



COMPREHENSIVE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

2023 - 2028



SOUTHEASTERN
CONNECTICUT
ENTERPRISE REGION

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The **Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy 2023-2027 (CEDS 2023)** is a publication of Southeastern Connecticut Enterprise Region (seCTer). It meets requirements set forth in 13 C.F.R. § 303.7 and updates CEDS 2017 and all prior updates and project lists. CEDS 2023 is approved by seCTer, the Southeastern Connecticut Council of Governments (SCCOG), the State of Connecticut Department of Economic and Community Development (DECD), Connecticut Office of Policy Management (OPM), and the U.S. Department of Commerce, Economic Development Administration (EDA).

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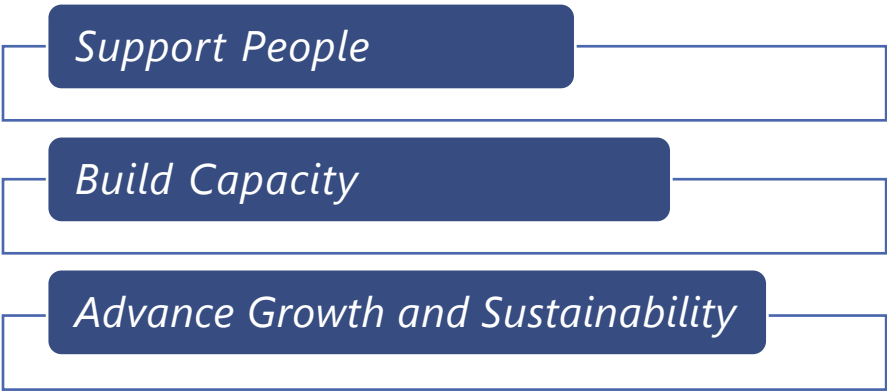
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Preface

Southeastern Connecticut Enterprise Region (seCTer) presents a **Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS)** for the **Southeastern Connecticut Economic Development District (SECT EDD)** which has three goals:



This CEDS (**CEDS 2023**) consists of a set of strategic goals and actions which will help the region become more resilient, equitable, attractive, wealthy and competitive. **Southeastern Connecticut Enterprise Region (seCTer)** is the facilitator, or steward, of the strategic goals and actions, but one organization cannot do it alone: the creation of CEDS is a shared exercise. The development of CEDS 2023 included formal and informal input by municipal, community and business leaders; hard and dedicated work by the seCTer Board and several of its working committees; and public input throughout the region via a regional survey, a series of focus groups, and one-on-one targeted interviews with six subject matter experts.

The U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA) defines CEDS as follows: “Creating the conditions for economic growth and improved quality of life by expanding the capacity of individuals, businesses, and communities to maximize the use of their talents and skills to support innovation, job creation, and private investment.” Two important threads run throughout CEDS 2023: **equity** and **resilience**. However, no section of CEDS 2023 is specifically labelled **Equity** or **Resilience** as these foundational concepts **should be** and **are** paramount and integrated throughout CEDS 2023.

There are goals that specifically address financial mobility and accessibility, with a focus on those who traditionally have had difficulty accessing capital to start a business. There are goals that center on ensuring businesses and communities are more resilient against potential economic shocks such as the Covid-19 pandemic. And while some goals and actions may seem vague now, some clarity will surface over time as an implementing framework is put in place. If not, CEDS 2023 can be amended, as it is intended to be a dynamic and flexible plan geared specifically to Southeastern Connecticut.

Why **Support People** as a goal? The definition of CEDS uses the phrases “capacity of individuals” and “their talents and skills.” People need to be afforded the ability to make positive choices that can positively impact their lives. It is not beyond the focus of economic development to ensure that educational structures are in place so that an individual can get the training needed to obtain a good paying job. Moreover, the business that has that good paying job needs to operate in an environment where it can thrive, grow and need new employees.

Another person’s path to financial mobility might be through entrepreneurship. Conditions in the region need to be such that entrepreneurs, despite geography or demographic background, can thrive. The **Support People** objective: Ensure there are equitable opportunities, programs and quality housing at accessible rates in place so that existing residents can make decisions that will positively affect their lives, and develop strategies to attract new, civically-engaged people who will participate in the workforce or start new employer businesses.

Why **Build Capacity** as a goal? The region needs human capacity and capital due to an aging workforce and population. The region needs greater financial capacity and sophistication so that projects can move from ideas to execution. The region needs more knowledge capacity so that economic development becomes better understood as a means to increase quality of life. The **Build Capacity** objective: Build economic development capacity and awareness throughout the region so that the region can become more resilient, equitable, attractive, wealthy and competitive.

Why **Advance Growth and Sustainability** as a goal? The past three years have amplified the region’s need to think more deeply about how the region can be in the best possible position to succeed. In the span of four years the region has experienced health and economic shocks, and now, at the time of this writing, significant inflation. The region needs to be better prepared to anticipate and withstand a wide variety of shocks. The **Advance Growth and Sustainability** objective: Uplift the region’s ability to withstand national or international economic shocks, loss of significant employers, or climate-related shocks by making the region more aware of risk and increasing its ability to respond.

The pages that follow capture and highlight some – certainly not all – of the relevant activity since CEDS 2017. There is information that depicts where the region is currently from a demographic, employment, wage and industry well-being perspective. There is information which provides insights into data and opinions shared for the creation of this document, specifically the perceived strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats facing the region. The data and public engagement inform the goals and strategies which will be seCTer’s focus for the next five years.



Paul Whitescarver
Executive Director, Southeastern Connecticut Enterprise Region



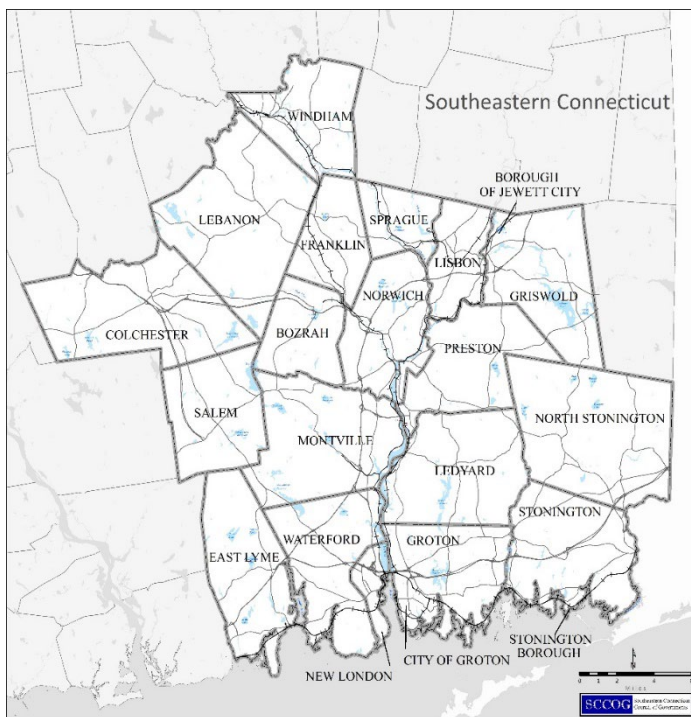
Sean Nugent
Board Chair, Southeastern Connecticut Enterprise Region



Date

1 Introduction

The **Southeastern Connecticut Enterprise Region (seCTer)** is a nonprofit, public-private regional economic development agency serving the municipalities and Native American tribal nations of Southeastern Connecticut. The seCTer region, also known as an economic development district (EDD), is coterminous with New London County with the following exceptions: 1) the region includes the Town of Windham, which is in Windham County, and 2) the region excludes three New London County municipalities: Lyme, Old Lyme and Voluntown (Figure 1).



Windham County, and 2) the region excludes three New London County municipalities: Lyme, Old Lyme and Voluntown (Figure 1).

The mission of seCTer is to promote and preserve the region's attractiveness, to encourage new businesses, and to assist and nurture existing and expanding local enterprises. seCTer is the agency responsible for developing and implementing the **Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS)** for the Southeastern CT Economic Development District, in close partnership/coordination with the **Southeastern CT Council of Governments (SCCOG)** and other regional organizations. This document follows the 2017 **Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS 2017)**.¹

Figure 1. Southeastern CT Economic Development District (EDD)

¹ seCTer's CEDS 2017 is recognized by the National Association of Development Organizations (NADO) and presented on its webpage as one of nine CEDS Spotlight case studies ([CEDS Spotlight: Southeastern Connecticut Enterprise Region - NADO](#)). Through these case studies, NADO highlights best practices and innovative elements of CEDS planning, development and implementation from EDDs and other regional development organizations across the country.

The 22 cities, towns and boroughs that comprise the seCTer EDD consist of urban, suburban and rural areas with a 2020 population of 279,918 spread along the shoreline of Long Island Sound and inland along the Thames, Shetucket, Quinebaug and Yantic Rivers.

In the absence of county government, each municipality provides its own government services and is a member of the SCCOG. Sixty-four (64) census tracts make up the region, eight of which are federally-designated Opportunity Zones. The EDD does not align with county borders and includes all but three towns in New London County and one municipality in Windham County. Of the 20 municipalities in the EDD, eight appear on Connecticut's 2022 Distressed Municipalities List, including three among the top five most distressed municipalities. For a region with under 8 percent of the state's population, it bears a disproportionate 32 percent of the state's distressed municipalities, a historical factor which led in great part to the region being officially designated an Economic Development District in 2011.

The purpose of CEDS 2023 is to provide **direction, focus** and a **framework** from which to proceed and to which local plans can align to gain validity and strength. CEDS 2023 provides flexible strategies able to adapt to both macro- and micro-economic conditions and allow full utilization of the region's unique advantages to maximize economic opportunity for its residents.

The **Regional Vision, broad objectives** and **flexible framework for implementation** developed for CEDS 2017 remain relevant today. However, the Covid-19 pandemic revealed inequities in the region and economy with respect to healthcare, housing, funding, employment, and basic goods and services. To address these inequities, CEDS 2023 has aligned with the State of Connecticut's vision for an equitable and healthy recovery by identifying opportunities to collaborate and create a more equitable, supportive economy that everyone can participate in.

The three unique but mutually supportive 2023 CEDS goals – **Support People, Build Capacity, and Advance Growth and Sustainability** – are linked to the seven key strategies in CEDS 2017 (Table 1) and existing regional plans (Figure 2). Thus, the past informs the present, which allows the region to evolve and develop new key objectives while maintaining historically important focus areas.

Table 1. CEDS 2023 Goals Alignment with CEDS 2017 Strategies

Support People

- Ensure every resident, existing and prospective business owner, employee and visitor to SECT has access to and palpably feels our quality of life tied to a strong place, by recognizing, strengthening and promoting our enviable regional assets, such that civic pride takes firm root.
- Identify and work to resolve any disparities and challenges impacting economic and community development related to each of the five components of the transportation network (transportation infrastructure; motor vehicles and containers; mobile workforce; propulsion system and power supply; and operation).

Build Capacity

- Build (expand) the capacity, systems and networks necessary to successfully and continuously adapt to future disruptions in the economy and create and support a more inclusive, resilient economy.
- Reposition SECT region as one innovation economy by continually transforming our current systems, structures and physical landscapes into those that are aligned, inclusive, supportive and innovative.
- Invest in tools needed to transition from an educational system designed for the industrial age to a system designed for the future business needs and that focuses on preparedness, competency, inclusivity, diversity and creativity.

Advance Growth and Sustainability

- Achieve greater regional efficiency through equitable and sustainable fiscal policy.
- Engage in collaborative efforts to identify the largest regional vulnerabilities, and share resources (planning, engineering, and monetary resources) to enhance regional resilience.



Figure 2. CEDS 2023 Goals Alignment with Key State and Regional Plans

As the world continues to live through and recover from the Covid pandemic, EDDs across the nation are considering creative and innovative methods to improve their respective region's resilience to shocks and disruptions. While not directly focused on job retention and creation, CEDS plays a key role in facilitating economic prosperity by building awareness, inspiring action and identifying the resources needed to open up pathways to success.

The social disruption and unrest during the pandemic period also demonstrated both the need to emphasize and clearly articulate the benefits of equitable economic disbursement throughout society and the perils of ignoring same. Underlying inequities were exacerbated by the pandemic which impacted unevenly along lines of race, age, class, gender and disability. CEDS 2023 is developed through a lens of resiliency, equity and opportunities for alignment in recognition that all three elements are key components of a stronger and more prosperous region (Table 2).

Figure 3 illustrates how CEDS 2017 shared outcomes are still relevant today. Shared Outcomes 1 and 2 are reversed to place greater emphasis on resilience and inclusivity, as well as introducing the overarching goals of Support People, Build Capacity and Advance Growth and Sustainability. Economic development takes time, and it is important to understand how priorities evolve after large economic shocks such as a pandemic.

CEDS 2023 meets the requirements set forth in 13 C.F.R. § 303.7 and updates CEDS 2017 and all prior updates and project lists. CEDS 2023 has been approved by seCTer, the Southeastern Connecticut Council of Governments (SCCOG), the State of Connecticut Department of Economic and Community Development (DECD), Connecticut Office of Policy Management (OPM), and the U.S. Department of Commerce, Economic Development Administration (EDA).

Table 2. The Principles of Economic Resilience, Equity and Alignment Defined

Principle	Definition
Economic Resilience	Economic development, planning and implementation that develops a regional economy with three attributes: the ability to recover quickly from a shock, the ability to withstand a shock, and the ability to avoid the shock altogether. Often, the shocks/disruptions to the economic base of an area or region are manifested in three ways: 1) downturns or other significant events in the national or international economy which impact demand for locally produced goods and consumer spending, 2) downturns in particular industries that constitute a critical component of the region’s economic activity, and/or 3) other external shocks (natural or man-made disaster, closure of a military base, exit of a major employer, climate change impacts, business decisions/practices, etc.).
Equity	Economic development, planning or implementation that advances the quality or ideal of being just, fair and impartial across Southeastern Connecticut through investments that directly benefit one or more traditionally underserved populations, including but not limited to: Women, Blacks, Latinos, Indigenous and Native American persons, Asian Americans, and Pacific Islanders; and underserved communities within geographies that have been systemically and/or systematically denied a full opportunity to participate in aspects of economic prosperity such as tribal lands, persistent poverty counties and rural areas with demonstrated, historical underservice.
Alignment	Cross-sector alignment with and integration of other local and regional plans and systems into CEDS to begin to build a common framework for regional economic development. This will increase the efficiency and efficacy of plans and systems, improve stakeholder engagement, increase funding opportunities, and optimize collaboration efforts. Acknowledge and align behind the public sector’s role in investing in new ideas, knowledge transfer, and infrastructure to build a foundation so that the private sector can flourish (i.e., economic development to promote regional prosperity).

The Vision, Shared Outcomes and Broad Objectives of CEDS 2017 remain relevant today, and the slightly different global and regional impact factors encountered during the past five years have shaped the broad goals of CEDS 2023.

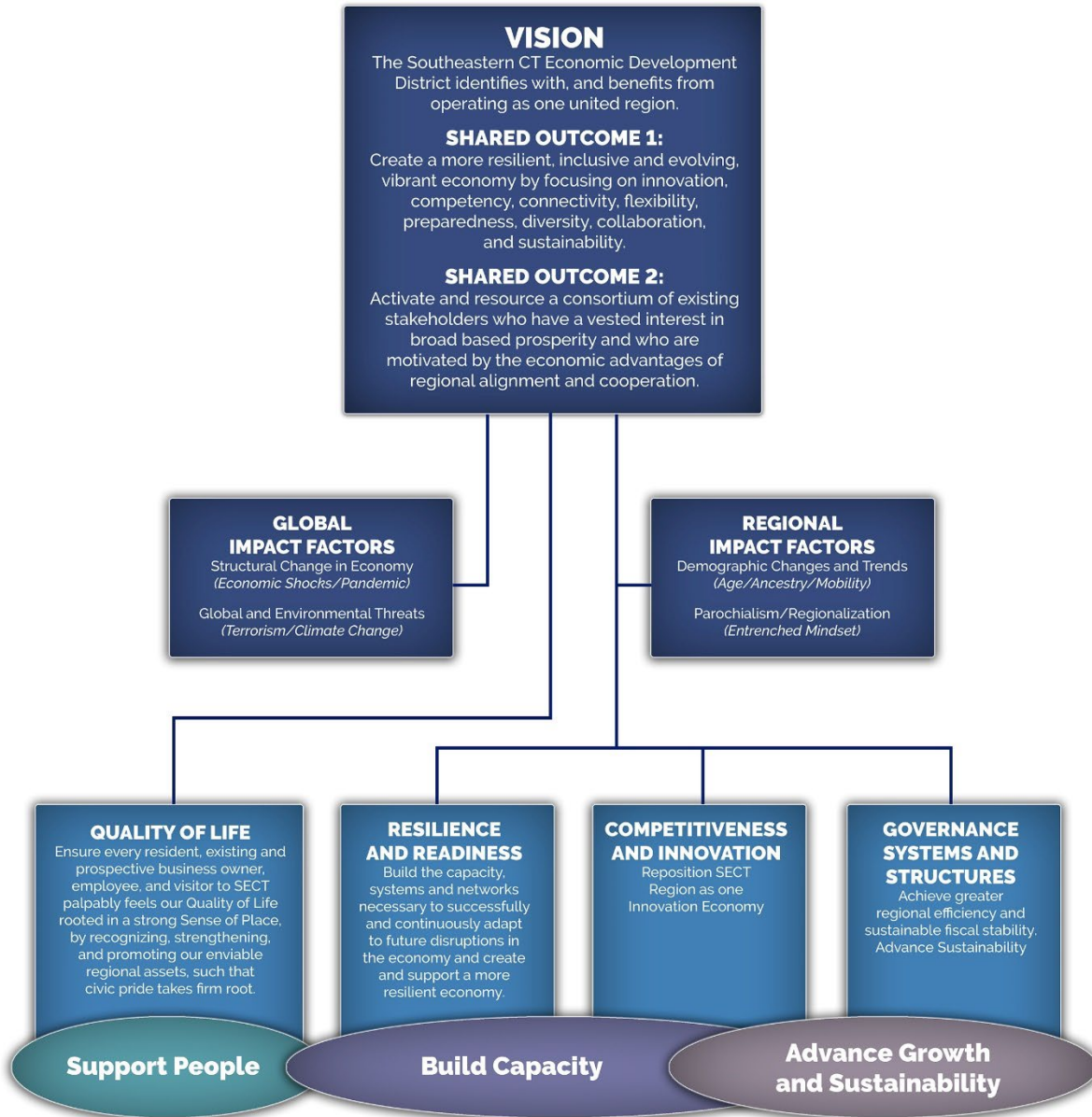


Figure 3. CEDS 2023 Vision and Shared Outcomes

2 Overview of the Economy

2.1 The New (Post Pandemic) Normal

The focus of regional economic development has shifted considerably since CEDS 2017. CEDS 2017 focused on the transition from manufacturing-focused industries and jobs to a knowledge-based and innovation focused economy using technology-led economic development practices. CEDS 2017 also referenced continued recovery from the Great Recession.² In March 2020, the phrase ‘Covid-19’ entered the lexicon and the world quieted due to a world-wide pandemic. The pandemic exposed serious and substantial racial, gender and income inequality and occurrences of social injustice which has since shifted local and national economic development priorities. For example, the EDA’s investment priorities now include:

- Equity
- Recovery and resilience
- Workforce development
- Manufacturing and technology-based economic development
- Environmentally sustainable economic development
- Exports and direct foreign investments

As a result, seCTer too has moved to modify key activities and alter the focus of the region’s strategic goals and activities in the post pandemic period, the “New Normal.”

The pandemic amplified regional challenges that have been themes in prior CEDS: housing equity and supply; vulnerability of hospitality industry and service workers in general; and the need for wrap-around services to support the regional workforce. The threat of exposure to Covid-19 was greater to service and healthcare workers as they were not able to work remotely, a benefit afforded to those working in professional and

² The Great Recession began in December 2007 and ended in June 2009, making it the longest recession since World War II. In addition to its duration, the Great Recession was notably severe in several respects. Real U.S. gross domestic product (GDP) fell 4.3 percent from its peak in 2007Q4 to its trough in 2009Q2, the largest decline in the postwar era (as of October 2013). The U.S. unemployment rate, which was 5 percent in December 2007, rose to 9.5 percent in June 2009, and peaked at 10 percent in October 2009. As late as November 2013, the unemployment rate remained at 7.3 percent. Even with a federal funds rate of zero percent and additional efforts by the Federal Reserve to stimulate that national recovery, the recovery in late 2013 was characterized as “slow and grudging” (“The Great Depression” at [The Great Recession | Federal Reserve History](#)).

technical jobs. The exposure risks and other pandemic-related challenges many workers could not overcome helped fuel the so-called “Great Resignation,” which combined with an aging workforce has resulted in the tightest regional and national labor markets seen in years.

Despite labor shortages, inflation and lingering supply-chain issues, many people are still starting new businesses. And some of the pandemic-related challenges were met by innovation and technology. The adoption of synchronous online meeting technologies, such as Zoom, allowed municipalities to continue to conduct business, provide services and engage with the public and constituents. The internet also helped businesses gain access to much-needed information regarding pandemic relief funds and other critical information. Many homeowners in rural and suburban areas took advantage of the pandemic-fueled demand of city dwellers seeking more rural/less urban settings to sell their homes at considerable profit, while contractors and tradesmen benefited from a surge in home renovations for home offices.

