



Lower Connecticut River Valley
Council of Governments

*Comprehensive Economic
Development Strategy*

April 2023 - April 2028

Acknowledgments

Project Sponsors

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1 INTRODUCTION

Old brownstone quarry, Portland





What is a Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS)?

A CEDS is a process created by the US Economic Development Administration (EDA) for creating a strategy to support regional economic growth. An approved CEDS is an important step to becoming an approved Economic Development District. An approved CEDS makes identified projects in the Lower Connecticut River Valley region eligible for EDA funds and supports competitive grant applications.

Why now?

The American Rescue Plan, the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, and the Inflation Reduction Act provide federal resources to support regional economic development and infrastructure investment initiatives. Many of the funding opportunities are competitive applications and typically require identifying whether the programs are consistent with a regional comprehensive economic development program.

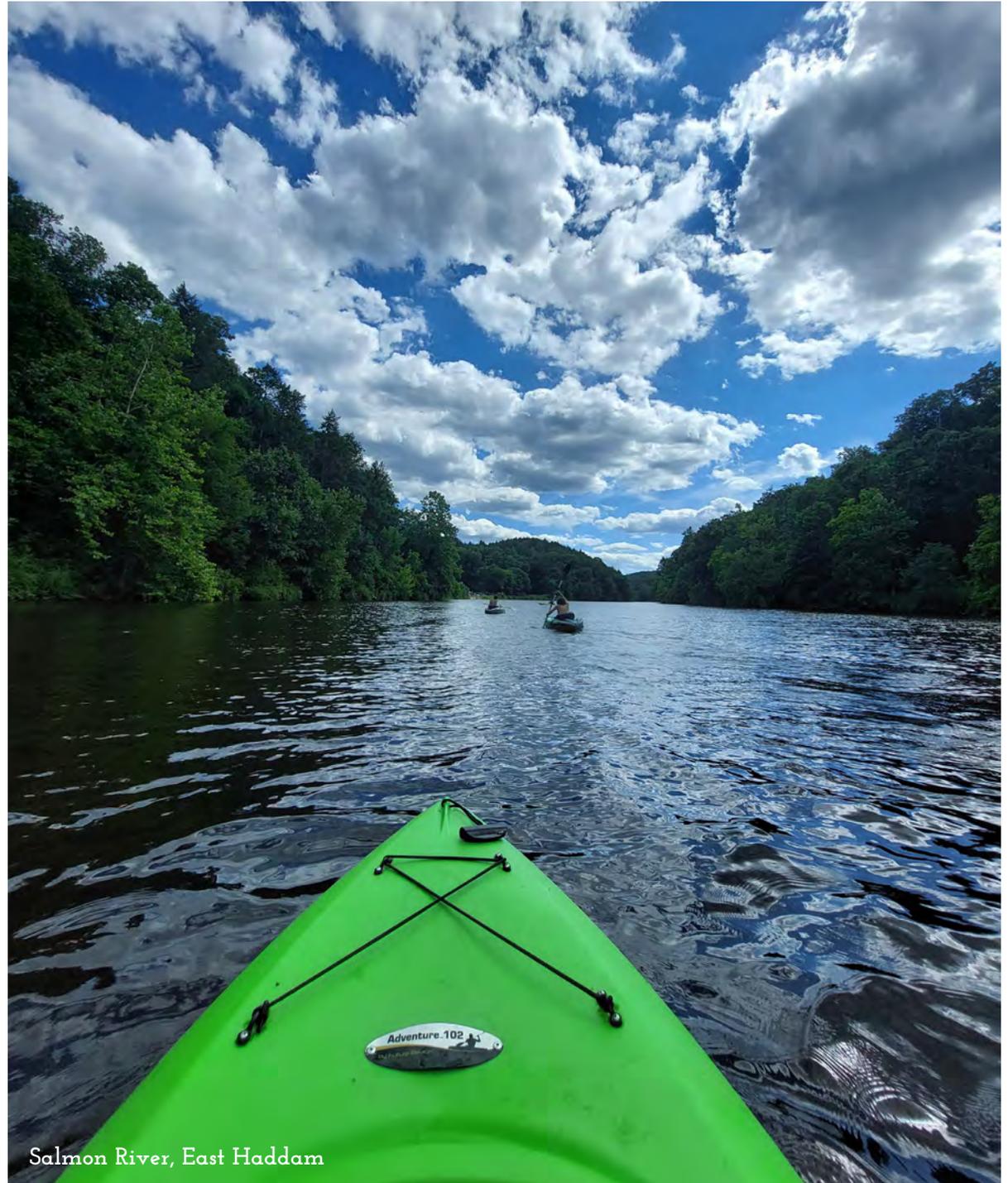
As the only region in Connecticut without a CEDS, the Lower Connecticut River Valley communities are at a disadvantage when competing for these funds. Having a CEDS does not guarantee receiving federal support, however, without one, it can be more difficult to compete for the funds. COVID-19 also brought significant changes in the region in terms of workforce trends and the need for reliable infrastructure, among others, which a more recent CEDS can help address.

Planning context

In 2016, RiverCOG completed the **GrowSmart** planning process, which created an economic vision and direction for the Lower Connecticut River Valley region. In 2021, RiverCOG adopted its first **Regional Plan of Conservation and Development (RPOCD)**, in order to address the issues of individual towns through a regional framework. With substantial public input, the RPOCD was organized into four overarching themes to reflect the regional vision:

- Sustainable: A region growing in balance with its natural resources
- Innovative: A climate that attracts new businesses and supports existing businesses
- Connected: A transportation system that provides ease of access to jobs, housing, and amenities by all modes of travel and for all types of people
- Community: A region that is welcoming of and accessible to a wide diversity of residents

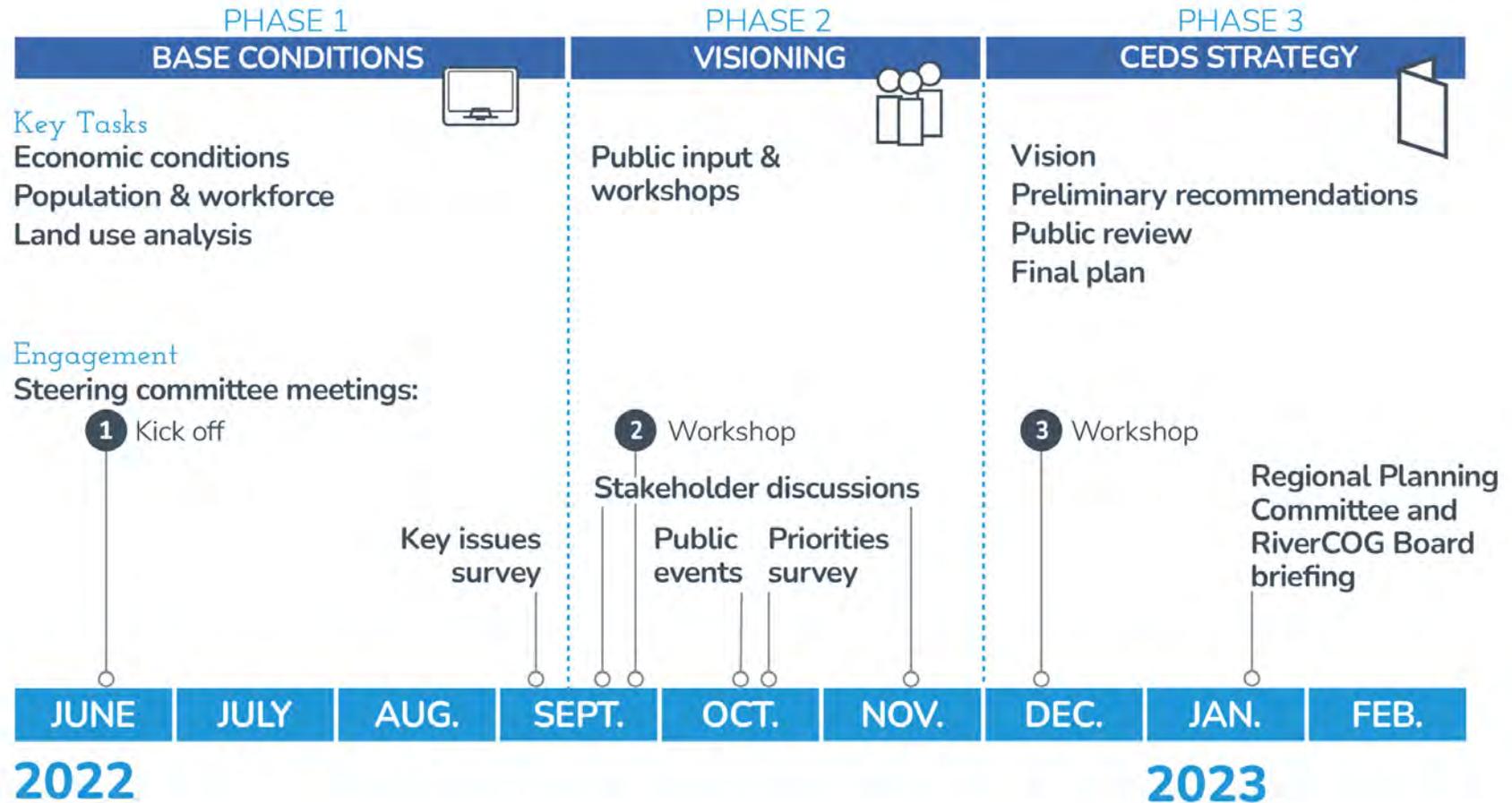
Economic development along with housing and a regional multimodal transportation system, will be key in making the RPOCD vision a reality. Building on the RPOCD, the **2022 Lower Connecticut River Valley Regional Housing Plan (RHP)** studied the region's housing needs in relation to its demographics, jobs, and environmental context. The housing plan recognized the symbiotic relationship between housing, jobs, and population. It concluded that the region was failing to attract and retain young people, in part as a result of its existing housing supply (larger, older, unaffordable, single-family homes), and in part because of its slow job growth. Economic development, and specifically job growth, will be necessary to increase the supply and variety of housing units in the region. Simultaneously, an increased supply of smaller, more affordable housing units, particularly rental units, will be necessary in order to attract and support the region's workforce.



Salmon River, East Haddam

The Process

The CEDS is 9-month process and involved three phases:
Base Conditions, Visioning and CEDS Strategy.



CEDS process

Public Engagement

June 2022

Steering Committee Kickoff (meeting 1) held on June 20

September 2022

Stakeholder Sessions (September 19-23)

- Planning and economic development representatives from 13 communities
- 5 business groups
- Online survey of key issues – 91 respondents

Steering Committee workshop (meeting 2) held on September 28

October 2022

Two public workshops on October 12 & 13 in Middletown and Old Saybrook, and three pop up sessions – 63 participants in total

Survey on Plan Priorities sent to regional Chamber

November 2022

Large employer Diversity & Training discussion group

December 2022

Steering Committee workshop (meeting 3) held on December 7 to review findings and proposed initial recommendations

January 2023

Regional Planning Committee and RiverCOG Board briefing in January

57 Comments received
208 Participants



2 EXISTING CONDITIONS

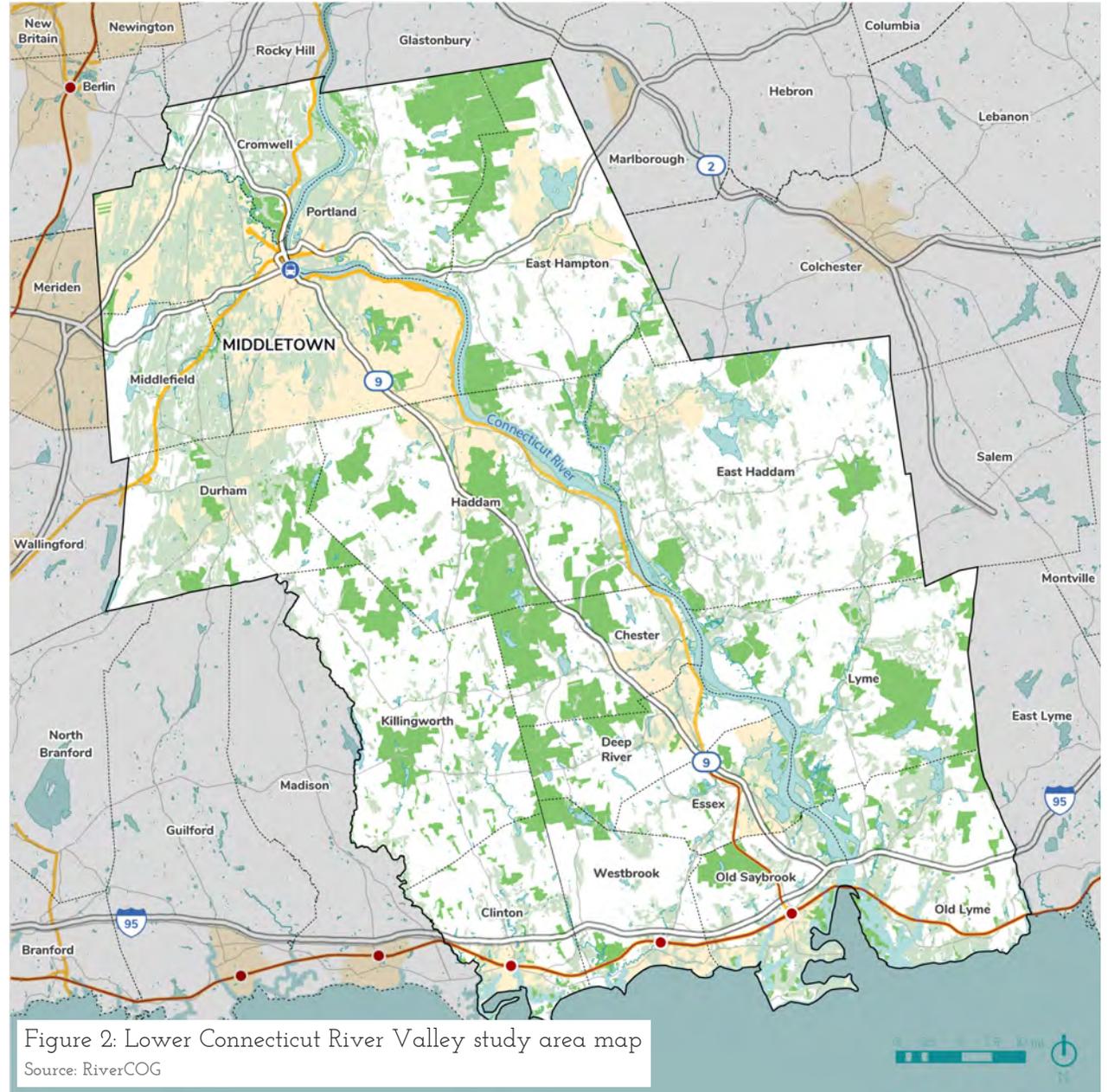




Regional Snapshot

The Lower Connecticut River Valley (LCRV) region includes 17 cities and towns: Chester, Clinton, Cromwell, Deep River, Durham, East Haddam, East Hampton, Essex, Haddam, Killingworth, Lyme, Middlefield, Middletown, Old Lyme, Old Saybrook, Portland, and Westbrook. It is comprised of predominately rural and low-density suburban neighborhoods, which are dotted with historic town and village centers. Middletown, the region's only city, serves as an urban anchor. Active agricultural land, as well as natural amenities such as beaches, forests, protected open spaces, and trail systems, contribute extensively to the character of the region.

The Lower Connecticut River Valley Council of Governments (RiverCOG) board is made up of the chief elected officials of the region's municipalities. The RiverCOG board, along with the regional transit district, chamber of commerce and a non-voting member from the Connecticut Department of Transportation, also serves as the region's Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) policy board.



- Study Area
- Town Boundaries
- Passenger Rail
- Freight Rail
- Middletown Transit Terminal
- Water body
- Open Space
- Farmland Soils

Demographics

Residents:

As of 2020, the region had a population of 174,225 people. This is a 1% decline since 2010. That population loss represents an 18% loss of the population under age 18.

The median age in the region is 46.6. The Baby Boomer generation (born 1946 -1964) makes up the largest population cohort at 26.5%, up from 16% in 2010.

Together, these statistics show that as the population has aged, the region has not retained or attracted new young people to replace them.

Workers:

Based on 2021 American Community Survey data the Lower Connecticut River Valley has a total labor force of approximately 97,000 for a labor force participation rate of 69%, higher than Connecticut's 66% rate.

Women represent 44% of the labor force in LCRV with a lower participation rate of 64%. However, this is slightly higher than the state participation rate for women, 63%.

Since the 2016 GrowSmart report, the workforce has gradually been getting older and more diverse. 28% of the workforce is over 55, this is an increase from 25% in 2014, and 36% of the manufacturing sector workforce is over 55. The workforce is also getting more diverse: 17% of the workforce was non-white and 12% had Latino ethnicity in 2021.

These are both substantial increases over 14% and 9.7% respectively from 2014.

The aging of the workforce and its increasing diversity are opportunities for the Lower Connecticut River Valley as the regional population undergoes key shifts over the next several years: an estimated 38,000 are under age 19 and 36% will be Latino and/or non white compared 26% of the total population.

Housing

The Regional Housing Plan provides an in-depth analysis of current housing conditions in the region. In summary:

- There are 82,497 housing units in the region
- Single family detached units make up 71% of the housing supply
- Only 26% of all housing units in the region are rentals
- Construction of new units has slowed substantially due to weak market conditions and high cost
- Limited housing variety and availability has made it difficult to attract and support a diverse population and workforce

- The average job in the region does not generate a high enough income to purchase the median home
- Housing cost burden (spending over 30% of income on housing) impacts 31% of the region's residents and disproportionately impacts renters

Transportation

The region is heavily car dependent, due in large part to its low-density, suburban development pattern. It is readily accessible by three major roadways: I-95 which runs along the shoreline, Rte. 9, which transects the region from north to south, and I-91, which crosses through Middlefield and Cromwell at the region's north-western corner.

Public transportation options are limited in the region. Local bus service is provided by Estuary Transit District. Commuter rail service between New Haven and New London is provided by Shoreline East, with stations in Clinton, Westbrook, and Old Saybrook. Shoreline East provides connections to Metro North and CT Rail, enabling travel to New York, New York, and Springfield, Massachusetts. However, current lack of frequency, coordination, and diversity of routes makes these options less efficient than driving for regular commutes.

