

**THE SOUTHWEST MISSISSIPPI PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT  
DISTRICT COMPREHENSIVE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY  
ANNUAL REPORT**

**December 1, 2020**

The Southwest Mississippi Planning and Development District (SWMPDD) prepared a comprehensive economic development strategy (CEDS) for the ten county region, including Adams, Amite, Claiborne, Franklin, Jefferson, Lincoln, Lawrence, Pike, Walthall and Wilkinson Counties. The CEDS was approved by the Economic Development Administration and serves as our Economic Development Plan for our region. As part of the special awards conditions, the SWMPDD is required to submit this Annual Report to the Economic Development Administration.

This Annual Report 1) includes progress of the CEDS implementation, 2) changes in conditions and 3) updates and how to move forward.

**Implementation/Progress**

The CEDS implementation progress is related to the performance measures identified in the EDA approved CEDS. The CEDS for the SWMPDD area has two phases of implementation. The first phase includes a comparison of the local economy's unemployment rate in relation to the region, the state, and the nation. The following tables compare the regional, state, and national employment numbers as reported by the MS Department of Employment Security Labor Market Data.

| <b>GEOGRAPHY (UNITED STATES, MISSISSIPPI OR COUNTY IN DISTRICT)</b> | <b>AVERAGE UNEMPLOYMENT RATE (%) JULY 2017</b> | <b>AVERAGE UNEMPLOYMENT RATE (%) JULY 2020</b> |
|---|--|--|
| <b>UNITED STATES</b>  | <b>4.6</b>                                     | <b>10.5</b>                                    |
| <b>STATE OF MISSISSIPPI</b>   | <b>6.1</b>                                     | <b>11.5</b>                                    |
| <b>ADAMS COUNTY</b>   | <b>8.9</b>                                     | <b>14.9</b>                                    |
| <b>AMITE</b>  | <b>8</b>                                       | <b>11.5</b>                                    |
| <b>CLAIBORNE</b>  | <b>11.3</b>                                    | <b>21.2</b>                                    |
| <b>FRANKLIN</b>   | <b>8.4</b>                                     | <b>11.2</b>                                    |
| <b>JEFFERSON</b>  | <b>17</b>                                      | <b>25.7</b>                                    |
| <b>LAWRENCE</b>   | <b>7.6</b>                                     | <b>12</b>                                      |
| <b>LINCOLN</b>  | <b>6.1</b>                                     | <b>10.2</b>                                    |
| <b>PIKE</b>   | <b>7.3</b>                                     | <b>13.3</b>                                    |
| <b>WALTHALL</b>   | <b>8.4</b>                                     | <b>12.4</b>                                    |
| <b>WILKINSON</b>  | <b>11</b>                                      | <b>17.5</b>                                    |
| <b>AVERAGE FOR ALL DISTRICT COUNTIES</b>                            | <b>9.4</b>                                     | <b>15</b>                                      |

*Source – Mississippi Dept. of Employment Security (MDES)*

This graph shows the change in unemployment rate from when the 5 year CEDS was created to exactly 3 years later during the highest unemployment rate during the pandemic. While the average unemployment rate for the entire 10 county area is currently at 9.9%, it peaked at a whopping 15% in the summer of 2020. While there has been some recovery, this had a significant negative impact on the local economy that will likely linger for months if not years.

The second phase of implementation of the EDA approved CEDS includes a measure of goals and objectives identified in the CEDS as they relate to the number and type of investments made in the region and the amount of private sector investment. During the last twelve months, SWMPDD has been instrumental in supporting various industrial and commercial developments as well as basic infrastructure improvements.

### **Investments within the Region in the last 12 Months**

| <b>Type of Investment</b>                      | <b>Grants</b> | <b>Private Investment</b> | <b>Jobs Created</b> |
|--|---------------|---------------------------|---------------------|
| Industrial/Commercial/<br>Basic Infrastructure | \$4 million   | \$65 Million              | 100                 |

### **Community and Private Sector Participation**

SWMPDD staff works closely with member governments on a day-to-day basis as well as agencies at the state and federal level. The staff works with economic development professionals from the local, state and federal level involving ongoing project development. The staff also works with the CEDS committee as necessary to make changes and/or updates to the CEDS.

### **Technical Component Changes**

There are no needed changes to the technical components of the EDA-approved CEDS. Should changes become apparent they will be provided to the public for a 30-day comment period and then submitted to the EDA.

### **Condition Changes**

The most significant change over the last twelve months is the pandemic. The pandemic has had both a negative economic impact as well as health/well being impacts on the population. With closures and people working from home the normal workday has changed significantly. Even today these impacts are difficult to quantify and much is still unknown. While it appears as the economic impact to industry seems to be minimal thus far, the service-oriented sectors that include tourism and travel, accommodations and food services, and arts and entertainment are bearing the brunt of the impacts. There have been some restaurant closures as well as a 75% decrease in conventions in the region that have greatly impacted the service industry. The CARES ACT helped these

sectors to some degree but they are still suffering. Over the last few months as businesses have reopened things looked promising but as we write this update the pandemic is seeing another spike and fears of another shutdown loom. The SWMPDD will continue to monitor this situation and work with local industry leaders and elected officials to navigate through these troubled times.

## **Moving Forward**

As long as Covid-19 remains a threat the economy will be slow to recover. The SWMPDD has current projects underway or completed in which job creation numbers haven't materialized due to the pandemic. Many projects are on "hold." Without knowing what the future holds the SWMPDD will continue to work closely with committee members and economic development partners to develop and implement the CEDS. Thanks to the CARES ACT, the SWMPDD received additional funding through EDA to help the district assist in regional economic recovery. Some of the SWMPDD goals include: 1) Support new opening efforts, reopening efforts and entrepreneurial development. 2) Enhancing the planning and development districts capabilities and needs of working from home by purchasing necessary equipment and provide training for employees to successfully work from home. 3) Support community quality of life initiatives which act as economic development tools and support health. 4) Collaborate with various local entities involved in monitoring and developing workforce training awareness efforts to address workforce needs

The SWMPDD will monitor any new government incentives or Covid-19 stimulus packages that might assist businesses/industry in this crisis.