People rediscovered the outdoors, public parks experienced historic attendance, and the sale of boats and recreational vehicles skyrocketed. Businesses had unparalleled access to capital through robust pandemic relief funding made available during and after the pandemic, which should help new business starts and existing businesses to grow, expand and become more resilient for years to come.

There is much work to do, however. Attention must be directed to regional and local levels when talking equity, inclusiveness, capacity and resilience. Members of decision-making organizations, agencies, elected officials and policy-makers members must reflect the diversity of age, ethnicity, income and gender found in the towns and region they serve. Only through industry diversification, alignment behind a common vision, coordinated collaboration to systematically remove barriers to equitable access and participation in the economy, and improved response readiness to future disruptions will the region become more resilient. A way to reinforce success while supporting areas in need must be found.

While the pandemic shuttered schools and businesses and disrupted lives, leaders in the SECT EDD met with increased frequency and urgency and collaborated in new ways. Traditional meetings and modes of communication were no longer as effective or convenient as before. Through a period of trial and error, EDD’s leaders gradually discerned that new and expanded partnerships were needed to steady the region. Small, highly reactive and proactive groups became important for sharing best practices among economic development professionals and their partners. New focus areas became critical. Moving the region’s economic development (and, at the time, economic preservation) forces in the same direction was imperative. Alignment of organizations was central to restoring efficient and effective economic activity.

2.2 Emerging from the Pandemic

2.2.1 Regional Disruptions

The Covid-19 pandemic posed an even greater challenge than the global financial crisis that led to the Great Recession. The anxiety triggered by the uncertainty as to how and when the pandemic would end impacted leaders, employers and workers alike. The pandemic’s burdens, however, have fallen unevenly, impacting marginalized populations more severely. The pandemic caused many to question the effectiveness of “linear

Inclusive Revitalization:

Overcoming economic distress in a way that provides the opportunity for all residents, especially historically excluded populations to benefit and contribute.

- Urban Institute

thinking” with respect to problem solving and overcoming challenges, and to realize the importance of collaboration. There was no “normal way” to handle the devastating impacts of the pandemic, and there was no clear “new normal” to embrace. The gross disparities revealed left an acute awareness that pre-pandemic conditions were inherently unstable and would remain so without a concerted effort to reduce stresses/stressors such as chronic poverty, lack of economic and/or educational opportunity, lack of affordable housing and/or poor access to a variety of transportation modes. This

effort must begin with a clear understanding that diversity, equity and inclusion are critical components of a resilient region able to overcome challenges and minimize impacts from future disruptions.

The most significant disruptions attributable to the pandemic include:

- **Job loss and unemployment** due to business closures, lay-offs, resignations of workers with children due to no childcare and a need for homeschooling, and early retirement (the “Great Resignation”). At the local government level, the non-education workforce across all Connecticut municipalities dropped by about 2,900 positions during the pandemic, giving new meaning to the phrase “lean government,” and this on top of prior municipal workforce reductions geared to balancing local budgets in response to the Great Recession.

Figure 4 illustrates the percent change in employment from the prior year within SECT EDD, State of Connecticut and U.S for the period 2012Q4 – 2022Q4. Employment losses due to the pandemic are clearly indicated by the steep losses beginning 2019Q4.

- **Loss of housing** due to foreclosures and evictions coupled with a lack of available and/or affordable housing for residents to transition into. According to Zillow Data Research, the cost of homes in New London County increased by 38 percent since June 30, 2020 and by 110 percent since 2000. Interestingly, the primarily rural county directly to the north, Windham County, had increases of 39 percent since June 30, 2020 and 145 percent since 2000, Connecticut’s highest percentage increase. CT Fair Housing data reveal an increase from 9

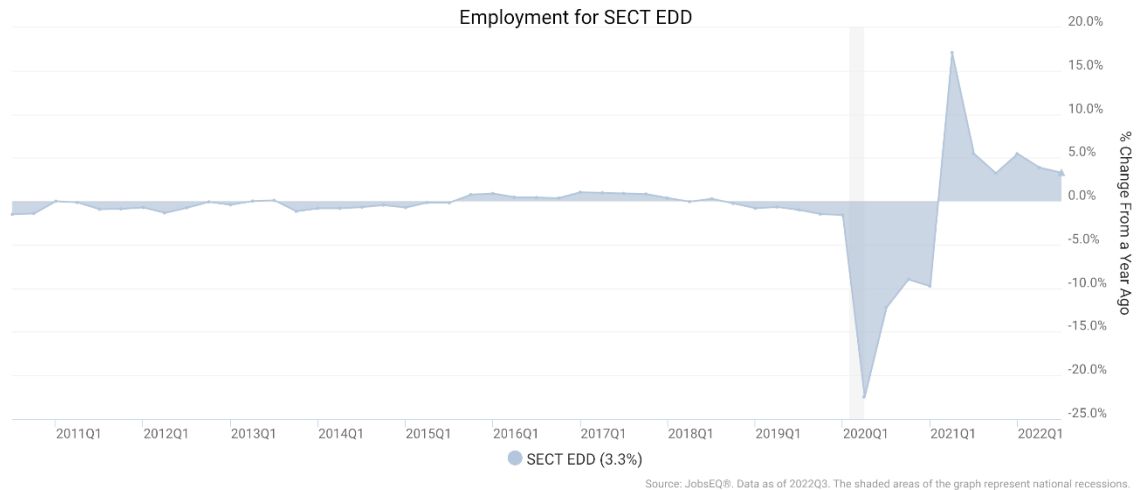


Figure 4. Percent Change in Employment from Prior Year in SECT EDD
Source: JobsEQ® as of 2022Q3

percent to 35 percent in “no-cause” evictions from the six-month period just prior to the pandemic to the period between August 2021 and February 2022. Studies show that women and people of color are more likely to be evicted. Given the estimated shortage of 85,400 affordable units of housing in the state, and the sharp increases in sales prices and rents, there are precious few housing options available.

- **Steep increases in the cost of living** caused by increased home values (and therefore higher property taxes) and a sharp increase in cost of goods and services, particularly the cost of food in part fueled by food shortages. The hardships created by rising costs and loss of income/employment and/or housing have been further intensified by the loss of funding for nonprofits who deliver the bulk of state-sponsored social services that many rely on to survive. The Day, a daily newspaper covering a 20-town region in eastern Connecticut with a daily and Sunday readership of nearly 37,000, launched the Housing Solutions Lab, which is series of public discussions, podcasts and journalism to uplift and broaden the conversation around regional housing affordability.
- **Health crisis** evidenced in Covid hospitalizations and death, long-Covid complications, and non-Covid related health problems untreated/ undiagnosed.
- **Disproportionate impact to tourism and hospitality industry** reflected in the closure of casinos and other major area attractions and restaurants, which significantly impacted lower wage earners. By April 2020, one month into the pandemic, the leisure and hospitality employment statewide had decreased 45 percent from 157,900 to 87,000 employees. Many of the jobs remain unfilled with approximately 10,000 fewer workers at the start of 2022 than there were two years prior in the tourism and hospitality industry. This figure does not

include Native American casino employment which is included under Government Employment rather than Tourism and Hospitality. Private sector employment was 92.4 percent recovered as of October 2022.

Covid-19 revealed deep inequities, the necessity of more flexible work schedules and spaces, the importance of housing and access to healthcare, and the need for a healthier work-life balance. The pandemic disrupted long-standing familiar relationships with physical spaces and traditional ways of earning an income.

Two of the most transformative consequences of the pandemic are the opportunities to learn and conduct business remotely. Remote work created opportunities for those who had been excluded traditionally from the job market such as stay-at-home parents, primary caregivers or those with disabilities. Workers without adequate or reliable transportation who could work from home had their transportation burden ameliorated as well.

Remote learning/work also revealed new challenges for different groups of people such as those with inadequate internet at home or those without a private space so as not to expose aspects of their personal life that could potentially jeopardize their career or result in discrimination. Low-wage workers (often women and minorities) have been excluded from remote work opportunities due to the nature of their jobs, e.g., nursing, retail and food, and other key service positions. Unlike most higher-wage white-collar jobs, low-wage service jobs lost during the pandemic have not been fully recovered, further exacerbating Connecticut's wealth inequality and accentuating the need to create additional pathways to wealth and fully engage any untapped workforce.

Shortages in teachers and school supplies have disproportionately impacted schools in rural areas, particularly those in high poverty areas, and/or with greater percentages of minority students ([Teacher and supply shortages linger in nation's public schools - The Washington Post](#)).

Most of the significant problems – those critical to survival – brought to the forefront during the pandemic, whether related to access to healthcare, education, safe housing, transportation, employment, or declining mental and physical health, were proven to be far more widespread in low-income and minority communities.

Ensuring the availability of goods and services is a key component of economic resiliency which hinges on the ability to create and implement plans that advance equity through investments that directly benefit underserved populations and communities systematically denied full participation in the economy. The pandemic has provided the perfect opportunity to create truly equitable spaces within a given system (education, healthcare, employment, etc.) that accommodate and support *all* people in ways that allow them to equally and fully participate in the economy.

2.2.2 Impacts to Towns

The **Connecticut Town Economic Index (CTEI)** measures each municipality's overall economic health. The four economic indicators used in compiling the CTEI are 1) total covered business establishments, 2) total covered employment, 3) inflation-adjusted covered annual average wages, and 4) unemployment rate.

Every town in the SECT EDD saw its CTEI drop drastically between 2019 and 2020, and none has fully recovered (Figure 5). Urban towns initially dropped an average of 43 points, Suburban towns, 42 points, and Rural towns, 40 points. When compared with 2010, when employment recovery from the Great Recession began in CT, all but two municipalities showed increases in 2021. North Stonington experienced the fastest economic increase between 2010 and 2021, but still joined the Distressed Municipalities List in 2022 (Figure 6). New London was the only municipality whose CTEI fell between 2010 to 2021. Several other towns in the EDD saw a sharp rise in rank, most notably Norwich, Sprague, Griswold, Montville and Windham.

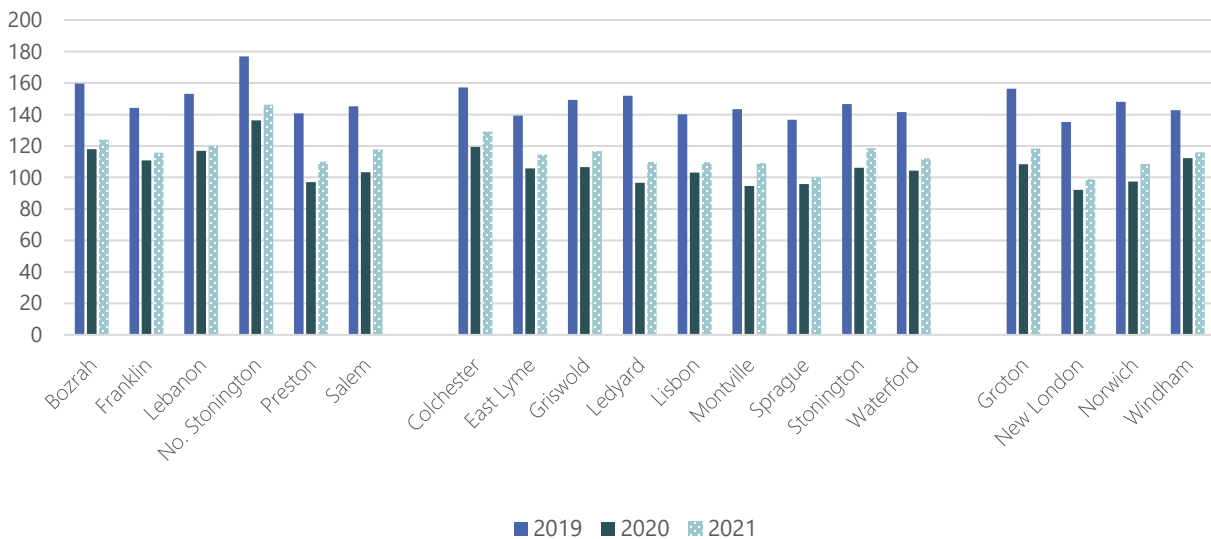


Figure 5. Change in CT Town Economic Index, 2019-2021

Source: CT Economic Digest

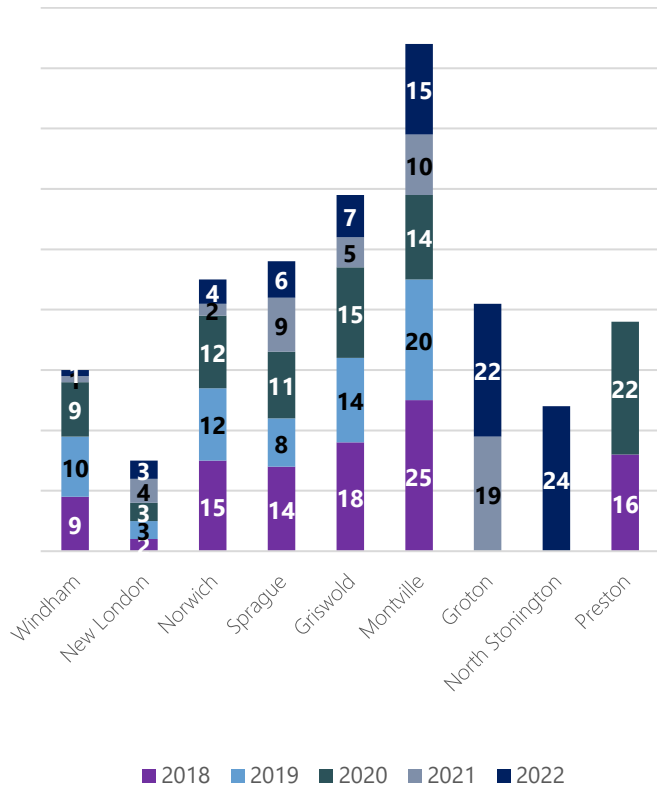


Figure 6. Rank of Distressed Municipalities in SECT EDD, 2018-2022

Source: [Distressed Municipalities \(ct.gov\)](#)

Collectively, municipalities in the region were allocated \$117,806,779 in funding through the federal American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) of 2021, \$1.9 trillion economic stimulus bill intended to speed up the country's recovery from the economic and health effects of the Covid-19 pandemic and the ongoing recession. Many towns designated a portion of their funding to support Covid mitigation efforts of Ledge Light Health District, the SCCOG Recovery Coordinator position, and art and culture initiatives through the Southeastern Connecticut Cultural Coalition, among others.

Municipalities were able to use ARPA funding for a wide variety of projects intended to provide immediate relief to businesses and residents. As reflected in the projects and programs funded, much of the funds were allocated to organizations that were best equipped to serve the immediate needs of the community while local governments developed more targeted programs to sustain ongoing recovery efforts. Towns were able to invest in much needed infrastructure and facility improvements, community connectivity improvements, sidewalks and traffic lights, park and public space revitalization projects, and open space planning. Towns were also able to provide direct assistance to struggling local businesses and households and fund housing rehabilitation programs.

2.2.3 Impacts to Local Businesses

Pandemic-related issues and impacts for businesses and industries included:

- Labor shortages
- Supply chain disruptions
- Business closures
- Lack of access to emergency funding
- Adjustments to operating hours
- Expansion into outdoor dining, take-out/delivery services

On a large scale, the pandemic underscored the need for greater investment in information technology infrastructure and research institutions. Locally, the ability to assist local businesses was crucial. There have been unparalleled investments at the national level for businesses, and SECT was able to capture some of that investment. Pandemic relief funds for businesses under the Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) resulted in 4,770 loans, which helped to retain nearly 50,000 workers in the region (Table 3).

Table 3. Summary of PPP Loans in New London and Windham Counties

County	No. of Loans	Jobs Retained	Amount Loaned (\$ million)
New London County, CT	3,562	35,539	\$251.8 - \$458.8
Windham County, CT	1,208	13,506	\$99.6 - \$190
	4,770	49,045	

Source: [Connecticut PPP Loans](#)

Norwich Public Utilities (NPU) and Three Rivers Community College (TRCC) are leading examples of how regional organizations in differing industry sectors were impacted by and responded to the pandemic. Details of their innovative approaches are provided in Appendix J.

The need for greater collaboration was central to CEDS 2017. The pandemic put the very concept of collaboration to the test. Through the implementation of CEDS 2023, seCTer aims to strengthen the collaborations formed during the pandemic and facilitate the creation of new ones. The pandemic exposed the vital connection between diversity, equity and inclusion, and resiliency. It exposed the instability of the economy due in part to the number of people excluded from participating in or contributing to it. The disruption has once again brought attention to the need to **refocus attention** to the local level; **identify the barriers** to building capacity and systems needed to enhance regional resiliency; **engage** in collaborative efforts; **activate** the untapped members of the economy; and **embrace** the diversity found in the region. The path to a more resilient region must begin with a shift in thinking and behavior at the local level and a willingness to align behind a shared vision for the region, rather than advancing (at

times) conflicting local priorities. Leadership must be aligned and actions must be sufficiently transformative to gain visibility and attract capital to move the whole region ahead.

CEDS 2017 was noted for its flexibility, and CEDS 2023 too is an adaptable document. The continued engagement of the CEDS Strategy Committee, SCCOG and the business community will help ensure that conversations about the direction and priorities identified in CEDS 2023 remain relevant and timely. With pandemic recovery still shifting the tides of the SECT EDD economy, CEDS 2023 aims to be a stabilizing force.

2.3 Regional Context

2.3.1 Demographic Trends | Socioeconomic Profile

CEDS 2017 was written with a focus on emerging from the Great Recession and developing strategies to create broad-based prosperity. As the region was finally recovering from the recession, the Covid-19 pandemic hit, and as before the impacts of

Education

Covid-19 impacted education on many levels. The sudden shift to online learning and cancellation of graduations and celebrations of achievement affected the social and emotional well-being of students, staff and parents.

Researchers at Columbia University concluded that disadvantaged students were more likely to be engaged in remote schooling during the pandemic, and fear that this less effective instruction will widen the achievement gap.

Disadvantaged students also often lack computer access or a quiet study area at home and are less likely to have help from parents or tutors.

Schools may be back in session, but staffing shortages are now an issue at every level – from bus drivers, cafeteria workers and housekeepers to para-educators, teachers and substitutes. Schools are also struggling to find funding for new federal and state covid recovery mandates.

(<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/12/24/us/remote-learning-student-income.html>)

this new disruption will not be fully known until years from now. [Note: Some of the data that informs the following section does not reflect 2022 conditions, and as such will not fully capture the impact of the pandemic. Additionally, 2020 Census data have not been fully released as of the time of this report.]

This section examines factors that contribute to the overall economic health of the region and its residents and addresses the region’s competitiveness and resiliency. CEDS 2017 characterized the 1 percent growth in population between 2005 and 2015 as being unable to support or sustain economic development. Recent Census data indicate a decline in the region’s population between 2010 and 2020 of just over 2 percent. Per the U.S. Census Bureau’s 2021 American Community Survey (ACS), the population of the seCTer region is 279,918, down (-1.15 percent) from 283,174 in 2017 (Figure 7). Between 2017 and 2021, 11 municipalities in the region saw a drop in population, the greatest in Bozrah at -6 percent. Waterford, Ledyard and Preston grew by 3 percent. Though the region has

lost residents, those who remain are younger when compared statewide, particularly in the 18-34 years age category (Figure 8).