Natural Environment

The region is notable for its natural resources, including rivers, streams, wetlands, coastal dunes and beaches, and vast forest land. These natural resources constitute primary habitats for the region's flora and fauna and support the migration routes for animals, particularly migratory birds, across the region. These abundant natural resources are unique to the region and important to its identity. The RPOCD recognizes the importance of the region's natural resources and charges the region to tread carefully in priority wildlife corridors (including core forest area, wetlands, and hydrologic features) protected open space, public water supply watersheds, and flood zones.

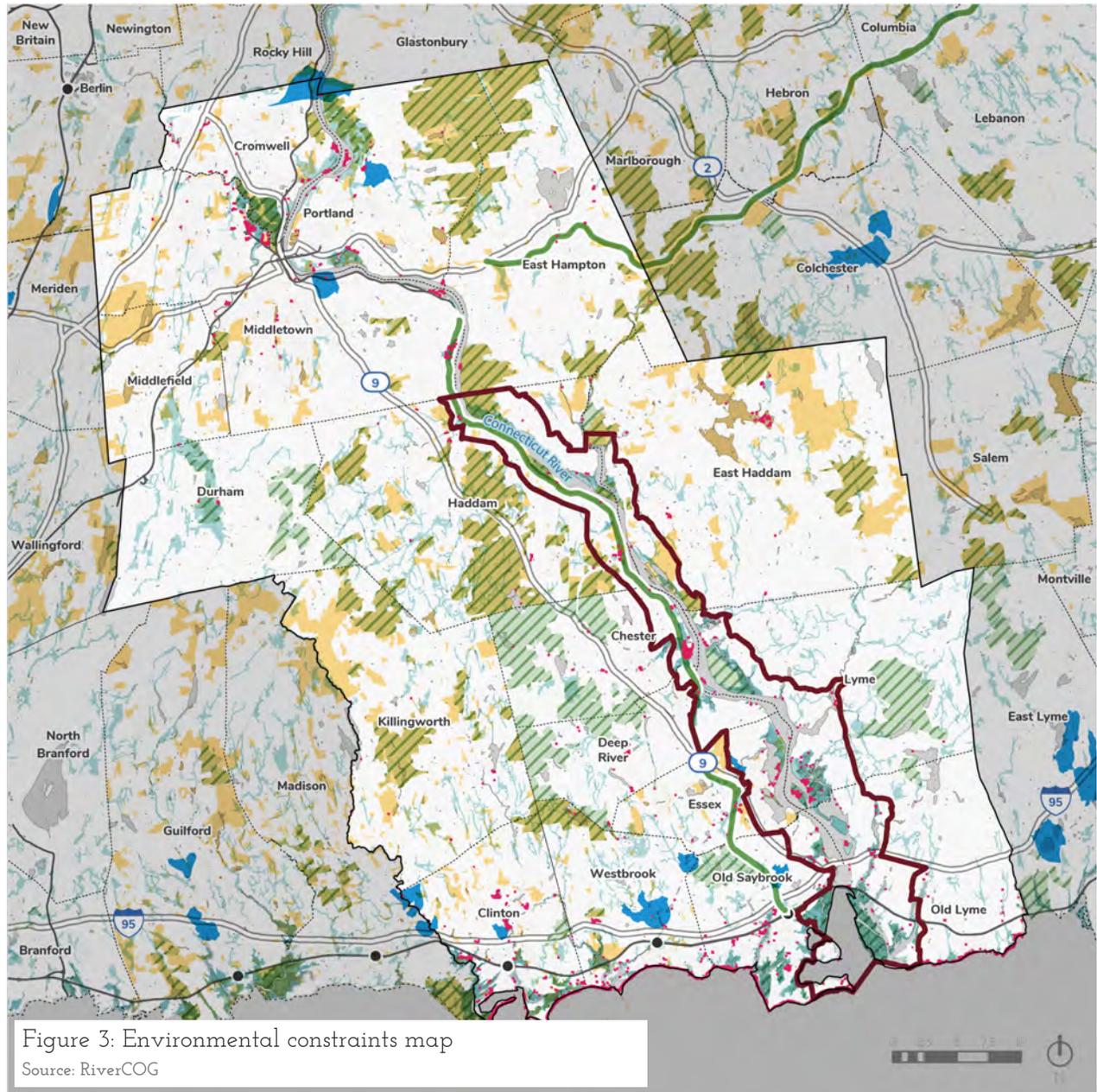


Figure 3: Environmental constraints map
Source: RiverCOG

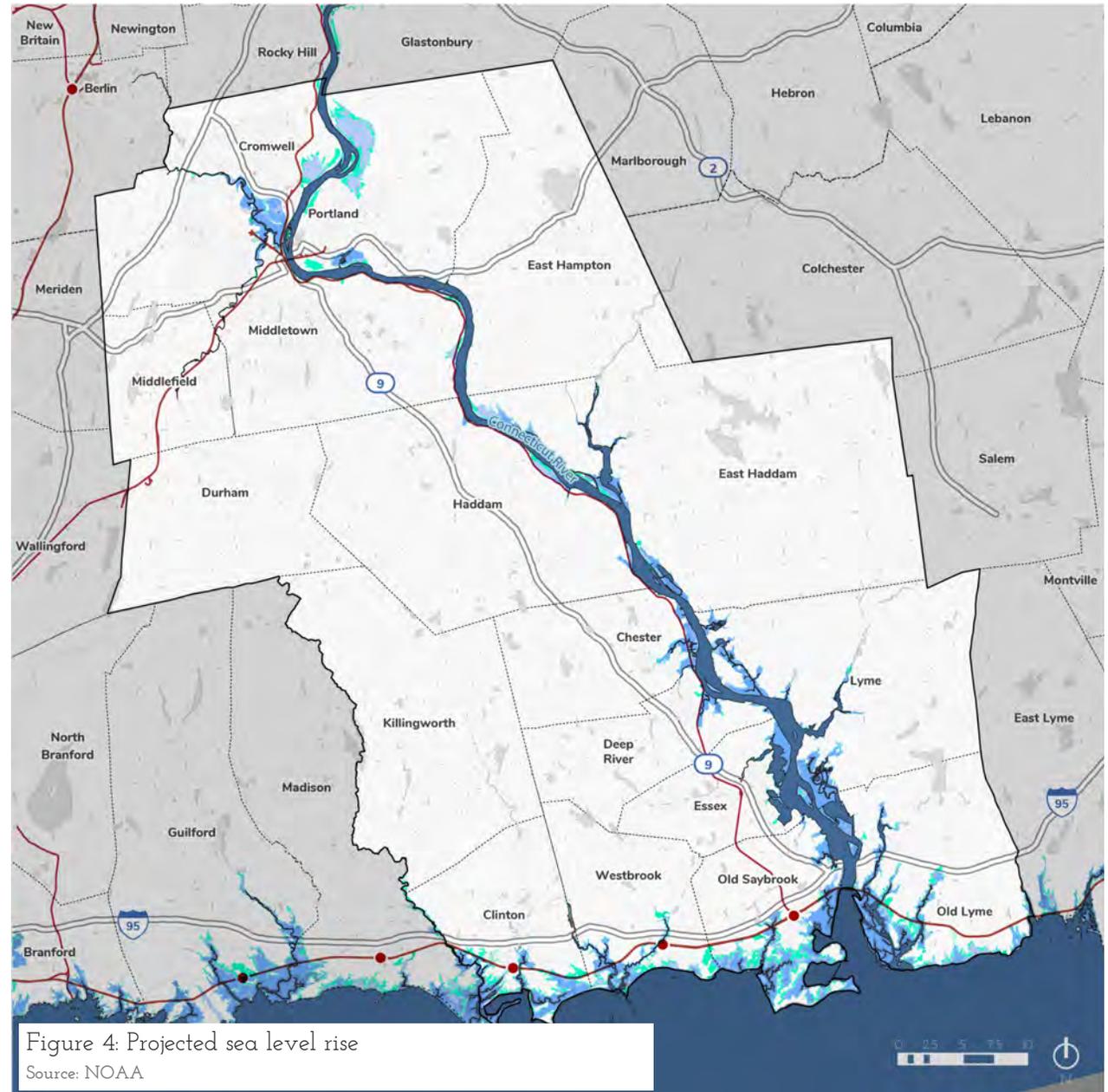
- Study Area
- Acquirer Protected Area
- Protected Open Space
- ▨ State Parks, Forests, and other DEEP Property
- State Park Trails
- Wetlands
- Flood Hazard Area

Natural Hazards

Floods, nor'easters, and hurricanes rank amongst the region's greatest natural hazard risks.

Projected Sea Level Rise

A two-foot sea level rise is projected for the region by 2050. The shoreline communities of Old Lyme, Old Saybrook, Westbrook, and Clinton will be most vulnerable to the impacts of sea level rise. However, properties along the Connecticut River can also expect to see significant impacts as the river is tidally influenced.



FEMA Flood Zones

Special Flood Hazard Areas (SFHA) are defined as the area that will be inundated by the flood event having a 1-percent chance of annual flooding. Mandatory flood insurance purchase requirements and floodplain management standards apply. SFHAs are labeled as Zone A - 1% annual chance of flooding (without Base Flood Elevation), AE - 1% annual chance of flooding (with Base Flood Elevation), AO/AH - 1% or greater chance of shallow annual flooding, VE - 1% or greater chance of flooding with storm waves (High Risk Coastal Flood Hazard).

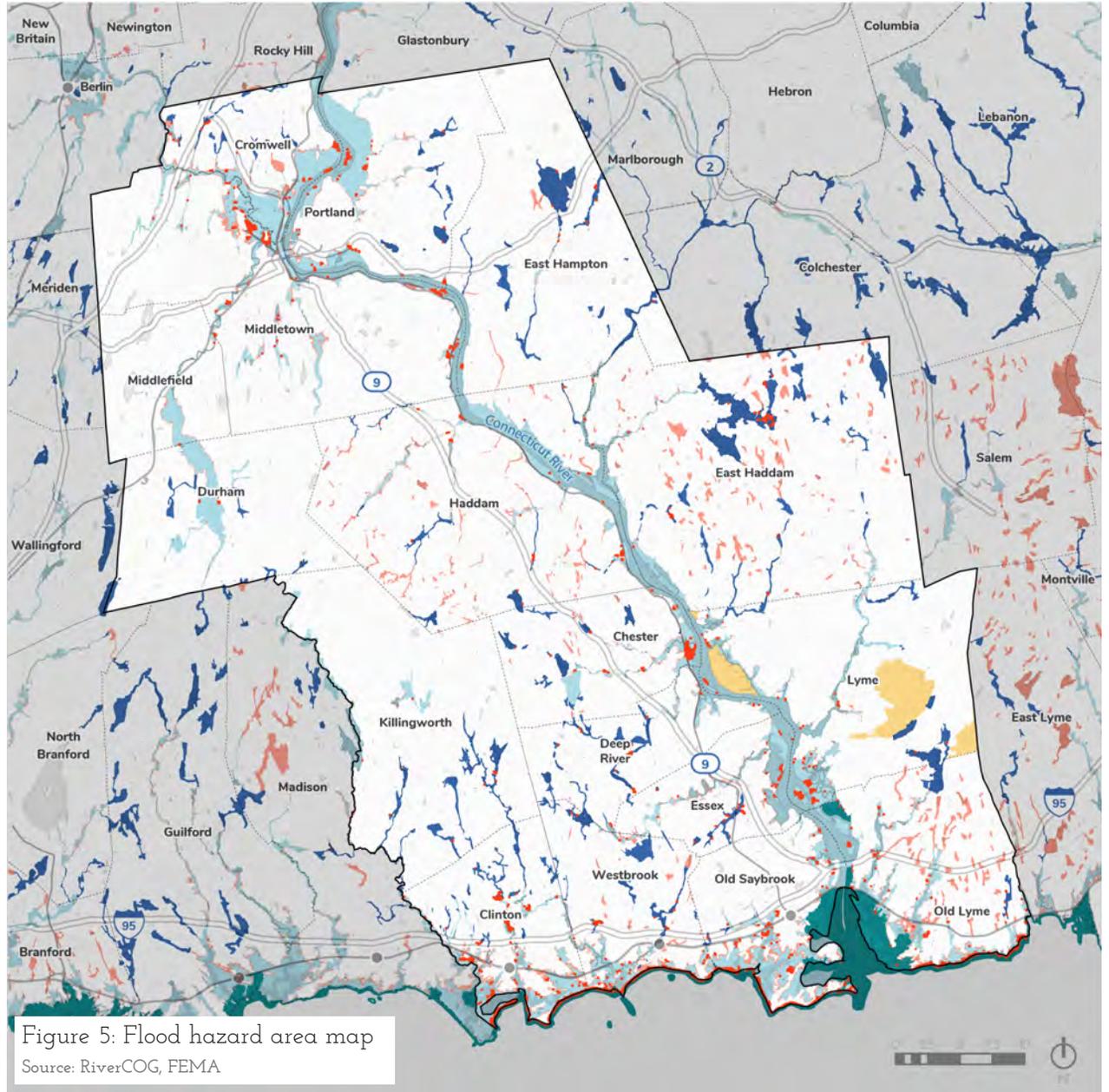


Figure 5: Flood hazard area map
Source: RiverCOG, FEMA





2018 flooding in Chester



2018 Liberty Street bridge collapse in Chester

Resilience and Hazard Mitigation

In 2020 RiverCOG updated the region’s Natural Hazard Mitigation Plans and conducted an assessment of the resilience of 15 of its 17 communities to natural hazards and disasters (access the plan here: <https://www.rivercog.org/plans/natural-hazard-mitigation-plan/>.)

A number of natural hazards were identified and ranked in terms of potential impact on the region. The highest score was 50.8; the lowest score 14.3. The four highest for additional consideration and planning emphasis included:

Hazard Type	Score	Hazard Planning Consideration
Winter Storms	50.8	Significant
Flood / Storm Surge	43.6	Significant
Severe Weather	33.87	Significant
Hurricanes (wind)	35.07	Significant

As part of this study estimated economic impacts were calculated using value at risk methodologies (VAR). This CEDS examined the four threats considered significant to understand the potential impacts based on the value at-risk methodology. For some of these categories there can be tremendous differences to potential losses based on the risk category, location and severity of the event. For example, the winter storm VAR estimates \$7.6b in building value at risk. Alternatively, a riverine flooding situation is measured against the type of event ranging from a 10 year flood even to a 500 year flood event. A 10 year flood event may impact 15 communities with a potential loss level of \$460m (2020) and a 500 year flood event totaling over \$1.4b. Similarly, losses from hurricanes show a range from \$2.6m to more than 1.4b for a 1000 year wind event. A 100 year wind event estimates losses at \$144m with approximately 2800 buildings sustaining damage based on the model.

As a follow up to the Natural Hazard Mitigation plan and the CEDS, RiverCOG intends to work with the regional business community and the communities at highest risk to develop a Resiliency and Recovery plan. This initiative will launch in 2023.

The Lower Connecticut River Valley economy

Quick facts about the economy

- The local economy has returned to pre-pandemic levels in terms of GDP, jobs, and incomes.
- Employment has grown steadily, but at a much slower rate than in previous decades.
- Key employment sectors have not changed since 2014, but the top four sectors are down more than 2300 jobs since 2019.
- Self employment keeps gaining in importance.
- The Lower Connecticut River Valley imports the majority of its workers from other parts of Connecticut.
- The workforce is getting older and more diverse as is the local population.



Figure 6: Total employment

Source: NP calculations from BEA.gov Table CAEMP25N revised 11/14/2022

Employment

The Lower Connecticut River Valley hosts approximately 100,000 jobs including private payroll jobs, self-employed individuals and government employees. The region has recovered from COVID but is still below the 2016 employment peak of approximately 101,000 jobs. In 2021 private payroll jobs represented 62% of total employment, self employment approximately 27% of total employment. Government employment represented about 10% of the total.

The Lower Connecticut River Valley has shown steady business growth, although it is slower than in the past. Self employment has added almost 2000 people since 2014. Establishments with payrolls (a proxy for businesses) have added almost 800.

