REX
DEVELOPMENT

2023-2028 SOUTH CENTRAL CONNECTICUT COMPREHENSIVE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

SOUTH CENTRAL CONNECTICUT REGIONAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION/REX DEVELOPMENT

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PURPOSE

The Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) is a locally-based, regionally-driven economic development plan that we use to identify our strengths and weaknesses and bring together a diverse set of partners to generate good jobs, diversify the economy, and spur economic growth. An effective CEDS allows a region to maximize its economic development potential and engage with the U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA) and other federal partners to receive infrastructure and technical assistance grants, such as those through EDA's Public Works and Economic Adjustment Assistance programs.

ABOUT US

The South Central Connecticut Regional Economic Development Corporation, a.k.a. REX Development (REX/SCCREDC) is the Economic Development District (EDD) for South Central Connecticut and coordinates the development and implementation of the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS).

SOUTH CENTRAL CONNECTICUT TOWNS

Bethany | Branford | East Haven | Guilford | Hamden | Madison | Meriden | Milford | New Haven | North Branford | North Haven | Orange | Wallingford | West Haven | Woodbridge

VISION STATEMENT

OUR RESILIENT, DIVERSE COMMUNITY WILL CREATE AND IMPLEMENT BUSINESS-FRIENDLY POLICIES AND PROJECTS TO ENHANCE THE ECONOMY, IMPROVE THE QUALITY OF LIFE, AND CREATE WEALTH FOR ALL RESIDENTS.

BACKGROUND SUMMARY

The 2023 South Central Connecticut region strongly resembles the one described in 2018. Our population is steady, unemployment is low, and we have several durable vital industries, including healthcare, higher education, life science, and manufacturing. The post-pandemic revitalization of arts, culture, and tourism is progressing more slowly.

In addition to the region-specific issues, we are also impacted by national and global issues, including supply chain disruptions, inflation, and geopolitical instability.

DEMOGRAPHIC & SOCIOECONOMIC DATA

Regional Population (2021)	570,275
Regional Households (2021)	221,300
County Per Capita Income (2021)	$41,192
New Haven County Median Household Income (2021)	$75,043
Median Sales Price Single Family Homes – New Haven Market (Q4 2022 Berkshire Hathaway 2022 Annual Report)	$300,000
County Median Age (2020)	40.5
Regional Workforce Population (2020)	323,719

2018-2023 ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT MILESTONES

The regional economic development strategy created in 2018 resulted in significant accomplishments during a globally challenging five years.

- 25,000 new business starts with 24% minority-owned in 2022.
- Towns submitted affordable housing plans to the State of Connecticut.
- Three new fulfillment/distribution centers totaling 1 million sq. ft.
- 500,000 sq. ft. of new bioscience space in construction.
- $100 million private investment in Tweed-New Haven Airport (HVN).
- Avelo Airlines completed 500,000 enplanements in its first year of operations at HVN.
- Union Station (rail) secured $17 million to develop a multi-modal transportation center.
- Yale New Haven Health is investing $838 million in a new neuroscience campus and expanded emergency department.
- The Downtown Crossing project in New Haven removed a highway to create developable land in the medical district.
- Several billion dollars in construction investment by colleges and universities.

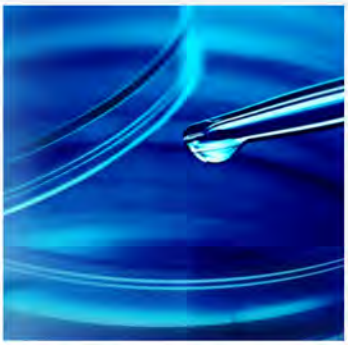
POPULATION

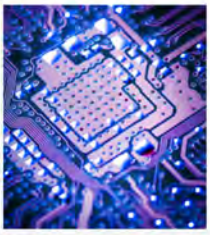
U.S. Census data shows that the population has remained unchanged since 2018. Factors contributing to this include an aging population, fewer documented immigrants, and limited affordable housing options relative to wages for many occupations. The decline in the natural population increase can be attributed to deaths due to COVID-19 complications, a decrease in the number of women of childbearing age residing in Greater New Haven since 2010, and the national trend of starting a family later in life.