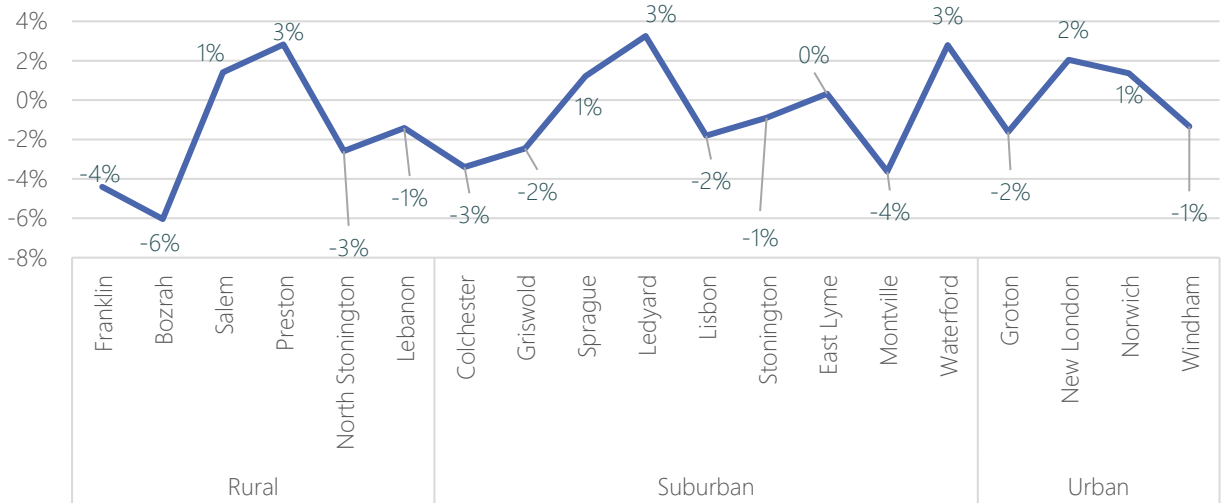


Figure 7. Population Change, Percent, 2017-2021
 Source: [Census Bureau Releases First Population Estimates for Connecticut's "County-Equivalent" Planning Regions — CTData](#)

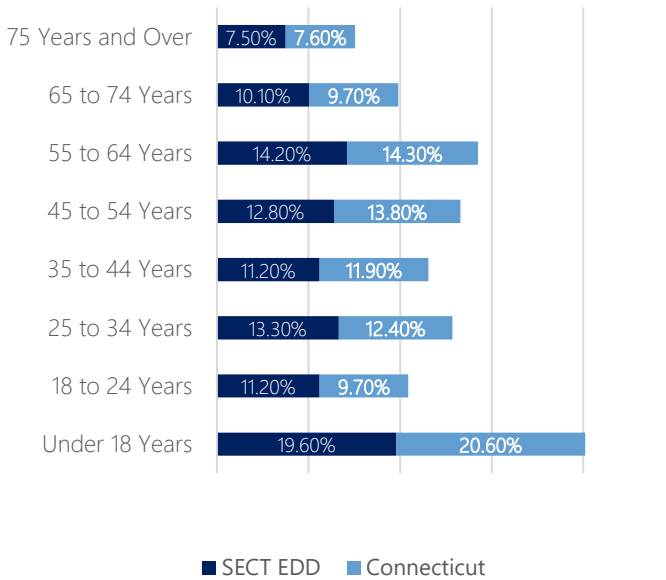


Figure 8. Age Distribution
 Source: [Census Bureau Releases First Population Estimates for Connecticut's "County-Equivalent" Planning Regions — CTData](#)

A comparison of race between 2017 and 2021 shows a 2 percent increase in population with two or more races and a 3 percent decrease in those identified as one race, suggesting that the seCTer region has become slightly more diverse (Figure 9). In New London County between 2010 and 2021, the share of the Hispanic/Latino population grew the most, increasing 3.5 percentage points to 12 percent. The White (non-Hispanic) population had the largest decrease, dropping 4.3 percentage points to 74.1 percent.

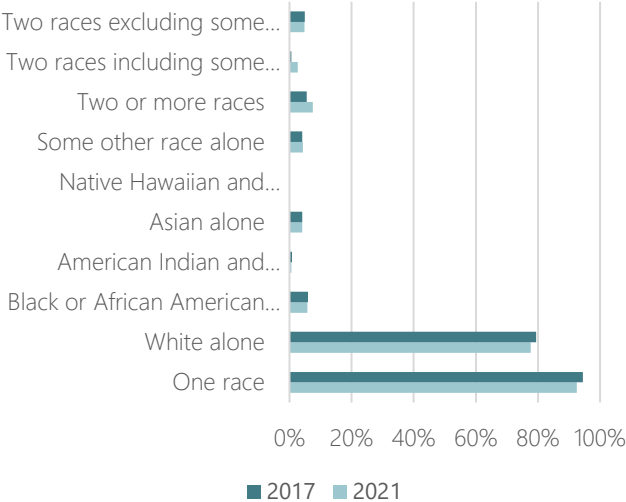


Figure 9. Race, 2017 & 2021
 Source: [Census Bureau Releases First Population Estimates for Connecticut's "County-Equivalent" Planning](#)

This is consistent with the 10-year trend of non-White population in the region. Salem, Montville and Preston are the only towns in the EDD to see their percentage of non-White population increase over the past 10 years (Figure 10).

Education attainment dropped slightly at the K-12 and College Undergraduate levels in the region. Windham saw a significant decline in K-12 graduation rates while EASTCONN, one of Connecticut's six nonprofit Regional Educational Service Centers serving 33 towns and 36 school districts in northeastern Connecticut, saw a 10 percent increase. Psychology and Business Administration topped the list of most awarded 4-year degrees in 2020-2021.

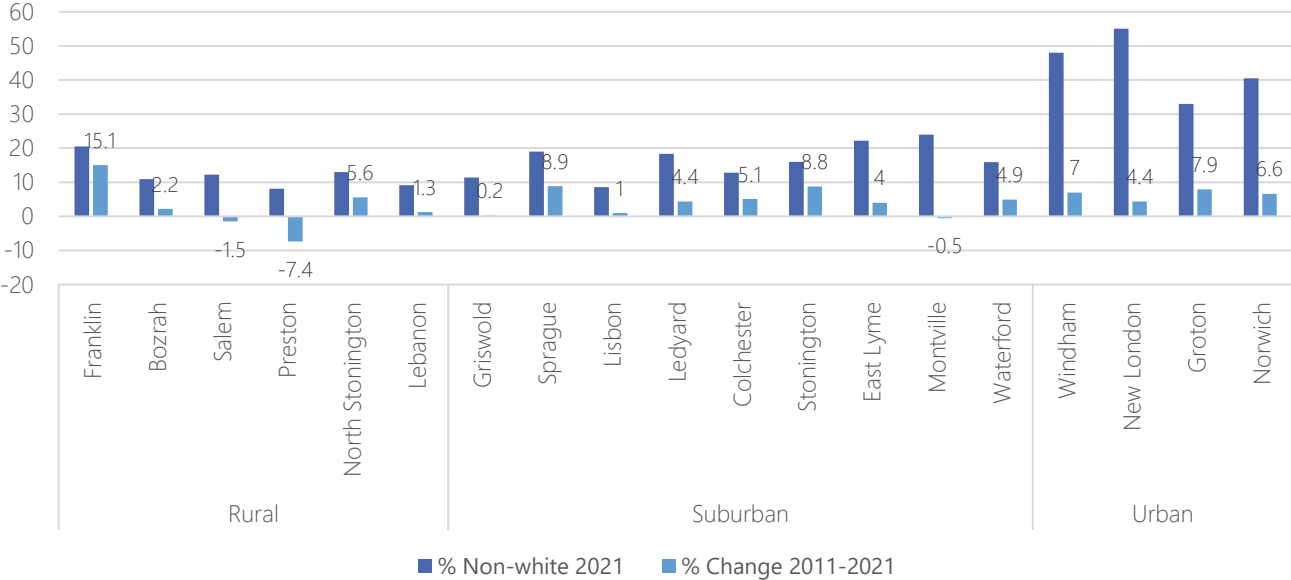


Figure 10. Percent Non-white Population and Percent Change, 2011-2021
 Source: [Census Bureau Releases First Population Estimates for Connecticut's "County-Equivalent" Planning Regions — CTData](#)

2.3.2 Employment and Wages

Similar to that during and after the Great Recession, unemployment rates in the region spiked in the pandemic, but unemployment rates in 2022 were lower than those reported in CEDS 2017 (Figure 11). Abundant opportunities exist for skilled workers in

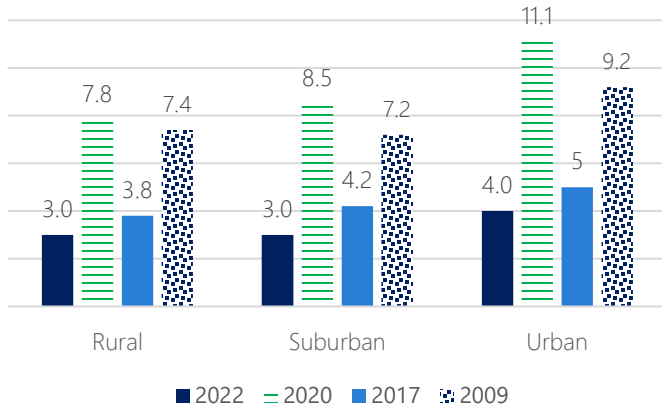


Figure 11. Average Annual Unemployment Rate
Source: [StatsAmerica](#)

the EDD given General Dynamics Electric Boat’s hiring projections of 3,050 workers in 2022 and beyond. Between 2017 and 2018, American Indian and Alaskan Native residents saw a significant drop in unemployment from 12.9 to 6.6 percent, but were the only group that experienced an overall increase in unemployment in 2020 (Figure 12). Race continues to play a role in unemployment as reflected by the unemployment rate of White workers being nearly half that of most other ethnic groups or those identified as “two or more races.” Interestingly, data indicate that

workers who lacked a high school diploma or college education still saw unemployment rates drop from 15.9 percent in 2017 to 8.1 percent in 2020, reflecting a tightening of the regional job market, but 2020 rates remain much higher than those with a college education.

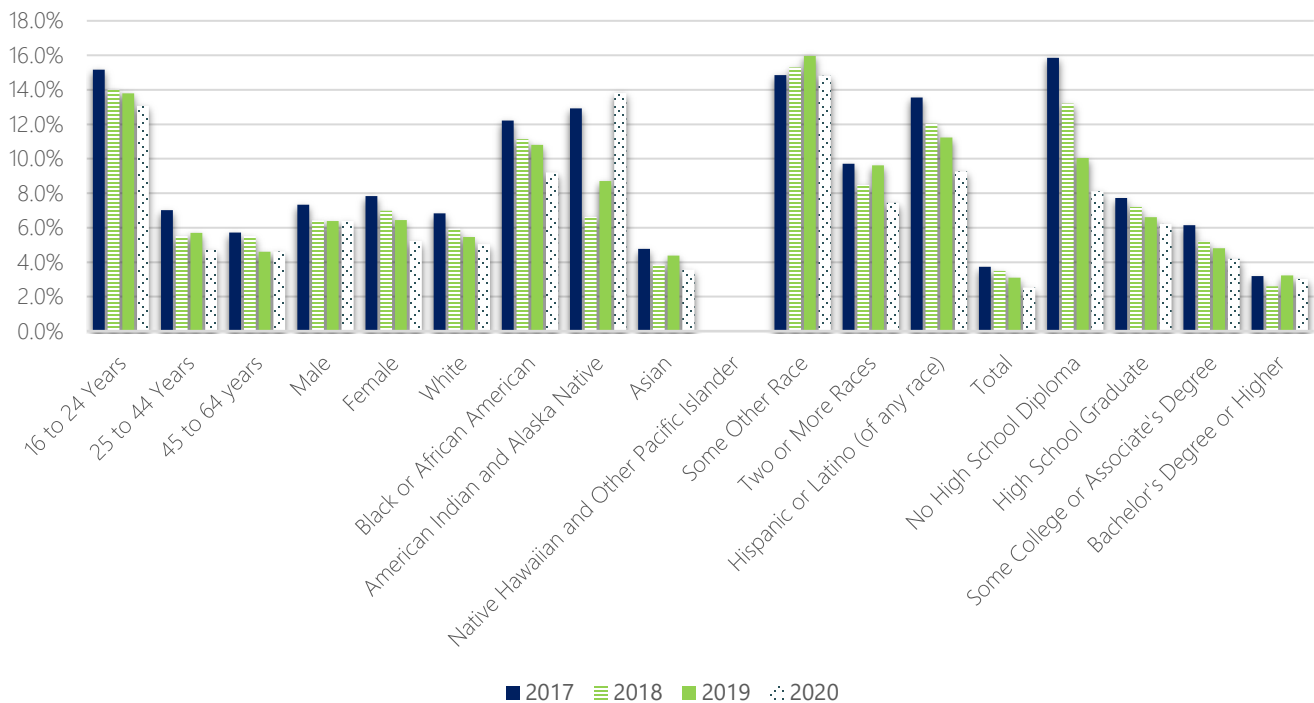


Figure 12. Percent Unemployment by Age, Gender, Ethnicity and Educational Attainment, 2017-2020
Source: [StatsAmerica](#)

Over the next year, employment in the SECT EDD is projected to contract by 1,089 jobs (-0.8 percent). The fastest growing sector in the region is expected to be Accommodation and Food Services with a +0.9 percent year-over-year rate of growth. The strongest forecast of employment growth over this period is expected for Accommodation and Food Services (+180 jobs), Mining, Quarrying, and Oil and Gas Extraction (-1), and Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation (-7) (JobsEQ® as of 2022Q3).

The largest industry sector in the SECT EDD is Health Care and Social Assistance, employing 20,905 workers, followed by Accommodation and Food Services (20,382

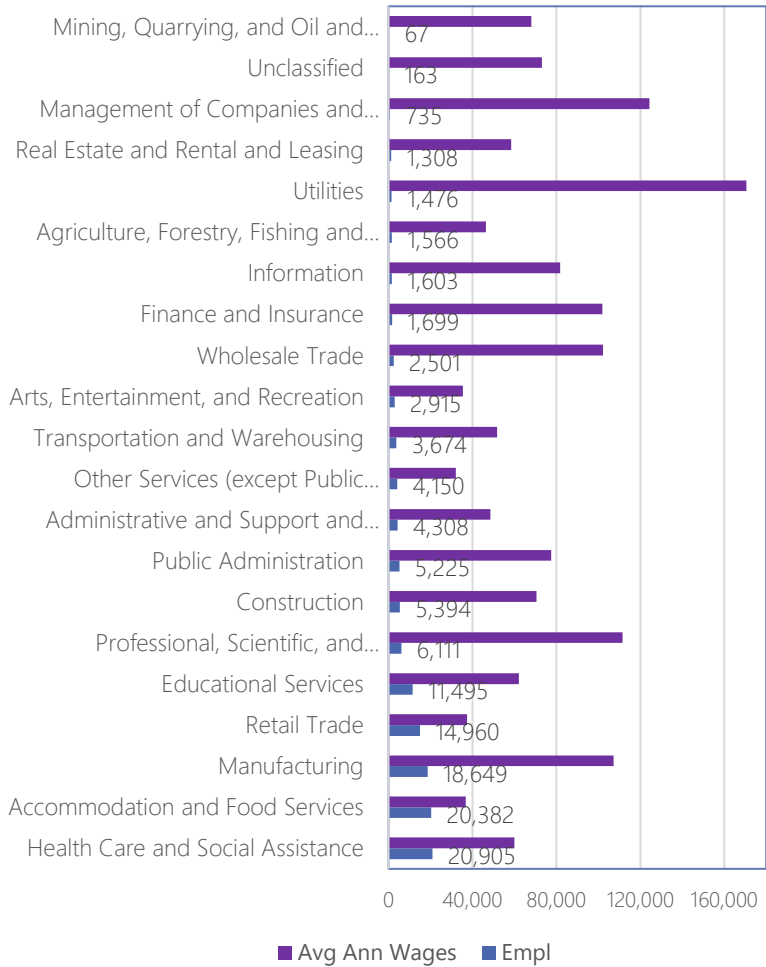


Figure 13. Employment and Wages in SECT EDD, 2022Q3
 Source: JobsEQ® as of 2022Q3

Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services (\$111,493) (Figure 13). Regional sectors with the best job growth (or most moderate job losses) over the last five years are Accommodation and Food Services (+6,566 jobs), Manufacturing (+1,176), and Administrative and Support and Waste Management and Remediation Services (+580) (JobsEQ® as of 2022Q3).

workers) and Manufacturing (18,649) (Figure 13). In terms of private industry, Health Care and Social Assistance is the largest employer with average wages of \$59,936. Manufacturing remains a key contributor to the region’s employment base with 18,649 workers with an average wage of \$107,000. Government-related employment, which includes the Tribal Gaming Authority, is also a significant source of jobs in the region, employing almost 25,900 people with payrolls exceeding \$407 million.

High location quotients (LQs) indicate sectors in which a region has high concentrations of employment compared to the national average. The sectors with the largest LQs in the region are Utilities (2.26), Accommodation and Food Services (1.86) and Manufacturing (1.78) (JobsEQ® as of 2022Q3).

Sectors in the SECT EDD with the highest average wages are Utilities (\$170,614), Management of Companies and Enterprises (\$124,289), and

The average worker in the SECT EDD earned annual wages of \$65,370 as of 2022Q3. Average annual wages per worker increased 4.3 percent in the region over the

preceding four quarters and are roughly \$12,000 more than they were in 2017. For comparison purposes, annual average wages were \$68,132 in the U.S. (JobsEQ® as of 2022Q3).

TVCCA Study

According to a study done by the Thames Valley Council for Community Action, Inc. (TVCCA), nearly 10% of TVCCA’s service area, New London County, lives in poverty. For segments of this population, the numbers are much higher. For example, 1 in 4 Hispanic residents and 1 in 5 Black residents live below 100% Federal Poverty Level (FPL), and 1 in 5 children under age 18 falls below 125% FPL. The causes and conditions of poverty in New London County can be summarized as follows:

- *Income-related – lack of jobs paying enough to support a family, lack of income from any source that is sufficient to meet the basic needs, racial/ethnic and gender inequalities*
- *Employment-related – wage gap between women and men*
- *Education-related – lack of access to education, affordable early childhood education and affordable higher education*
- *Housing-related – lack of affordable housing, conditions of poverty in New London County*
- *Most residents are employed but many are not earning enough to be self-sufficient*
- *44 percent of all New London County renters are cost burdened*
- *Reliance on benefit programs to supplement employment income*

- TVCCA-Community-Action-Plan-2020.pdf

2.3.3 Wage Inequality

When comparing salaries for full-time, year-round male and female employees, the wage disparity ranges from **\$14,000** (Service Industry) to **\$43,000** (Healthcare Practitioners and Technical) in favor of men, with the only exception being the Computer, Engineering and Science Industry, where the salaries for women were just over **\$3,000** higher than those for men in 2021. Regional inflation-adjusted data suggest earnings for women increased by 1.2 percent of male earnings between 2017 and 2021.³

Wage inequality is most pronounced when comparing household income and race. White, Non-Hispanic household income is approximately 43 percent higher than the household income for Blacks (ACS 5-year estimate. Census.gov data for New London County, the closest statistical area to SECT EDD).

While inequality persists in Connecticut, it did narrow slightly over the last two years due to mandated increases in the minimum wage and higher demand for workers. In May 2019 the CT Legislature passed and CT Governor Ned Lamont signed a law increasing the state’s minimum hourly wage from \$10.10 to \$11.00 on October 1, 2019, and then by another \$1.00 every

11 months thereafter until it reaches \$15.00 on June 1, 2023. Beginning January 1, 2024, the law indexes future annual minimum wage changes to the federal employment cost

³ U.S. Census Bureau data at [S2411: OCCUPATION BY SEX AND MEDIAN - Census Bureau Table](#) (2017 data) and [S2411: OCCUPATION BY SEX AND MEDIAN ... - Census Bureau Table](#) (2021 data).

index (Public Act No. 19-4, An Act Increasing the Minimum Fair Wage, [Public Act No. 19-4 for House Bill No. 5004](#)).

The pandemic put additional pressure on towns to rein in non-education expenses and personnel, meaning the workforce in many local police, fire, public works and land use offices were made even leaner than they were already before the pandemic. Similar to

The cost of living is 7.2 percent higher in SECT EDD than in U.S.

Area	Average Annual Salary	Cost of Living Index	U.S. Purchasing Power
SECT EDD	\$65,370	107.2	\$60,963
Connecticut	\$79,326	116.0	\$68,368
USA	\$68,132	100.0	\$68,132

Source: JobsEQ® data as of 2022Q3

the recovery from the Great Recession, the loss of public sector jobs slowed Connecticut’s recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic. Government at all levels can most directly address this problem by funding public sector jobs, which will boost wages for low- and middle-wage workers and subsequently increase their purchasing power.

The high cost-of-living index (107.2) for the region, reduces the purchasing power of the average annual wage in the EDD to only \$60,963 (JobsEQ® data as of 2022Q3). The high cost of living has likely contributed to some leaving the region, but overall New London County showed slightly more in-migrants than out-migrants between 2017 and 2021, with a net gain of 539 migrants (U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey).

*According to Connecticut’s **Gini Index**, which measures income inequality, workers in the SECT EDD contend with an income inequality index of .501, the second highest in the United States. The Gini Index for Connecticut was higher than the national average of 0.478. In other words, wages are distributed less evenly in Connecticut in comparison to the national average.*

The existing wage gap, high number of cost-burdened households, income inequality, lack of supporting services that allow full participation in the workforce, and decreased population resulting in part from the pandemic, all signal an opportunity for the region to develop strategies to “retool” its available workforce, provide services to enable participation by all in the workforce, and address inequalities in wages. seCTer’s ongoing CEDS work, including the development of CEDS 2023, comes at a time when stakeholders in the region are looking for a clear, cohesive plan to follow to build capacity and resiliency and address inequalities that directly impact the region’s economic wellbeing.

Median Household Income, 2020

White, non-Hispanics	\$79,933
Asian	\$80,943
Hispanics	\$54,803
Blacks	\$45,246
Two or More Races	\$67,414
Native American	\$52,330

Source: ACS 5-yr Est. Census.gov data for New London County, the closest statistical area to SECT EDD.

Developing CEDS 2023 is one thing; implementing it and allowing to evolve and adapt is another, requiring the cooperation and collaboration of key stakeholders throughout the region. The CEDS 2023 5-year implementation process is detailed in Section 5 Implementation and Evaluation Framework.

2.4 Regional Assets and Activity

CEDS 2017 detailed eight categories: Transportation, Utilities, Land Use and Agriculture, Tourism and the Creative Economy, Manufacturing and Defense, Education and Workforce Development, Healthcare, and Innovation.⁴ Highlights of significant projects, events or changes that have impacted the region over the past five years are presented in Appendix F, and will be updated periodically throughout the life of the plan.

