

Executive Summary

The Livingston County Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) is a useful source for public officials, community leaders, educators, developers, business owners, the public, and others to gain an understanding of the county's economic profile. The purpose of the CEDS document is two-fold. First, the result of the planning process is a strategy that includes goals, objectives, and action items that will enable the county to capitalize on its unique strengths and opportunities and will remedy identified weaknesses. Second, the CEDS document permits Livingston County and the municipalities within the county to apply for U.S. Department of Commerce - Economic Development Administration (EDA) assistance. The EDA offers grant funds for public works, infrastructure, technical, and planning projects that will lead to private investment and the creation of long-term jobs in distressed communities and regions.

The CEDS document is the result of a year-long process of conducting research and gathering information from the people who live and work in Livingston County. Per the requirements of the planning process for developing the CEDS document, a committee comprised of both public and private individuals was created to identify the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) that influence the county's economic position locally, nationally, and globally. Goals, objectives, and action items were formulated based on the SWOT analysis. They are discussed below.

Strengths

Livingston County's economy remains strongly based in manufacturing and agriculture, but supporting industries including health care, retail, finance, insurance, and tourism have diversified it. Wind energy and crude oil distribution have also expanded the county's economy. The region's multi-modal transportation network that includes a major freight rail hub, high-speed passenger rail, the Pontiac Municipal Airport, Interstate 55, and several local, state, and federal highways has contributed to strengthening the manufacturing and agriculture industries. The City of Pontiac and the City of Fairbury are also part of the Central Illinois Broadband Network that provides public entities and businesses with high-speed internet. A strong infrastructure network provides businesses with access to larger markets and additional distribution options. There are several companies in Livingston County that have an international presence. These companies position the county to compete globally.

Having an educated and skilled workforce is necessary to grow the economy. Livingston County residents have access to quality elementary, secondary, and post-secondary education. The county touches six (6) community college districts and is less than one (1) hour away from several four (4)-year colleges and universities. The Livingston County Career Center prepares high school students for the workforce and a partnership between the Greater Livingston County Economic Development Council and Heartland Community College offers customized workforce training to meet the needs of local employers.

Historic downtowns, a small-town feel, multiple civic organizations, and access to health care are characteristics that have an impact on the quality of life for residents. In order to preserve and improve this quality of life, the county must be business friendly. Low permitting fees and no utility taxes are incentives for businesses to locate in the county.

Weaknesses

A lack of major employers and jobs that offer a living wage are weaknesses that can have a ripple effect across the economy. The development of bedroom communities and the loss of young talent may be attributed to these weaknesses. With the absence of major employers, there are fewer supporting businesses and residents must shop outside of the county. The result is retail leakage, the loss of sales tax revenues the county and municipalities would otherwise receive.

High property taxes, difficult access to information (i.e. tax increment financing districts, tax incentives, etc.), and the presence of strong unions may discourage some companies from locating in the county. The need for improving or replacing infrastructure, including the need to expand broadband throughout the county, is an additional weakness that may preclude economic growth. Lack of public transportation and the lack of cultural, ethnic, and educational diversity are quality of life weaknesses.

Opportunities

Every weakness that was identified by the CEDS committee can be turned into an opportunity. Most economic growth within communities originates from promoting, expanding, and strengthening existing companies and resources. Identifying the needs of companies and linking them to individuals with specialized skill sets is one (1) way to support existing businesses. Expanding broadband and completing other public infrastructure projects will also strengthen the incentives for growth. The Greater Livingston County Economic Development Council creates partnerships to meet the needs of area employers and the City of Pontiac recently approved plans to expand broadband service to current and future businesses. Both local governments should continue with these endeavors.

Promoting tourism will also create economic opportunities. Livingston County and its communities should continue to promote Historic Route 66, which is now attracting international travelers. Supporting farm operators and encouraging them to share their knowledge will also help grow agritourism. The construction of new train stations in Dwight and Pontiac to serve high-speed rail may serve as a catalyst for economic development for tourism and other industries. Other opportunities identified by the CEDS committee include repurposing the closed Dwight Correctional Center, increasing public transportation in communities throughout the county, and improving access to government information. The county's location (Interstate 55 and other roadways) provides an ideal opportunity to attract supply chain companies. The county's strengths should be packaged to attract businesses, including retail.

