connecting regional initiatives to federal funding through NBRC programming.

Clean Energy & Climate Adaptation
CDRPC manages a 28-county area assisting communities with clean energy planning and implementation.

Planning & Technical Assistance
Providing assistance for asset based economic development projects.

Data Analysis & GIS
CDRPC is a well known resource for Capital Region mapping, data analysis and visualizations that are accessible via cdrpc.org.

Workforce Development
Collaboration with related region-wide partners and initiatives. Future Leaders in Planning (FLIP) program for high school students created and held annually.

Water Quality
CDRPC is a key partner and facilitator of regional environmental programs that concern water quality, sewer systems, and storm water runoff.
**Capital Region Overview**

**Geography and History**
The Capital Region is centered around the confluence of the Hudson and Mohawk rivers in east-central New York State, bounded by the Catskill Mountains to the south, the Adirondacks to the north, and the Berkshires and Green Mountains to the east. It contains the New York State Capital, which provides a significant source of employment for residents in the region.

The Capital Region as comprised of Albany, Rensselaer, Saratoga and Schenectady Counties features 79 municipalities, has a population of 869,548 and was the only region in upstate NY to gain population (modestly) per the 2020 US Census. The Mohawk and Mohican tribes were earlier largest native populations in the region and several of the names they gave local towns, creeks and mountains are part of the Capital Region’s vocabulary today.

Historically the main sources of employment have included state government, and manufacturing. Manufacturing has suffered from a long term decline like many communities in the Northeast. While Government is still central to the regional economy, over time there has been a shift in diversification to a growing number of other industries.

**Population**
The Capital Region has a population of 869,548, and was the only region in upstate NY to gain population (modestly) per the 2020 US Census.

**Education**
34 Colleges and universities call the Capital Region home offering a wide range of post-secondary undergraduate, graduate, education, and workforce training opportunities.

Over two-thirds of residents have some college education or higher.

**Age**
The region skews slightly older than the US populations with greater numbers of adults 45 and above. Youth from 0-18 ages make up slightly less of the region’s population than the US as a whole.

**Race and Ethnicity**
The Capital Region population is majority white, and does not match the US average for racial diversity. In the 2020 Census however, the trend of increasing diversity continued with African American increasing 13.5% (now 9% of total population), Hispanic or Latino to 6%, and Asian to 5% of total population.

Median household incomes vary among county of residence (Saratoga highest median income, Schenectady lowest). Also noted is the disparity among race and ethnicity and corresponding median household income— for example in Albany County White household is $81,167, Black or African American at $42,050 (only half of white median household income), Asian $84,393, and Hispanic or Latino households with $53,944.
REGIONAL INDICATORS

Poverty

The average poverty rate in the region is 10% compared to the 12.80% for the US as a whole. Poverty, while not pervasive across the region, still has a significant negative impact, especially on specific distressed neighborhoods and underserved populations. The reduction and elimination of poverty remains a priority of this CEDS, and investments and activities proposed are expected to have a positive impact on reducing some of the elements that contribute to poverty and lead to increases in employment, household income and betterment within distressed communities.

Workforce

Post-COVID, the region continues to experience an unemployment rate (2.6%) below that of the state (3.8), and national averages (3.3%). The region currently struggles with filling open job vacancies, and attracting qualified labor especially in certain sectors. In addition, this low unemployment rate does not tell the entire picture as the region also has specific areas that experience a higher rate of unemployment that combined with other indicators, identify these specific areas as distressed and pinpoint them for further concentrated efforts for improvement.

Government related industry remains the region's most significant industry at 20% of all regional jobs, but of note are employment growth in other primary sectors including Educational & Health Services, Professional & Business Services, and Leisure & Hospitality.

There is still a noted gender wage gap with women making 83.4% of what men make overall (ACS 1 year estimate, 2017-2021).

Infrastructure Assets

**Housing:** The region has 399,080 housing units with the majority (57%) owner-occupied, and single-family (56%) housing type. However a decade plus trend has seen the number of multi-family housing units grow in the region.

**Transportation:** The region is well served by roads including NYS 87, 787, US-90 and a network of state and local roads. Rail access is provided serving freight and passenger needs and includes Rensselaer (primary) Station, and local stops. Albany International Airport is the primary airport, with several other airports serving other commercial or niche needs. CDTA provides a growing diversity of options to provide mass transit options to the population, but the urban centers within the region have most access to bus routes, micro-mobility, bikeshare, and newly introduced car share service. Due to the number of distinct cities and sprawl, the region is notably harder to serve with a mass-transit service. The deep water Port of Albany via the Hudson River provides a connection with New York City and the Atlantic Ocean, and the Champlain and Erie Canals provide connections west to Buffalo, and north to the St. Lawrence Seaway.