The SECT EDD is strategically located within a day's drive of over 30 percent of the nation's effective buying income, retail sales and manufacturing firms (Figure 14). The region marks the midpoint between the major metropolises of New York and Boston, and is within an hour of New Haven and Hartford, CT, Springfield, MA, and Providence, RI – all significant urban centers providing additional economic and cultural opportunities for residents and business owners of SECT.

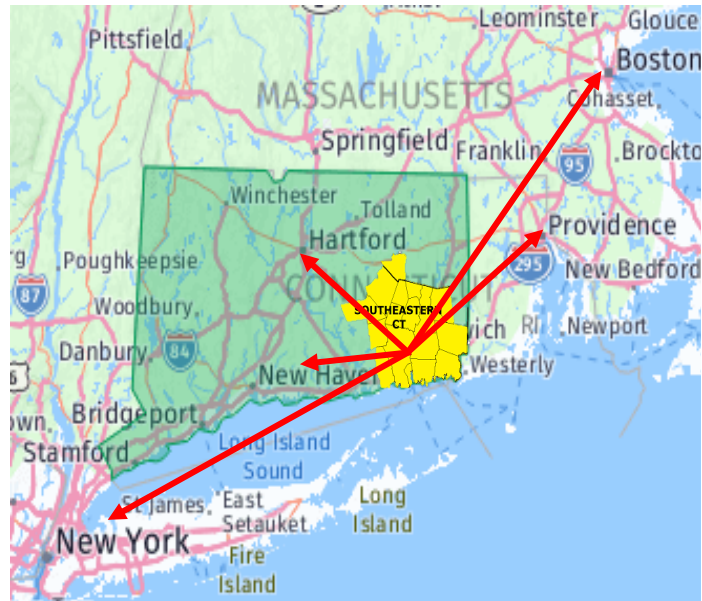


Figure 14. SECT EDD in Regional Context
Source: Base map from Google Maps

Long Island Sound forms the southern border, ranging from the Connecticut River to the Pawcatuck River and providing easy access to the shipping lanes of the Atlantic Ocean. Marine resources have influenced the region's economic growth and development since the 1600s. The deepwater port of New London enticed government entities and businesses to the region during the 19th and 20th centuries, most notably the U.S. Navy, the U.S. Coast Guard, General Dynamics Electric Boat, and Pfizer, Inc.

2.4.1 Transportation

The network of transportation corridors and services throughout the region consists of two major highways, freight and passenger rail lines, bus services, two regional airports, passenger ferry service, and shipping services (Figure 15). Interstate-95, serving the east-west corridor in the region, is the most heavily traveled thoroughfare along the Atlantic Coast from Florida to Maine (Figure 16).

⁴ Sections 1.4.1 – 1.4.8, CEDS 2017

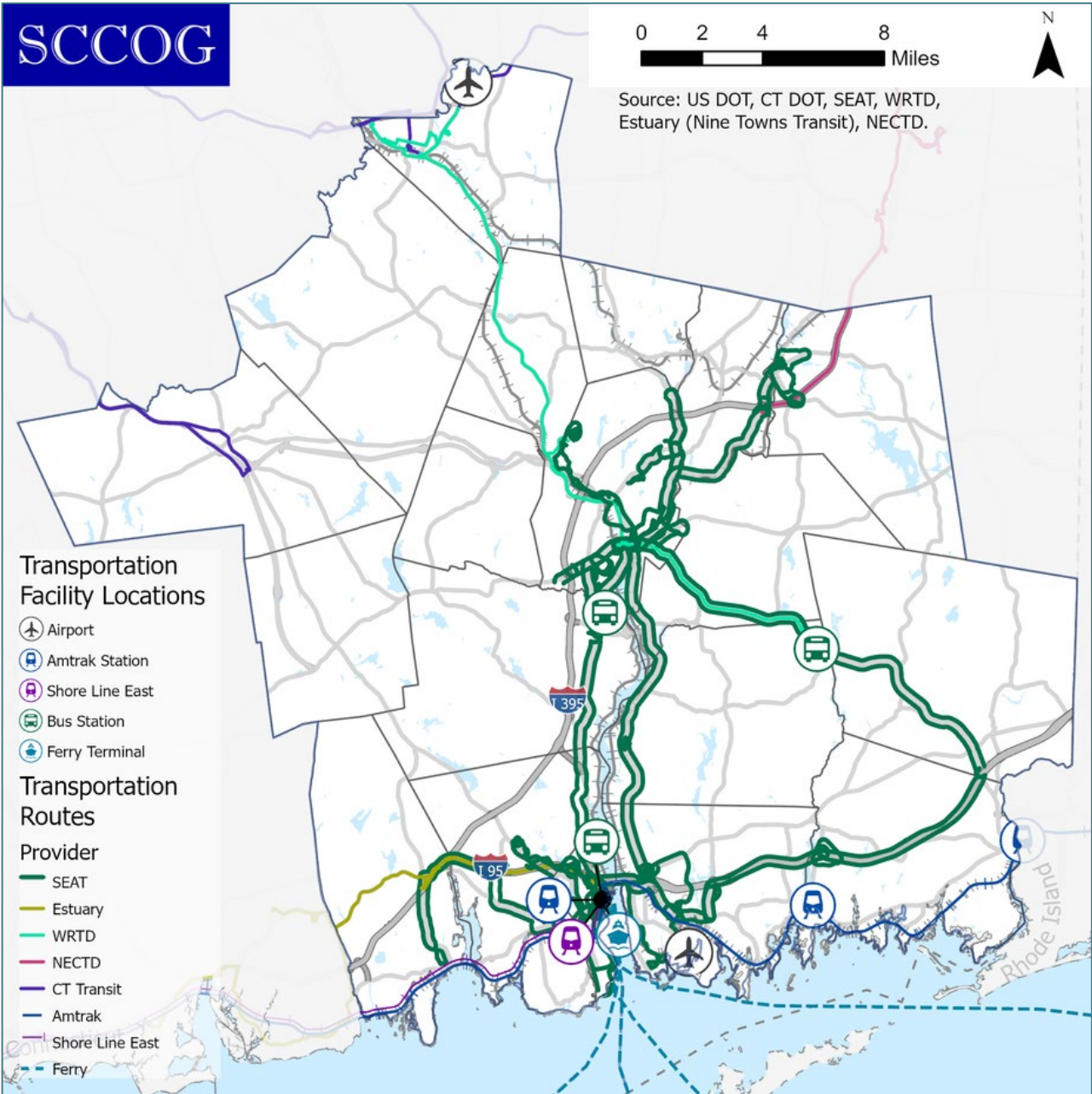


Figure 15. Transportation Facilities and Key Routes in SECT EDD
Source: USDOT, ConnDOT, SEAT, WRTD, Estuary (Nine Towns Transit), NECTD

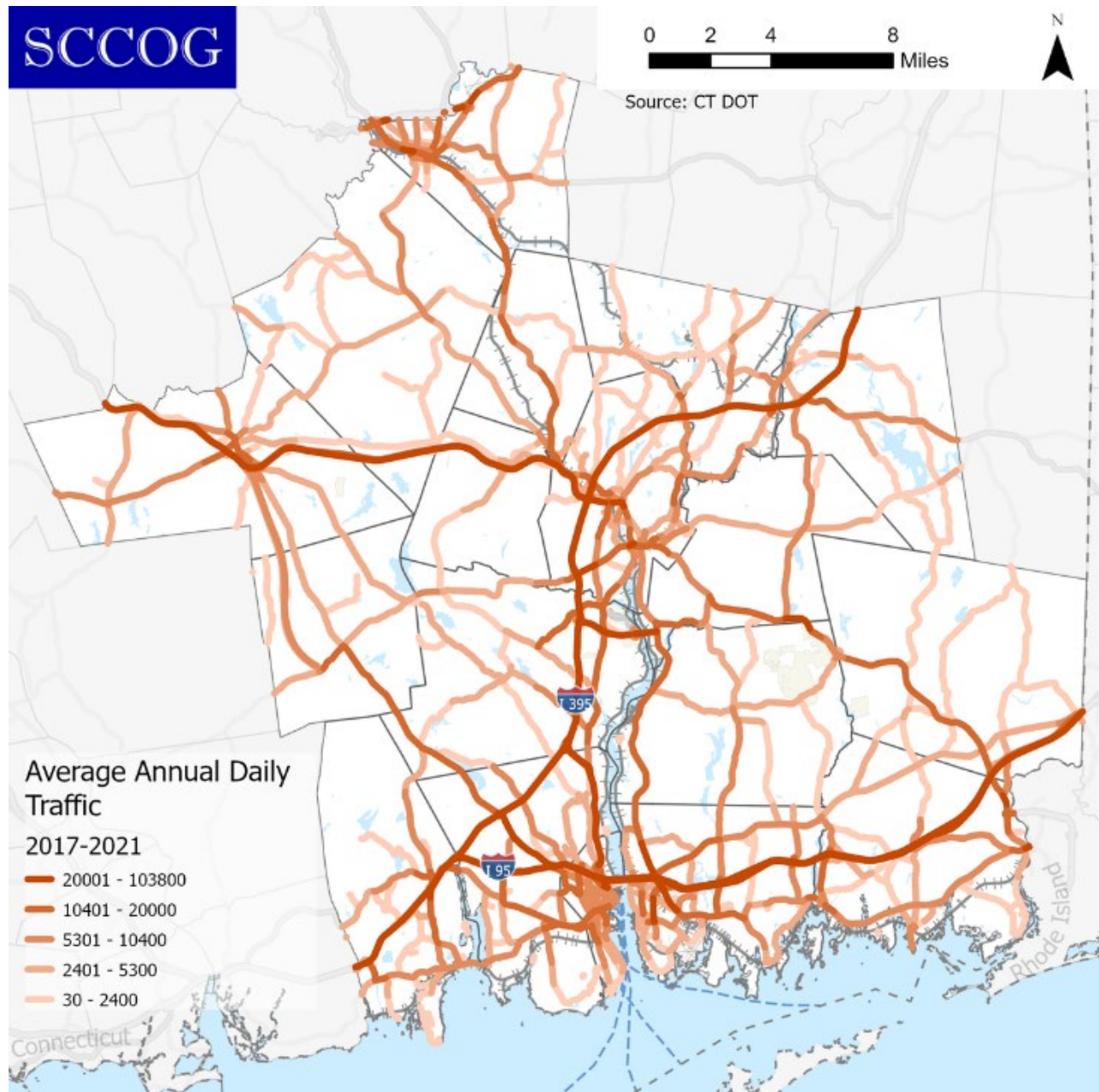


Figure 16. Average Annual Daily Traffic in SECT EDD, 2017-2021

Source: CT Department of Transportation

As identified in the SCCOG *Regional Plan of Conservation and Development 2017*, the region's dispersed development patterns have affected its ability to provide public transportation service at frequencies and to locations that effectively and efficiently serve its residents ([RPOCD Full-Document 11-16-2017.pdf \(seccog.org\)](#)). This has particular effect on residents who cannot drive or lack access to a vehicle. This issue is likely to grow in importance with an aging population.

The pandemic affected people's choices around mobility. Daily decisions about remote work and commuting, where to live or study, whether to go out to eat, shop or order on line, and whether to get on a plane to go on vacation or rent an RV all had a huge

impact on transportation. During the depths of the pandemic, people still used public transportation – many had to – but were wary of close contact forcing transportation service providers to adapt. The impacts of the pandemic on transit ridership remain and are reverberating through the transportation system, and transportation providers continue to explore innovative ideas to address safety concerns and maintain ridership.

Key transportation assets and providers in the region are listed in Table 4.

Table 4. Key Transportation Assets and Providers in the Region and Proximity

Asset	Provider	Description
Airports		
Groton-New London	Connecticut Airport Authority	Groton-New London Airport (GON) is a public-use, publicly-owned general aviation (GA) airport on 489 acres in Groton, CT, seven miles from the New London city center and in the Mystic Region, a popular area for visitors. The airport is home to the Army National Guard 1109th Theatre Aviation Sustainment Maintenance Group (TASMG).
Windham		Windham Airport (IJD) is a public use, publicly- owned GA airport on 280 acres Windham, CT. The University of Connecticut in Storrs is a 15-minute drive from the airport, and Eastern Connecticut State University is nearby in Willimantic.
Bradley International		Bradley International Airport (BDL) is a commercial service airport in Windsor Locks, CT, with portions of the airport extending into the Towns of East Granby, Windsor and Suffield. Flights to national and international destinations are available. The airport is currently the second-busiest airport in New England after Boston-Logan International Airport (BOS) in Boston, MA.
Tweed-New Haven	Tweed-New Haven Airport Authority	Tweed-New Haven Airport (HVN), a small commercial service airport in New Haven, CT, offers domestic flights to several airports in FL and a few others.
Railroads		
Passenger Rail	Amtrak	Amtrak provides passenger rail service with stops in New London and Mystic.
	Shoreline East	Shoreline East is a commuter rail service between New London and New Haven.
Freight Rail	New England Central Railroad Providence and Worcester Railroad	Freight rail is provided by New England Central Railroad (NECR) and the Providence and Worcester Railroad (P&W).

Asset	Provider	Description
Busses	Southeast Area Transit District (SEAT)	SEAT and WRTD provide limited bus service throughout the region.
	Windham Regional Transit District (WRTD)	
Ferries/Water Taxis	Cross Sound Ferry	Cross Sound Ferry provides service between New London and Long Island, NY.
	Thames River Heritage Park Water Taxi	Thames River Heritage Park Water Taxi provides service between Groton and New London.

One of the region’s prime transportation assets is the port of New London and its shore-based facilities, most notably the State Pier. Located at the mouth of the Thames River, the port of New London is a protected deepwater port with unobstructed access to the Atlantic Ocean and is situated along a federally-designated Maritime Highway.

One of the key emerging economic development forces in the EDD is the nascent but growing **offshore wind industry**, and the State of Connecticut is responding and reacting proactively. Public Act No. 19-71, An Act Concerning the Procurement of Energy Derived from Offshore Wind, was passed by the Connecticut General Assembly on June 7, 2019. The act requires the Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP), in consultation with others, to solicit proposals from Class I offshore wind facilities with a total nameplate capacity of 2,000 megawatts (MW) in the aggregate. Among other things, the act requires (1) bidders to include an environmental and fisheries mitigation plan for building and operating their offshore wind facilities, and (2) DEEP to establish a commission on environmental standards to inform these plans ([An Act Concerning the Procurement of Energy Derived from Offshore Wind](#)).

DEEP established the commission on environmental standards in June 2019, and the commission released its final report in August 2019. In June 2009 DEEP issued a request for proposals (RFP), subsequently receiving 46 bids from three developers: Constitution Wind (Bay State Wind), Mayflower Wind, and Vineyard Wind. In December 2019, DEEP selected Vineyard Wind’s 804 MW Park City Wind Project for development.

In August 2020, Public Utilities Regulatory Authority (PURA) approved power purchase agreements (PPAs) between Vineyard Wind and the state’s electric utilities for the Park City Wind Project and authorized the companies to recover costs and credit revenues through the non-by-passable federally mandated congestion charge (a component of ratepayer bills) ([Offshore Wind Procurement \(ct.gov\)](#)).

One key initiative currently underway in support of the offshore wind industry is the transformation of State Pier into a state-of-the-art, heavy-lift-capable port facility that will accommodate a wide variety of cargoes, including wind turbine generator staging and assembly. This expansion of the State Pier to accommodate all aspects of wind turbine assembly and delivery in particular will create an exciting opportunity for the region to become a significant hub for the offshore wind energy industry.

The State Pier project has received \$255 million in investment through a public-private partnership between the State of Connecticut and Revolution Wind (a 50/50 partnership between Eversource Energy, a major New England utility company, and Ørsted, a Danish wind farm developer): \$180 million through the quasi-public Connecticut Port Authority and \$75 million through Revolution Wind. Revolution Wind plans to begin utilizing State Pier in 2023, creating more than 400 new technically skilled jobs in the EDD.

The State Pier was also the catalyst for seCTer’s successful Phase I application in October 2021 to the U.S. Economic Development Administration’s (EDA) **Build Back Better Regional Challenge (BBBRC)**. seCTer received \$500,000 from EDA to further advance its development projects. In March 2022 a set of six projects forming an **Offshore Wind Industry Cluster (OWIC)** was submitted to EDA in BBBRC’s Phase II competition. The six projects, representing \$63 million in regional investment from EDA, the State of Connecticut and private partners, were aimed at diversifying and expanding the supply chain, providing waterfront industrial sites for development, building a green business park, leveraging a replicable workforce development model, supporting blue tech research and development, and bringing innovative new products to production. According to a regional economic modeling study commissioned by seCTer for the Phase II application, direct and indirect impacts due to the six projects would initially produce 9,000 jobs and sustain another 6,500 jobs for decades.

Unfortunately, the seCTer-sponsored OWIC was not named a Phase II awardee, but seCTer continues to actively market and promote the region to potential offshore wind developers ([About - seCTer \(southeasternctwind.com\)](https://southeasternctwind.com)).

2.4.2 Utilities

SECT EDD is fortunate to be served by several reliable local utility companies; however, despite this competitive advantage, energy costs in CT continue to be among the highest in the country (Table 5). Business expansion is prohibitively expensive due to the high cost of electricity, oil and gas. Limited public water, wastewater treatment capacity and natural gas supplies may limit some rural and suburban areas from providing the necessary utility infrastructure and services to support denser housing and increased commercial activity. Stakeholders in the region identified the need for **energy efficiency in real estate development** and the importance of **partnerships** and **collaboration** to leverage funding for necessary infrastructure.

Broadband availability and accessibility has taken on new importance as Covid-19 demonstrated just how unequal access and use of the internet is in the region and the

Table 5. Utility Providers in SECT EDD

Electric
Bozrah Light and Power
CT Municipal Electric Energy Cooperative (CMEEC)
Dominion Energy, Inc. ¹
Eversource Energy
Groton Utilities
Norwich Public Utilities
Natural Gas
Enbridge ²
Eversource Energy
Norwich Public Utilities
Water
Aquarion Water Company
Groton Utilities
Norwich Public Utilities
Southeastern CT Water Authority

Notes:

1. Dominion Energy operates the Millstone Nuclear Power Station, which generates almost half the electricity produced in CT.
2. Spectra Energy merged into the Canadian company Enbridge in February 2017.

U.S. as a whole. Broadband availability in the region still shows portions of the EDD where access is less than 25 percent in some areas (Figure 17). To address this on a national scale, the U.S. Congress included provisions in the American Rescue Plan Act to support broadband buildout and crafted and funded (\$42.45 billion) a new program, the **Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) Program**, as part of the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act. The program aims to expand high-speed internet access by funding planning, infrastructure deployment and adoption programs in all 50 states and territories of the U.S. Of note is a provision which funds the installation of internet and Wi-Fi infrastructure or providing reduced-cost broadband within a multi-family residential building, with priority given to buildings that have a substantial share of unserved households or is in a location in which the percentage of individuals with a household income that is at or below 150 percent of the poverty line ([Frequently Asked Questions and Answers Draft Version 2.0 \(doc.gov\)](#)).

2.4.3 Land Use and Agriculture

2.4.3.1 Land Use

SECT is a diverse setting with land that is designated rural, suburban and urban (Figure 18). While much of the region shows undeveloped land, development, in fact, has been in full swing over the past five years. The pandemic did not appear to

curtail development; on the contrary, many people now had the time to make the home improvements that had been put off during the recession, and both homeowners and developers took advantage of the historic low interest rates to invest in properties.

seCTer has been involved in several developing projects in the EDD including Preston Riverwalk, Ponemah Mills, Thames River Innovation Place, Thames River Heritage Park (TRHP), and several Connecticut Port Authority projects funded by Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP).

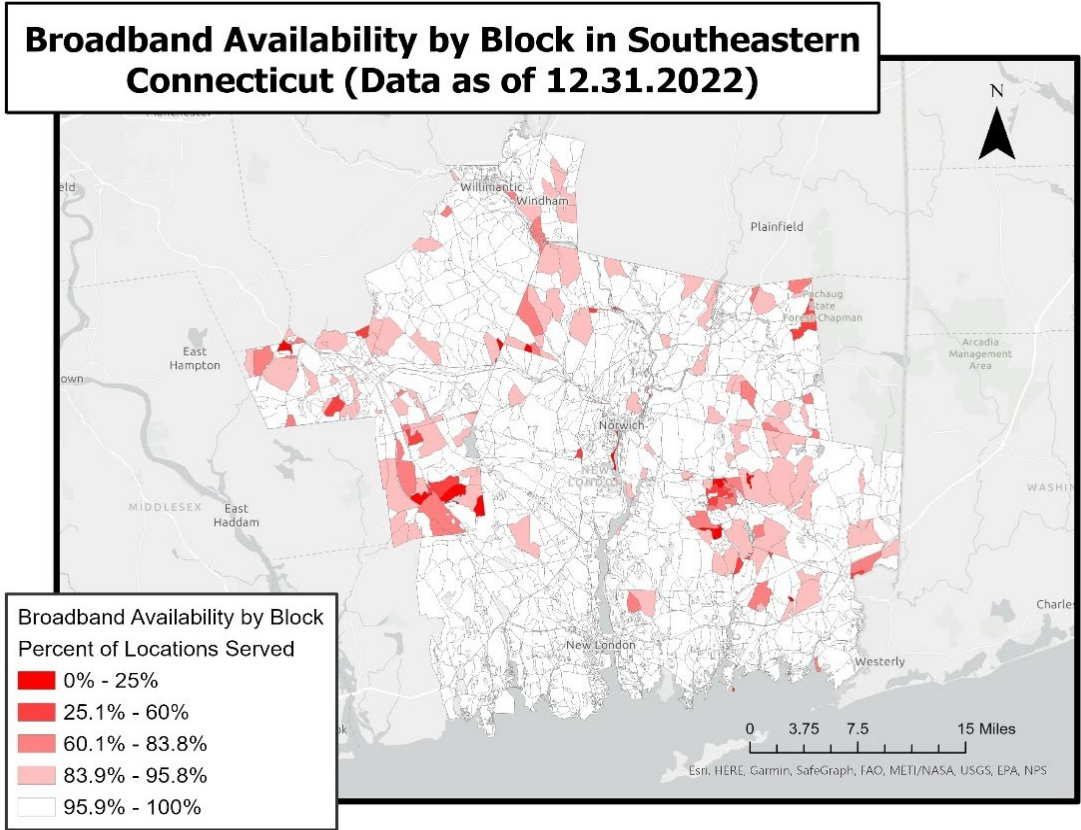


Figure 17. Broadband Availability by Block in SECT EDD, 2022
 Source: Esri, HERE, Garmin, SafeGraph, FAO, METI/NASA, USGS, EPA, NPS

In addition, EDD has received funding for utility modernization, bridge repair, infrastructure projects, brownfields redevelopment, and facilities upgrades, including airport runway and capacity upgrades and a new port along the Thames River. All this investment is central to regional prosperity and resiliency.