One of our initiatives to address this issue is to retain college students after graduation. Through community interaction, career counseling, entrepreneur support services, and internship opportunities, we strive to improve the student retention rate. In addition, we are increasing the availability of workforce housing.

KEY SECTORS

Healthcare
Higher Education
Life Science/Bioscience
Manufacturing
Arts, Culture, & Tourism





WORKFORCE & JOB READINESS

While the unemployment rate is low, there is a mismatch between the supply and demand for labor. Workforce organizations, colleges and universities, and businesses collaborate to devise and clarify career pathways. From certificate programs focusing on specific skills to advanced degrees in STEM majors, the organizations actively recruit participants, intentionally promoting opportunities for economically distressed residents. Declining educational achievement in some of the region's primary and secondary schools is a concern when developing a job-ready population.

Access to reliable childcare and efficient public transportation are significant barriers to workforce participation. Improved rail service, particularly with reduced travel time between New Haven and Grand Central Terminal, would enhance the region's ability to compete with locations closer to the city. State and local governments are providing federal funds and programs to tackle these impediments on a broad scale.

HIGHLY-EDUCATED WORKFORCE

South Central Connecticut's colleges and universities produce highly-educated graduates with technical healthcare, bioscience, engineering, manufacturing, and computing skills. Existing healthcare systems are expanding with additional outpatient and specialized services. The bioscience industry is outpacing our ability to produce lab space. Research developed through Yale University is positioning the region as a leader in quantum computing. The area is also noted as an innovation hub with significant state support for businesses, particularly those supporting women and minorities.

Yale University, one of the world's most prestigious academic research institutions, is located in New Haven.

HOUSING

Developing additional low and middle-income housing is essential to increasing our workforce. The current shortage limits the ability to attract new residents and keep current residents adequately housed. Housing costs also challenge residents of wealthier suburban towns. Through the South Central Regional Council of Governments' intensive multi-year housing project, suburban and rural communities are developing strategies to increase affordable housing stock beyond the urban centers. The towns have submitted affordable housing plans to the state.

WEALTH

Connecticut is one of the wealthiest states in the U.S. However, there is a significant wealth gap in the region. Addressing job readiness and housing issues, with particular attention to historically underserved communities, will promote more equitable prosperity. Homeownership is a key to generational wealth as real estate generally appreciates over the long term. A person's home is often their largest financial asset, the benefits of which are often passed on to the next generation.

DIVERSITY, EQUITY, & INCLUSION

Greater New Haven celebrates the enhanced quality of life having a diverse community generates. Our community was built by waves of Irish, Italian, and Black populations. In recent years, we have welcomed refugees from Afghanistan and Ukraine. A variety of cultural events, assets, and cuisine are integrated into our daily lives.

This appreciation of a diverse community contrasts with the historical injustices experienced by the BIPOC and other economically distressed communities.

Tools to increase diversity, equity, and inclusivity include incentives for minority hiring/contracting, entrepreneur support, and small business assistance. Community agencies are partnering with the business community to address longstanding economic and environmental concerns and healthcare inequalities.