**Broadband:** The Capital Region largely reflects the 87% broadband household subscription rate of the US as a whole (Census ACS 2017-2021), however the region grapples with last mile connections to largely rural households, and inadequate service and speeds.
Economic Resiliency is the ability of our region to anticipate, withstand, and bounce back from various disruptions to its economy. The concept of resiliency towards economic and natural shocks is a key priority and interwoven throughout this CEDS.

Core principles of resiliency include:

- Making resilience-infused decisions about planning, economic development, and infrastructure investments;
- Supporting a diversified economy that does not rely on one single industry for our success and growth;
- Enhancing the existing strong partnerships and communication across public and private sectors;
- Encouraging solid institutions and governance structures that are trusted and transparent; and,
- Engaging a diverse set of stakeholders, including residents, in our success.
A SWOT analysis of our regional economy helps us answer the question "where are we now?" and acts as a strategic planning tool to ensure the CEDS is informed by a holistic sense of its capabilities as well as deficiencies. The Capital Region has notable strengths including its people and educational institutions, and exciting opportunities including diversification of sector clusters. There are of course also weaknesses and threats that deserve our attention. This SWOT analysis uses data from a variety of sources to make informed representation of the region's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (see Appendix for complete SWOT analysis and survey results).
Our region's relative competitive advantages

**Education**

34 colleges and universities call the Capital Region home and contribute to high education rates of residents—25% having a Bachelor’s degree, and 21% holding a Graduate degree.

**Industry Clusters**

Diversification of the economy has been a continued goal for the region. Growing clusters within Clean Energy, Semiconductors, and Life Sciences are providing strength to the region’s economy.

**Natural Resources**

Open space, water, and access to natural amenities are abundant. The Capital Region is also relatively stable with a low incidence of natural disasters such as earthquakes, tornadoes or hurricanes, although climate change impacts need to be continue to be assessed and planned for.

**Livability**

Composed of a network of smaller cities, towns, and countryside with accessible amenities, community and natural beauty, the Capital Region rates highly for its livability.

**Education-Research and Development ties**

A strength noted by 63% of survey respondents are the strong ties between academic, research and development and entrepreneurship within the region.

**Location**

Located in the Northeast along primary transportation corridors and 2 hours driving distance to major metro areas of NYC to Montreal, the region’s location is perceived as a strength, especially for certain industries.
CAPITAL REGION WEAKNESSES

Our region's relative competitive disadvantages

Aging Or Lacking Infrastructure

The region has an abundance of aging or not yet present infrastructure from substandard roads and bridges, to broadband. To remain competitive and attract future economic opportunities, we need resilient buildings and infrastructure that mitigate future risk and vulnerability to climate change.

Housing- condition and affordability

While there have been notable retrofitting of structures for new commercial and industrial uses, the region still has a number of vacant structures that remain unused. Equally as significant, affordable housing that is accessible to needs in both an urban and rural setting are lacking.

Retention of College Graduates

Although the region’s population saw modest gains in the 2020 Census, there are still concerns that college graduates from the region are initially settling elsewhere and putting down roots away from the Capital Region.

Transportation Options that serve Everyone

The region features a unique arrangement of smaller sized cities, towns, and rural areas. A majority of destinations are accessed primarily by car. This can further exacerbate unequal access to resources and unemployment rates for those without reliable transportation.

Multiple Regional Identities

Tech Valley, Capital District, Capital Region, State Capital—knowing the same region by different identities was seen as a disadvantage and collective lost opportunity.

Real or Perceived costs of doing business

Taxes, permitting, approval process length of time and complexity are cited as unique disadvantages for the region.
CAPITAL REGION OPPORTUNITIES

Our region’s opportunities for progress and betterment

Burgeoning Clusters

Semiconductors, wind energy, and life sciences are specific clusters that after much investment and attention by NYS, business, and regional stakeholders, show tremendous opportunities for the region. Diversifying the regional economy, offering high paying employment and economic stability to region residents are all seen as continued opportunities with these and other emerging clusters.

Community Placemaking

Urban centers, villages, rural communities with a sense of place are a common feature of communities within the region. Walkability, historic or well constructed structures, community institutions and spirit are all highly desirable qualities for people to live and work within.

Equity and Inclusion

Ensuring that economic and community efforts reach all populations, especially those that are underrepresented, is vitally important to ensure equitable growth. Many funding agencies are realizing this and include equity as an evaluation metric. The region has an opportunity to prioritize inclusive recovery and growth.

Broadband

Broadband has quickly become essential infrastructure as we witnessed during the pandemic. Ensuring universal and equitable access to broadband is an opportunity as well as a necessity for the region.

Regional Tourism and Marketing

Whether encouraging Capital Region residents to vacation around their own area, or drawing in visitors from NYC, Canada, and other locations, tourism could be a more significant contributor to the regional economy as well as protect its’ natural resources.