On the land use regulation front, significant and controversial changes were made to state statutes that impacted local zoning, as well as pandemic-related changes that impacted how public space is used and how public meetings are held (Table 6).

Land use commissions shifted to virtual meetings during the Covid-19 pandemic due to spatial distancing concerns. This change allowed for greater participation for those with constraints that kept them from being physically present at meetings, e.g., children, no transportation, poor health, etc., provided they had internet access. However, those without access to the internet and related technology were suddenly left out. Conducting public hearings and reviewing complex development plans via a virtual platform proved less than ideal, and many plans suffered significant delays. As it appears the virtual meeting option will continue indefinitely, it will be critical to ensure that all members of the community have access to local decision-making processes and that conversations about change also occur beyond the virtual meeting and out in the communities where the changes are proposed.

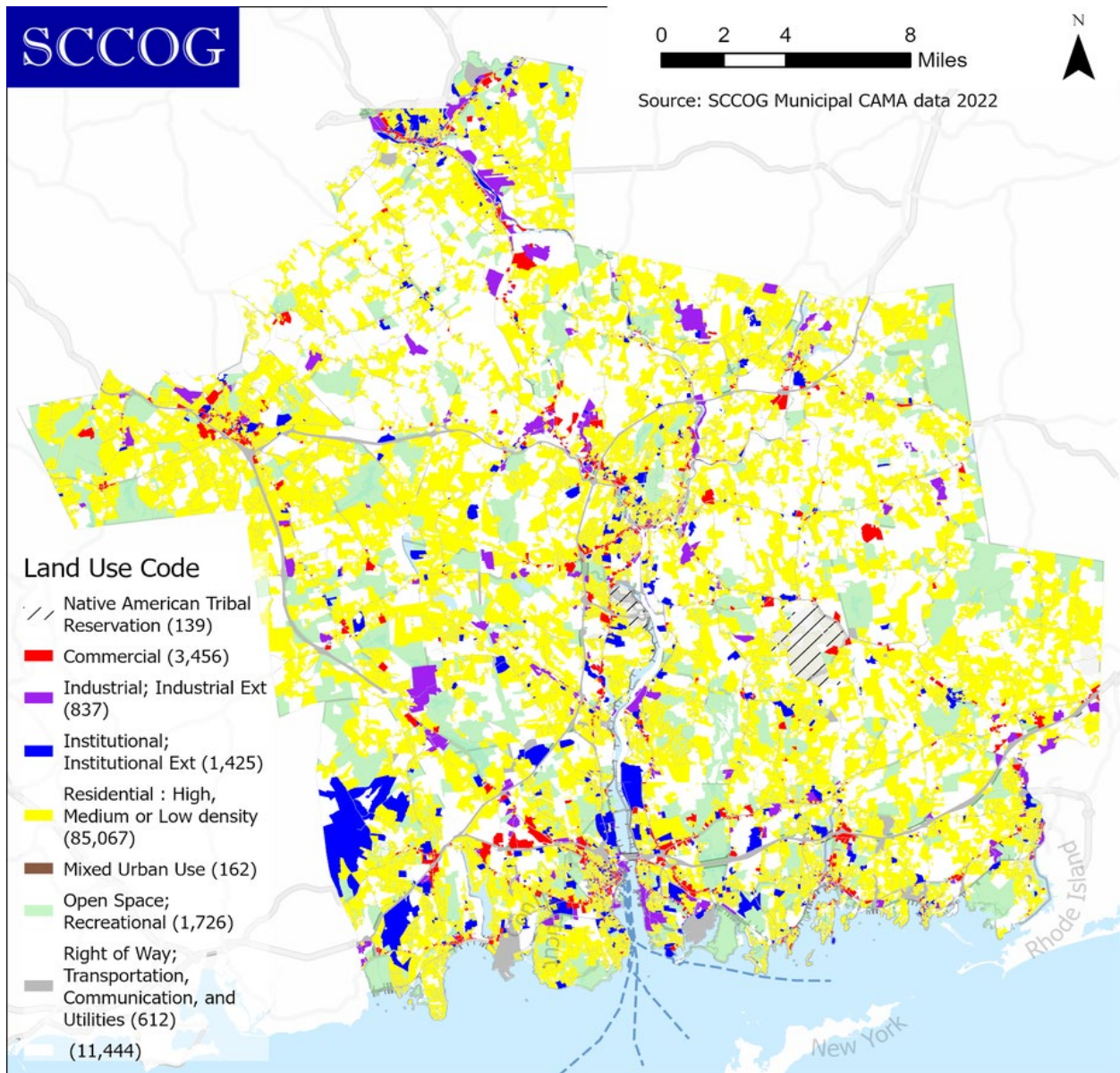


Figure 18. Land Use in SECT EDD, 2022

Source: SCCOG Municipal CAMA Data, 2022

The pandemic has also impacted how the public thinks about and uses public spaces, e.g., streets, sidewalks, plazas, etc. Public spaces were transformed into outdoor dining rooms, Covid testing centers, meeting places and waiting rooms, becoming more flexible and multi-use in the process. On any given day, a particular space could be used for a wide variety of uses, posing a challenge to towns with respect to zoning and permitting, and local regulations will have to change to reflect and adapt to this change.

Table 6. Land Use/Zoning/Development-related Changes

Topic	Note
Alcohol Permitting	Changes were made to the Liquor Control Act.
Cannabis	The Connecticut Legislature passed and Gov. Ned Lamont signed a bill in June 2021 allowing the legal use of cannabis for adult recreational use in the state and for organizations to apply for licenses to sell cannabis in Connecticut from 2022.
Mandatory training for land use commission members	[See ‘Housing regulations’ note below.]
Required certification of municipal zoning enforcement officers	For those officers appointed after January 1, 2023.
Required municipal affordable housing plans	[See ‘Housing regulations’ note below.]
Housing regulations	<p>Despite the pandemic and the worst economic downturn since the Great Depression, America’s housing market boomed and demand for housing soared. This increase in demand has run up against a severe shortage in supply. Addressing this housing shortage has become a top priority for the state and region as evidenced by several significant changes in CT General Statutes. In particular, HB 6107, Public Act 21-29, An Act Concerning the Zoning Enabling Act, Accessory Apartments, Training for Certain Land Use Officials, Municipal Affordable Housing Plans and a Commission on Connecticut’s Development and Future, mandates several significant reforms to local zoning and land use regulations to allow for increased housing supply, but significant concessions that narrowed the bill’s scope were necessary to ensure that it had sufficient political support to pass (An Act Concerning the Zoning Enabling Act, Accessory Apartments, Training for Certain Land Use Officials, Municipal Affordable Housing Plans and a Commission on Connecticut’s Development and Future).</p>

2.4.3.2 Agriculture

The agricultural and aquacultural sectors dot rural towns with dairy farms and the shoreline with marinas, oyster beds and commercial fishing vessels. Farming has

Bozrah, City of Groton, Stonington, Waterford, Willimantic, Preston, Lebanon, Niantic Ledyard, and North Stonington all host farmers' markets in the region.

<https://www.localharvest.org/new-london-ct/farms>



CT Senator Cathy Osten received the 2019 Legislative Leadership Award from the Connecticut Farm Bureau for helping Connecticut's dairy farmers.

historically played a vital role in the EDD economy. The region is home to a multitude of very successful farmers' markets, including one voted best in the state. A strong emerging sector of agricultural manufacturing shows great promise for the region. However, many farms across the country were impacted by several hurricanes in 2017 and 2018, experienced historically poor planting conditions in 2019, and saw their exports reduced from retaliatory tariffs. The Covid-induced economic crisis threatened the viability of many farming operations, and with it the

sustainability of the domestic food supply. Some examples of the pandemic-induced impacts include:

- Dramatic decrease in miles driven as the public sheltered in place. This led to a decreased demand for biofuels, which in turn led to reduced demand for grains, particularly corn.
- Immediate and drastic decline in food demand by restaurants and hotel customers. This took away farmers' and food processors' largest buyers, especially for meat, dairy and specialty crops.

Farmers experienced a surge in customers during the pandemic, particularly during the initial "lock-down" as people were afraid to go to crowded stores and the larger farmers' markets were closed. Farmstand markets, community supported agriculture (CSA) memberships, and farm-to-table events put on by area restaurants also grew in popularity.

Southeastern Connecticut is seeing a resurgence in family farming fueled by a younger generation able to adopt new business models and willing to respond to changing social attitudes about food and where it comes from. This new generation of farmers also embraces new technical advances that allow them to work more efficiently.

2.4.4 Tourism and the Creative Economy

What is the creative economy? An \$878 billion domestic economic ecosystem of for-profit and nonprofit creative industries, artists, educators, entrepreneurs, vendors, policymakers, and funders that produce and distribute creativity- and arts-based goods and services. A dynamic creative economy generates jobs and revenue, bolsters community resources, and fosters cultural engagement.

The Connecticut Small Business Boost Fund sports a 94 percent success rate in helping organizations, businesses and artists get grants. The program provides monthly drop-in grant clinics, workshops, consulting, online resources, peer-to-peer resource sharing, and technical support to improve the region’s arts and cultural sector ability to capitalize on local, state, New England and federal grant opportunities.

Mystic, CT is often listed as a top-rated destination in national publications. Most recently, it was rated the 4th summer destination spot in the country by USA Today ([10 best summer travel destinations in the US for 2023](#)).

While Connecticut’s manufacturing sector has grown since the last recession ended in late 2009, the most gains have come in tourism, which in turn supports restaurants, hotels and the hospitality sector in general. A vibrant creative economy is essential to quality of life, tourism, economic development, health and wellness, and

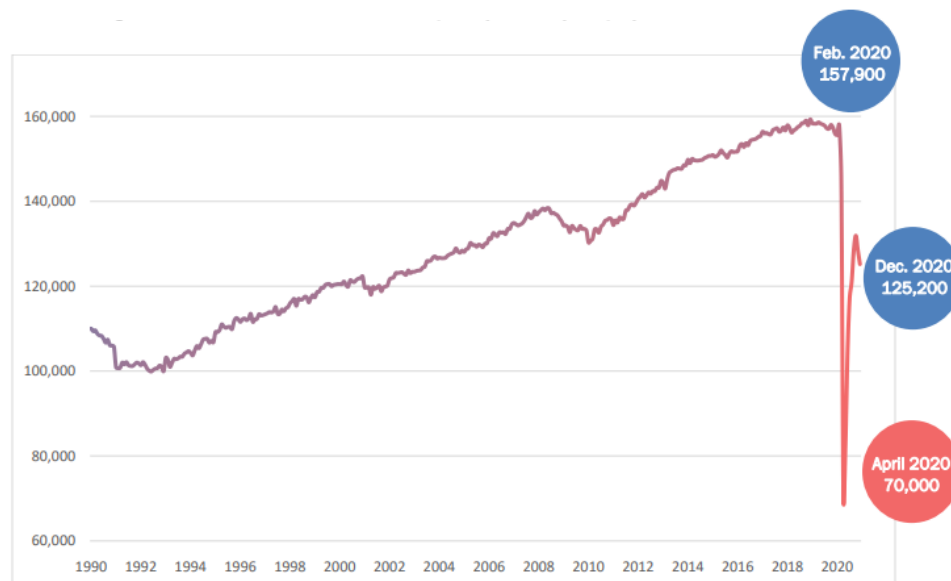
community vitality in the region. Southeastern Connecticut houses most of the state’s top tourism attractions, all of which were significantly impacted by the pandemic.

***THRIVE!** was a conference for all partners/members of the Southeastern Connecticut Cultural Coalition (SCCC) to gather, share, learn and celebrate the arts community. In 2022 the Mashantucket Pequot Museum & Research Center and members of the Mashantucket Pequot Tribal Nation helped SCCC co-create the biennial event centered on a theme of Healing. Through partnership and collaboration, the conference highlighted stories and issues from the arts and cultural community, and catalyzed challenging conversations around the topics of pandemics, racial and social justice, and equity.*

According to analysis from Johns Hopkins University, the Arts, Culture and Recreation sector experienced job losses at three times the rate of the next-most-impacted sector from January to August 2020 ([News-Release-Sept-Jobs-Report-10-21-20.Pdf \(Jhu.Edu\)](#)). The state lost nearly 88,000 service and hospitality related jobs between February 2020 and April 2020, due to the rapid closure of restaurants and major tourism attractions as a result of the pandemic and government-mandated social distancing requirements and travel restrictions, but gained roughly 55,000 of those jobs back by December 2020 as restrictions were gradually removed (Figure 19). These figures do not include jobs lost at the two casinos in Connecticut as these jobs are included under “Government” employment.

Arts and cultural organizations are further impacted by historically unreliable state funding sources, as consistent funding is critical to long range planning for these

organizations, especially when the economy is volatile or depressed. Smaller organizations often cannot take advantage of funding opportunities because they lack the resources to do so and would require multi-year funding to confidently hire professional staff to help.



Source: CT DOL Office of Research, [State of Connecticut Leisure and Hospitality Sector Monthly Employment Estimates, 1990-Present, Seasonally Adjusted](#).

Figure 19. Connecticut Leisure and Hospitality Industry Employment, 1990-2020

Source: Connecticut Department of Labor Office of Research

The **Southeastern Connecticut Cultural Coalition (SCCC)** has had a tremendous positive impact on individuals and entities that participate in arts, culture, history or creative pursuits trying to recover from this latest shock. The SCCC is one of eight Designated Regional Service Organizations (DRSOs) for the CT Office of the Arts (COA). This statewide network of service providers plays a key role that is mutually beneficial to the state's citizens and creative economy, the regional arts and cultural infrastructure, and COA's goals, programs and services.

SECT's two tribal casinos closed temporarily due to the pandemic. According to spokespeople from each tribe, employment at Mohegan Sun dropped from 6,875 to 4,935 between July 2019 and July 2021, and at Foxwoods from about 5,400 to 2,900. In an effort to boost state revenues, expand the customer base of the two casinos, and help recover casino jobs in the state's struggling southeastern corner, a bill was passed in May 2021 to legalize sports betting and online casino games and lottery sales in Connecticut. Passage of Public Act No. 21-23, An Act Concerning the Authorization, Licensing and Regulation of Online Casino Gaming, Retail and Online Sports Wagering, Fantasy Contests, Keno and Online Sale of Lottery Tickets, came after a relatively brief debate, an anticlimactic ending to a multi-year push to expand the customer base of two tribal casinos squeezed by competition in New York, Rhode Island and Massachusetts and a temporary closure forced by Covid-19 ([An Act Concerning the Authorization, Licensing and Regulation of Online Casino Gaming, Retail and Online Sports Wagering, Fantasy Contests, Keno and Online Sale of Lottery Tickets](#)).

Other key projects and updates affecting tourism and the creative economy in the region are highlighted in Table 7.

Table 7. Notable Regional Projects/Events in Tourism and the Creative Economy

Foxwoods and its owner, the Mashantucket Pequot Tribe, have begun to build the \$300 million Great Wolf Lodge development at Mashantucket. The development encompasses 13 acres of reservation land and will feature a 91,000-square-foot indoor water park, a 61,000 sf family entertainment center, family restaurants, and a 550-room hotel. Scheduled to open in 2025, the new resort is projected to attract 600,000 visitors a year from within a 6½-hour drive ([Mashantucket Pequot, Foxwoods Leaders Break Ground on \\$300 Million Great Wolf Lodge – NBC Connecticut](#)).

The **Thames River Heritage Park Water Taxi** has regained pre-pandemic levels for tours.

The **Garde Arts Center** in New London received the 2022 Outstanding Historic Theatre Award from the League of Historic American Theatres in recognition of significant community impact (services and breadth of populations served), quality of programs and services, and quality of the restoration or rehabilitation of its historic structure ([Garde Arts Center | Performance Theater in New London, Connecticut](#)).

Mystic Seaport Museum received in January 2022 three grants from Connecticut Humanities, the statewide, nonprofit affiliate of the National Endowment for the Humanities, totaling \$519,999 to augment museum operations ([1-14-2022.pdf \(mysticseaport.org\)](#)). Additionally, the museum received funding from Ørsted and Eversource Energy to conduct “research on how impacts of offshore wind on marine mammals can be minimized. The research will provide valuable data to scientists studying the impacts of the climate crisis, as well as educate the public on the solutions to these challenges” ([Ørsted and Eversource Partner with Mystic Aquarium on Comprehensive Study of Offshore Wind and Marine Life - Mystic Aquarium](#)). It also received \$650,000 in January 2023 to establish the Blue Economy Workforce Development Initiative: Creating a Pathway for Underserved Youth. The Blue Economy Initiative is a partnership between Mystic Aquarium and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, and key players include the Chamber of Commerce of Eastern Connecticut’s Innovation Center in New London and 10 youth-serving organizations throughout Connecticut ([Mystic Aquarium Celebrates Federal Funding for Blue Economy Workforce Development Initiative - Mystic Aquarium](#)).

2.4.5 Manufacturing and Defense

As a region, SECT has a strong tradition in advanced manufacturing with a focus on defense contracting. In 2020 New London ranked 5th in the nation for defense contracting dollars spent: \$12 billion. Other regions that were higher were in much larger markets such as Dallas and Los Angeles.

General Dynamics Electric Boat’s (GDEB) CT employment will grow by almost 6,000 over the next 10 years and is predicted to peak in 2033 with 21,000 CT-based employees. Far more than 6,000 are needed to offset losses from attrition; thus, a predicted 1,000 new employees per year for the next 10 years will be needed. GDEB is planning to implement over \$700 million in capital improvements over the next 10 years at its Groton complex.

The GDEB shipyard facilities will need to be expanded at all sites to support a multi-program construction plan. The Facility Master Plan (FMP) lists two dozen major projects which entail over \$1.5 billion of additional investment through the next decade.

PARTNER SPOTLIGHT

The Naval & Maritime Consortium (NMC)

NMC is an active network of member companies, community partners, and OEMs that collectively addresses challenges, shares solutions, and collaborates to develop opportunities within the growing Blue Tech industrial sector. Its programs and goals focus on Naval submarine shipbuilding and offshore wind supply chains within and around New England. It works to bolster the naval and maritime business base within New England. Its network maximizes collaborative and teaming opportunities in Blue Tech to support its objectives.

- *Effectively catalog capabilities of members and offer greater visibility and exposure to regional and industrial consumers.*
- *Develop a coordinated ecosystem of integrated manufacturers and suppliers in the Blue Tech industrial sector.*
- *Leverage a world-class network to provide access to valuable information and programs related to workforce development, Industry 4.0 technology transfer in production and quality systems, cybersecurity, growth financing, and regulatory standards and compliance.*

The major facility projects at the Groton shipyard will support final assembly, test and delivery of the Virginia and Columbia Classes of submarines. The current plan includes adding additional assembly bays, modifying the waterfront footprint to support off-load of larger modules, replacing or refurbishing the launch pontoon, continuing demo of aged assets, and completing enabling projects.

The centerpiece of the Groton FMP is a dedicated Columbia Final Assembly Facility and a dedicated COATS Facility in the south yard just south of Building ([General Dynamics Electric Boat - Strategic Plan \(gdeb.com\)](#)).

For FY2020, annual defense spending in Connecticut totaled \$23.6 billion, placing it #6 among the Top 10 states in defense spending⁵ ([DoD Releases Report on Defense Spending by State in Fiscal Year 2020 > U.S. Department of Defense > Release](#)). New London County accounted for more than half of that. While this type of investment is significant for the regional economy, the rapid acceleration in this one sector is straining the region's public services and workforce resources, particularly as repercussions from the Covid-19 recession and resulting widespread labor turnover continue to reverberate across the economy. GDEB had to slow its Virginia Class submarine production in order to meet the tight deadlines for the higher-priority Columbia Class submarines because of a staffing shortage.