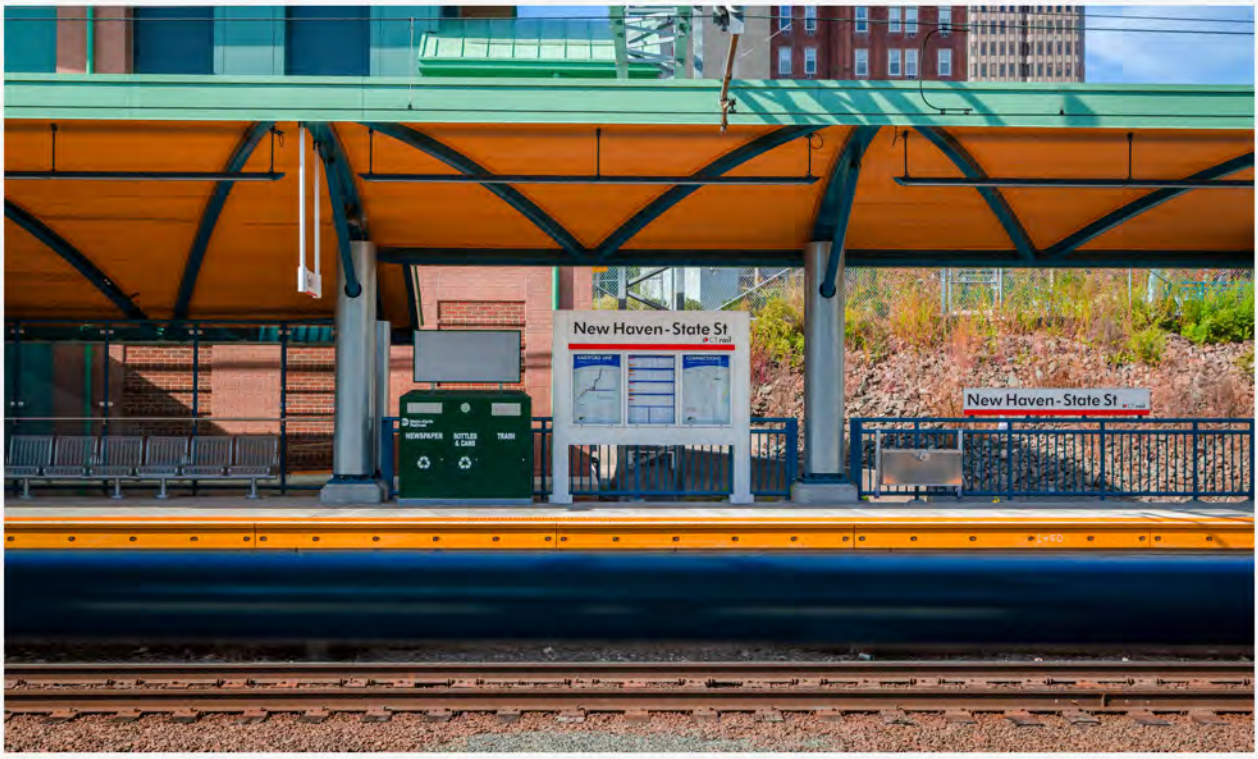
Two significant initiatives addressing historical injustices within our community are workforce training and housing. There is extensive neighborhood outreach for community engagement when developing economic plans and deploying resources. We are addressing the wealth gap by enhancing educational opportunities, expanding occupational options, increasing home ownership, creating more effective public transportation, and assuring equitable access to the benefits of living in the Greater New Haven region.

ECONOMIC RESILIENCE

While economic disruptions are inevitable, the region executes plans to avoid or effectively respond to these events. We are not reliant on a single industry for economic vitality and are nurturing new opportunities by supporting small businesses and providing relevant workforce training. Upgrades to the transportation, utility, and broadband infrastructure are ongoing.

INFRASTRUCTURE

TRANSPORTATION, FREIGHT CAPACITY, WATER, ELECTRICITY, BROADBAND



The region's extensive transportation infrastructure needs modernization. The rail system requires significant upgrades to maximize our prime location on the eastern seaboard. State-of-the-art rail service between the economic powerhouses of Boston and New York will facilitate collaboration and increase access to talent. Highways, roads, and bridges must be in a state of good repair. Rapid bus transit is a high priority for the region to provide more efficient and flexible transportation options within and beyond the region.

While the extension of the runway and relocation of Tweed-New Haven Airport terminal primarily supports increased commercial traffic, the airport is also a local asset for transporting personnel and emergency supplies in the event of a disaster.

Our utility companies are continuously working to harden the existing infrastructure and deploy new technology. In addition, the vegetation management program is a vital component of maintaining power during storms.

Broadband service requires significant upgrades to meet current and future needs. More equitable access must be provided to underserved communities by increasing the availability of services and reducing costs. Increased competition among service providers and incentives are options for extending access to the Internet.

2023-2028

CHALLENGES

- Aging population
- Population growth
- Diversity, equity, & inclusion
- Sustainability
- Brownfields
- Municipal solid waste
- Hazard mitigation
- Housing shortage
- Inflation
- Resiliency
- Workforce development

GROWTH OPPORTUNITIES

Several of the region's most pressing challenges will be addressed by allocating pandemic economic recovery funds. Federal and state priorities closely align with the region's needs. Funds distributed to the municipalities can be used to address priority issues beyond the current programs.