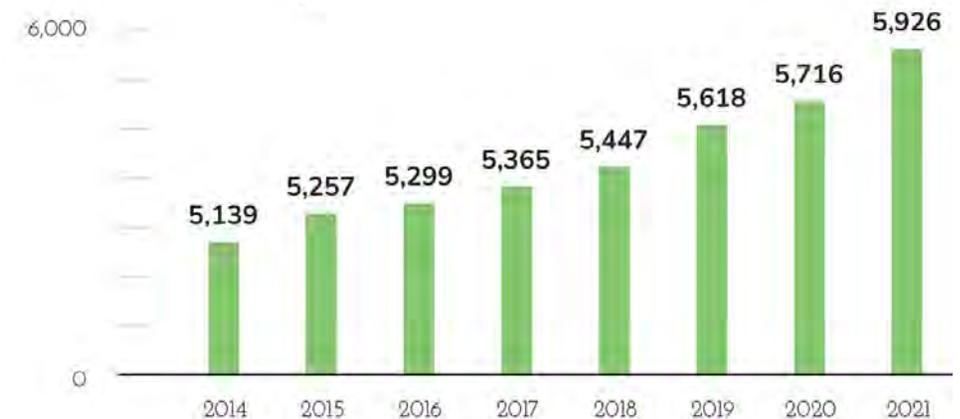


Figure 7: Payroll establishments since 2014

Source: NP calculations from BLS and CT LMI QCEW data

Unemployment

LCVR unemployment rate tends to mirror the state's changes in unemployment. However, historically the region has had a lower unemployment rate than the state overall. LCVR reached its lowest level of unemployment prior to the impact of COVID. However, **during COVID the region's unemployment rate was 3 points lower than the state peak. This speaks to the industry mix and resiliency of the local economy.**

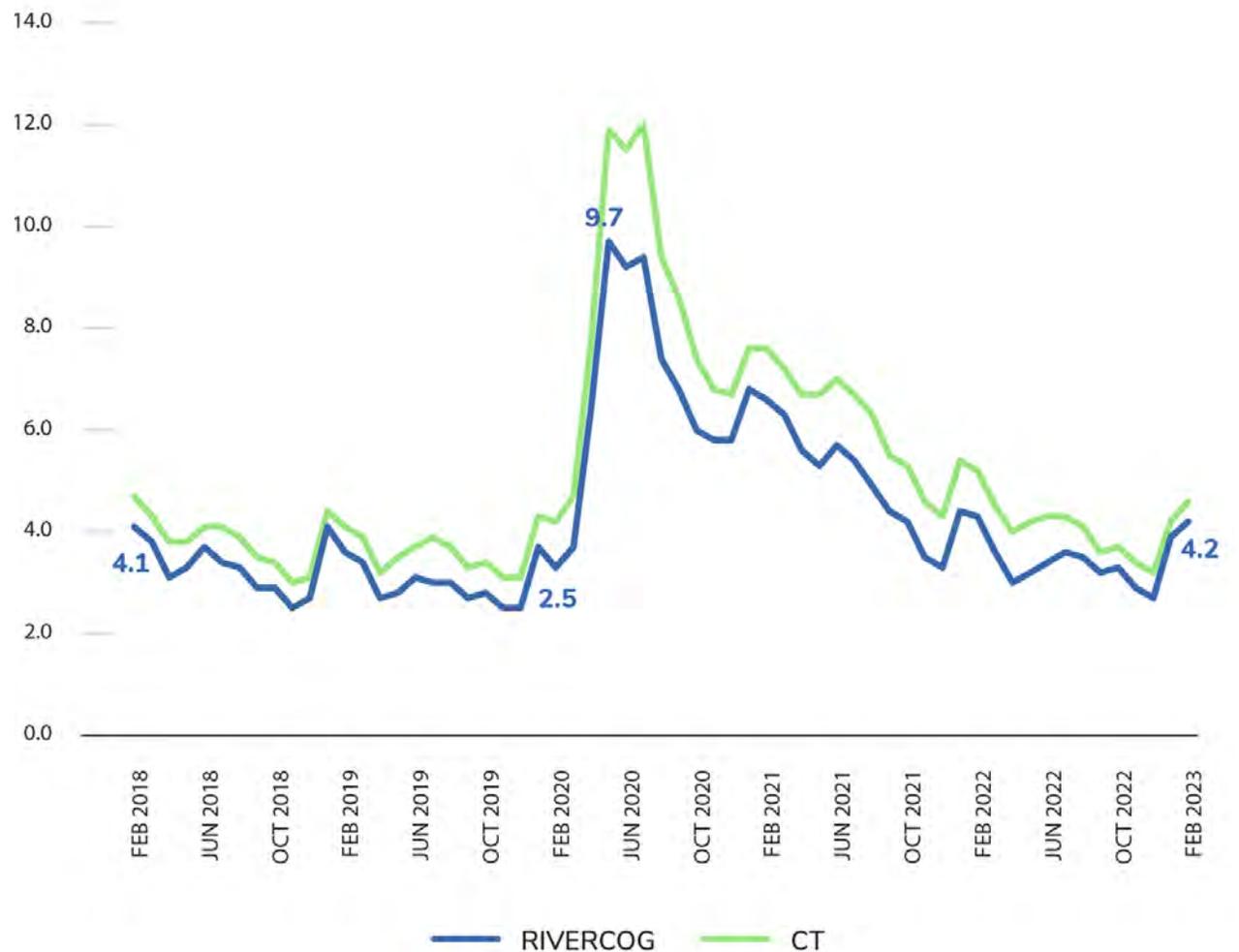


Figure 8: Unemployment Rate in RiverCOG and Connecticut

Source: NP analysis of ST Louis Fed FRED Economic data.

Note: unemployment rate for RIVERCOG reflects Middlesex County, CT, because of data limitations on calculating trend, but as of February 2023, unemployment rates in other communities were consistent with Middlesex County.

Private employment sectors

Key private employment sectors have not changed since the 2016 GrowSmart report. However, **the top four sectors are down more than 2,300 jobs since 2019 with healthcare and social assistance representing nearly half of the job loss.**

Employer Size Categories

Employers in LCVR tend to be smaller than in the state. 37% of employers have less than 50 employees versus 30% statewide. Moreover, 41% of employees work in businesses with more than 500 employees compared to 49% statewide. This makes the regional economy less prone to a major employment shock in an industry or single large employer.

Figure 10: Employment by Size of Firm

Source: LEHD Q3 2021.

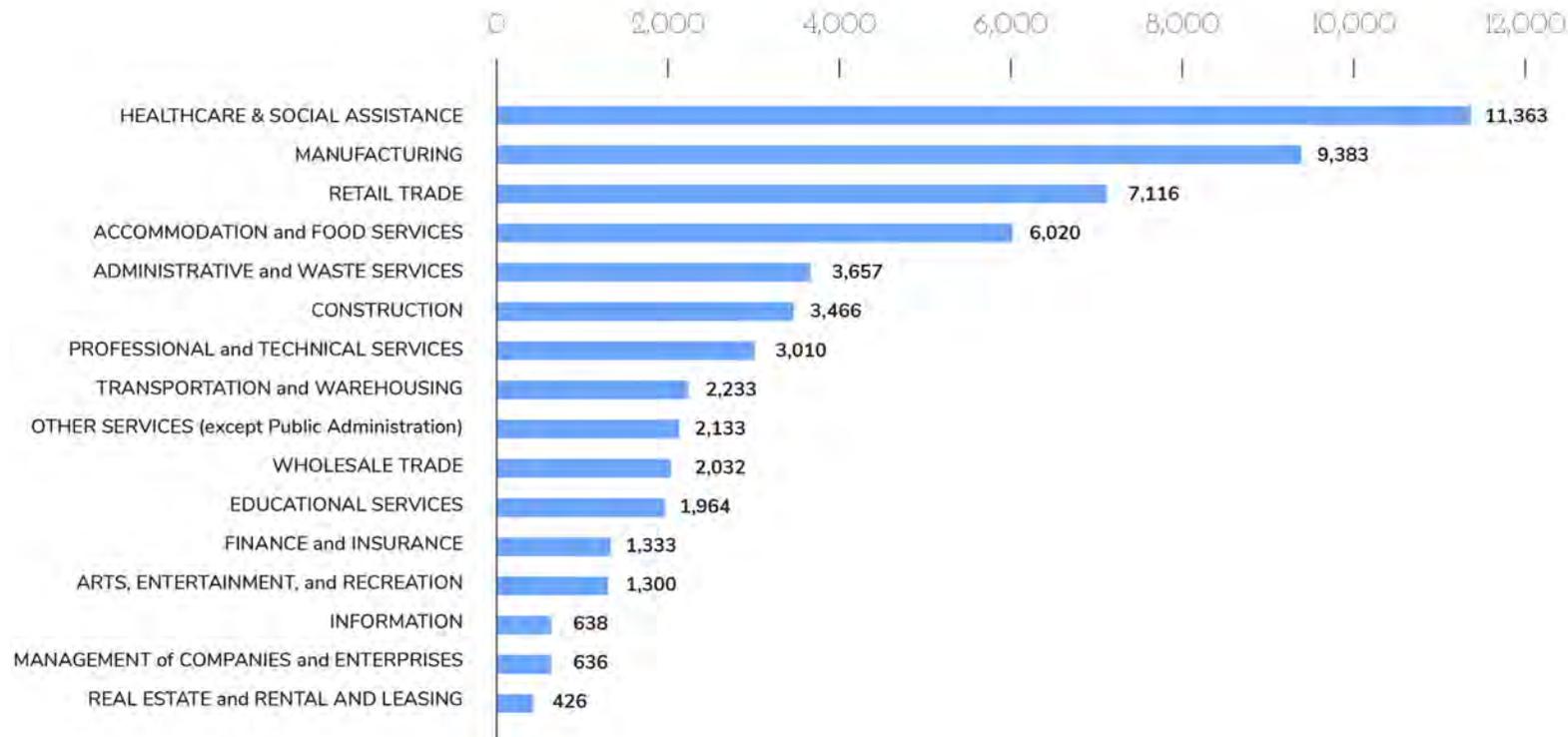
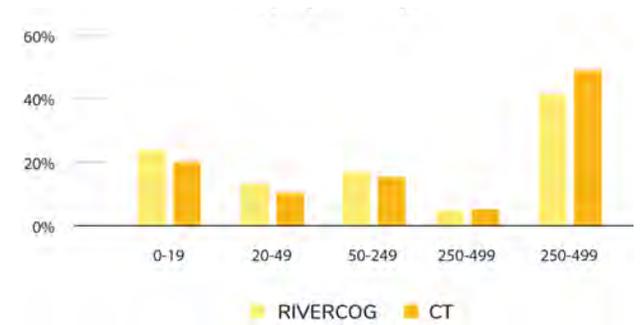


Figure 9: Private wage and salary employment

Source: NP calculations from BLS.gov & BEA.gov

Self-Employment

Self-employment is a business owner or independent contractor that provides goods or services to individuals, households or other businesses. These businesses can either be sole proprietorships, partnerships or other forms of pass-through businesses. This also includes “gig” economy jobs.

Self-employment is an important contributor to several sectors. Real estate is the largest self-employed category with more than 5,000. Finance and insurance are approximately 3,600. Professional technical services and construction are the next two largest with more than 3,000 people each. Self-employment growth in LCRV has been broad-based, across a range of industry sectors with no single sector being the principle driver of job growth. In addition to being a major job creator, it also contributes over \$1.2 billion in additional income to LCRV.

Continued growth in self-employment can offset overall job losses and help retain talent in the region.

The needs of the self-employed can vary depending on the nature and type of business. Some of these needs are human resource oriented (benefits, talent recruitment) while others may be space oriented. For example, contractors will need shop space and contractor yards whereas professional / technical businesses may want flexible office space arrangements. However, self-employment particularly home-based businesses have some important implications / considerations regarding land use, zoning, and property taxation.

As this type of employment continues to grow in the region, developing additional insights into how it is evolving will help cities and towns adjust or create appropriate policies.

Industry Concentrations

Industry concentrations can be measured by location quotients (LQs), which at the most basic level measure the relative concentration of an industry relative to the state or nation as a whole. This has been used by economic development officials as a way to target industries.

The North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) codes have 6 levels with 2 digits representing a general sector down to 6-digit NAICS (e.g., NAICS 23 equals construction while NAICS 23810 equals drywall contractors). An LQ of 1.00 means the region is equal to the nation. Greater than 1.00 means has a higher concentration of employment than the nation.

Due to the size of the region, the lowest level of industry identification for an LQ analysis is a 3-digit NAICS code not subject to business privacy / disclosure restrictions.

Manufacturing has the largest location quotient at the sector level, including at the 3-digit industry level. Education and Arts, Entertainment Recreation also have higher than typical concentrations, however, not in any specific industry area. **The opportunities these sectors present to the Lower Connecticut River Valley economy depends on available infrastructure, land area, and “fit” with the communities.**

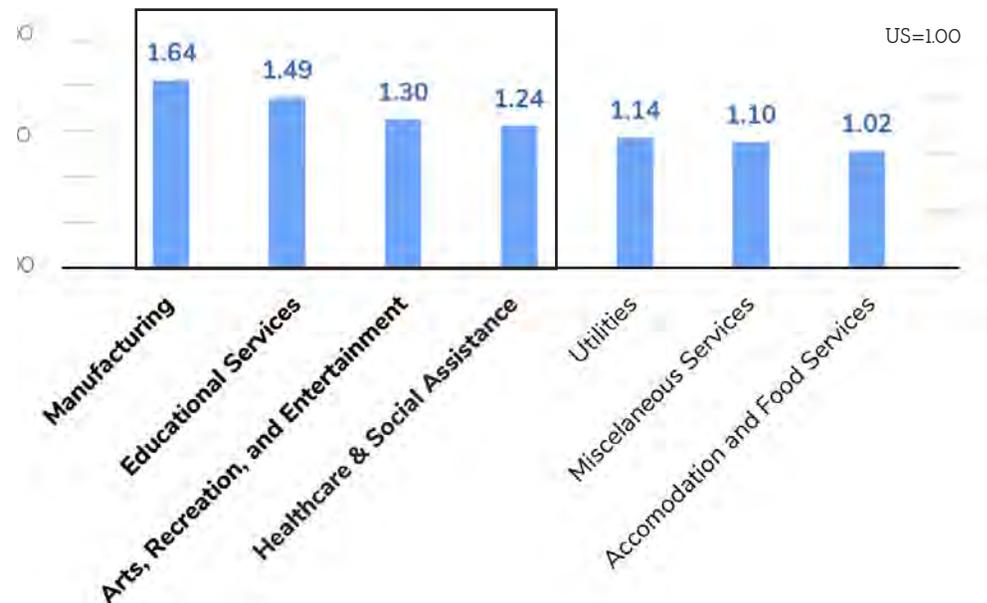


Figure 11: 2-digit sectors LQs
Source: BLS QCEW LQ calculations

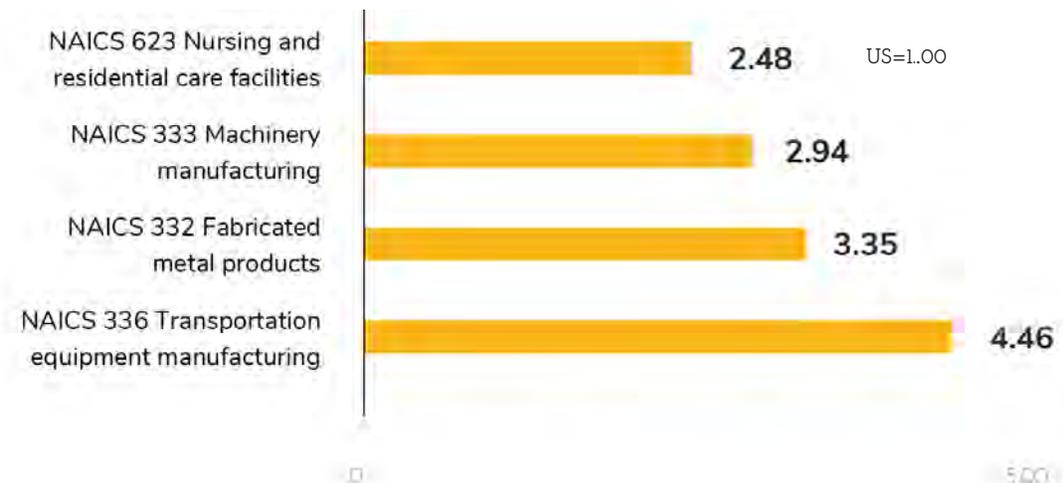


Figure 12: Top 3-digit industry LQs
Source: BLS QCEW LQ calculations

Workforce & Population

Full-time workforce needs are met by people outside the region



The Lower Connecticut River Valley region has 17,000 fewer full-time jobs than residents who are employed. As discussed in the Regional Housing Plan, the region is on the periphery of the Hartford, New Haven, and New London labor market areas. Commuting patterns reflect that 68% of the region's residents leave the region for employment, predominately to these destinations. This is a slight increase from 2014.

This commuting pattern means that an estimated \$4.2b in income is brought into the Lower Connecticut River Valley from outside the region versus an estimated \$2.2b leaving the region from commuting workers (source: BEA Table CAINC91).

Middletown, although a smaller urban area, is the core in-region employment center, representing 31% of employment (~7900 jobs) for people living in the region.

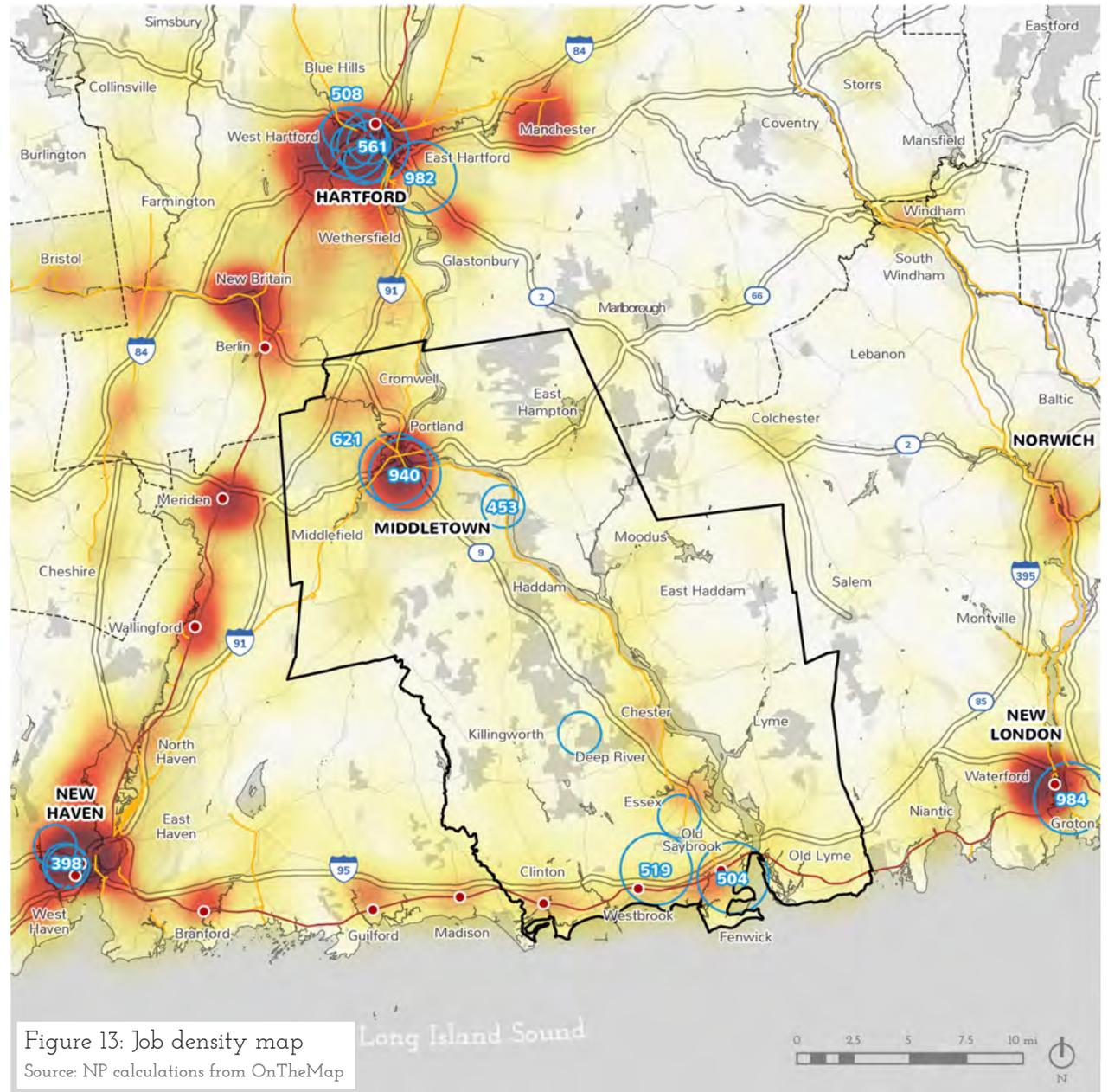
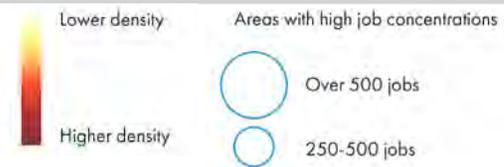


Figure 13: Job density map
Source: NP calculations from OnTheMap



Wages

The average wage for jobs in the region is approximately \$62,000. Manufacturing is the only large employment sector (top 5) that pays above the regional average.