Given that the submarine base was targeted for closure in 1993 and 2005, and in recognition of the boom-bust cycle of the shipbuilding industry over the past 25 years which resulted in huge losses in supply chain companies and supporting services, economists and business leaders have suggested investment in a broader range of sectors. Particularly cited is workforce investment focused on industrial automation,

⁵ The five states with greater defense spending in FY2020 are #1 Texas, \$83.0 billion; #2 Virginia, \$64.3 billion; #3 California, \$61.0 billion; #4 Maryland, \$30.4 billion; and #5 Florida, \$29.1 billion ([DoD Releases Report on Defense Spending by State in Fiscal Year 2020 > U.S. Department of Defense > Release](#)).

information technology, data processing, and green energy – sectors poised for growth – in order to build a more diverse and resilient economy.

2.4.6 Education and Workforce Development

2.4.6.1 Education

Education is fundamental to competitiveness, capacity for innovation, resilience, quality of life, and readiness. In an age of globalization and international trade, countries and their economies continually compete with each other. The same competition occurs at the state and regional level. Every region would like to hold competitive and comparative advantages over neighboring regions – and having a skilled productive workforce can provide one such advantage.

SECT is fortunate to have numerous public and private educational institutions that are actively engaged in preparing their students for success in a challenging economic climate. As a region, developing innovative strategies that address inefficiencies and fuel new investment in education will be crucial in providing the types of programming that align with current realities. Also crucial is investment in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) education and skills training, entrepreneurship, and the critical thinking skills needed in current high-tech environment. Focus must remain on competency, skills development and investment in education (subsidies) to improve curriculum, engage disadvantaged populations through alternative and/or affordable platforms for learning, and foster entrepreneurship to expedite personal resilience.

2.4.6.2 Workforce

Housing and jobs within the region are isolated and the lack of public transportation in certain parts of the region is a challenge for both employers needing to access labor pools and workers to access potential jobs. Equally as important as career training programs are the wrap-around services needed in the region to reduce the challenges associated with job access (transportation) and personal and family needs.

The region’s leaders must create a diverse and inclusive workforce that meets current and future industry needs. For example, there continues to be a shortage of skilled labor in the region, particularly fabricators, and this is major problem for the region’s smaller companies who face the additional burden of competing with GDEB and other larger companies for these workers.

The **Eastern Connecticut Workforce Investment Board (EWIB)** is an award-winning, nonprofit workforce development organization that has been serving Eastern Connecticut since 1985. EWIB services a 41-town area by coordinating a dedicated network of partners to implement programs and initiatives including 1) three job center locations, 2) industry-led manufacturing and healthcare workforce pipeline programs, 3) a variety of workforce preparation programs for youth, and 4) a range of services for employers ([Home \(ewib.org\)](http://ewib.org)).

In its 2022 Local Plan Modification, EWIB “maintains a vision that Eastern Connecticut will create and sustain the global economy’s best-educated, most-skilled, highest-

productive workforce, with increased access to opportunities for all residents to pursue rewarding careers, such that every business has access to a qualified, skilled, job-ready workforce” ([2022 Plan Update - Submitted Plan Only - 06-14-22.pdf \(ewib.org\)](#)).

Noted workforce advancements in the region are listed in Table 8 below.

Table 8. Workforce Developments in SECT

The **Columbia Class Submarine Program** construction announcement included workforce hiring, Thames River location construction, and continued federal funding of the Eastern CT Manufacturing Pipeline Initiative (MPI).

In the years since submarine building last ramped up to this degree along the Groton riverfront, the **internet** has arrived, creating widespread demand for technology specialists. Other fields gaining ground are cybersecurity, mechatronics, green energy, and biomedical fields.

Three Rivers Community College has further developed its term training classes that lead to employment under the categories of Computing Skills, Allied Health, Business, Transition Skill Building, ESL and the Manufacturing Pipeline Initiative ([Three Rivers Community College – Your College. Your Future.](#)).

Nearly \$16 million from federal and state grants and private sources have supported the **Manufacturing Pipeline Initiative (MPI)** thus far. In FY2023 the program’s budget increased to roughly \$10 million, about a third of which comes from the State of Connecticut.

Mitchell College will use \$555,000 in federal funding to create a Digital Innovation Hub for Educational Excellence, offering virtual programming – with an in-person component – for people to do coursework for career advancement. The hub furthers the college's commitment to the state's workforce strategy "through academic innovation and increasing access to training in both the STEM and mental health fields, all through the lens of neurodiversity and adaptability."

CareerConneCT is a program launched by the State of Connecticut in January 2022 to help workers whose employment was impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic. Individuals have access to short-term training programs, where they can earn an industry-recognized credential and enter employment in high-quality and in-demand careers. Administered by the Connecticut Office of Workforce Strategy, the program is supported through \$70 million in funding allocated from the state’s share of the federal American Rescue Plan Act. The program is anticipated to support training for approximately 8,000 participants. The initiative has led employers such as Accenture, Eversource Energy, General Dynamics Electric Boat, Hubbard-Hall, Infosys, Ørsted, and Yale New Haven Health to commit to hire nearly 4,000 job seekers ([CareerConneCT](#)).

Ella T. Grasso Southeastern Technical High School educates students from 24 Southeastern Connecticut towns for workforce entry or to enroll in a two- or four-year college or university.

Norwich Technical High School educations approximately 700 students.

2.4.6.3 Workforce Housing

“Local control” as it currently exists is used to preserve an unequal and exclusionary status quo and is damaging Connecticut’s long-term vitality.”

- <https://ctmirror.org/2022/09/19/connecticut-local-control-housing-shortage>

Connecticut’s lack of available housing for low-income people is tied to restrictive local zoning laws that make it difficult to build affordable multifamily housing. Local and state representatives must understand that affordable housing is a crucial component of economic development and that there is a social cost to the housing shortage. Analysis from the National Association of Home Builders shows that for every \$1 the state invests

“In addition to workforce development programs, the provision of appealing, affordable housing is crucial to the success of attracting the millennials, sought to fill the anticipated job openings (particularly at Electric Boat) over the next decade. Housing needs for the increasing senior population are very similar to those of millennials: both desiring smaller, rental units within walking distance of basic services including healthcare, employment and entertainment. SECT’s housing stock is primarily single-family detached units, while the vast majority of multi-family rental units are slightly outdated and located in the urban centers.”

- CEDS 2017

in building affordable homes, \$4.57 in private investment is leveraged. When the workforce must spend more and more of their income on housing, they spend less on goods and services in the local economy. Families are having to pay half or more of their income for rent, workers are commuting for hours because they cannot afford to live anywhere near work, and young people are leaving for lower-cost states. These people are not represented at all in the current political process.

Reform is needed at the state and local level with respect to governance systems which often exclude broad public participation and advance the interests of local property owners who are able to be present for evening meetings. Research has shown that those who participate in local politics either through voting or showing up to town meetings are overwhelmingly wealthy, older property owners whose desire to maintain the status quo often conflicts with the interests of younger people, renters, workers and families who need access to homes, jobs, childcare, medical care and other services. Having clear local and regional targets for new homes, educational and

medical facilities, etc., that localities must comply with through new zoning are vital to ensuring that all residents have access to the housing and services they need.

The **Southeastern Connecticut Housing Needs Assessment 2018** by SCCOG concluded that the Southeastern Connecticut region lacks appropriate housing. Throughout the state nearly 140,000 households are extremely low income and severely cost burdened ([A Fair Share Housing Model for Connecticut - Open Communities Alliance \(ctoca.org\)](#)). The demand for low-cost rentals and single-family homes is most likely to come from young, newly-forming households and retirees looking to stay in the region ([2018 Housing Needs Assessment 03162018.pdf \(seccog.org\)](#)).

The following housing-related facts/trends were identified:

“The reality is the economic engine of our state is dependent on the workforce, and the workforce is linked with affordable housing.”

*- CT Sen. Saud Anwar,
Housing Committee*

- Continued decline in average household size means need for housing will grow faster than population
 - Baby boomers are downsizing
 - Housing preferences of younger residents are shifting toward urban locations
 - General Dynamics Electric Boat continues to grow
 - Affordability challenges are increasing for renters and owners alike, with 29,000 households living in houses they can't afford in the region
- Demand for low-income housing is increasing
 - 30 percent of owners are cost-burdened (Figure 20)
 - 48 percent of renters are cost-burdened (Figure 21)
 - Lack of sewer limits development

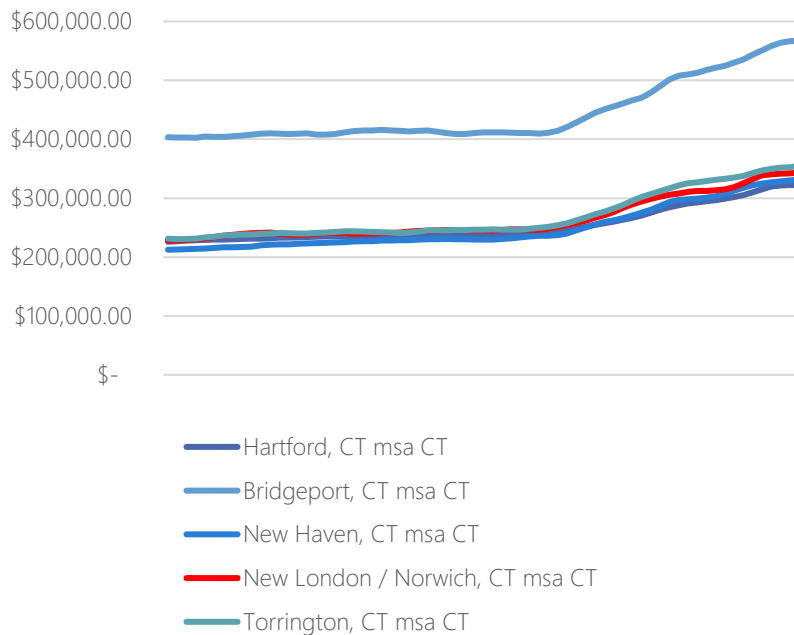


Figure 20. Home Values by Metropolitan Statistical Area

Source: [Housing Data - Zillow Research](#)

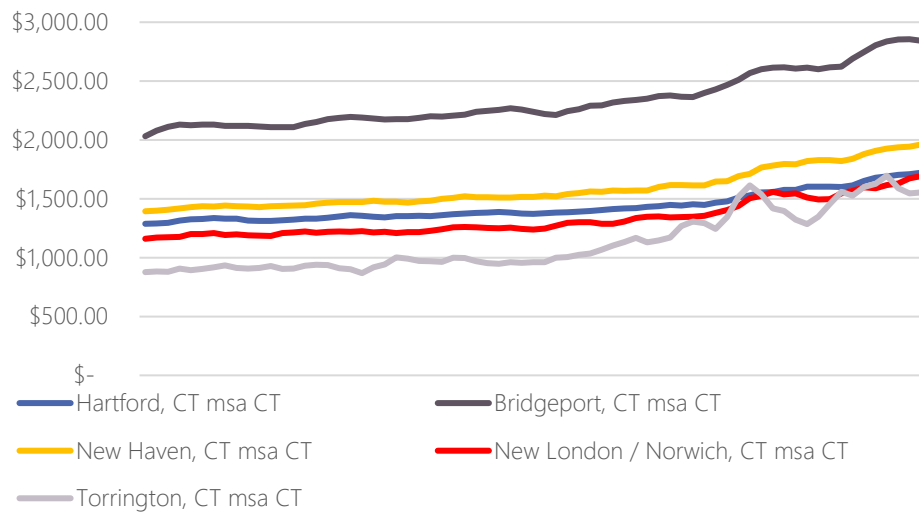


Figure 21. Rents by Metropolitan Statistical Area

Source: [Housing Data - Zillow Research](#)

A February 2023 article in the *Washington Post* explored the increasing distorting role all-cash buyers are playing in the U.S. housing market ([See how many all-cash buyers snagged houses in your neighborhood - Washington Post](#)). Key quotes from this article are relevant to the housing market in Southeastern Connecticut:

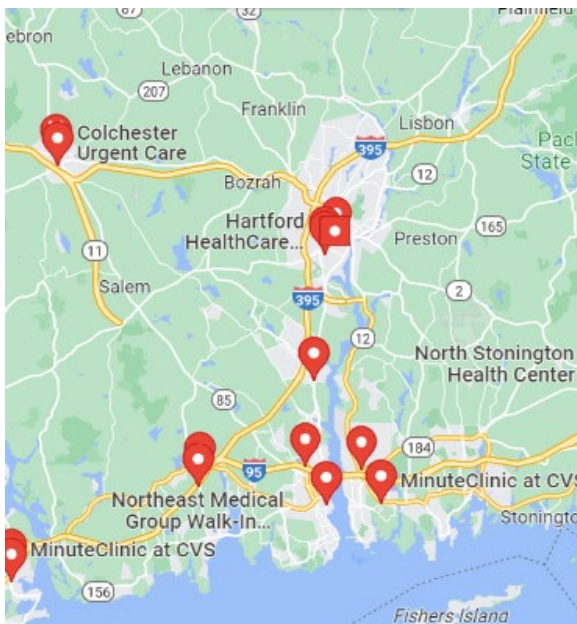
- “Last year, nearly a third of U.S. homes were purchased with cash an 8 percent increase from 2021, continuing a trend that started during the pandemic. The share of homes bought with cash is now at levels not seen since 2014, when the housing market was on the rebound after the foreclosure crisis and the Great Recession.”
- “Early in the pandemic, home buyers seeking more space desperately outbid one another in the frenzied housing market. Now all-cash offers continue, even as the housing market has cooled, as a way to sidestep rising interest rates.”
- “The rise of all-cash buys comes at a time when the average home buyer is increasingly likely to be White, wealthy and older and the proportion of first-time buyers is at its lowest in more than 40 years.”
- “Only the wealthy are essentially buying homes “If this trend was to continue, that means something fundamentally is wrong with society.”
- “Retirees, buyers who relocated using home equity proceeds, foreign buyers, investors and high-wealth individuals all outgunned bidders who needed the help of banks to finance their offers ”
- “The pandemic also reoriented people’s values toward activities that required more land such as hosting friends, gardening and swimming in backyard pools.”

- The ability to work from home has resulted in “increased remote-work lifestyles and people leaving large city centers.” Said another way, many white-collar workers in high-paying industries like high tech and finance transitioned to more flexible remote-work assignments.
- “What we found was those that already were more well-off were able to take advantage of the strong housing market and add to their wealth, while those trying to better their situation were often pushed to the side ”

Collectively, cities and towns in the region allocated less than 1 percent of federal ARPA funding to help reduce Connecticut’s housing problems. There were notable exceptions, however. Stonington allocated roughly \$170,000 – 3 percent of its federal funds – for housing-related projects, including a revolving loan fund that will help low- and moderate-income homeowners make repairs on their properties. Ledyard allocated \$100,000 for a similar revolving housing rehab loan program. Norwich, which is home to roughly 40,000 people, set aside \$889,000 for rental and mortgage assistance and another \$1.1 million to help create and preserve affordable housing in the city. New London allocated \$610,000 towards housing. The Town of Groton allocated \$175,000 toward housing programming ([American Rescue Plan | Greater Groton](#)).

2.4.7 Healthcare

Healthcare and Social Services is the largest industry sector in the SECT EDD, employing 20,905 people and marking it as a primary focus for seCTer. The industry has only a -0.3 percent predicted annual growth rate which is one of the lowest in the region. As



consolidations and re-alignments among system providers stabilize, new opportunities to grow the cluster will emerge and take hold. In light of the shortage of healthcare workers, workforce training, recruitment and retention are keys to the economic future of this vital sector in the regional economy.

Within the last five to seven years, consolidations within the larger hospital networks have brought Yale New Haven Healthcare and Hartford Health to the region. As a result, the number of satellite, urgent and convenient care clinics have increased (Figure 22).

Figure 22. Urgent Health Clinics in SECT EDD

Source: Google Maps, Urgent Care Clinics

Demographics within SECT are trending older and elder care is an increasing need. Through the Connecticut Office of Workforce Strategy (OWS), seCTer has formed a Healthcare Regional Sector Partnership with Three Rivers Community College focusing on workforce demand. Healthcare has been identified as a priority sector for workforce development in the coming years.

Major hospitals in SECT and surrounding area are:

- Backus Hospital, 213 beds, part of Hartford HealthCare
- Lawrence + Memorial Hospital (L+M), 308 beds, part of Yale New Haven Health
- Hartford HealthCare Centers, various
- Smilow Cancer Hospital Care Center, Waterford, part of Yale New Haven Health

L+M’s triennial Community Health Needs Assessment (CHNA), prepared in collaboration with community partners, guides its collective work toward advancing health equity and identifies priorities for future planning and funding so that all residents can benefit from community resources. The 2022 CHNA priority areas identified for the next three years are: affordable healthcare, behavioral health, drug/alcohol misuse, education, financial security, food security, and housing ([2022 Lawrence Memorial CHNA CHIP.pdf](#)).

Hartford HealthCare operates the Women’s Health Center at Windham Hospital. The center offers reproductive health, family planning, breast health and gynecology services. Regarding the latter, the Center provides a full range of gynecological services to patients, and also provides prenatal care for pregnant patients, who then deliver at Backus Hospital. In FY22, 74 patients of the Center delivered babies at Backus ([Windham Women's Health Center Continues to Grow | Backus Hospital | CT](#)).

2.4.8 Innovation

Within the region innovation and creative spaces have endured. Foundry 66 in Norwich is close to capacity and SPARK Makerspace was able to persist through the pandemic. The Eastern Connecticut Chamber of Commerce is developing an under-utilized property in New London to be called Innovation Place when complete.

Technology-based economic development remains an important strategy for the region. **CTNext**, a subsidiary of **Connecticut Innovations**, Connecticut’s strategic venture capital arm and the leading source of financing and ongoing support for Connecticut’s innovative, growing companies, develops programs and funding to help technology and innovation-based startups and early-stage businesses grow in Connecticut while also managing initiatives to expand and strengthen the ecosystem that supports new business development across the state. CTNext is currently revising the way in which it facilitates innovation within the state, aligns projects with appropriate resources, and helps identify potential funding sources.

State resources are shifting with CTNext's new leadership and yet-released new model. seCTer is working to deepen relationships in the region with innovation-focused organizations so that the entrepreneurial ecosystem has the appropriate resources and components to thrive.

Other developments around innovation in the region are presented in Table 9.

Table 9. Innovations In and Affecting SECT

Spark Makerspace is a community workshop and learning center. For a small monthly membership fee, it provides access to tools, equipment and work space for a wide variety of making activities, including art, woodworking, electronics and more. It was founded in 2015 by a group of artists, techies and entrepreneurs looking to support creativity by providing urban dwellers with resources they did not have at home. With support from CTNext, the City of New London, and some very generous individuals, Spark opened its first community workshop space at 86 Golden Street in New London in June 2016. In 2017 Spark relocated to State Street where it grew from 30 to 130 active members. To accommodate growth and embrace momentum, Spark and friends bought a historic 9,400 sf commercial building on Union Street in New London which it renovated throughout 2021 ([Spark Makerspace | New London, CT](#)).

Foundry 66 is a co-work space located in Norwich that allows small businesses to rent workspace while being part of a greater community. It offers space for larger meetings and events to support small emerging businesses ([Home - Foundry 66](#)).

The **Chamber of Commerce of Eastern Connecticut** is developing an Innovation Center to offer integrated solutions for entrepreneurs, growth-phase businesses and small businesses in an incubator and co-working setting in New London. The Innovation Center's mission is to provide an innovative environment where professionals can convene and work and underserved community members can receive career-enhancing training. The project expands emerging economic opportunities and builds resilience in one of Eastern Connecticut's most economically distressed urban centers. The Center will also facilitate economic recovery in response to high regional unemployment and business closures due to the pandemic ([Chamber of Commerce of Eastern CT officially owns Innovation Hub \(chamberect.com\)](#)).

Connecticut Innovations administers the Angel Investor Tax Credit Program, which allows investors an opportunity to receive a tax credit by investing in a qualified Connecticut business. An investment of \$25,000 to \$2,000,000 qualifies the investor for a 25 percent credit on state income tax provided the investment is in a Qualified Connecticut Business (QCB) ([Angel Investor Tax Credit - CTNext : CTNext](#)).

BioCT Innovation Commons at UConn Avery Point is an incubator dedicated to talent retention, job creation and building high value sustainable businesses. The Commons provides commercial-grade laboratories, offices and co-working and meeting spaces for proof-of-concept experiments, start-ups and growing companies. The Commons is a catalyst for innovation and entrepreneurship to build out a diverse understorey of new companies critical to Connecticut's future ([The CURE Innovation Commons in SE CT \(bioctcommons.org\)](https://bioctcommons.org)).

The mission of **UConn Technology Commercialization Services** is to expedite and facilitate the transformation of UConn discoveries into products and services that benefit patients, industry and society. Its goals are to bring together UConn researchers and the business community in order to significantly enhance the commercial and societal impact of UConn's research; identify and help move inventions by UConn faculty, staff and students towards the market through licensing or new company formation; secure patent protection for new technologies; and generate support for ongoing applied/translational research projects including industry partnerships. Over 750 patents have been granted based on UConn innovations, and \$463 million was raised by UConn incubator companies in FY2020 ([Home | Technology Commercialization Services \(uconn.edu\)](https://uconn.edu)).