Regionally, we will continue to:

- Support key economic drivers, including healthcare, higher education, life sciences, manufacturing, and arts, culture, and tourism.
- Provide technical and financial assistance to entrepreneurs with additional support for women and minority-owned businesses.
- Promote workforce opportunities to all community members with an increased focus on people with different abilities and people previously incarcerated.
- Promote our prime location as a more cost-effective location to reside or operate a business than New York or Boston while retaining access to talent and established transportation options.
- Capitalize on the improved perception of suburban living as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Continuously communicate information about available resources to businesses and employees.

SWOT ANALYSIS

Strengths

- Prime location on the eastern seaboard with 1/3 of the nation's gross domestic product within a 500-mile radius
- Outstanding quality of life
- Highly educated workforce
- Established key sectors: life science; healthcare; higher education; manufacturing; arts, culture, and tourism
- Innovation hub
- Entrepreneurial Community

Weaknesses

- Aging population/lack of population growth
- High cost of electricity
- Inequity: education, wealth, home ownership, healthcare, transportation, technology, environment
- Lack of developable land
- Lack of appropriately-skilled workforce
- Insufficient housing options

Opportunities

- Use funding to improve and increase the resilience of existing infrastructure (transportation, utilities, etc.)
- Market the region as an innovation hub
- Increase diversity, equity, and inclusivity efforts
- Expand workforce development programs
- Provide incentives for housing projects

Threats

- Inflation
- Other states recruiting our businesses, especially manufacturing
- Competition for talent
- Supply chain disruptions
- Continued concerns about COVID-19
- Climate change
- Cybersecurity
- Decline in business travel

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Public outreach for the CEDS began in January 2022 with presentations to municipalities, chambers of commerce, the SCRCOG Hazard Mitigation Public Outreach Meeting, and community groups. A 60-day public comment period notice was posted in the Meriden Record Journal, La Voz, and the New Haven Register. The request for public comment was also distributed via REX/SCCREDC and Visit New Haven newsletters, social media, and partner communications.

In addition to the meetings, the Business Retention, Expansion, and Recruitment Committee created an online survey to provide additional input opportunities. The survey was distributed via REX/SCCREDC and Visit New Haven newsletters, social media, and partner communications.

GOAL 1: BUSINESS RETENTION, EXPANSION, & RECRUITMENT

USE THE REGION'S COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGES TO FOSTER EQUITABLE, RESILIENT BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT, RECRUITMENT, ACCESS TO JOBS, WEALTH CREATION, AND ENTREPRENEURIAL ACTIVITY.

OBJECTIVES & STRATEGIES

OBJECTIVE 1

Advance growth of key sectors critical to the region's economic vitality.

OBJECTIVE 2

Provide technical support to existing businesses, including resilience planning; succession planning; diversity, equity, and inclusion programs; the use of technology; sustainability initiatives; and compliance with local, state, and federal regulations.

OBJECTIVE 3

Support programs that promote diversity, equity, and inclusion for employment, entrepreneurship, and education.

OBJECTIVE 4

Develop a well-qualified workforce by creating multiple access points to various career paths.

OBJECTIVE 5

Expand participation in our robust, diverse entrepreneurial ecosystem.

OBJECTIVE 6

Advocate for business-friendly federal, state, regional, and local initiatives to encourage economic growth and vitality.

CORE STRATEGIES

Support businesses, promote workforce development programs, and prioritize development in historically underserved communities.

GOAL 2: WORKFORCE

DESIGN AND DELIVER REAL-TIME, INTUITIVE TOOLS THAT WILL ENABLE THE REGIONAL WORKFORCE SYSTEM TO MORE QUICKLY AND EFFECTIVELY RESPOND TO EMPLOYER, EDUCATION AND TRAINING PROVIDER, AND JOBSEEKER NEEDS THROUGH INDUSTRY PIPELINES, WORK SUPPORTS, AND LABOR MARKET INFORMATION (LMI)-INFORMED CAREER PATHWAYS POSSIBLE.