Wages on a nominal basis have increased by 26% since 2014. The 2014 annual average wage was \$48,806. On a real wage basis, the 2014 wage average equaled \$55,874 in 2021, therefore wages in inflation adjusted terms have increased approximately 10%.

A critical consideration for many of these sectors is: **will the Lower Connecticut River Valley region have an appropriate mix of housing at a price that would allow workers to live in the region? Based on the current supply, the answer is no.**

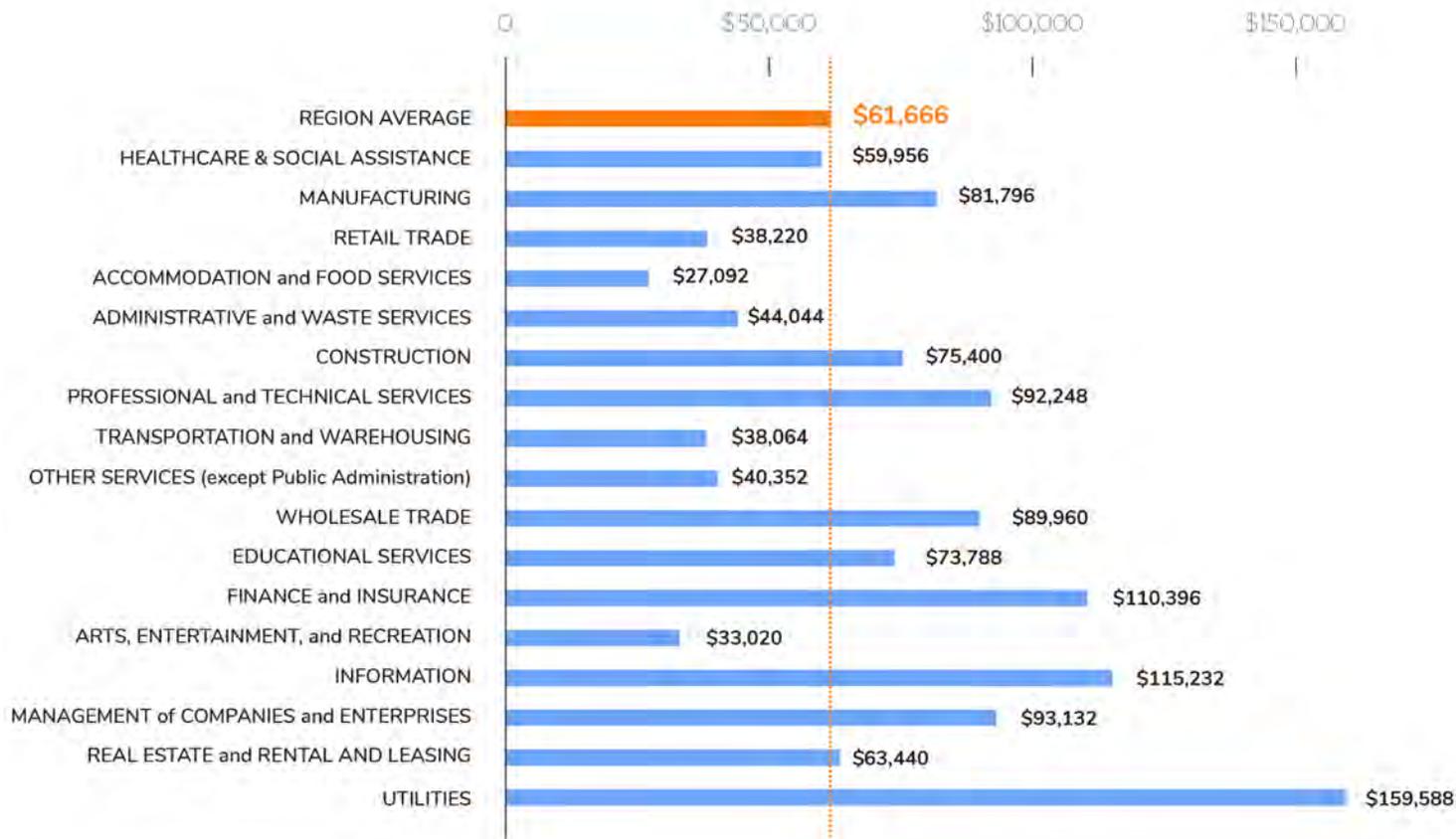


Figure 14: 2021 Average annual industry wages in order of employment

Source: NP calculations from BLS quarterly QCEW

Incomes

Total income in the LCRV in 2021 was over \$12b, up from \$9.9b in 2014, in large part because of COVID relief funds. Median household income in the region is approximately \$91,000, up from just over \$77,000 in 2014.

The growth of retirement income versus income from wages is a key income trend with important implications. Earnings from wages has fallen from 70% in 2014 to 66% in 2021. Retirement income has increased to 16% of income in 2021 compared to 12% in 2014. Because Connecticut communities are dependent on property taxes to fund local government services and schools, the increase in fixed income may impact local government funding over the next decade.

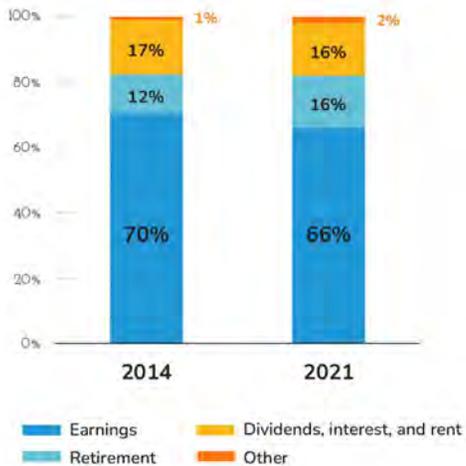


Figure 15: Sources of income
Source: NP analysis of ACS 5 year estimates ; Income derived from BEA GDP accounts Table CAINC30. Poverty rate and income inequality: NP analysis of PolicyMap county and place data with adjustments made for Old Lyme and Lyme

Some key indicators of economic equity have changed slightly since the GrowSmart plan:

- Poverty rate increased from 6.7% (2014) to 7.7% in 2021. The state poverty rate is 10.1%
- Income inequality¹ increased slightly from .43 to .45. By comparison the state has an income inequality index of .5. (the US is .49). This means that the region has lower income inequality than the state or the nation as a whole.

¹ Income inequality gini coefficient created by US census bureau. It measures the distribution of income across the population. A score of 1.0 means total inequality. A score of zero means total income equity.

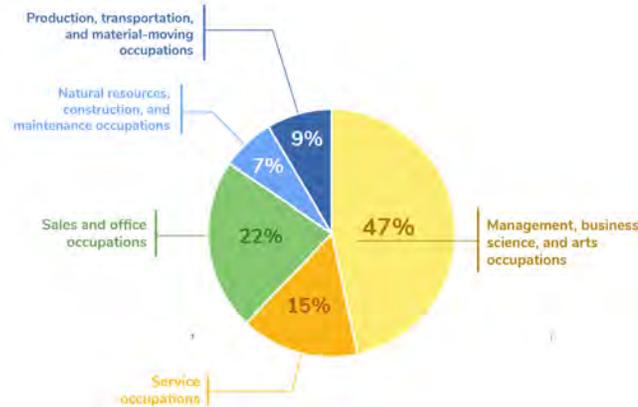


Figure 16: Occupational mix
Source: NP calculations from LEHD data and ESRI population demographics

Population and Workforce Dichotomy

A majority of the region's workforce needs are met by workers from outside the region and much of the region's population commute elsewhere for work. There are several possible reasons for this:

Industry Mix: The jobs in the region are not well matched to the skills and occupations of the region's residents. The region hosts approximately 1,500 jobs in the finance and insurance sector but nearly 5,000 residents work in this sector. The region also has relatively high employment concentrations in service industries but nearly 50% of workers are in management and business occupations.

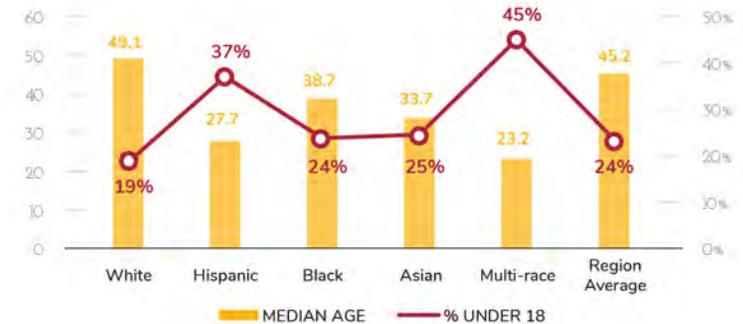


Figure 17: Population diversity
Source: NP calculations from ESRI population demographics

Regional Housing Plan Objectives

In July of 2022 RiverCOG published the Regional Housing Plan (RHP) to help the region address affordability and workforce housing concerns.

The plan has 6 primary objectives:

1. Diversify the Region's population in terms of age, race, and socio-economic status.
2. Create a resilient workforce in the region.
3. Ensure that people who work in the Region can live in close proximity to their jobs.
4. Diversify housing stock for non-traditional households.
5. Examine ways to make the existing housing stock, office, and retail space in the Region functional for a changing population.
6. Encourage orderly creation of housing of different styles and types throughout the Region near existing areas of development, employment, and transit.

<https://www.rivercog.org/plans/rhp/>

Housing Supply and Cost: The housing supply in the region does not match the needs of the region's workers. Wages for the region's jobs tend to be lower than income for the region's residents. Two of the top employment sectors (retail trade and accommodation and food services) pay well below the \$62,000 regional average. Conversely, existing housing stock consists almost exclusively of large lot, single-family units, either in need of significant repair, or more expensive than the region's average worker can afford. There are very few rental units in the region and personal vehicles are generally required for daily commutes.

Interest and Opportunity: The entire region, but particularly the shoreline area, has a high amenity value. It is attractive to people who can work remotely or commute occasionally. Although this population is largely conducting their work in-region, their official place of business could be located outside of the region.

This dichotomy between workforce and population has several implications for the region. These include increased greenhouse gas emissions from single-occupancy vehicle commuter trips, reduced quality of life for workers and residents due to time and expense of commuting, and relative homogeneity due to inadequate mixture of jobs and housing. Expressed in terms of needs, improvements in public transportation options to and from major job centers; increased mixture of housing size, type, and cost; solicitation of employers matched to the population's skill and occupation; and emphasis on supportive services and infrastructure for remote workers would all be warranted.

Four economic drivers

Based on the economic research the Lower Connecticut River Valley region has 4 different “economies” with different drivers and impacts. The four economies include traded goods, “lifestyle”, local resident driven economy, and tourism. These “economies” are not with firm sector boundaries and definitions, but are intended to be more illustrative providing a different perspective of employment characteristics and drivers in LCRV.

- Traded goods – manufacturing led sector which remains a key driver of the local with employment base of at least 14,000.
- “Lifestyle” economy – businesses and people that have the flexibility to be anywhere total approximately 13,000 employed and self-employed people. Of note is the emergence of some new areas such as non-store retailers and electronic markets / brokers approaching 1,000 employees,
- Resident economy – driven by local residents as well as seasonal households (5600)¹. This remains a critical component of the region’s economy and employment base. The aging of the population and an increase in seasonal residents could have a dramatic impact on this sector
- Tourism economy – driven by the region's location, natural amenities, plus historic and cultural resources.

1 RPOCD



Traded goods economy snapshot

This part of the LCRV economy is based on manufacturing supply and value chains, wholesale trade and logistics. This sector employs around 14,000 people with \$1.1 billion in wages. LCRV has a diverse manufacturing base with at least 15 different subsectors represented. Subsectors with the highest level of employment and wages include fabricated product metal manufacturing, machinery manufacturing, transportation equipment, and wholesale trade brokers.

Several of the region’s manufacturing industries have very high location quotients. Location Quotients measure the level of concentration an industry has in a specific location relative to the nation. Five of the LCRV’s manufacturing subsectors have very high employment concentration levels relative to the US. For example, transportation equipment manufacturing in LCRV is almost 4.5 times the amount of employment as the nation overall. These five sectors represent more than ½ of the total employment in this part of the regional economy.

A key issue for the future of this sector is the age of the workforce. 36% of the workforce in manufacturing is over the age of 55 compared to only 28% for the economy overall.

Manufacturing Subsector	Location Quotient US=1.00
Transportation Equipment	4.46
Fabricated Metal Manufacturing	3.35
Machinery Manufacturing	2.94
Electrical Equipment	1.39
Plastics Rubber Manufacturing	1.30

Lifestyle economy snapshot

There is a segment of the workforce that has flexibility to choose where they live. LCRV’s high quality of life is an important driver for the local economy. The “Lifestyle” economy – businesses and people that have the flexibility to be anywhere (professional / technical services, information, HQs) total approximately 12,000 employed and self-employed people. Professional/technical employment is the largest category representing 50% of the total. This sector includes lawyers, engineers, designers, scientists, software, among others. A portion of construction is also allocated to this sector because most of the construction employment in LCRV is tied to residential work. Self-employment is a critical contributor to this sector. For example, professional technical

services payroll employment (measured by unemployment insurance eligible) is approximately 3,000 employees but an additional 3,200 people are self-employed in this industry. Of note is the emergence of some new areas such as non-store retailers (i.e., e-commerce, catalogs) and electronic markets / brokers approaching 900 employees.

Resident economy snapshot

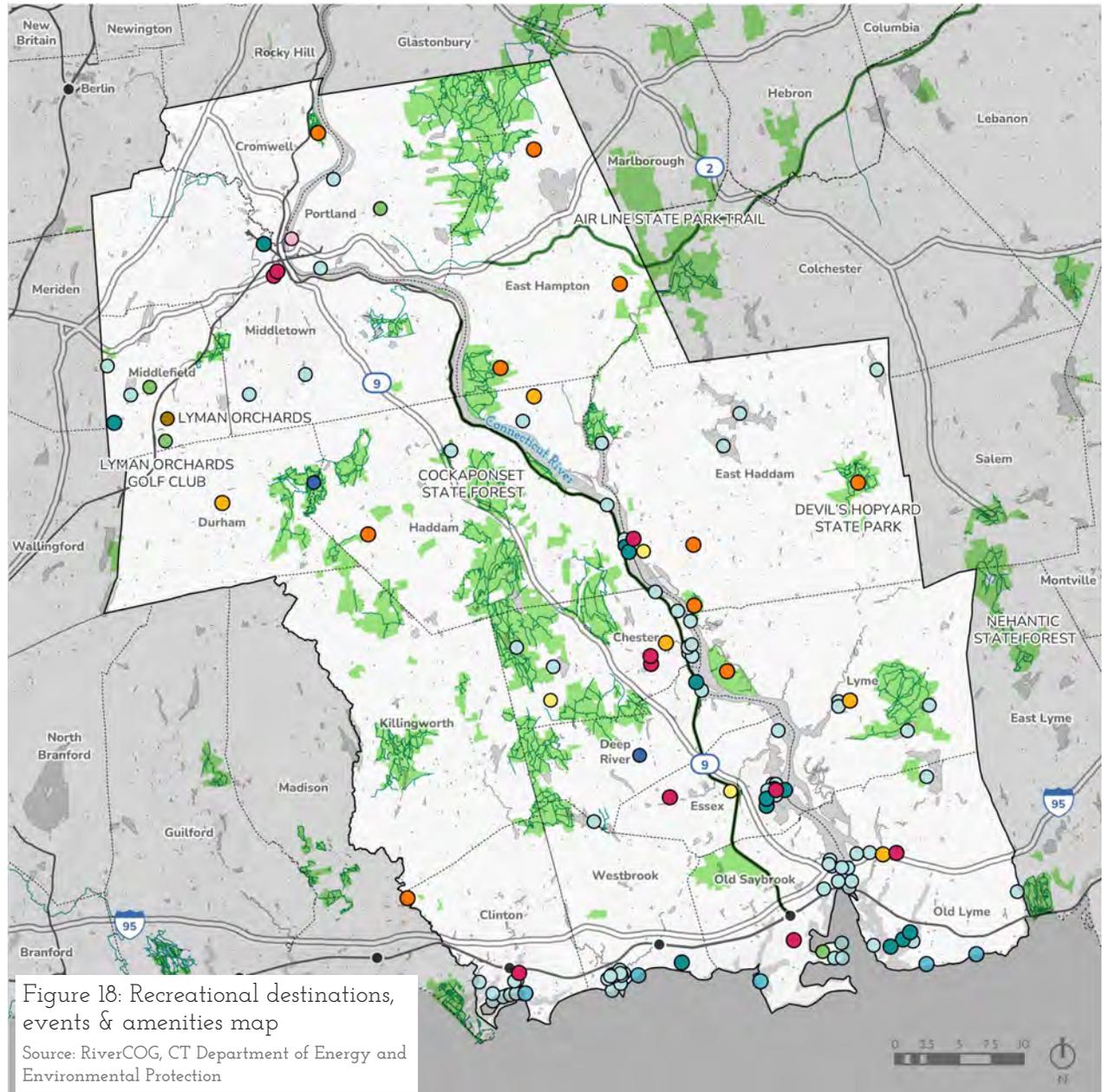
The resident economy reflects the parts of the local economy tied to the residents and the estimated 5,600 seasonal residents. This includes healthcare services, social services, government, retail, and a variety of household and related services. At least 47,000 jobs are tied in some way to local population demographics and growth. As the population in LCRV goes through the demographic shifts identified in the RPOCD, the resident dependent economy will likely shift. For example, there may be less demand for non tourism retail (region’s 3rd largest employer) but more demand for healthcare services (region’s largest employer). This could have important implications for the employment base and property tax base in several LCRV communities.