Technology for Connecticut, Inc., or TechConn, is a nonprofit organization whose mission is to help retain and create jobs in Connecticut. This is accomplished by accelerating the commercialization of emerging technologies, focusing on regional technology clusters, and providing access to capital in the earliest pre-seed stages of development ([seed funding, TechConn Home](#)).

AdvanceCT is a business driven nonprofit that works to engage, retain and recruit businesses to Connecticut. AdvanceCT collaborates with the Department of Economic and Community Development (DECD) and its partners to implement high impact, equitable economic development. The AdvanceCT team advocates for and promotes Connecticut as a location for companies to compete and grow ([AdvanceCT](#)).

3 Stakeholder Engagement

3.1 Economic Development Committee

seCTer initiated the stakeholder engagement process by convening a meeting of its **Economic Development Committee (EDC)** and seCTer staff in November 2021 to discuss how best to organize focus groups and data sources and amend CEDS 2017 to incorporate the priorities of equity and economic resilience. It was decided the next CEDS would be an update of CEDS 2017 to improve upon seCTer's regional experience in implementing CEDS 2017, while also acknowledging the impact of unprecedented pandemic health and safety restrictions during the prior two years on economic development activities and interactions. seCTer's then new executive director Paul Whitescarver, the recently retired Commanding Officer of the U.S. Naval Submarine Base – New London, identified helping the region recover from the economic fallout caused by the pandemic and updating CEDS 2017 as top priorities.

During his service as Commanding Officer of the Submarine Base, Mr. Whitescarver made extraordinary efforts to establish positive relationships with the region's municipalities, agencies and community groups. The result was the 2018 Great American Defense Community Award to Southeastern Connecticut from the Association of Defense Communities. Early on Mr. Whitescarver made clear that maintaining strong ties to the region's municipalities, federal/state/regional agencies and departments, community groups, and businesses would also be a priority under his tenure.

The EDC is a large committee of 25+ members with a nearly 50-50 representation of board members and other committed parties including the U.S. congressional district delegate. In December 2021 EDC formed the **CEDS Strategy Committee**. The ad hoc group coalesced around an urgency to incorporate three principal concepts: **Recovery & Resiliency** (assessing economic disruptions such as the pandemic and follow-on recommended actions), **Equity & Inclusive Economic Development**, and **Alignment** (integrating the CEDS with other plans already underway), each as they apply to the region (Figure 23).

The CEDS Strategy Committee engaged in an internal **Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT)** exercise and analysis that began with a review of the SWOT analysis completed for CEDS 2017. Members considered these questions: Do you agree with the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats from 2017? Would you add any? Did the pandemic change your thoughts? Would you change the priority or level of importance from 2017?

The Strategy Committee determined that there were certain 2017 themes that remained relevant in 2022. Chief among them were:

- Continued critical need to attract and retain skilled workers and to train more residents to perform work of steady livable-wage jobs in Southeastern Connecticut; and
- Continued need for increased regional communication, coordination and collaboration between organizations and municipalities to integrate and streamline systems and make better use of valuable regional resources.

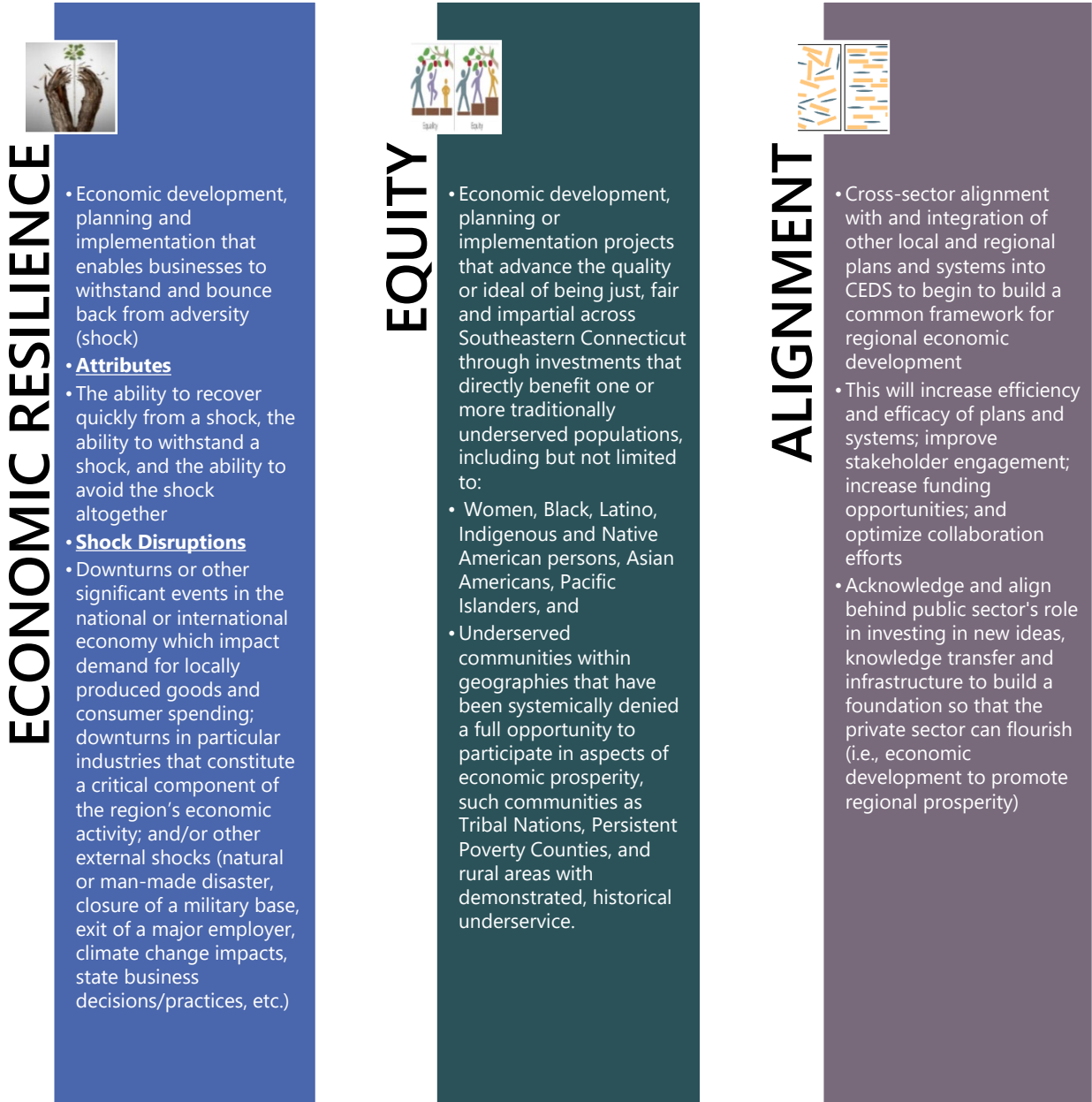


Figure 23. Economic Resilience, Equity, Alignment

The Strategy Committee then applied the lens of Southeastern Connecticut's 2022 economic realities and resilience, equity and alignment principles and identified the following regional priorities and/or concerns for exploration throughout the stakeholder engagement process:

- Disproportionate representation of SECT EDD communities in the region on the 2021 Distressed Municipalities List
- Extremes of inequity present in the region
- Diversity of stakeholder engagement
- Wraparound services for the workforce
- Definition of economic resiliency for Southeastern Connecticut
- Coordination of federal funding resources
- Human capital capacity in smaller towns
- Support for the region's growing offshore wind industry
- Regional coordination
- Regional alignment

3.2 Public Input and Engagement

To reach a broad group of citizens and leaders in the seCTer region, it was decided the public SWOT would be accomplished through a **three-step process** starting with a **regional survey**, then **focus groups** and, finally, **targeted interviews**. The Strategy Committee formed a Core Team to curate a list of stakeholders for engagement in the 2022 SWOT. With a commitment to bringing new voices to the CEDS process, the Core Team identified 300+ stakeholders and organized the following set of economically imperative topics to target during all segments of public outreach: Workforce, Development & Support Services, Equitable Housing, Real Estate Development, Regional & Local Capacity, and Energy.

3.2.1 Regional Survey

As a failsafe to engaging a vast array of perspectives, stakeholders were organized by North American Industry Classifications System (NAICS) codes. A response rate of 32 percent to the survey was achieved.

Key findings gleaned from the regional surveys were:

- The most pressing economic issue facing Southeastern Connecticut in 2022 is a lack of available/qualified workforce. This is followed closely by a lack of affordable housing.
- The top three sectors key to the success of economic recovery, growth and resilience in the region are Housing, Infrastructure and Health & Social Services.

- The historically significant industry clusters in the region needing the most attention are (in order) Agriculture, Fishing & Food Production, Maritime (excluding defense shipbuilding), and Tourism.
- The top three elements of success most critical to moving Southeastern Connecticut forward are Collaborative Aligned Leadership, Shared Visions and Goals, and Adequate Funding. Private Sector Support and Engagement followed as a close fourth.
- The leading approach selected to be the most effective in creating an update to CEDS 2017 that is engaging and user-friendly is a Concise Roadmap report with clear recommendations, outcomes and actions.
- When survey respondents were invited to share additional thoughts the following five themes received the most frequent comments: Affordable Housing, Workforce, Diversity, Equity & Inclusion, Transparency & Communication, and Tourism.

3.2.2 Focus Groups

In lieu of organizing focus group participants by location, it was decided to target the topics of shared concern and significance identified in the internal CEDS Strategy Committee SWOT and survey results and analyses.

Key findings from the focus groups were:

- There is a lack of large properties available for large-scale development.
- Local opposition to meeting the region’s housing needs requires adjustment.
- College students leave when they graduate because they can’t find affordable housing.
- Public utilities are a strength of the region due to overall reliability.
- Expanding businesses is hindered by high cost of energy, gas and oil.
- Opportunities exist for federal/state/local officials and NGOs to be more creative about how to attract businesses to the region.

3.2.3 Targeted Interviews

The public input process concluded with one-on-one interviews with six subject matter experts closely associated with the targeted economic development topics of Energy, Real Estate Development, Workforce/Wraparound Services, Local and Regional Government Capacity.

Key findings from the targeted interviews were:

- There is a lack of affordable housing across socio-economic status.
- There is a lack of formal programs for real estate development, and current redevelopment incentives and financing programs are insufficient.

- With the increased need for workers, there is an increased need for improved workforce training across all trades that goes beyond technical high schools.
- There is a shortage of childcare practitioners, and shrinking availability is not projected to meet increasing demand.
- Partnerships and collaboration to leverage funding for energy projects are both important and critical to project success.
- Government regulatory environments affect the ability to put affordable housing units on the ground.
- More municipal funding is needed to build necessary infrastructure such as wells, water and sewer pipes, gas and electrical lines, etc.

3.2.4 Regional SWOT Summary

The Core Team compiled a comprehensive chart of all data gathered from all sources – internal SWOT exercise, regional survey, focus groups, targeted interviews – and performed a comprehensive SWOT analysis (Table 10). The information contained in the updated SWOT informed CEDS 2023 priorities, goals and actions for Southeastern Connecticut.

As to be expected, there are numerous themes common to both the 2017 SWOT analysis and the regional SWOT analysis prepared for CEDS 2023. Importantly, there are significant new topics in the 2023 regional SWOT analysis. Common and new topics are presented in Table 11.

Table 10. SWOT Summary Analysis, CEDS 2023

Strengths	Opportunities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Quality of Life ▪ Manufacturing Pipeline Initiative ▪ Economic Development Resources & Competitive Advantages ▪ Transportation Systems & Existing Infrastructure ▪ New London State Pier ▪ Thames River ▪ Build Back Better Regional Challenge Coalition 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Public/Private Partnerships ▪ Graduate Retention ▪ Regionalization ▪ Funding Alignment ▪ Offshore Wind Cluster Advancement ▪ Business Retention and Expansion (BRE) ▪ Commercial Real Estate Development
Weaknesses	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Housing Quality/High Rent Burden ▪ Workforce Wraparounds ▪ Non-diverse Industry Clusters ▪ Lack of Regional Cohesion ▪ Lack of Industrial Diversification ▪ Lack of Resilience (environmental & economic) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Aging Workforce ▪ Reduced Quality of Life & Climate ▪ Population Decline ▪ NIMBY Impediments ▪ Regulatory Environment ▪ Global Threats (geopolitical) ▪ Climate Change ▪ Naval Base Closure ▪ Lack of Childcare

Table 11. Common and New Themes, CEDS 2017 SWOT vs. CEDS 2023 SWOT

Item	Common Themes	New Themes
Strengths	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Quality of Life ▪ ED Resources & Competitive Advantages ▪ Transportation Systems & Existing Infrastructure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Manufacturing Pipeline Initiative ▪ Build Back Better Regional Challenge Coalition
Weaknesses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Lack of Regional Cohesion ▪ Lack of Industrial Diversification 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Quality Housing/High Rent Burden ▪ Workforce Wraparounds ▪ Lack of Resilience (environmental and economic)
Opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Regionalization 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Public Private Partnerships ▪ Graduate Retention ▪ Funding Alignment ▪ Offshore Wind Industry Cluster Advancement
Threats	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Climate Change ▪ Population Decline ▪ NIMBY Attitudes ▪ Regulatory Environment ▪ Global Threats (geopolitical) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Aging Workforce

To conclude the stakeholder engagement process, the Core Team reviewed key findings from the internal and regional SWOT analyses, regional survey, focus groups and targeted interviews. With this key information available, the Core Team and seCTer staff then formed and assembled seCTer’s economic recovery and development priorities into three goals. This approach is to assist seCTer communicate and clarify the key role of regional economic development. Throughout the stakeholder engagement process, it became clear that there are a wide variety of ways in which residents characterize activities associated with economic development. By defining and articulating clear regional goals and objectives, seCTer can provide a unifying vision for residents, business owners, community leaders and government officials alike.

4 Strategic Direction and Action Plans

Economic Development “creates the conditions for economic growth and improved quality of life by expanding the capacity of individuals, firms, and communities to maximize the use of their talents and skills to support innovation, lower transaction costs, and responsibly produce and trade valuable goods and services.” ([Key Definitions | U.S. Economic Development Administration \(eda.gov\)](#))

The correlation of key findings from the regional survey, focus groups and one-on-one interviews, the CEDS Strategy Committee SWOT sessions, and EDA’s investment priorities focusing on resilience and equity clearly inform the goals of CEDS 2023: **Support People, Build Capacity, and Advance Growth and Sustainability**. Within these goals, policy and planning, housing, workforce development, and industry diversification rose as focus areas within which CEDS 2023 can lay the groundwork for impactful action at the EDD level.

The goals and strategies start with the most important category: **Support People**. This CEDS update starts with the identified priorities of housing and infrastructure to outline strategic actions to support all residents, despite geographic location or other defining demographic characteristics. All residents in the region should have choices and the opportunity to expand one’s capacity. It is clear through the regional survey that having quality housing, healthcare and basic infrastructure in place are the keystones to achieving economic prosperity. Without these, individuals are not able to expand their capacity through education and meaningful work.

The second goal, **Build Capacity**, builds on the first because once basic needs are in place, systems are introduced in order to further support the individual so that greater prosperity can occur. Still, much work is needed in order to increase awareness, talent and capacity for economic development within the region. seCTer’s region contains eight of the twenty-five state-designated distressed municipalities; therefore, the region needs to increase its knowledge capacity to actively mitigate conditions that lead to economic distress. Capacity is a broad term that includes human, financial, infrastructure and, lastly, energy.

The last goal, **Advance Growth and Sustainability**, incorporates actions that are in direct response to the pandemic, but which are also very similar to a number of strategic actions in CEDS 2017. SECT is familiar with the threat of economic shocks that are unique to the region due to Naval Base closure discussions. Discussions about building a more resilient economy that is less dependent on defense contracting are ongoing;

however, the pandemic heightens the discussion and adds a new layer of complexity as the tourism/hospitality industry was heavily impacted during the pandemic. Work is underway on the development of a resiliency assessment survey that is focused on small- to medium-sized businesses to understand their ability to respond to a variety of economic shocks.

The goals require prioritization based on the pandemic exposing the need for a more resilient approach to regional planning. Throughout the stakeholder engagement and research processes, it became clear that the goals are interdependent with themes running through the SWOT. Actions for one focus area will inevitably impact the outcomes of another focus area. It is important to know that when the phrase “all residents” appears, it is deliberately inclusive despite geography or demographic designation. Programs being launched now, for example, target businesses that are women-owned, minority-owned, veteran-owned, and those in distressed municipalities for priority funding. This focus will intentionally continue, develop and evolve as seCTer deepens relationships and builds new networks.

In order to make SECT more resilient and ready to adapt to future economic and environmental changes, community leaders and policy makers must first understand the implications of, and adapt to, the economic impact of shifting global roles, technological advances, changing demographics, and climate change. All must then engage in collaborative efforts to identify the largest regional vulnerabilities and share resources (planning, engineering and monetary resources) to enhance regional resilience.

Goal 1 Support People

Objective: Ensure there are equitable opportunities, programs and quality housing at accessible rates in place so that existing residents can make decisions that will positively affect their lives, and develop strategies to attract new, civically-engaged people who will participate in the workforce or start new employer businesses.

STRATEGIC ACTIONS

A. Ensure and promote initiatives that grow and enhance the regional workforce.

1. Promote extended pipelines and pathways for a variety of industries, such as healthcare, from the primary school to higher education and continuing education levels.
2. Develop employer-informed programs that scaffold skills to various levels of expertise.
3. Support the adaptation of EWIB’s Manufacturing Pipeline Initiative to an emerging cluster and ensure this promotes regional resilience with the diversification of industry and talent.
4. Promote “forward-thinking” talent development solutions and invest in a proven model for promoting an emerging industry such as coding education, which is the foundation of computer programming. Talent development, retention and attraction are key for each focus area.
5. Facilitate regional support organizations that are working in tandem with EWIB and employers to develop leading programs prioritizing childcare and transportation as well as services to support a wide variety of worker needs.
6. Focus efforts on creating opportunities for residents in distressed areas and historically marginalized populations to increase their incomes.
 - a. Provide support for micro-enterprises as a pathway out of poverty, especially in distressed municipalities.

B. Identify strategies to increase access to affordable housing across the region.

1. Convene a regional planning effort designed to inform a comprehensive set of interventions that remove the regulatory barriers to building more multi-family housing.
 2. Convene municipalities and adjacent partners to vet Connecticut's land banking roles to promote property re-use (tool for blight reduction).
 3. Work to increase property redevelopment financing instruments.
-

C. Research and develop programs to attract and retain younger people.

1. Research and conduct a feasibility study for the establishment of the Southeastern Connecticut Center for New Americans.
 2. Work with workforce partners to conduct a workforce assessment survey to inform workforce attraction and retention policies and programs.
 3. Retain and attract a working age, diverse population.
 4. Develop incentives to retain college graduates.
-

D. Enhance the quality of life in urban centers, rural areas and suburban communities by ensuring adequate housing, access to services, and support for individuals, families and businesses living and operating in the region.

According to the SWOT analysis, quality of life in the region is highly regarded. Areas characterized as urban, suburban and rural are all within a very short distance of each other. There are miles of shoreline and a plethora of outdoor activities. During the pandemic, the region gained many new residents who left larger metropolitan areas to gain access to a different quality of life.

1. Develop metrics that provide a baseline for quality of life indicators at the metropolitan level.
 2. Develop and support programs and practices to support more vibrant main streets in town centers.
 3. Support creative economy projects, downtowns and vibrant communities that appeal to young workers and families.
 4. Provide workshops and best practices to municipalities and regional leaders related to quality of life and quality of business environment considerations.
-

E. Create regionally focused content celebrating the diversity of the region: rural, urban, agricultural, maritime.

1. Support creative economy projects, downtowns and vibrant communities that appeal to young workers and families.
 2. Create the “I am Southeastern CT” campaign which highlights people who work in a wide array of vocations and the high quality of life enjoyed in Southeastern CT.
-

Goal 2 Build Capacity

Objective: Build economic development capacity and awareness throughout the region so it can become more resilient, equitable, attractive, wealthy and competitive. EDA defines "Economic Development Capacity Building" as "developing or improving community assets that businesses need to succeed." "Capacity" here is separated into four categories: 1) Economic Development Knowledge Capacity, 2) Infrastructure, 3) Financial Instruments, and 4) Energy.

STRATEGIC ACTIONS

A. Increase awareness, talent and capacity for economic development within the region.

1. Advocate for grant writing and grants management training for public sector projects.
2. Encourage civil service (governmental and nonprofit) talent attraction and career growth strategies.
3. Create a regional economic development dashboard to better communicate and measure economic development impact.
4. Create an economic development intern program.
5. Convene consortia of organizations and municipalities to leverage technical assistance for increased capacity with shared staff positions in common disciplines with demand.
6. Develop strategies to expand seCTer's deliberate and active outreach to new organizations not currently within seCTer's network of partnerships with the intent of hearing all voices within the region.
7. Work to get millennials and under-represented populations involved with Chambers of Commerce, civic organizations and local government, and be open to new/emerging platforms for engagement.

B. Capitalize on funding opportunities to improve infrastructure critical to sustained growth and resiliency.

1. Support the development of a central regional resilience office that focuses on evaluating the alignment of funding opportunities, plans, regulations and policies in the region regarding infrastructure.