OBJECTIVES & STRATEGIES

OBJECTIVE 1

Expand and support Jobs Pipeline projects in the region.

OBJECTIVE 2

Provide better local access to existing work supports in the region to provide job and business retention services to workers and their companies.

OBJECTIVE 3

Support a region-wide system of providing quality local labor market information and career pathways to long-term unemployed youth and young adults in the region.

CORE STRATEGIES

Increase workforce readiness, provide relevant curricula, collaborate with higher education institutions and businesses, and overcome barriers to workforce training participation.

GOAL 3: HOUSING

ENSURE CONTINUED ACTION IN CREATING AND PRESERVING HOUSING TO OFFER A BROAD SPECTRUM OF HOUSING OPTIONS FOR PEOPLE OF ALL INCOME LEVELS, WORKING REGIONALLY TO BUILD MARKET RATE AND AFFORDABLE HOUSING, DECONCENTRATE POVERTY, AND PROMOTE INTEGRATION UTILIZING THE SCRCOG REGIONAL HOUSING PLAN UPON COMPLETION.

OBJECTIVES & STRATEGIES

OBJECTIVE 1

Support opportunities for incentivizing housing production.

OBJECTIVE 2

Establish and expand Below Market Registry across the region to support Housing for All.

OBJECTIVE 3

Support Workforce Homeownership Programs offered by the state and local government throughout the region.

OBJECTIVE 4

Educate residents on available programs and regional housing units.

OBJECTIVE 5

Implement the SCRCOG regional housing plan.

CORE STRATEGIES

Provide incentives to build affordable housing, develop a below-market rate registry, create an affordable housing database, provide down payment assistance, and implement the SCRCOG Regional Housing Plan upon approval.

GOAL 4: INFRASTRUCTURE

DEVELOP, MAINTAIN, AND EFFECTIVELY USE A ROBUST, INTEGRATED, MULTI-MODAL TRANSPORTATION, COMMUNICATIONS, AND INFORMATION SYSTEM THAT FACILITATES THE EFFICIENT, CONVENIENT MOVEMENT OF PEOPLE, GOODS, AND DATA INTRA-REGIONALLY, INTER-REGIONALLY, AND INTERNATIONALLY.

OBJECTIVES & STRATEGIES

OBJECTIVE 1

Improve and rebalance the multi-modal transportation network with an emphasis on safety, congestion mitigation, reduced carbon emissions, and the accommodation of bicyclists and pedestrians.

OBJECTIVE 2

Support continued investments in roadways and bridges.

OBJECTIVE 3

Expand the freight capacity of the region.

OBJECTIVE 4

Optimize water infrastructure and partnerships for maximum economic impact.

OBJECTIVE 5

Ensure the entire region has affordable telecommunications infrastructure to support modern communication and information systems.

OBJECTIVE 6

Support the expansion of renewable energy sources, reduction in cost, and resilience of the electric grid to extreme weather events caused by climate change and physical and cyber attacks.

CORE STRATEGIES

Modernize existing transportation infrastructure, reduce the climate impact of the transportation network, provide reliable and less costly electricity, and provide equitable access to state-of-the-art broadband service.

GOAL 5: REAL ESTATE, LAND USE, & SUSTAINABILITY

DEVELOPABLE LAND IS AN EXTREMELY LIMITED RESOURCE IN THE REGION. THE REGION MUST CONTINUE TO EMBRACE AND ADOPT STRATEGIES THAT FOCUS ON CLEANING UP CONTAMINATED SITES, SUPPORTING EFFECTIVE AND EFFICIENT DEVELOPMENT PLANS, AND PROTECTING RESOURCES THAT ADD TO THE REGION'S OVERALL SUSTAINABILITY.

OBJECTIVES & STRATEGIES

OBJECTIVE 1

Support brownfield redevelopment.

OBJECTIVE 2

Utilize best practices for development projects, including mixed-use development, transit-oriented development (TOD), adaptive reuse, green building, and smart growth.

OBJECTIVE 3

Manage the region's natural, cultural, and economic resources.

CORE STRATEGIES

Remediate high-value brownfields, review and adjust existing zoning regulations, support green development, and preserve open space.

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