Threats

Factors that the county and municipalities have little or no control over are considered threats. Illinois' politics, fiscal insolvency, and corporate income tax can impede economic growth. Workers' compensation costs can also be a hindrance. The county has experienced firsthand the closure of a state facility that employed hundreds of people; the Dwight Correctional Center. The closure of additional state facilities and major employers remains a threat. An increase in the low-income population and subsidized housing are threats that can arise with a loss of jobs or jobs that do not offer a livable wage.

Top Action Items

Members of the CEDS Committee were asked to vote for their top 10 action items across all of the goals using a ranking system with 10 being the most important and 1 (one) being the least important goal to pursue. Listed below are the top 10 action items decided upon by the committee.

1. **Infrastructure Goal- Action 4:** Assist Livingston County and its communities with developing projects, through capital improvements planning, that are eligible for Economic Development Administration (EDA) funding and other state and federal grant programs. Projects should improve the district's infrastructure and result in job creation and private sector investment.
2. **Workforce and Education Development Goal- Action 1:** Advance Livingston County's ability to meet the needs of employers with a trained and ready workforce by continuing to partner with regional schools, community colleges, and universities to develop training programs for existing and future businesses and industries in Livingston County and the surrounding area (i.e. Partnership between Livingston County employers, Livingston Area Career Center, Heartland Community College, and the Illinois Workforce Investment Board). Assist partners with increasing their capacity to offer sound programs and deliver expected results.
3. **Business Development Goal- Action 1:** Develop a plan to attract and retain manufacturing and logistics companies.
4. **Business Development Goal- Action 4:** Facilitate communication between businesses and municipalities by establishing a small task force to meet with top officials of the major regional and local employers to seek opportunities for supporting services.
5. **Infrastructure Goal- Action 1:** Working with county and local officials, compile and maintain a list of infrastructure projects that when completed will give Livingston County a competitive advantage in attracting new businesses and industries.

6. **Transportation Goal- Action 1:** Monitor Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT) projects that could impact Livingston County and the region and participate.
7. **Infrastructure Goal- Action 3:** Develop and market industrial parks with appropriate infrastructure to attract new industrial and commercial growth and provide space for local companies to expand.
8. **Workforce and Education Goal- Action 5:** Partner with local and regional businesses to educate high school students, their parents, and teachers and school counselors about the types of employment available within the county and the training or education required for the positions.
9. **Business Development Goal- Action 6:** Identify and catalog available (i.e. willing sellers) land and buildings for interested prospects. Use LOIS to market properties.
10. **Disaster Resiliency Goal- Action 2:** Inform about public information campaigns (i.e. FEMA, IEMA, Red Cross, SBA, Restore Your Economy, ready.gov) to educate people and businesses of the hazards they face, how to protect themselves, and how to recover.

Livingston County CEDS Projects, Programs, Activities

A Call for Projects was conducted as part of the planning process to identify projects, programs, and activities that will improve the economic competitiveness of the region. The CEDS Committee ranked the projects on a scale of 1-5 with five (5) having the highest priority and one (1) having the least priority. Five (5) priority projects are listed followed by the rest of the identified projects.

1. **Hotel/ Meeting Facilities at 116 & 55 (Pontiac)** - The county is in need of a hotel facility that will give corporate executives a place to stay while in town and have the amenities to host conferences. The hotel will be private, but meeting rooms will be public. A project cost has not yet been determined.
2. **County Wide:** Expand internet availability throughout Livingston County.
3. **Lift Station at U.S. 23 and I-55 (Pontiac)** - Estimated cost is \$125,000 a quadrant. There is water and a force main for sewer. An issue for the area is that rock table is high so it is costly to install a gravity fed system.
4. **12th Street Reconstruction Project (Streator)** - Rehabilitation/Industrial. This will reconstruct 12th Street from IL Route 23 to Smith Douglass Road in Streator to accommodate additional truck traffic generated by the sand transfer operation along Smith Douglass Road along with storm sewer improvements. Project is currently being

planned for construction in 2022. The road will have a capacity of 80,000 pounds; a class three (3) truck route. The city will use road impact fee paid by the san transfer facility to assist in paying for the improvements. Engineering is not completed. The estimated cost of construction is \$2 million.