Funding for Catalyst Projects in Region

Unprecedented funding at federal level, as well as continued NYS funding program provide significant opportunities to financially support regional priority initiatives.
CAPITAL REGION THREATS

Our region's potential negative impacts or regional decline

**Age and Condition of infrastructure**

The region has an abundance of aging or not yet present infrastructure from substandard roads and bridges, to broadband. To remain competitive and attract future economic opportunities, we need resilient buildings and infrastructure that mitigate future risk and vulnerability to climate change.

**Climate Change Impacts**

Climate change impacts are being felt currently. A changing environment, negative impacts and uncertainty of what and timing of change all are perceived as threats to the region.

**Aging population**

Composed of a network of smaller cities, towns, and countryside with accessible amenities, community and natural beauty, the Capital Region rates highly for it's livability.

**Affordable and Accessible Childcare**

There is an evident lack of affordable, accessible and reliable childcare within the region. Conditions during COVID put a giant spotlight on this as an issue and continues to impact ability for labor force to enter or return to the job market.

**Competition from Successful Areas around US**

There is a perceived threat that other larger, successful regions—i.e. young, innovative, hip, high-growth will win and draw our region’s current or potential future residents away from the Capital Region.
STRATEGIC GOALS

Goals can help answer the questions "Where do we want to go?" and "How do we get there?" by leveraging the findings from the SWOT analysis, and from stakeholder input. These goals help us create centralized next steps for the next five years and will assist in continuing the necessary work we completed previously, and move new priorities to the forefront. The overarching goals contained herein are designed to reflect the existing and emerging priorities for action within the region. Cited plans and their specific goals are explicitly included within the overall CEDS and available via link (where possible) in section "Complementary CEDS supported efforts and plans which are incorporated by reference".

1. Economic Competitiveness—Prioritize resilient economic development projects and programming

Efforts to diversify the regional economic base such as through focus on more than one sectoral cluster, adaptability to new conditions, development of resilient infrastructure (i.e. clean energy, broadband) and comprehensive planning that prioritizes input and benefits shared by all community members for shared economic prosperity are key to a resilient region.

Changes to our natural environment and weather patterns are impacting our region, and is expected to intensify in the years to come. Climate Hazards can cause impacts to Community infrastructure, Socio-Economic assets and systems, natural and working lands, and any other asset or system needed by the community.

Key Tactics:

1. Encourage that a Climate Vulnerability Assessment and Adaptation Plan is completed for each county (example: Albany County Climate Resiliency Plan).
2. Increase export activities and volume (regional, national, and international)
3. Develop supply chain systems that facilitate commerce among businesses in the region
4. Develop and expand tools that support business growth (Foreign Trade Zone, revolving loan funds)

Complementary, CEDS supported efforts and plans which are incorporated by reference:

New York State Climate Action Scoping Plan (2022)
County Hazard Mitigation Plans (Albany, Rensselaer, Saratoga, Schenectady)
Emergency Management Plans—created by a multitude of municipalities in region
2. Human Capital—Continue to collaborate to create a comprehensive, holistic workforce development system that is highly effective in connecting the region's potential workforce to current and future employment needs

Key Tactics:

- Ensure employers have diverse and inclusive pipelines of skilled workers from within the region
- Provide equitable access to quality jobs and economic opportunity
- Advocate and make accelerating ideas a reality and support start-ups, entrepreneurs and business expansion
- Build vibrant cities for businesses and families
- Address key ecosystem barriers keeping talent out of the region's economy by understanding and mitigating childcare, housing and other barriers
- Provide meaningful early connections for young adults to workforce opportunities and civic engagement—i.e. Future Leaders in Planning (FLIP)

Complementary, CEDS supported efforts and plans which are incorporated by reference:

- Greater Capital Region Workforce Development Plan (July 1, 2021–June 30, 2025)
- Capital Region Economic Development Council (CREDC) Progress Report 2022
- Capital Region Workforce Development Strategy 2022
3. Continue to Diversify the Regional Economy

Further diversification in the regional economy provides for better utilization of current assets in our area, promotes healthy independent and inter-dependent sectors in our region, leading to more sustainable growth, while also avoiding overreliance on any particular, specific industry.

Key Tactics:

Continue to foster high-growth target industry sectors- Tech and Electronics, Digital Game/Software development, Materials Processing, Cleantech and Renewable Energy, Biotech and Life Sciences, R&D to Commercialization, Creative Arts, Foods, and Tourism, Logistics and Distribution (as identified by NYS Empire State Development).

Foster Potential or Emerging Opportunities as they become apparent- Future opportunities for sector growth may become apparent over time. Potential investment and employment opportunities within the Capital Region that contribute to the collective wellness of the region must be continually provided outreach to, analyzed, and an understanding created of opportunities as well as any necessary investments in their growth.