Tourism economy snapshot

One of the limits of the LQ analysis is that it does not provide insights about an industry ecosystem or cluster. For example, the Arts, Recreation, and Hospitality sector in the Lower Connecticut River Valley pre-pandemic was at least a \$3b sector. There is a wide range of historical, cultural and outdoor amenities that span the Lower Connecticut River Valley. Several of these amenities are large generators of visitors. For example, state parks had an attendance of 860,000 visitors in 2021, or about 10% of total state park visitorship. Demand led to occasional closures of several regional parks based on available capacity.

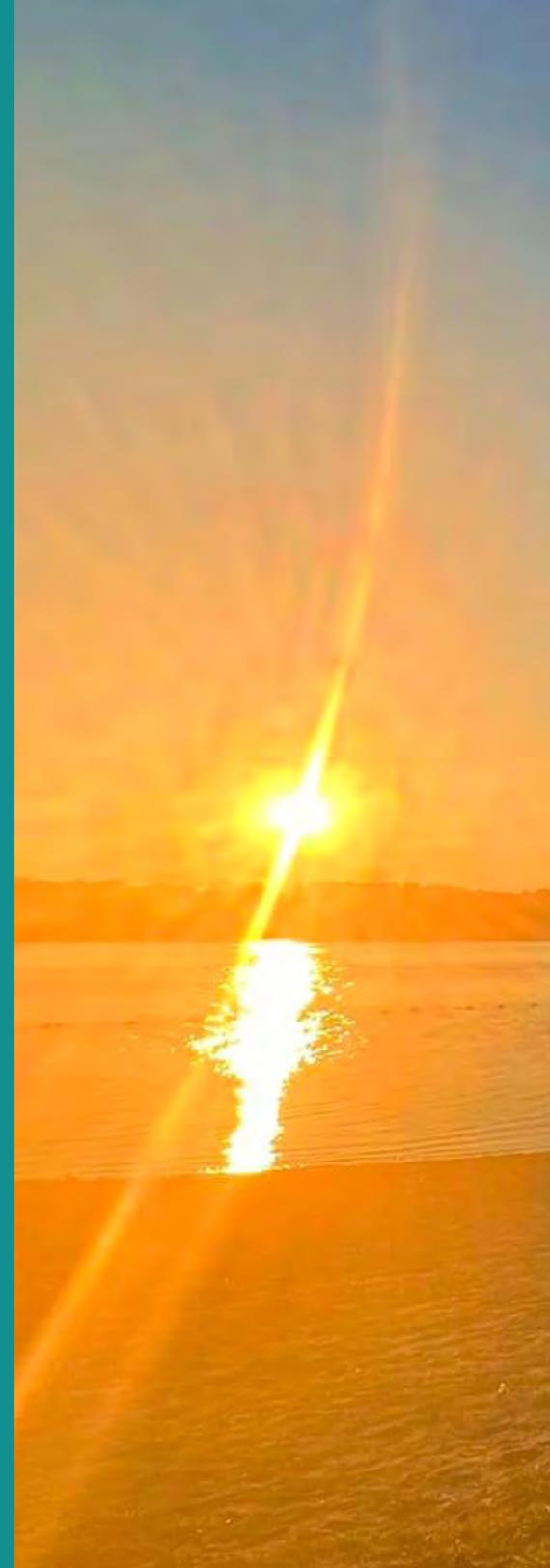
However, it should be noted that infrastructure to support some of these assets, such as parking, restrooms, and signage, is limited in some locations.

The region has more overnight stay capacity than is evident by available hotel rooms, including 500 - 600 AirBNBs, 1400+ campsites with various levels of utilities, and transient marina slips.



3 STRATEGIC GROWTH AREAS

Lake Pocotopaug, East Hampton
Credit: Derek Lee





Opportunities for Growth in the Region

There are many ways in which the region can grow. While the term growth is typically associated with an increase in size, this CEDS is predominately focused on progressive development or evolution of the region's current economic condition.

Why?

Both the Regional Plan of Conservation and Development and Regional Housing Plan recognized that the region's demographic trends are concerning. The median age is continuously increasing and there has been an ongoing failure to attract or retain young people. A supply of young talent attracts quality employers and quality employers attract talent. Even the region's existing major employers are struggling to fill employment vacancies. Continued failure to bring in young people to the region will lead to future disinvestment and job loss.

Part of this failure is due to the housing stock. There is a current lack of housing variety and affordability in the region that deters young people from locating here. Several current employers in the region noted that they have lost employees to places with better housing options. However, current lack of investment in job creation is also part of the failure. A stagnant job market dampens the housing market, leading to fewer housing units (of any size or type) being built in the region. This cycle – lack of housing, lack of jobs, and declining population – will continue unless it is broken by change.

The RPOCD recommends growing and supporting the region's business community for the long-term health of the region. The Innovative theme focuses on attracting and supporting innovative industries in amenity rich environments that are integrated into the surrounding communities. The goal is to establish the region as a "unique enclave that provides a high quality of life combined with an environment supportive of innovation." (Innovative Goal 1).

The RHP recognizes that the creation of innovation hubs, which contain a mixture of anchor institutions, supporting businesses, and creative startups, as well as housing, restaurants, and retail opportunities, are highly attractive to both workers and businesses. Young professionals tend to prefer these mixed-use, walkable communities and major employers tend to seek out these areas in order to attract young talent. This land use environment can not only draw high-wage employment opportunities to the region but also create an ecosystem of economic drivers by keeping wages and tax dollars circulating in the local economy.

The RHP also recognizes the importance of housing opportunities for the region's workforce as key to the region's overall economic health.

One of the key issues related housing is its costs. As noted earlier more than 30% of residents face housing costs burdens. A contributing factor has been the declining role of commercial and industrial property subsidizing residential property tax base (see Figure 19). With rising home values and an aging population over time this could become a major issue in supporting the services and amenities desired by LCRV residents.

% of Commercial Industrial Value as % of Total Grand List

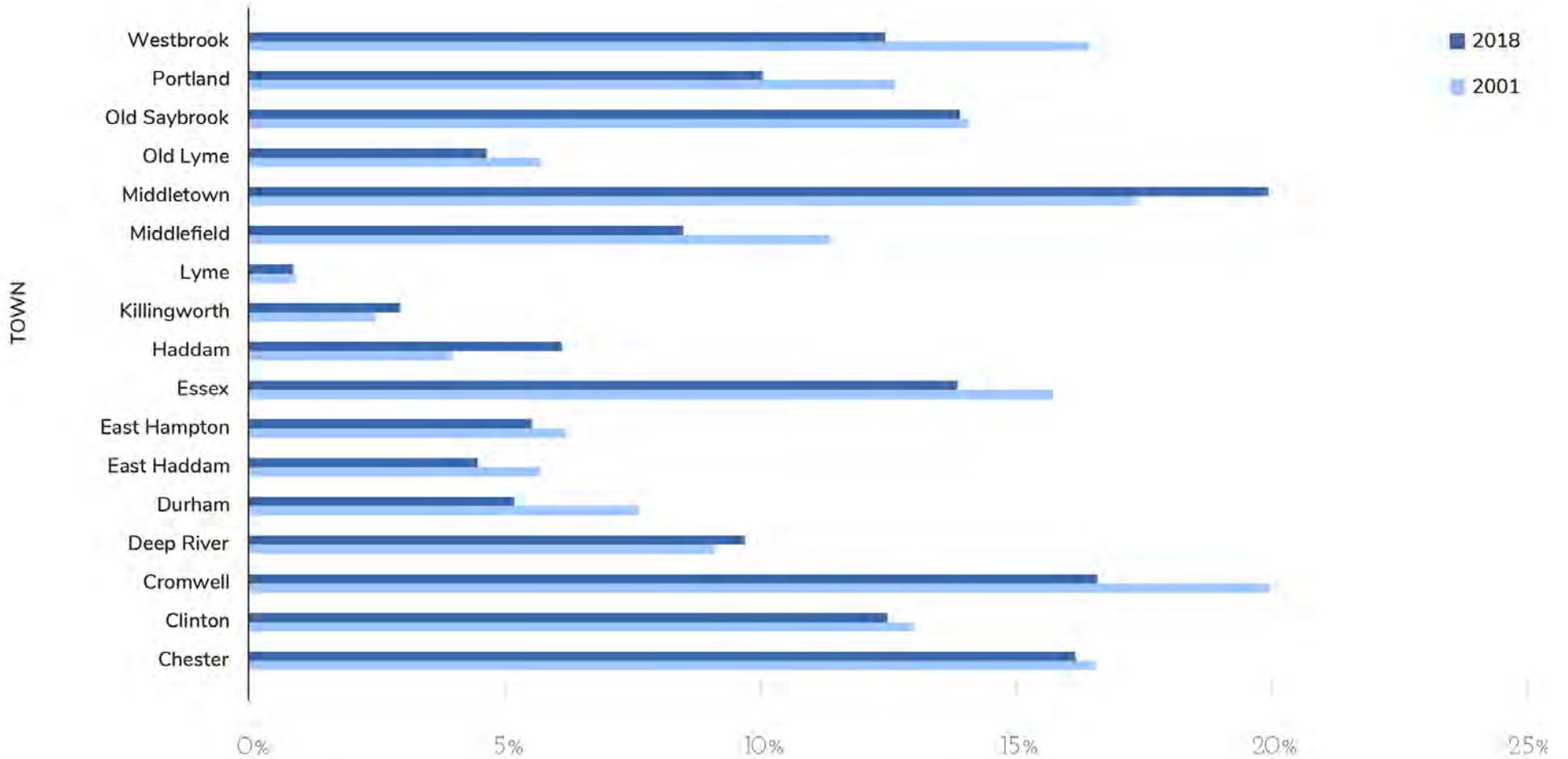


Figure 19: Commercial and industrial grand list % of net total grand list, FY 2001 - FY 2018

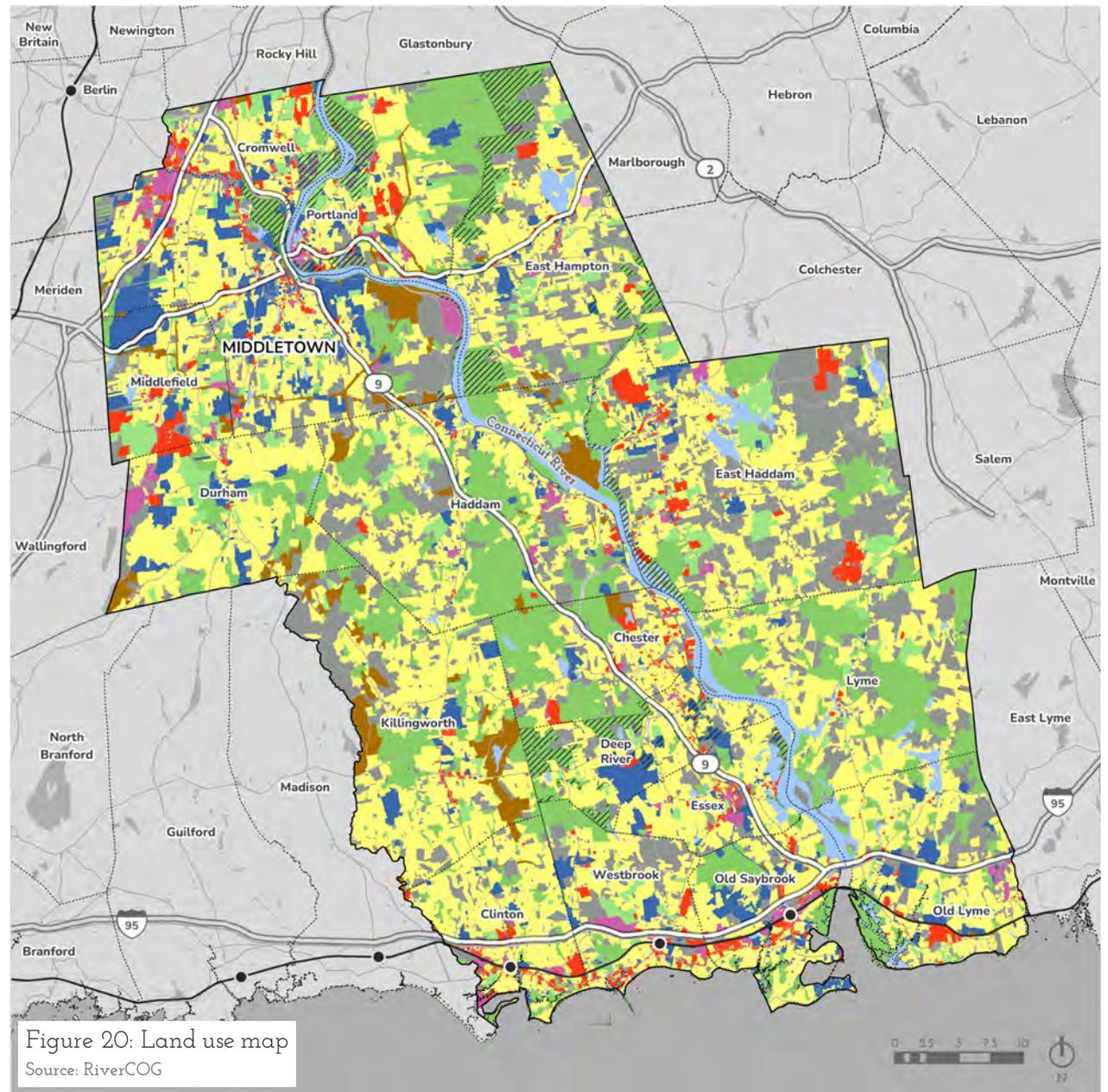
Source: CT Office of Policy and Management

How?

The RPOCD and RHP strongly support sustainable development patterns across the region, particularly due to the importance of irreplaceable natural resources. For this CEDS, that means any new development should be encouraged in areas with existing infrastructure and amenities, and discouraged in areas with high natural resource value. An important strategy for the region will be understanding infill, redevelopment, and reuse opportunities, preparing a regulatory environment that encourages desired development and use in those areas, and promoting the opportunities to developers and employers.

The “Innovative” layer of the RPOCD future land use map identified areas for commercial and industrial growth based on the overlap of existing job density, public water and sewer infrastructure, and commercial, industrial, institutional, and mixed-use zoning. This CEDS examines vacant and underutilized land within these targeted areas to assess the infill development and redevelopment potential.

*While an important component to the strategy, reuse potential will require an assessment of existing vacant and underutilized buildings. It is a recommendation of this CEDS that this exercise be completed, and a catalogue of such buildings be maintained.



Identifying strategic areas for growth

The first step in assessing growth opportunities in the region involved isolating targeted growth areas. Using the RPOCD Innovative layer as a guide, the analysis identified land zoned Commercial, Industrial, and Mixed-Use. Land with environmental regulatory limitations were removed from the analysis. These included aquifer protected areas, protected open space, state parks, forests, and DEEP

property, wetlands, flood hazard areas, and the gateway conservation zone. Land remaining was categorized into vacant land, underutilized land, and non-vacant land. Vacant land is land in the targeted growth area that has not been built on, making new development relatively easy. Underutilized land is land in the targeted growth areas that has been developed, but the development only covers a maximum 35% of the lot, indicating potential for more efficient use of the land. Non-vacant land is land in the

targeted growth area that has been developed and development covers more than 35% of the lot. There may be potential to repurpose non-vacant land, but a detailed assessment of development on underutilized land was not undertaken as part of this analysis.

The next several pages use the three submarket regions identified in the RHP (Northern, Interior, and Shoreline) to provide a closer look at the identified vacant and underutilized land.