-
2. Provide funding to businesses in the form of grants.
 3. Identify and improve underutilized properties that can be activated for positive economic uses, and help identify grants and programs to mitigate blight.
 4. Seek transformational funding by responding to EDA opportunities such as Regional Technology and Innovation Hubs or the Build Back Better Regional Challenge.
-

C. Increase portfolio of potential financial instruments that can be leveraged in the region to advance projects.

1. Conduct feasibility study of financial tools currently available and identify gaps which negatively impact private development of housing or industry.
 2. Craft a New Markets Tax Credit (NMTC) joint venture with an established Community Development Financial Institution (CDFI) with a demonstrated history of achievement in securing and placing NMTCs.
 3. Create awareness of existing programs throughout the region that will aid in development activity.
 4. Convene a financing consortium to help identify opportunities for synergy and greater leverage, and foster regional collaboration in pursuing competitive resources from public and philanthropic entities.
-

D. Grow the Energy and Environment Clusters.

1. Continue to support and convene stakeholders to drive the multi-dimensional Offshore Wind industry, building on the USEDA Phase 2 Build Back Better Regional Challenge Coalition.
 2. Create an intensive accelerator program or other early stage firm development model to help nurture the growth of promising early stage firms, initially in the alternative energy space leveraging seCTerRise funding which aligns with Connecticut Innovations and UConn’s Technology Incubation Program (TIP).
 3. Support the use of Clean Energy assessment programs and other tools to provide private commercial businesses incentives for transitioning to or deploying renewable energy solutions.
-

Goal 3 Advance Growth and Sustainability

Objective: Uplift the region's ability to withstand national or international economic shocks, loss of significant employers, or climate-related shocks by making the region more aware of risk and increasing its ability to respond.

STRATEGIC ACTIONS

A. Strengthen the resilience of the region's businesses to withstand and respond to external shocks.

1. Strengthen local capacity by expanding capital finance and technical assistance resources for small businesses and entrepreneurs.
2. Develop and implement regional business retention and expansion (BRE) programs, and provide workshops to municipalities on local BRE best practices.
3. Institute supply chain vulnerability assessment tools for small businesses.
4. Facilitate partnerships between/among regional support organizations to support innovation and entrepreneurship as a strategy for workforce development and personal resilience.
5. Provide existing and prospective business owners with easy access to information on available resources, regulatory requirements, transportation, workforce training and housing, and incentives.

B. Strengthen the region's ability to confront and thrive in the midst of climate and other external shocks.

1. Advocate for a regional sea level rise assessment study and publish findings.
2. Conduct study/survey to understand the impacts of extreme events on communities.
3. Examine and publish best practices for regional energy diversification and independence.
4. Develop a scorecard to help assess regional business resilience so that annual progress can be measured.

-
5. Identify the policy barriers that lead to certain groups not having access to funding and suffering economic hardship due to lack of housing, loss of work, and supply chain constraints.
-

C. Foster an environment that provides opportunities for cross-sector interaction resulting in proactive strategies to diversify the regional economy.

1. Launch program to foster entrepreneurial early stage firms in high wage/high growth sectors.
 2. Create and establish best practices for economic development gardening.
 3. Create network of entrepreneurial support organizations.
 4. Continue to facilitate industry-driven partnerships among regional employers, organized labor, education/training providers, and other stakeholders to facilitate the “rebalancing” of the regional economy to meet manufacturing and healthcare openings.
 5. Seek funding to catalyze innovation-based economic development projects such as the blue economy, artificial intelligence and robotics.
-

D. Increase personal and economic resilience.

1. Create a regional environment that is conducive and supportive of economic mobility.
 2. Provide access to resources and tools that will facilitate personal and economic resilience.
 3. Address cultural, linguistic and/or regulatory barriers to help individuals integrate into the local economy.
-

5 Implementation and Evaluation Framework

5.1 Implementation

seCTer has been operating as a functioning economic development organization since 1993, with an active Economic Development Committee deeply involved in the creation of CEDS 2023. seCTer staff will, jointly with support from the Economic Development Committee, facilitate meetings, workshops and networking events aimed at engaging individuals and organizations in CEDS 2023 5-year implementation process illustrated below.

Y1	<i>Program evaluation/gap analyses</i>
Y2	<i>Funding source identification to develop programming identified through gap analyses</i>
Y3	<i>Program launches</i>
Y4	<i>Program assessments</i>
Y5	<i>Review and assessment with additional gap analyses</i>

5.2 Evaluation Framework

Perhaps one of the most important mechanisms needed to implement this plan is **coordinated collaboration**. seCTer envisions that a key role of the Economic Development Committee, jointly with dedicated support from seCTer staff, is to facilitate meetings, workshops and networking events aimed at engaging individuals and organizations in the implementation process.

While a list of regional priority projects is NOT the focus of CEDS 2023 or the planning process, the importance of adopting a project prioritization process remains. CEDS 2017 provided the region with several goals, objectives and actions. However, seCTer staff and leading stakeholders indicated it was an onerous and challenging task to track progress and outcomes.

seCTer will annually solicit projects throughout the region using a data collection tool. Tracking the status of each project is not the objective for seCTer; establishing the list is in order to develop a regional listing of priority projects. Each project will be associated with one of the three main goals. Prioritization will identify projects vital to the region, aligned with CEDS 2023, and ready for potential funding.

Throughout this planning process, seCTer has been provided adaptive and resilient project prioritization tools including but not limited to:

- **Stoplight System.** Identify projects and initiatives that are complete or nearly complete, irrelevant due to new conditions, or have an outcome that is too abstract to report. Categorize actions and projects into red (remove), yellow (keep in the pipeline), and green (prioritize the “low-hanging fruit” and clear priorities in the current environment).
- **Leading Practices.** Utilize an assessment of projects and initiatives that is consistent with leading practices across the nation but customized to Southeastern Connecticut.
- **Project Prioritization Rubric.** Assess remaining projects and initiatives in a rubric with a ranking of Urgent to Not Urgent on one axis and Important to Not Important on another. The rubric will further break down projects into:
 - Top Priority Vital projects with substantial urgency
 - Significant Pipeline Critical projects with minimal urgency
 - Delay/Delegate Pressing projects with negligible impact
 - Insignificant/Remove Minor projects with little urgency
- **seCTer Values.** Review project/program against seCTer’s official mission statement, vision statement and values. If a project or program does not align with those, remove it.

Using subscription-based data tools, seCTer will monitor household median income in the region, cost of housing as a percentage of income, available housing units, business starts and closings, and Regional Gross Domestic Product.

6 Alignment with Federal, State and Regional Initiatives

CEDS 2023 is informed by and in alignment with a number of key federal, state and regional growth and development initiatives, ranging from economic development to environmental/energy justice.

6.1 Federal Initiatives

6.1.1 Economic Development Policies of the U.S. Economic Development Administration

The **mission** of the Economic Development Administration (EDA) is pointed and succinct:

To lead the federal economic development agenda by promoting innovation and competitiveness, preparing American regions for growth and success in the worldwide economy.

Accordingly, EDA's investment policy is designed to establish a foundation for **sustainable job growth** and the building of **durable regional economies** throughout the U.S. This foundation builds upon two key economic drivers: **innovation** and **regional collaboration**.

- **Innovation** is key to global competitiveness, new and better jobs, a resilient economy, and the attainment of national economic goals.
- **Regional collaboration** is essential for economic recovery because regions are the centers of competition in the new global economy and those that work together to leverage resources and use their strengths to overcome weaknesses will fare better than those that do not.

EDA's **Value Proposition Statement** further defines its mission (abbreviated here but full text at [Value Proposition Statement | U.S. Economic Development Administration \(eda.gov\)](https://www.eda.gov/value-proposition-statement)):

1. EDA makes it easier for businesses to start and grow in the U.S.
2. EDA matching grants start with local business conditions and needs – not Washington's.

3. EDA drives innovation and entrepreneurship throughout our country, especially in our manufacturing sector, to help U.S. workers and businesses compete globally.

CEDS 2023 is both informed by and in alignment with the mission and programs of the U.S. Economic Development Administration.

6.1.2 Environmental/Energy Justice

Federal government agencies/departments, as part of a federal government-wide effort, are working to address housing, environmental, public health, energy, and other challenges affecting communities, specifically those adversely and disproportionately affected by environmental, climate and human health harms and risks. This includes communities historically underserved and adversely impacted by persistent poverty, inequality and lack of funding/resources.

Triggering this federal government-wide effort are two key Executive Orders issued by President Joseph Biden in January 2021. **Executive Order 13985, Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government** ([Executive Order On Advancing Racial Equity an Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government | The White House](#)), issued on January 20, 2021, expresses administration policy that the federal government should pursue a comprehensive approach to advancing equity for all, including people of color and others who have been historically underserved, marginalized and adversely affected by persistent poverty and inequality.

Executive Order 14008, Tackling the Climate Crisis at Home and Abroad ([Federal Register :: Tackling the Climate Crisis at Home and Abroad](#)), issued on January 27, 2021, advances the administration’s commitment to advancing environmental justice by creating the **Justice40 Initiative**. The Justice40 Initiative establishes a goal that 40 percent of the overall benefits of certain federal investments—including those in climate change; clean energy and energy efficiency; clean transit; affordable and sustainable housing; training and workforce development; the remediation and reduction of legacy pollution; and the development of critical clean water infrastructure—flow to disadvantaged communities. Increased technical assistance and community engagement of disadvantaged communities is included in the Justice40 Initiative.

Environmental justice as defined by the EPA is “the fair treatment⁶ and meaningful involvement⁷ of all people regardless of race, color, national origin, or income with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies.” ([Environmental Justice | US EPA](#))

Energy justice as defined by the U.S. Department of Energy is “the goal of achieving equity in both the social and economic participation in the energy system, while also remediating social, economic, and health burdens on those disproportionately harmed by the energy system.” ([How Energy Justice, Presidential Initiatives, and Executive Orders Shape Equity at DOE | Department of Energy](#)). At its core, energy justice applies the basic principles of civil rights to the climate space.

The equity and resilience elements of CEDS 2023 are both informed by and in alignment with federal programs geared to addressing long-standing environmental and energy justice issues in historically underserved, marginalized and adversely affected communities.

6.2 State Initiatives

6.2.1 CT Department of Economic and Community Development 2021 Economic Action Plan

The 2021 *CT Economic Action Plan* for inclusive growth is built on four pillars: 1) Workforce, 2) Communities, 3) Innovation, and 4) Business Environment (Figure 24). The 5+-year plan proposes over a dozen initiatives aimed at creating 83,000 jobs, and seeks to leverage \$824 million in state funding with \$938 million from the private sector. Total funding for the plan is approximately \$1.8 billion ([DECD-Economic-Plan-2021final.pdf \(ct.gov\)](#)).

CEDS 2023 is informed by and in alignment with the 2021 *CT Economic Action Plan*.

6.2.2 CT Department of Economic and Community Development Programs for Small Businesses

In October 2022 seCTer received a \$4.5 million grant award through a new state initiative aimed at fostering the formation, growth and innovation of small businesses. Administered by the CT Department of Economic and Community Development, the program specifically targets underserved businesses: at least 50 percent of the financial

⁶ “Fair treatment” means that no one group of people, including racial, ethnic, or socioeconomic groups, should bear a disproportionate share of the negative environmental consequences resulting from industrial, municipal, and commercial operations or the execution of federal, state, local, and tribal environmental programs and policies.

⁷ “Meaningful involvement” means that: 1) people have an opportunity to participate in decisions about activities that may affect their environment and/or health; 2) the public’s contribution can influence the regulatory agency’s decision; 3) community concerns will be considered in the decision-making process; and 4) decision makers will seek out and facilitate the involvement of those potentially affected.



Figure 24. Four Pillars of the 2021 CT Economic Action Plan

Source: CT Economic Action Plan, CT Department of Economic and Community Development, September 2021

assistance is to fund minority-, woman-, disabled-, and veteran-owned companies, as well as those located in distressed municipalities.

The award will provide seed and growth funds to startup and existing businesses in the SECT, with a focus on companies in advanced manufacturing, offshore wind supply chain and renewable energy, childcare services, and agriculture/aquaculture production. It also will fund **seCTerRise**, a technical assistance initiative to provide workshops in business fundamentals, pitch events, and business planning competitions, with particular emphasis on underserved, marginalized and untapped populations in Southeastern Connecticut.

This new state initiative complements the **Connecticut Small Business Boost Fund**, which launched summer 2022. The Boost Fund, supported by the CT Department of Economic and Community Development, is a public-private partnership that provides low-interest loans to small businesses and nonprofits, particularly those in low-income and historically underserved communities. Small businesses and nonprofits can borrow between \$5,000 and \$500,000, depending on eligibility and need, and can choose how to spend the money — on equipment, payroll, utilities and rent, supplies, marketing and advertising, eligible refinancing, building renovations, and other expenses. Loans are not forgivable, and payback terms include a fixed 4.5% interest rate and a 60- or 72-month term, depending on the size of the loan ([Connecticut Small Business Boost Fund \(ctsmallbusinessboostfund.org\)](https://ctsmallbusinessboostfund.org)).

As of October 2022, 66 loans totaling \$10.8 million have been made, with 61 percent of those going to minority and women-owned businesses, and 23 percent to companies and nonprofits located in distressed municipalities ([Governor Lamont Announces \\$46.6 Million To Support Small Business Growth in Connecticut](#)).

seCTer is also host to the CT APEX Accelerator, formerly the CT Procurement Technical Assistance Center, which connects businesses with government contracts.

6.2.3 CT Office of Policy and Management

The CT Office of Policy and Management (OPM) prepares a state plan of conservation and development policies (State C&D Plan, also known as the POCD) every five years in accordance with Section 16a-27 of the Connecticut General Statutes. The 2018-2023 plan, titled *Conservation & Development Policies: The Plan for Connecticut 2018-2023* ([Conservation and Development Policies: The Plan for Connecticut](#)), was adopted on May 4, 2022 via House Joint Resolution No. 107.

The State C&D Plan is built on a framework of six **Growth Management Principles**:

1. Redevelop and revitalize regional centers and areas with existing or currently planned physical infrastructure.
2. Expand housing opportunities and design choices to accommodate a variety of household types and needs.
3. Concentrate development around transportation nodes and along major transportation corridors to support the viability of transportation options.
4. Conserve and restore the natural environment, cultural and historical resources, and traditional rural lands.
5. Protect and ensure the integrity of environmental assets critical to public health and safety.
6. Promote integrated planning across all levels of government to address issues on a statewide, regional and local basis.

Though the State C&D Plan's growth management principles are understandably broad in nature, CEDS 2023 is informed by and aligns with all six principles and with OPM general objectives to increase equitable access to economic opportunity and invigorate Connecticut's workforce and businesses. CEDS 2023 goals and objectives encourage the creation of a regional environment conducive to and supportive of equitable and inclusive economic mobility and wealth creation by addressing issues of affordability and vulnerability created by entrenched inequality, external shocks and climate change, and by increasing access to resources necessary to build the physical and social capacity needed to enhance regional resilience.

6.3 Regional Initiatives

The Southeastern Connecticut Council of Governments (SCCOG) is a public agency with representatives from twenty-two towns, cities and boroughs; the Mohegan Tribe and Mashantucket-Pequot Tribes (affiliate, non-voting members); CT Department of Transportation (non-voting); and Southeast Area Transit (votes on MPO matters). Primary focus areas are regional planning, transportation planning (SCCOG serves as the region’s Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO)), and providing regional services, such as staffing assistance to local land use commissions.

Among the many SCCOG regional planning studies referenced and considered in development of CEDS 2023 are 1) *Regional Plan of Conservation and Development 2017* ([RPOCD Full-Document 11-16-2017.pdf \(seccog.org\)](#)) and its accompanying future land use map (http://seccog.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/FutureLandUseSept2017_small.jpg); 2) *Southeastern Connecticut Housing Needs Assessment 2018* ([2018 Housing Needs Assessment 03162018.pdf \(seccog.org\)](#)), and 3) “Resource Guide for Building and Preserving Affordable Housing in Connecticut,” September 2022 ([Affordable-Housing-Guide-Final.pdf \(seccog.org\)](#)), both prepared by SCCOG for the Southeastern Connecticut Housing Alliance (SECHA); 4) *Southeastern Connecticut Metropolitan Transportation Plan FY 2023-2050*, adopted March 2023 ([2023-2050 SCCOG MTP-adopted20230315.pdf \(seccog.org\)](#)); 5) *Transportation Improvement Program F.Y. 2021 – 2024*, adopted October 2020 ([TIP-20201021-1.pdf \(seccog.org\)](#)); and 6) *Regional Plan for Housing and Transportation Associated with Expansion of Submarine Shipbuilding in Southeastern Connecticut*, October 2019 ([Microsoft Word - 2019-10-23 JLUS Final Report \(seccog.org\)](#)). CEDS 2023 is informed by and in alignment with these SCCOG plans and documents.

SCCOG is also an active member of the CT Department of Emergency Management and Homeland Security (DEMHS) Region 4 Recovery Steering Committee. Region 4 (of five such regions) refers to Region 4 of the CT Department of Emergency Services and Public Protection (DESPP), of which DEMHS is a division. Region 4 includes every SCCOG-member municipality, both affiliate Tribal Nations, and 22 other municipalities in eastern Connecticut.

SCCOG worked closely with the State of Connecticut on a statewide effort to produce baseline assessments of the initial and on-going impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic in all five DEMHS regions. The baseline assessment, completed in February 2021, provides a firm knowledge base to the Region 4 Recovery Steering Committee, SCCOG, seCTer, and municipalities throughout the region ([Regional Resilience Baseline Assessment, DEMHS Region 4](#)). CEDS 2023 is informed by and in alignment with the Region 4 baseline assessment, particularly its five key findings.

Appendix M lists the region’s identified brownfield sites as of April 2023.

7 Conclusion

Southeastern Connecticut is unique. There are shorelines, urban centers, rural agriculture-based areas, suburban areas, and many small towns. There are areas where jobs go wanting for lack of a local trained workforce, and areas where unemployment is high. In practically all areas, affordable housing is lacking.

The region is only a few hours from major metropolitan centers and, due to that, enjoyed some investment during the pandemic as people sought a different quality of life. Simply put, more people are needed in the region for it to grow and prosper.

Economic development has many definitions and is often misunderstood by municipal leaders, residents and even development professionals and practitioners. There are many and sundry reasons for this, and there is an ongoing and healthy debate between those who want to ensure and promote a vibrant business environment and those who what to preserve and cultivate the region's quality of life. The two visions are not mutually exclusive, and proper planning, strong municipal and community leadership, and an enlightened business community can ensure an economically-viable region with a high quality of life.

Many planning, community development and economic development practitioners debate, analyze, and debate some more these same issues re: quality of business environment (QOBE) over quality of life (QOL) considerations. In a recent paper, *An Aggregate Approach to Estimating Quality of Life in Micropolitan Areas*, the authors assert that in micropolitan areas there are indications that a "higher QOL drives both population growth and employment growth more than QOBE in micropolitan area counties" ([An aggregate approach to estimating quality of life in micropolitan areas | SpringerLink](#)). Interestingly, SECT EDD is referenced in the 2020 Census as a metropolitan area because it has a population more than 50,000 ([Metropolitan and Micropolitan Statistical Areas of the United States and Puerto Rico \(census.gov\)](#)). However, due to the unique blend of rural, urban and suburban environments in the region, one could argue several micropolitan sub-regions exist.

CEDS 2023 is a blend of QOBE and QOL strategic goals and actions. The region CAN thrive AND maintain a high quality of life. The goal **Support People**, perhaps the most important of the three goals, reminds everyone that the region is stronger when all – family members, professional and scientific workers, craftspeople, tradespeople, hospitality and healthcare workers, residents, business owners – strive for the same outcomes.

Acknowledgements

Thank you to the following for significant contributions to **CEDS 2023**.

CEDS Oversight Committee

David Hammond, seCTer Economic Development Committee

Catherine Young, seCTer Economic Development Committee

Juliet Hodge, Director of Land Use and Planning, Town of Ledyard

Sean Nugent, Board Chair, seCTer

Mark Oefinger, Board Chair Emeritus, seCTer

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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
Economic Development Administration
Robert N.C. Nix Sr. Federal Building and
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Philadelphia, PA 19107

June 27, 2023

Paul Whitescarver, Executive Director
Southeastern Connecticut Enterprise Region
5 Connecticut Avenue
Norwich, Connecticut 06360-4592

Dear Paul,

Thank you for the recent submission of your CEDS document. EDA appreciated the opportunity to review your CEDS document for the period of 04/01/2023 through 04/01/2028.

We are pleased to inform you that EDA's review of your CEDS document and process align with the regulatory and programmatic requirements and your CEDS has been accepted by EDA. The priorities and focuses outlined within your CEDS document will help form the foundation of how EDA reviews applications for Public Works and Economic Adjustment Assistance Programs from your region.

We greatly appreciate the work of the Southeastern Connecticut Enterprise Region Board and CEDS Committee to develop this innovative, regionally-driven economic development strategy. EDA looks forward to continuing to work with you to help support the goals and priorities outlined in your recently submitted CEDS.

Sincerely,

Debra Beavin, Economic Development Representative
Philadelphia Regional Office