Complementary, CEDS supported efforts and plans which are incorporated by reference:
Capital Region Economic Development Council 2022 Progress Report
Center for Economic Growth (CEG) Industry Assets and Economic Profiles
Capital Roots Greater Capital Region Food System Assessment 2020
4. Foundational Assets: Address infrastructure needs through strategic, pro-active collaboration and implementation

Key Tactics:

**Housing:** Increase the number of housing units that are affordable and accessible to rural and urban households.

**Broadband:**
Ensure the collection of accurate data around served, underserved and unserved communities.
Work with NYS and Federal initiatives and funding to provide universal connectivity within region.

**Road Network:** Work with Capital District Transportation Committee (CDTC), NYS Department of Transportation (DOT) and regional partners to address critical issues while planning for future needs.

**Transit/Active Transportation:** Continue to collaborate with CDTA and invest in a multi-modal, seamless transportation system that allows a user to reach destinations by foot, bike, car, bus, scooter, Flex or other future means.

**Clean and Renewable Affordable Energy:** Reach 30% deployment of renewable energy by 2030.

**Community Resource Facilities:** Expand childcare options- private, public, and cooperative.

Complementary, CEDS supported efforts and plans which are incorporated by reference:
Capital Region Economic Development Council Progress Report 2022
CDTC New Visions Regional Transportation Plan 2050 (adopted 2020)
New York State Climate Action Council Scoping Plan 2022
5. Increase regional collaboration and further develop existing and future partnerships across the entire region

The region features many notable partnerships and collaborations that can be expanded and further utilized to create further positive impact in regional goals and in addressing critical needs.

Key Tactics:

Embrace cross-sectional collaboration that involve consistent, critical partners but also invites underrepresented or diverse interests to the conversational table.

Actively recruit and nurture emerging leaders through community leadership programming, with intentional focus on untapped communities in the region.

Share resources and involve diverse stakeholders where objectives align. An example of this is economic development planning with hazard mitigation, emergency management and resiliency planning.

Complementary, CEDS Supported Efforts and Plans which are incorporated by reference:

Innovate 518
6. Provide programming and initiatives that support livable communities where people can find quality jobs, affordable housing, accessible childcare and social and cultural opportunities aligned with their needs.

**Key tactics:**

Maximize investment in the region's underdeveloped/underutilized areas—private sector and supported with federal, state, local funding as needed. 
Support burgeoning arts and entertainment creative industries. 
Utilize arts based placemaking to improve downtowns and public spaces. 
Identify and safeguard valuable natural resources and outdoor heritage through specific activities. 
Target specific Capital Region recreation, arts, and cultural experiences for marketing for current residents and future tourists. 
Support the developing regional marketing efforts to promote the Capital Region as the best place to visit, work, and live. Utilize these efforts to attract and retain new, younger resident families.

Complementary, CEDS supported efforts and plans which are incorporated by reference: 
Captivate the Capital Region's Creative Economy, Upstate Alliance for the Creative Economy (ACE) 
GoCapNY
MEASURING PROGRESS

How will we know if we've accomplished our goals?

This CEDS report is a continuous work in progress—a way for CDRPC and the Capital Region to track its impact and improvements over time. Having measurable evaluation metrics can assist us in understanding where we are making progress, and where more effort or a different approach may be needed.

Utilizing a variety of performance measures is an appropriate way to evaluate specific programming impact, as well as create a composite view in quantifying the regional impact of our goals and objectives. We use both primary and secondary data sources in this analysis.

Primary Sources
- Number of EDA or other grants submitted over the 2022-2026 period
- Leadership and involvement in regional initiatives
- Number of designated CEC communities
- Number of specific technical assistance, economic impact analyses provided to partners
- Number of Regional projects that benefit all counties started, maintained, and advanced.
- Stakeholder interviews
- Community surveys

Secondary Sources
- US Census, American Community Survey
- StatsAmerica
- NYS Bureau of Labor Statistics
- NTIA—The Indicators of Broadband Need map (Department of Commerce, NTIA)
- NYS Broadband Access Mapping and future comprehensive address level mapping
- Internal Revenue Service Change of Address mapping
CONCLUSION

This CEDS is designed as a stand-alone Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy, but also to serve as a unifying document that lifts up and provides cohesion to the many state, regional and local efforts active within the Capital Region.

A variety of primary and secondary sources were utilized including the 2020 Census, NYS DOL data, stakeholder interviews, CEDS community survey conducted, and also incorporates findings from a number of active and key planning efforts that were based on extensive public outreach and planning efforts of their own.

We appreciate and thank all of our CEDS advisors and those that provided input directly or indirectly to this effort.

Organizational Review and Approval Process

Public Comment Period April 24, 2023-May 24, 2023
-Comment period posted on CDRPC’s website and social media pages
-Email notification provided to local units of government and community partners, CEDS advisors, and CDRPC Board