Figure 21: Process for identifying available land
Source: RiverCOG, CT Dept of Energy and Environmental Protection, Interface Studio



Summary of available developable land in the Lower Connecticut River valley area within targeted zoning categories

As seen on the previous maps, there isn't an abundance of vacant developable vacant land in targeted growth areas. Developable vacant land represents only **0.5%** of the region's total acreage. **Underutilized land, which represents an additional 1% of the region's total area, or 2x the available vacant land, has development potential pending further exploration.**

The relative lack of vacant land in the targeted growth areas has several implications for the region:

- Development on this land should be well planned and strategic.
- Redevelopment of underutilized parcels and reuse of vacant/underutilized buildings will have greater importance for the region and should be the priority.
- **Large scale, new development will be limited under current conditions, and that's ok.**

Criteria for DEVELOPABLE VACANT LAND

- are zoned commercial or industrial
- on visual inspection did not show significant impediment of water, wetland, etc.
- had clear access (was not landlocked)
- was not indicated by town as having any major issues

1,485 ACRES (339 PARCELS) are vacant land within the targeted zoning area, clear of zoning restrictions and environmental regulations.

of which

1,201 ACRES (66 PARCELS), or 19% of available vacant parcels, are **5 acres and over.**

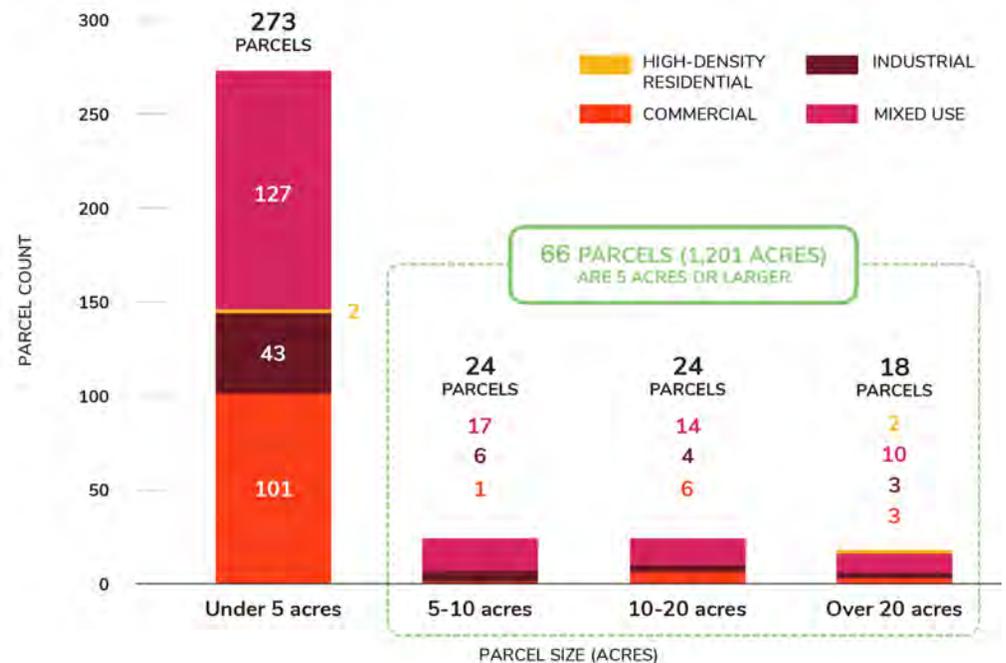


Figure 22: Breakdown of available land by parcel size

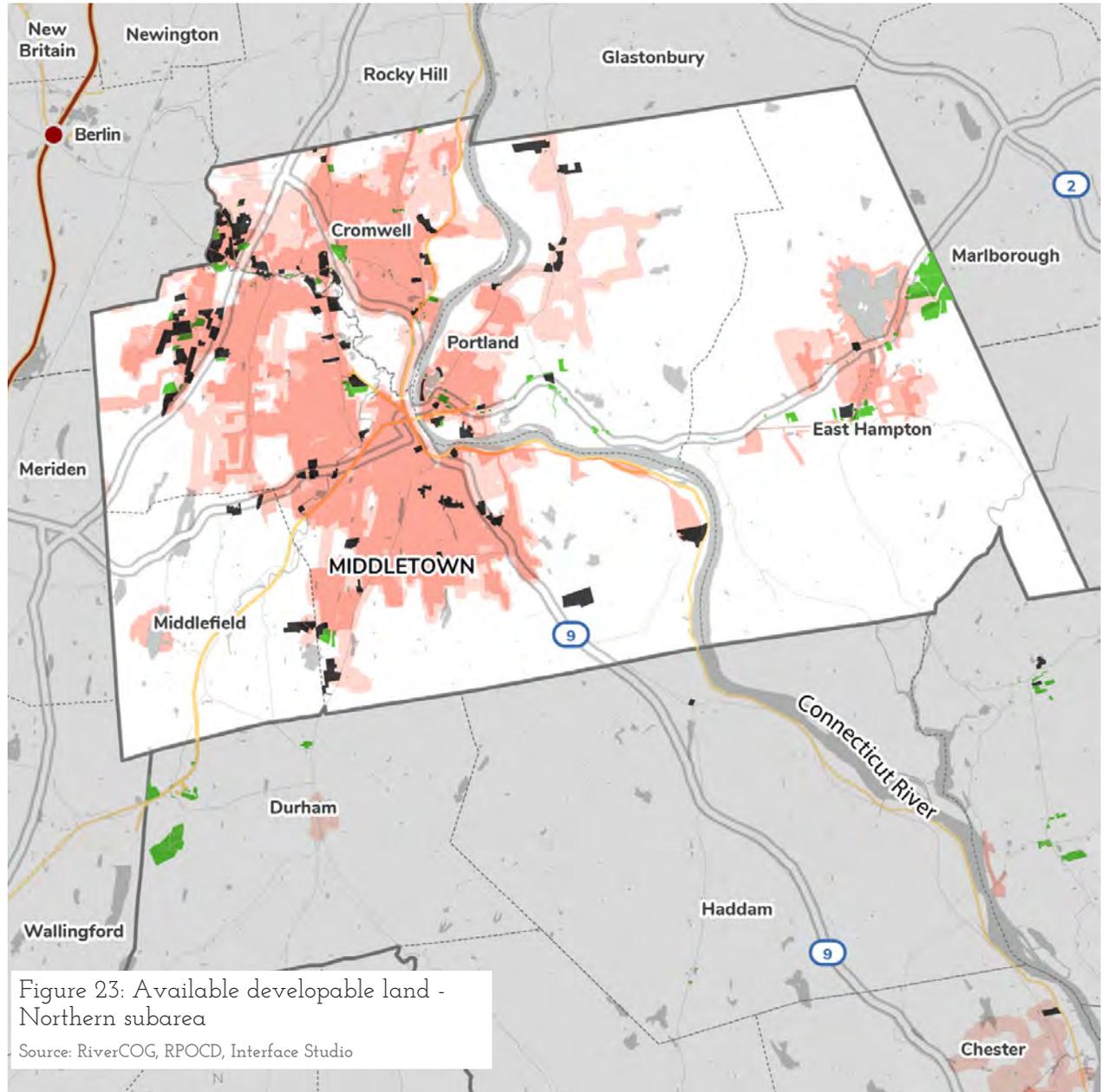
Available developable land

**692 ACRES
(124 PARCELS)**
IN THE NORTHERN SUBAREA*
are vacant land within the targeted
zoning area, clear of zoning restrictions
and environmental regulations.

of which

**598 ACRES
(30 PARCELS),**
or 9% of all available vacant parcels,
are **5 acres and over.**

*Subareas are based on the RHP Market Study which looked at housing market potential.



- Subarea Boundary
- Town Boundaries
- Utilities Service Area
- Sewer Service or Public Water
- Sewer Service and Public Water
- Passenger Rail
- Freight Rail
- Available Vacant Land, ready for redevelopment (free and clear of zoning and environmental constraints, 5 acres or larger in size)
- Underutilized Land (non-vacant commercial or industrial land with under 35% built area)

Available developable land

**364 ACRES
(78 PARCELS)**
IN THE INTERIOR SUBAREA
are vacant land within the targeted
zoning area, clear of zoning restrictions
and environmental regulations.

of which

**274 ACRES
(17 PARCELS),**
or 5% of all available vacant parcels,
are **5 acres and over.**

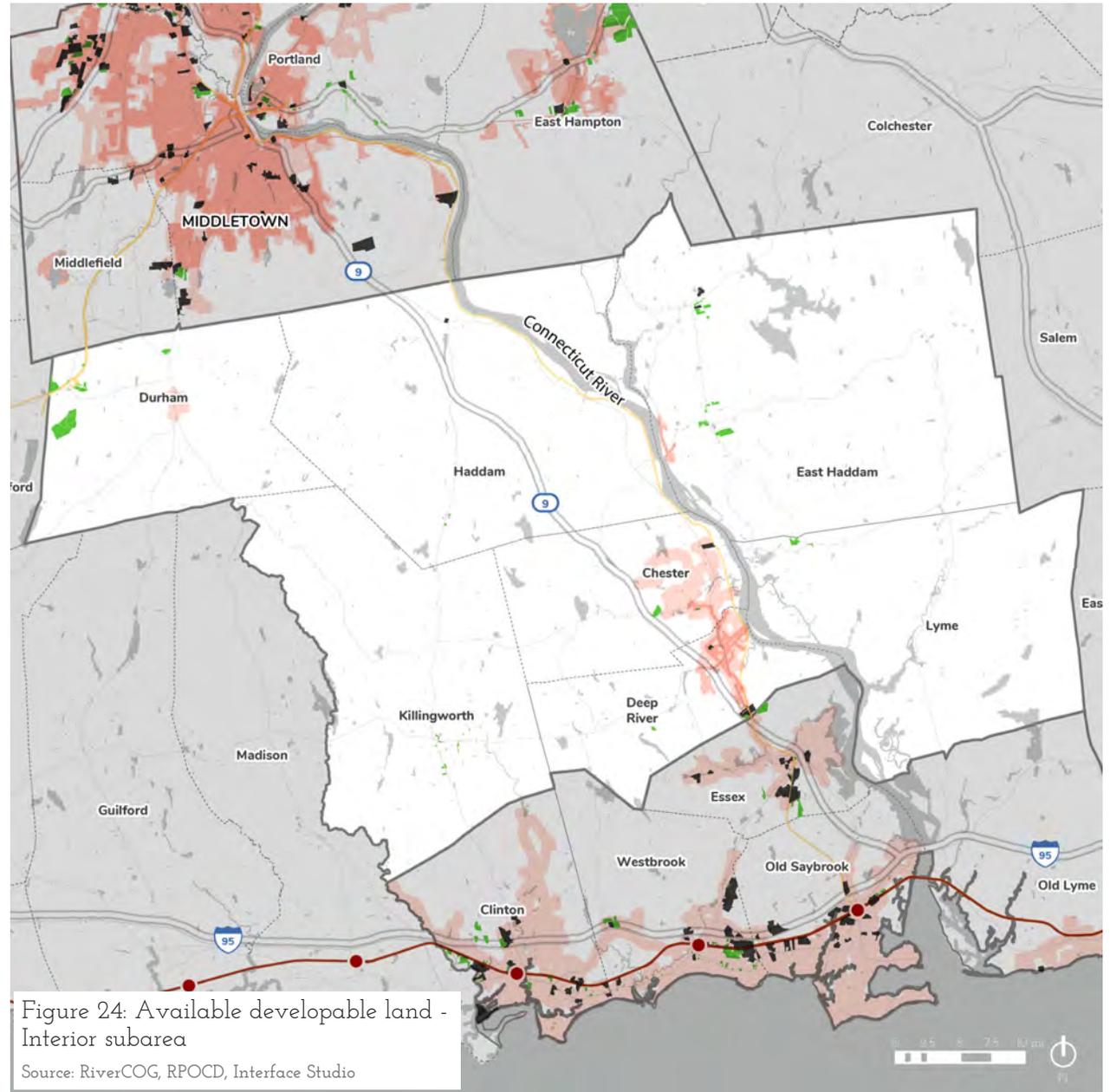


Figure 24: Available developable land - Interior subarea

Source: RiverCOG, RPOCD, Interface Studio

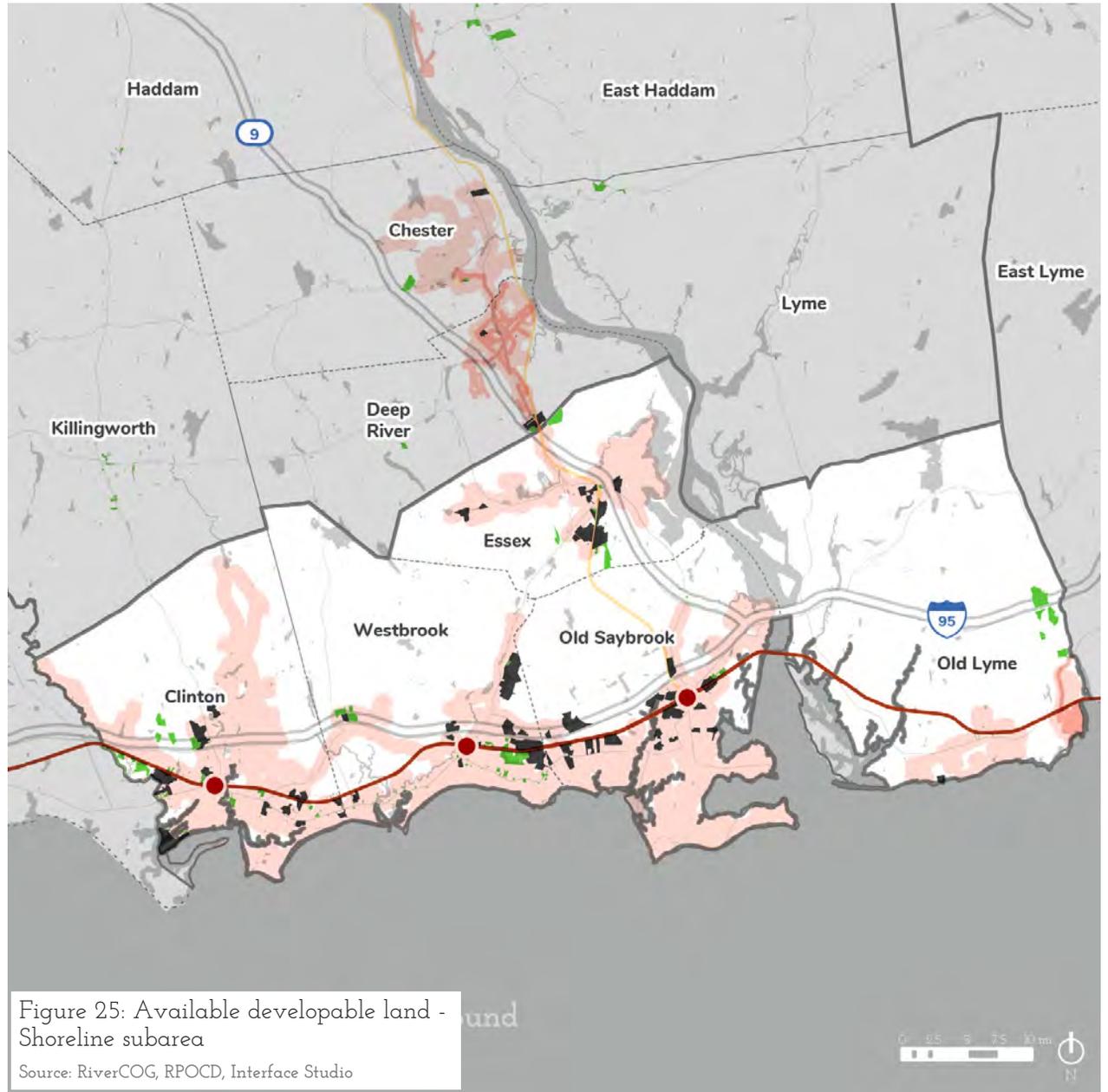


Available developable land

430 ACRES
(137 PARCELS)
 IN THE SHORELINE SUBAREA
 are vacant land within the targeted
 zoning area, clear of zoning restrictions
 and environmental regulations.

of which

329 ACRES
(19 PARCELS),
 or 6% of all available vacant parcels,
 are **5 acres and over.**



- Subarea Boundary
- Town Boundaries
- Utilities Service Area
- Sewer Service or Public Water
- Sewer Service and Public Water
- Passenger Rail
- Freight Rail
- Available Vacant Land, ready for redevelopment
 (free and clear of zoning and environmental constraints, 5 acres or larger in size)
- Underutilized land
 (non-vacant commercial or industrial land with under 35% built area)

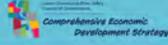
4 COMMUNITY VOICES

RiverCOG meeting, Riverfront Park, Portland





01 What is the economic development environment in RiverCOG?



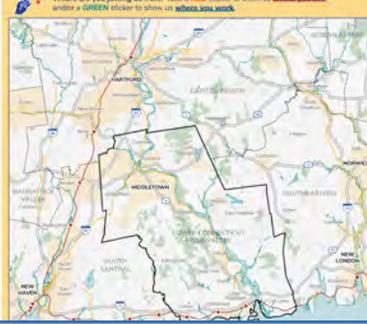
First things first, what is a Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS)?

How did the CEDS come about?

- A CEDS is a process created by the U.S. Economic Development Administration for creating a strategy to support regional economic growth.
- An approved CEDS is an important step to becoming an approved Economic Development District.
- An approved CEDS enables identified projects in the RiverCOG region eligible for EDA funds, as well as economy competitive grant applications.

- This effort comes at the heels of previous planning efforts, including:
 - The 2011 Regional Plan for Conservation and Development (RPOCD) created to address the needs of individual towns more holistically through a regional framework. Economic development, along with housing and a regional multimodal transportation system, will be key in making the RPOCD vision a reality.
 - The 2022 Lower Connecticut River Valley Region Housing Market Study, which set the foundation of the Regional Housing Plan.

The RiverCOG Area sits on a strategic location within the region.



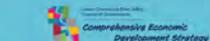
Why have one now?

- The American Rescue Plan, the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, and the Inflation Reduction Act provide federal resources to support regional economic development and infrastructure investment initiatives.
- Many of the funding opportunities are competitive applications. These applications typically require identifying whether the programs fit in concert with a regional comprehensive economic development program.

- As the only region in Connecticut without a CEDS, the RiverCOG communities are at a disadvantage when competing for federal funding. Having CEDS does not guarantee receiving federal grant money without it, it can be more difficult to compete for the funds.
- COVID-19 also brought significant changes in the region in terms of workforce trends, and the need for resiliency infrastructure, among others, which are more likely to be able to address.

The planning area for the CEDS is comprised of the seven municipalities in the 2021 RPOCD: Middlebury, Killbuck, and Okaucheeville in New London County; and Okaucheeville, Middlebury, and Killbuck in Windham County. This is meant to build community connections and to establish a shared business for data gathering and reporting.

02 What sustains RiverCOG's economy today?



Quick facts about the RiverCOG economy

- The pandemic GDP (GDP in 2020, 2021 distribution) manufacturing rose 20%, real estate rose 16%, and healthcare grew 10% between 2020 and 2021.
- Businesses (2021) 55% + self-employed or 300+ employees.
- Employment (2021) 80% including self-employed or 300+ employees with decrease in self-employment.
- Average wages (2021) - \$42,000; up an inflation adjusted index by 50.3%.
- These RIVERCOG communities (Middlebury, Killbuck, Killington) have experienced an industrial value as % of their tax base increase since 2002.

Key employment sectors have not changed since 2014.



A snapshot of the region's tourism and outdoor recreation industry (cont.)

- RiverCOG State Parks had an attendance of 1,000,000 visitors in 2021, or about 10% above some park visitation.
- Demand for occasional streams of seasonal regional parks based on available capacity.



Who's working here?