5. **Elevated Water Tank (Fairbury)** - Rehabilitation/infrastructure with an estimated cost of \$165,000. Improvements are needed to the water tower. The city will finance \$165,000 at three (3) percent for 20 years and \$.75 rate increase per meter, per month.
- **West Side Sanitary Sewer (Dwight)** - Install about 1,250 feet of new sanitary sewer line on west side going north to sewer plant at an estimated cost of \$2 million.
- **Water main on Route 17 (Dwight)** - Replace approximately 6,500 feet of old water main along Route 17. The estimated cost is \$1 million.
- **Water Park (Pontiac)** - Development of a water park on the west side near potential hotel and meeting facilities project. Project cost is estimated at \$4.5 million.
- **North Street (Dwight)** - Approximately 3,500 feet of storm sewer and street repairs. The estimated cost is \$450,000.
- **Wastewater Treatment Plant Upgrades (Fairbury)** - Rehabilitation/infrastructure project- the City of Fairbury has a combined sewer system. This project will prevent combined sewer outflows. Engineering still needs to be completed. The estimated cost is \$8,874,800.
- **Flooding on Route 47 (Dwight)** - Route 47 from Linden Street 4-5 blocks south floods as certain times of heavy rains. Cost of improvements has not yet been determined.
- **Route 66 Walking and Bike Path (Odell)** - Rehabilitation/recreational- installation of walking and biking path as identified in Route 66 Prairie Trail. Estimated cost is \$250,000.
- **Streator Industrial Park (Streator)** - New Construction/industrial- The project proposes to construct roadway and utility service improvements to the platted Streator Industrial Park located along Livingston Road. The project will be undertaken upon commitment of any potential industrial developer wanting to purchase the platted lots. Engineering is not complete. Construction has an estimated cost of \$1,000,000.

- **Smith Douglas Road infrastructure improvements (Streator)** - construction/industrial- This project includes the installation of sewer and water down Smith Douglas Road from 12th Street to a potential industrial site that is a brownfield. There is no current cost estimate for this project.
- **Franklin Street water line (Dwight)** - Replacement of water line on Franklin is needed at an estimated cost of \$100,000.
- **Walnut/Ash Street Lining (Fairbury)** - Rehabilitation/infrastructure- Project includes the lining of sewer and rehabilitation of manholes. Engineering is completed. The city will be financing through an IEPA loan in the amount of \$350,000 at 1.93 percent for 20 years and by increasing meter rates by \$2.50 per meter, per month.
- **North Jackson Street Sewer Lining (Flanagan)** - Construction/infrastructure- Relining of sewer on North Jackson Street with an estimated cost of \$150,000.
- **New Water Meters (Odell)** – Installation of new water meters at with an estimated cost of \$100,000.
- **New Sidewalks (Odell)** – Installation of new sidewalks in various locations in town. The cost has not yet been determined.
- **Katchewan Lakes Loop and Canoe Launch (Streator)** - New construction/recreational- This project will construct a multi-purpose trail along the Vermilion River in Livingston County near Streator, a canoe launch, and a park, as identified in the 2002 City of Streator Vermilion River Greenway Master Plan. The engineering is completed and the project has an estimated construction cost of \$1,000,000.

Livingston County Facts

- The county's population peaked in 1980 at 41,381. The current population is 38,950.
- The county's population is predominately white (92 percent).
- The median age is 37.9.
- The county's educational attainment levels are below neighboring counties' levels and the state average.
- The median household income of \$54,339 is five (5) percent lower than Illinois' income.
- The county has a lower median home value compared to five (5) out of the six (6) neighboring counties' and Illinois' value.

- The county has a strong, multi-modal transportation network that includes freight and passenger rail, a municipal airport, Interstate 55, and other state and federal highways.
- Livingston County is part of the Central Illinois Regional Broadband Network, a federally-funded project to provide high-speed internet service to rural, unserved, and underserved communities.
- The unemployment rate is currently at 7.8 percent, down from 10.1 in 2009.
- Although the unemployment rate is down, the 24-month average unemployment rate has increased and the county is now considered economically distressed by the U.S. Department of Commerce Economic Development Administration.
- The county's labor force has decreased by 1,600 people since 2009.
- 1) Primary Metal Manufacturing; 2) Agribusiness, Food Processing, and Technology; and 3) Machinery Manufacturing are strong industry clusters in the county.
- The top three employers in the county are RR Donnelley (800 people), the Pontiac Correctional Center (565 people), and Caterpillar, Inc. (550 people).
- 98 percent of all land in the county is used for agriculture.
- The county is home to one (1) of the largest wind farms in Illinois; the Streator Cayuga Ridge South Wind Farm, which has 150 wind turbines.
- Enbridge has a crude oil shipping terminal in Pontiac that distributes oil via pipeline to Cushing, Oklahoma.
- Historic Route 66 runs through the county.