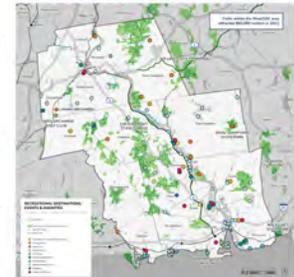


RiverCOG's workforce needs are met by people outside of the region.



A snapshot of the region's tourism and outdoor recreation industry

- The arts, recreation and hospitality sector generates revenue at least a 5% to 10%.
- Infrastructure to support some of these assets, such as parking, restrooms, and signage, is needed in some locations.
- The region has more overnight stay capacity than they are utilizing:
 - 1,400+ campsites with various levels of amenities.
 - Transected moose trails.



03 Where are there opportunities for growth in the region?



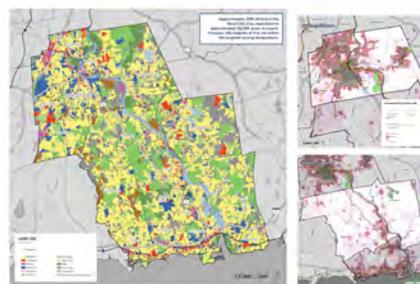
Identifying strategic areas for growth

The first step in assessing growth potential in the region involved identifying what land was actually available.



After identifying free and vacant land, the next step was to identify areas where development, projects were analyzed by size and comparing zoning designation to primary factors in determining potential for development.

How much free and vacant land is available in the RiverCOG area within the four zoning categories?



How are we qualifying growth potential?

- Local growth is feasible, but the volume need to be placed responsibly for that to happen.
- Future development will require further evaluation of development potential on a site-specific basis, with the context of local zoning, infrastructure, and other factors.
- Additional considerations for development:
 - Partial sites.
 - Shape/percentage: Are parcels with shapes of 20% or more open space suitable for development?
 - Environmental considerations: Presence of wetlands, streams, and other sensitive areas.
 - Access to utilities: Sewer lines and public roads, among others.

There isn't an abundance of developable vacant land in relation to the region - developable vacant land represents 2% of the region's total acreage.

Among the available vacant parcels for development, those with less than 5 acres in area are potentially suitable, accessible or not developable/financially sound.

Non-vacant developable land, which represents an estimated 20% of the region's total area, has development potential pending further evaluation.

Public input

RiverCOG, in partnership with the consultant team, held 15 stakeholder group interviews to learn about challenges and opportunities across municipalities and business sectors. The number of attendees ranged from two to ten per meeting, with approximately 65 participants in total. Each of the region's 17 towns was represented by a combination of planning and economic development professionals and commission members, as well as elected and appointed officials. Industry representation included banking, real estate, education, and tourism as well as major employers.

The team also conducted two public engagement workshops, one in the northern part of the region and one in the southern part of the region, to share data and give the public an opportunity to weigh in on economic development priorities. The workshops attracted approximately 15 participants in the first and 25 participants in the second for a total of approximately 40 participants.

Workshop boards



Workshop in Old Saybrook

SWOT analysis of the Lower Connecticut River Valley region

In 2021, RiverCOG completed a Regional Plan of Conservation and Development (RPOCD), the equivalent of a Comprehensive Plan. The RPOCD process had more than 300 participants

Upon review of the stakeholder discussions as well as the community survey, it was determined that the economic development elements SWOT analysis from the RPOCD reflected the current commentary as well. Accordingly, the SWOT from the RPOCD was refined down to the essential economic development elements, and adopted as the SWOT for the CEDS.

Strengths

- Significant natural resources including farmland, forest, wetlands and waterbodies
- Connecticut River, sound, and shoreline
- Local stewardship of environmental resources
- Central location in the State
- Highway access (I-95, Route 9, and other State highways)
- Rail Lines (Shore Line East, Amtrak, and freight)
- Major institutions and industries including universities/colleges, hospitals, manufacturing, research, bioscience, and technology
- Highly-educated workforce and highly-skilled trades persons and contractors
- Small villages, towns, and cities, organized around the landscape such as the shore, river, and farmland
- Maintained historical integrity of the architectural past
- Strong spirit of community and commitment to volunteerism

Weaknesses

- Substantial reliance on single occupant vehicles for a majority of trips
- Limited distribution of high-speed Internet which is impeded by topography and landscape
- Limited access to and integration of public transit service, bicycle, and pedestrian facilities
- Limited locations for innovative business development
- Lack of cooperation/partnership in attracting new innovative businesses
- Limited public utilities in large portions of the region, especially along the I-95 corridor
- Ratio of residential to industrial acreage
- Limited number of skilled workers and the need for technical job training
- Lack of diversity (age, race, ethnicity, etc.) in some areas of the region, young adults are underrepresented
- High cost of housing and inadequate affordable housing options, particularly for those working in or serving our towns
- Limited access to resources for low-income populations

Opportunities

Expanded protection of open space through strategic targeting of the most ecologically significant lands

Infill development and redevelopment of underutilized land

Support and incentives for agriculture

Expanded access to public transit, bicycle, and pedestrian facilities for all segments of the population

Expanded high-speed Internet network

Access to capital for start-ups and growing businesses

Potential schools and venues for technical job training

Technology sector and medical/bioscience/manufacturing innovation hub

Outward movement of New Yorkers

Engagement with the business community

Diversify housing stock, including more affordable options, to attract a younger demographic and retain seniors

Improve connectivity between neighborhoods, rural areas, and village and town centers

Threats

Climate change and sea level rise

Loss of biodiversity

Invasive species

Aging infrastructure

Dependence on state and local subsidies for transit service

Lack of expansion of high-speed Internet and associated lack of competitiveness

Unreliability of electrical grid and Internet service

Loss of job sectors such as manufacturing, retail, and agriculture

Migration of industry out of the region

Less engagement of institutions in innovation

Reluctance or resistance of towns or communities towards innovation or change, including resistance to challenge existing zoning regulations

Population loss, including additional loss of young adults

Insufficient infrastructure and services to support aging population

Prohibitive cost of housing/living

Erosion of community organizations due to lack of participation and loss of volunteers, partially due to aging out of participants

Failure to address issues surrounding equity and inclusion

Perspectives on key economic issues

13 Discussion groups

(involving every community)

General findings:

- Limited capacity – marketing resources, staff, volunteers, occasionally technical expertise
- Increasing concern around finding qualified volunteers to offset staffing limits
- Limited or no infrastructure particularly to execute on town center / village center plans
- Housing attainability (deeply subsidized and middle income + aging in community housing)
- Overcoming NIMBYism

5 Business groups

General findings:

- Workforce and housing
- Better access to and in the region
- More marketing of region
- Focus on activities across age groups, life stages (families, retired, young professionals) and ethnicities

90+ Survey responses

The greatest barrier to business growth and development in the region:

[84 responses]

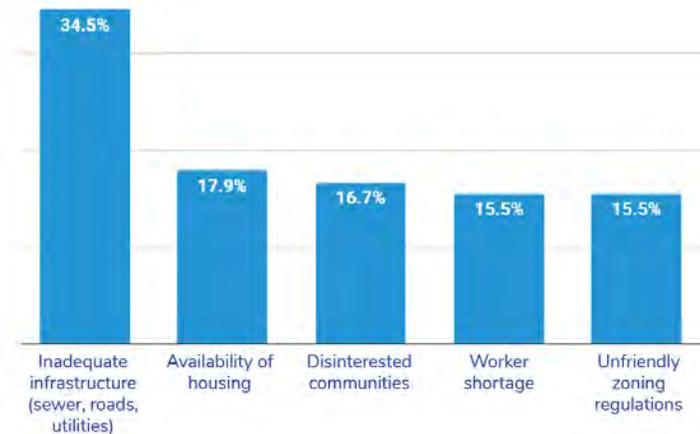


Figure 21: Survey results - barriers to business growth and development

The Lower Connecticut River Valley has:

[93 responses]

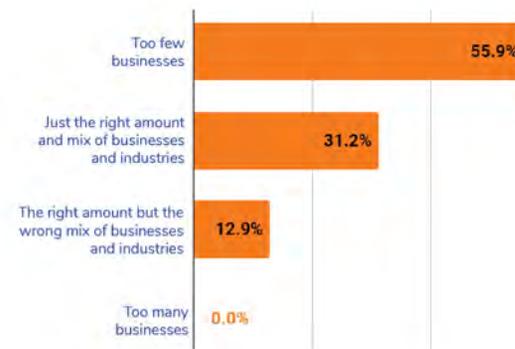


Figure 22: Survey results - business amount

From an economic development perspective, the region should focus on:

[78 responses]

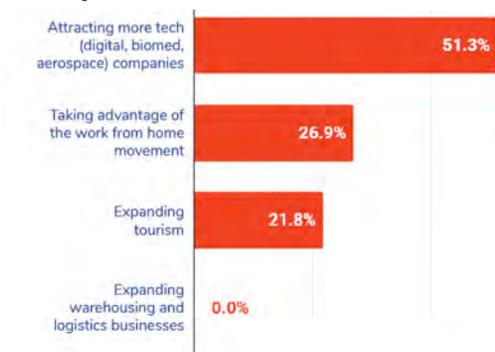


Figure 23: Survey results - regional focus

Survey responses (continued)

Potential initiatives to promote economic development:

[92 responses]

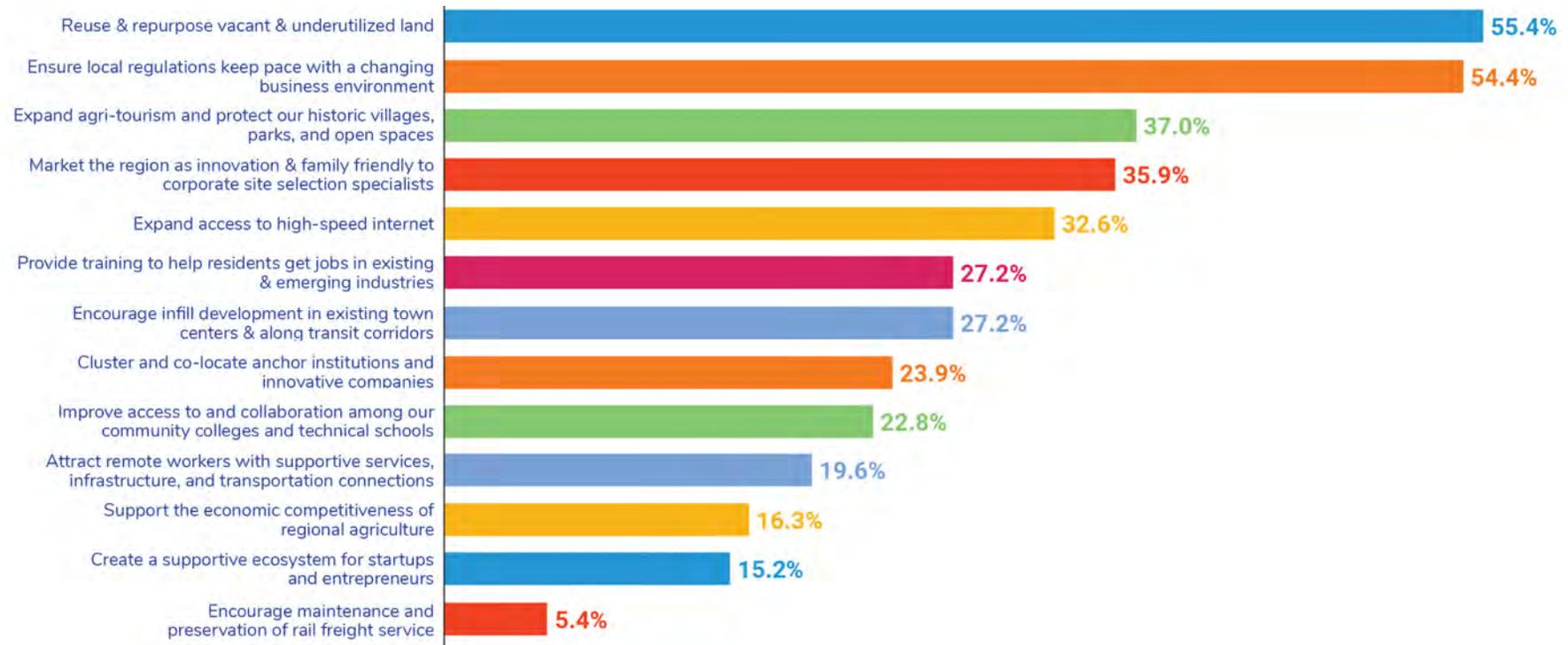


Figure 24: Survey results - potential economic development initiatives

Prioritization of economic development issues and initiatives

The priority exercises from the October workshops were transformed into a survey in order to gather information in the field. It was sent to members of the Middlesex Chamber of Commerce Side Street to Main Street program, which is the minority-owned business community in the region.

Additionally, live input was collected from the region's business community, at a regular meeting of the Middlesex Chamber of Commerce, and was gathered at table events outside of the Westbrook Town Hall, Middletown City Hall, and Old Saybrook Shoreline East train station.

Issues #1 and #3 in Figure 25 below were identified as the most important economic development issues and are also reflected in the survey results from Figures 21-24 which highlighted tech companies, infrastructure, and housing as areas of focus.

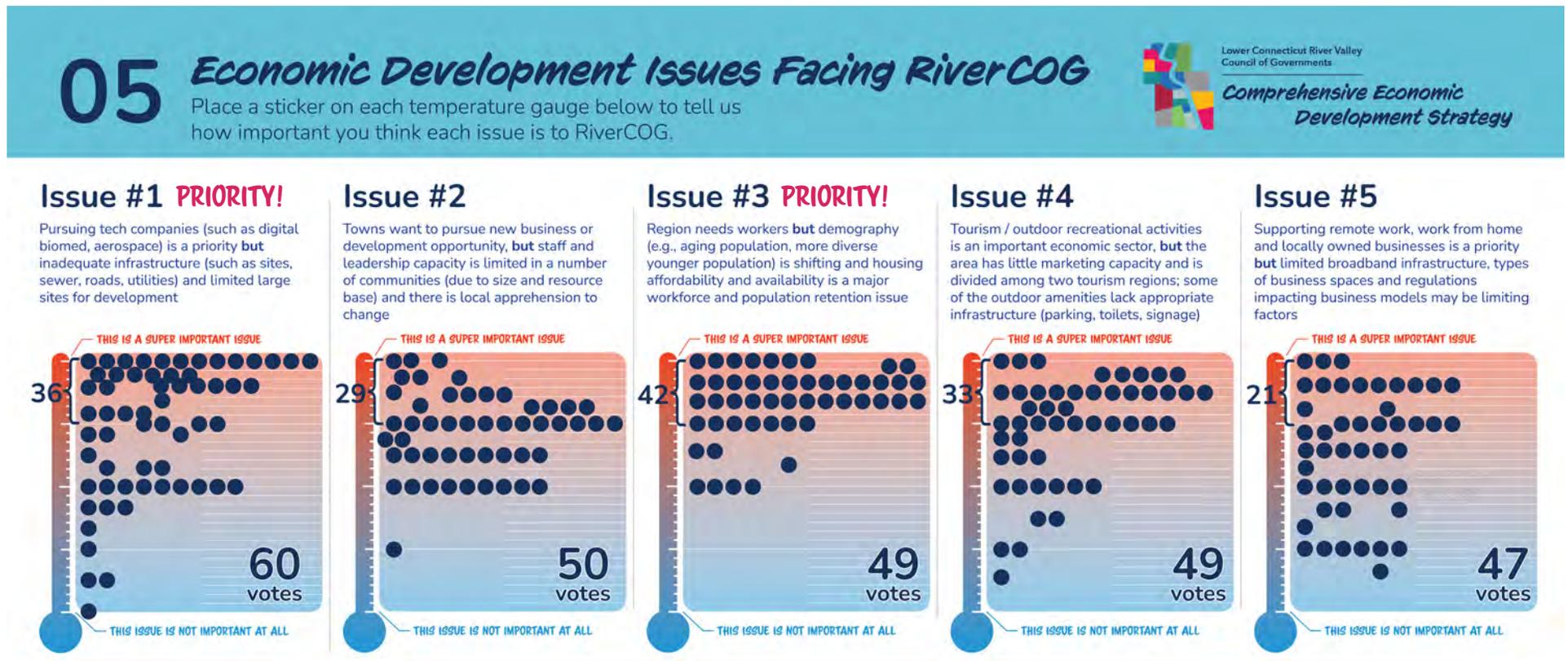


Figure 25: Prioritization of economic development issues

As shown in Figure 26, the top three initiatives included infill development, reusing vacant and underutilized land, and workforce training.



Figure 26: Prioritization of potential economic development initiatives

5 STRATEGIC DIRECTION

Remington-Rand Building, Middletown





Vision

In keeping with the Sustainable, Innovative, Connected, and Community themes of the RPOCD, the Lower Connecticut River Valley region will:

become a **culturally and ethnically diverse region** that is welcoming of and accessible to all people

become a **better-connected place**, accessible by all modes of travel and for all types of people

become a place **supportive of innovation and innovative industries** and **attractive to a highly skilled workforce**

utilize sustainable policies, practices, infrastructure, and development to **grow in balance with its natural resources.**



Strategic Direction

1



Providing the capacity and resources to promote a growing and equitable economy

2



Encouraging sustainable & resilient communities

3



Supporting the development of economic infrastructure

4



Enhancing high quality of life options for all residents

Rationale

Providing the capacity and resources to promote a growing and equitable economy The Lower Connecticut River Valley is an economically vibrant area of Connecticut. It faces the same statewide business climate issues (healthcare costs, cost of doing business) as the rest of the state, and has limited ability to take direct actions to improve those conditions. However, with the right resources and focus it can continue to be a prosperous and high quality of life community.

Encouraging sustainable & resilient communities This is a key priority for the region as evidenced by the Regional Plan of Conservation and Development (RPOCD), and the local planning documents of our communities. The engagement process reinforced that better utilization

of our existing developed area is one of the top development priorities for the region.

Supporting the development of economic infrastructure Economic infrastructure is defined as not only traditional infrastructure such as roads, water, sewer but also broadband, buildings and connectivity to jobs. A number of these issues were identified as top priorities for the region and its future economic viability.

Enhancing high quality of life options for all residents Housing has been identified in the RPOCD as well as this CEDS process as one of the top issues facing the region. The Regional Housing Plan provided an in-depth assessment of the housing dynamics and needs of the region.

Approach to Recommendations

Use of metrics and milestones

This is the first official CEDs for RIVERCOG. It represents an initial effort by the region's communities to work together on framing an economic vision and direction for the Lower Connecticut River Valley. During this process, it became evident that the key initial steps to implementing the economic vision were the development of organizational capacity (staffing, expertise, resources) and increased networking and communication across communities and key partners.

Accordingly, rather than set metrics tied to improvement in economic indicators, the decision was made to use a combination of indicators and organizational milestones more typically used in building a new organization.

Evaluation framework

Progress toward each milestone will be tracked annually based on the level of increased organizational capacity created in each succeeding year. Evaluation will consider number of recommended new systems put in place, number and quality of new resources made available through those systems, and amount of involvement and interaction with the regions municipalities, businesses, and other organizations. Based on feedback from end users, resources and systems can be adjusted to better accommodate ongoing needs.

In the first several years following the adoption of this plan, it is assumed that substantial changes to the longstanding demographic and housing trends noted in this plan will not occur. That is because it will take time for the systems and resources to become established. Nonetheless, these trends will be monitored annually, concurrent with the implementation of the Regional Plan of Conservation and Development and Regional Housing Plan, in order to assess potential shifts and adjust milestones as needed.

Partners	State: OPM, DECD, DEEP, etc. Local: municipal government in all of its capacities (governing bodies, departments, boards, commissions, and committees, etc.) Regional: Middlesex County Chamber of Commerce, Estuary Transit District, Regional Agriculture Council, surrounding COGs, and similar	Private/Non-Profit: This includes major institutions, non-profit organizations, businesses, and advocacy groups and organizations.	Timeframe	Short - 1-2 years Med - 3-5 years Long - 5+ years/ongoing
-----------------	--	--	------------------	---

1

**Providing the capacity
and resources to
promote a growing and
equitable economy**





Providing the capacity and resources to promote a growing and equitable economy

1.1 Establish a regional economic development resource that can support the region's municipalities with grant writing, project management, and technical expertise

Rationale

The region consists of communities that vary significantly in size and budget capacity. During the engagement process, it was stated numerous times that the limitations on staffing and expertise to pursue a range of economic development projects is a real limitation and barrier. A shared resource that each community can access will significantly increase the region's ability to respond to a changing economy.

Implementation

Metrics and Milestones	Partners	Timeframe
Increase RiverCOG staffing capabilities and/or utilize Middlesex Chamber of Commerce to create an economic development coordinator for the region	Regional	Short
Work with the region's municipalities, existing economic development professionals/commissions, and chambers of commerce to define the roles and responsibilities of economic development coordinator	Local; Regional	Short
Compile and create economic development resources, including but not limited to technical guides, funding opportunities, and a repository of priority projects and opportunities across the region, to share on the RiverCOG website	Regional; State	Medium



Providing the capacity and resources to promote a growing and equitable economy

1.2 Develop a regional brand / identity and create marketing campaign that can help market the region to tourists, businesses, and potential residents

Rationale

The region is split between two state tourism districts. Each of these districts have major centers of gravity with established brands and assets (Hartford and Mystic Country). However, region is its own unique geography with a mix of assets and physical attributes that deserve its own branding and marketing.

Implementation

Metrics and Milestones	Partners	Timeframe
Obtain consultant for purpose of brand development	Local; Regional; Private/Non-Profit	Medium
Conduct public outreach regarding brand preference	Local; Regional; Private/Non-Profit	Medium
Work with a marketing consultant to launch marketing campaign	Local; Regional; Private/Non-Profit	Medium

Providing the capacity and resources to promote a growing and equitable economy



1.3 Create a regional outreach and advisory program that can assist in engaging with underrepresented groups and ensure a range of diverse voices have opportunities to influence the direction of the region

Rationale

The region is gradually becoming more diverse with younger populations containing a higher percentage of Black, Indigenous and people of color (BIPOC) than the overall population. Ensuring that this population is engaged in the future of the Lower Connecticut River Valley is important as the region addresses its workforce and housing needs.

Implementation

Metrics and Milestones	Partners	Timeframe
Working with community partners, including workforce development agencies, to identify groups in the region that have not been historically well represented in the planning process	Local; Regional; Private/Non-Profit	Short
Develop contacts with key individuals or organizations representative of these groups	Local; Regional; Private/Non-Profit	Short
Establish regular dialogue and a pipeline for ongoing engagement	Local; Regional; Private/Non-Profit	Long

Providing the capacity and resources to promote a growing and equitable economy



1.4 Create a regional leadership development program, in coordination with the Middlesex County Chamber of Commerce, Old Saybrook Chamber and other community business groups, to provide a training resource for current and future municipal commissioners, municipal officials, and other volunteer positions

Rationale

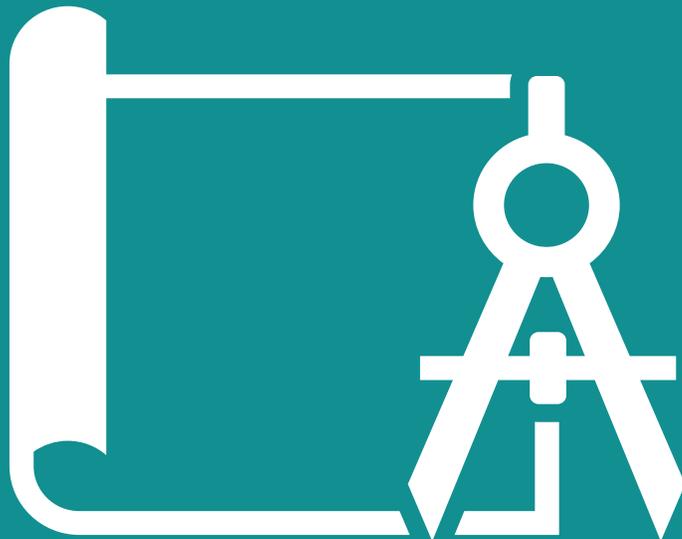
A number of the Lower Connecticut River Valley communities are run and managed by volunteer boards and groups in key roles such as planning, economic development, conservation, and First Selectman roles. During the engagement process, it was also noted there are relatively few millennial volunteers on these necessary boards and commissions. Encouraging and creating a pipeline of future leaders is vital to the success of the region's communities.

Implementation

Metrics and Milestones	Partners	Timeframe
Host a forum with municipal commissioners to identify areas where training and education could be most beneficial	Local; Regional	Medium
Identify existing leadership training resources that can be leveraged to support a leadership development program	Regional; Private/Non-Profit	Medium
Create training modules that can be viewed on-line and hosted on the RiverCOG website	Regional; Private/Non-Profit	Long

2

Encouraging sustainable & resilient communities





2.1 Identify high priority reuse development opportunities and secure resources to begin process of revitalization **PRIORITY!**

Rationale

Across the region exist several high priority redevelopment site opportunities. These have been identified in the appendix. Some of these sites will be complex due to potential environmental remediation needs or lack of appropriate infrastructure.

Implementation

Metrics and Milestones	Partners	Timeframe
Build on analysis of vacant and underutilized parcels and structures in priority innovative areas	Local; Private/Non-Profit	Short
Work with municipalities to study capacity for development, redevelopment, or reuse of selected parcels or structures	Local; Private/Non-Profit	Medium
In partnership with municipalities, compile an on-line repository of vacant and underutilized parcels and structures, including development, redevelopment, or reuse potential, and host on the RiverCOG website	Local; Private/Non-Profit	Long



2.2 Prioritize infill development in town centers and underutilized commercial corridors **PRIORITY!**

Rationale

Communities across the region have opportunities for infill development appropriate to their local context. The public process identified pursuing these opportunities as more desirable than new greenfield development. In some cases, infrastructure improvements are needed and/or new zoning needs to be put into place. Other recommendations address the infrastructure needs as well as zoning considerations.

Implementation

Metrics and Milestones	Partners	Timeframe
Support communities in facilitating discussions with existing property owners about redevelopment opportunities using additional staff resource identified in recommendation 1.1	Local; Regional	Short
Work with municipalities to identify priority areas for infill development	Local	Short
Assist municipalities in identifying zoning regulations that inhibit infill development in priority areas	Local	Short
Provide tools and resources for revising zoning regulations to encourage infill development in priority areas	Local; Private/Non-Profit	Long



2.3 Partner across the region and with regional workforce development agencies to provide training opportunities that match workforce needs **PRIORITY!**

Rationale

During the engagement process with business, it became clear that the scale of many local businesses was not large enough to support their own workforce development programs aside from on-the-job training. There are 11 regional resources to support workforce development, but they may not match with emerging needs.

For example, based on 2021 IPEDS data only 46 students at Middlesex Community College completed a course of study in health professions and related programs. By contrast the largest health employer in the region has more than 500 active openings. Manufacturing is one of the key sectors in the region and faces an aging workforce yet IPEDS reports only 7 engineering degrees and 5 certificates related to precision production. There were zero reported completions related to computing and information systems.

The region needs to actively engage with the workforce partners and industry leaders to see what types of career awareness and “talent pipeline” activities can be created.

Implementation

Metrics and Milestones	Partners	Timeframe
Identify industries that would benefit from workforce development assistance	Local; Regional; Private/Non-Profit	Short
Identify existing workforce development programs outside of the region that could benefit local industry and form partnerships as appropriate	Local; Regional; Private/Non-Profit	Long



2.4 Develop a model template for supporting hybrid businesses that may consist of several different uses under one roof typically found in “maker” consumer product-oriented businesses **PRIORITY!**

Rationale

The Lower Connecticut River Valley has an emerging maker culture that can be an important driver of success for its business districts. However, many of these businesses are hybrids that mix manufacturing, direct selling and order fulfillment under one roof. Zoning practices need to be aligned where appropriate to support these types of businesses.

Implementation

Metrics and Milestones	Partners	Timeframe
Compile a database of best practices research for hybrid business or “maker district” models that can inform the region’s zoning practice	Regional; Private/Non-Profit	Short
Create a zoning template for supporting hybrid businesses and provide supporting research for the region’s municipalities to incorporate into their regulations	Local; Regional	Medium
Provide guidance and template on establishing and / or supporting maker spaces in communities	Local	Short



2.5 Discourage intensive development along environmentally sensitive areas or high-risk zones

Rationale

The region takes environmental protection seriously as the environment and the abundant natural amenities are a critical part of its identity. Given the emphasis on infill and targeted redevelopment, supporting non development in environmentally sensitive areas increases the attractiveness of infill options. It is also a key part of a resilience strategy to reduce the amount of the region's economy and built environment subject to natural hazard risk.

Implementation

Metrics and Milestones	Partners	Timeframe
In partnership with municipalities, develop a standard for identifying environmentally sensitive areas and high-risk zones – methodology should be based on the RPOCD and NHMP	Local; Regional; Private/Non-Profit	Short
Develop additional standards that could be incorporated into local zoning regulations to prevent overdevelopment of these areas	Local; Regional; Private/Non-Profit	Medium



2.6 Create a Business Resiliency and Recovery Plan for businesses as well as government

Rationale

The Natural Hazards Mitigation Plan identified and quantified the potential risk areas and economic losses. This is the logical next step of this plan. Resources have already been identified to assist in creating the Resiliency and Recovery Plan and RiverCOG is in discussions with the state on repurposing a potential funding source.

Implementation

Metrics and Milestones	Partners	Timeframe
Move forward with next stage of Plan development	Regional	Medium



2.7 Support the region’s agricultural industry in diversifying operations to other endeavors compatible with agricultural use

Rationale

The Lower Connecticut River Valley region has an active, important agricultural sector. There is an interest among the agricultural industry as well as from the entrepreneurial community to further development the agricultural and food product sector. However, community level regulations vary and may not be compatible with helping to diversify the revenue streams coming into the local farms to help maintain their viability.

Implementation

Metrics and Milestones	Partners	Timeframe
Work with the Regional Agriculture Council to determine interest in expanding and diversifying operations and understand the current impediments.	Local; Regional	Short
Identify municipal regulations that could be reconfigured to better support the region’s agricultural community	Local; Regional	Medium
Provide tools and templates for revising regulations and promoting opportunities	Local; Regional	Long
Develop a program of technical training and assistance for the region's agricultural community to enable greater operational efficiency and business promotion.	Local; Regional; Public/Private	Long

3 Supporting the development of economic infrastructure





3.1 Pursue opportunities for broadband expansion (wired and wireless) across the region

Rationale

Broadband access particularly wireless broadband is spotty across the region. It is important to be conscious of processes and deadlines related to federal broadband capital investment opportunities.

Implementation

Metrics and Milestones	Partners	Timeframe
Partner with municipalities to identify areas of inadequate wireless broadband coverage.	Local	Short
Work with the state and federal government to draft an updated definition of broadband coverage that adequately reflects the shortcomings of broadband use in the region.	Local; State	Short
Identify opportunities to leverage municipal-owned space on existing utility poles for improved coverage.	Local	Medium
Partner with wireless companies and communication industry to collaborate and problem-solve on identified areas with broadband issue.	Local	Medium



3.2 Support technical expertise in furthering alternative wastewater treatment options

Rationale

Wastewater management alternatives to expensive sewer system construction is an important element for potential development in the region.

Implementation

Metrics and Milestones	Partners	Timeframe
Compile research and data on wastewater management trends.	Local; Professional assoc.	Short
Work with industry experts to better understand the potential for new technologies in the region.	See above	
Host information sessions and provide educational materials to municipalities that allow them to evaluate the use of wastewater management alternatives.	Local; State; Professional	Medium



3.3 Evaluate potential for culinary / food products incubator to support the region’s agricultural industry

Implementation

Metrics and Milestones	Partners	Timeframe
Work with the Regional Agriculture Council to identify needs for culinary/food product incubator support.	Local; Regional; Private/Non-Profit	Short
In partnership with municipalities, identify potential locations for shared industrial space that could support culinary/food product development for the region's farmers.	Local; Regional; Private/Non-Profit	Short
Work with municipalities to identify and amend potential regulatory barriers that would prohibit the region's farmers from expanding into culinary/food product development.	Local; Regional	Medium
Facilitate partnerships between the Regional Agriculture Council, municipalities, and private/non-profit enterprises to create shared facilities for culinary/food production.	Local; Regional; Private/Non-Profit	Long



3.4 Emphasize increased connectivity of employment centers with multi-modal transportation access

Rationale

Various studies have identified connectivity to employment as a key issue in helping to manage the housing affordability concerns and equity considerations in the region. Moreover, because the areas eligible for future employment type development are limited and scattered across the region, connectivity will become increasingly more important.

Implementation

Metrics and Milestones	Partners	Timeframe
Identify existing and proposed priority areas for employment centers across the region	Local; Regional	Short
Work with municipalities to ensure that zoning regulations support bicycle and pedestrian connections in and around these employment centers	Local	Short
Provide tools to help municipalities pursue first and last mile solutions that connect employment centers to public transportation options	Local; Regional; State	Medium
Provide a channel between municipalities and the transit district to ensure adequate public transportation access and infrastructure is in place for projects in major employment centers	Local; Regional; State	Short



3.5 Provide supportive amenities and services for remote workers, including but not limited to creative options for shared workspaces

Rationale

Remote work is a permanent part of the fabric of the future workplace. The region has a large population that commutes to office-type settings for work in Hartford and New Haven. The region has also demonstrated its ability to attract self-employed workers and other professionals who seek the type of lifestyle offered by the area. However, it's also been demonstrated that flexible workspaces are desired for remote and self-employed workers. Given the size of the communities, not all of them can support flexible options. Working together may enable options that could not exist separately.

Implementation

Metrics and Milestones	Partners	Timeframe
Conduct public outreach to determine the needs of the region's existing remote workers	Local; Regional	Short
Compile best practices data and information related to supportive amenities and shared workspaces for remote workers	Regional; Private/Non-Profit	Short
Work with the region's municipalities to create amenities and shared workspaces that support remote workers in town centers	Local; Regional; Private/Non-Profit	Long



3.6 Secure resources for high priority infrastructure projects

Rationale

The region’s communities have many infrastructure needs that are identified in the appendix. These range from roadway improvements to streetscapes, multi-modal infrastructure, water/sewer needs, and broadband enhancements. A number of these projects are beyond the fiscal capacity of the local communities and will require state and federal resources. The shared resource identified earlier can help with grant writing and application development for these competitive funding sources.

Implementation

Metrics and Milestones	Partners	Timeframe
Work with the region’s municipalities to maintain a complete list of priority infrastructure projects across the region	Local	Long
Match projects with available funding or project partners where appropriate	Local; Regional; State	Long
Review funding opportunities and provide grant writing assistance to design and construct supporting public infrastructure	Local	Short

4 Enhancing high quality of life options for all residents





Enhancing quality of life for all residents

4.1 Create a diverse range of housing options at price points that are reflective of wages paid to workers in the region's jobs

Implementation

Metrics and Milestones	Partners	Timeframe
Implement the recommendations in the Regional Housing Plan	Local; Regional; Private/Non-Profit	Long



4.2 Promote mixed-use, walkable, vibrant communities in the region's town centers and welcome a diverse population

Implementation

Metrics and Milestones	Partners	Timeframe
Using the RPOCD as a guide, work with municipalities to identify appropriate locations for these town centers across the region.	Local	Short
Examine municipal plans and zoning regulations to determine whether they support a mixture of uses and pedestrian scale development.	Local	Short
Provide tools and resources to municipalities, including template regulations, sample plans, and renderings, that can be used to improve development outcomes in town centers	Local	Long



Enhancing quality of life for all residents

4.3 Encourage continued investment and improvements to the region's parks, trails and public outdoor amenities

Rationale

LCRV's outdoor amenities are key components of the region's quality of life but also an important asset to supporting the growing tourism economy.

Implementation

Metrics and Milestones	Partners	Timeframe
Work with municipalities, NGOs, and land trusts to identify priority parks, trails, and outdoor amenities for investment and improvement	Local; Regional; State; Private/Non-Profit	Short
Conduct public engagement to determine what additional amenities would be most beneficial to priority areas.	Local; Private/Non-Profit	Medium



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