




South Alabama
Regional Planning
Commission (SARPC)

COMPREHENSIVE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY


For Baldwin, Escambia, and
Mobile Counties

2023 Annual REPORT

Prepared by the South Alabama Regional Planning Commission

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**SOUTH ALABAMA REGIONAL
PLANNING COMMISSION (SARPC)**



**COMPREHENSIVE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY
FOR BALDWIN, ESCAMBIA, AND MOBILE COUNTIES**

**ANNUAL UPDATE
2023**

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WWW.SARPC.ORG

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SARPC'S PLANNING AREA

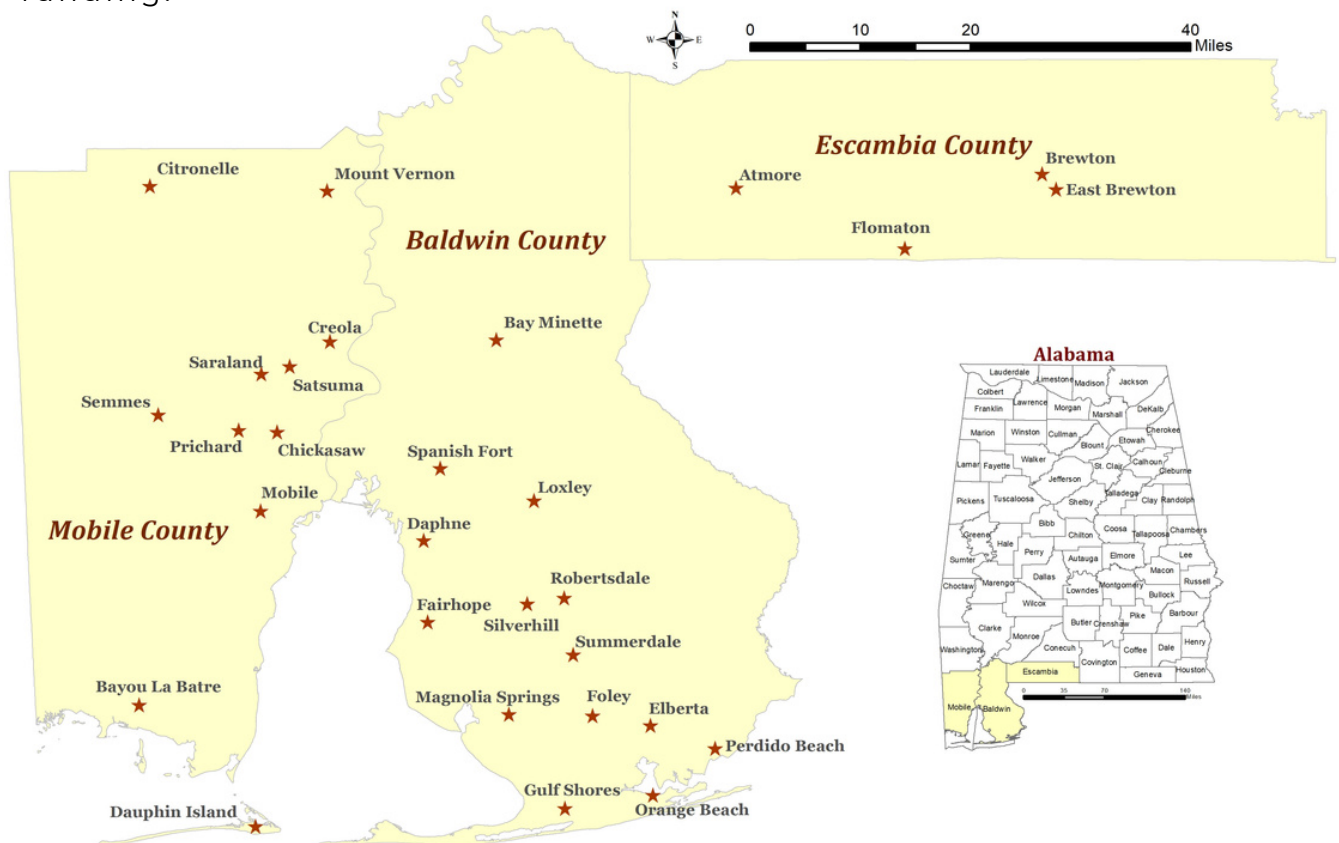
OVERVIEW

As the designated Economic Development District (EDD) by the Economic Development Administration (EDA), SARPC is responsible for developing the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) for the three-county region.

The Commission is required to fully update and publish the CEDS every five years and complete an annual update each year.

The CEDS is intended to guide the economic prosperity and resiliency of SARPC's three-county area by using economic, built, natural, and service assets to develop an Economic Plan of Action for the region. This plan outlines strategies for prioritizing projects throughout the region.

Member governments and organizations can utilize the CEDS as a guide for the development of grant applications to enhance economic opportunities for their communities. Specifically, projects seeking EDA assistance must align with goals and recommendations outlined in the CEDS to be considered for funding.



I. SARPC'S REGION: ANNUAL UPDATE

The Economic Development District (EDD) staff at the South Alabama Regional Planning Commission (SARPC) continues to work towards the goals outlined in the 2022 Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS). This annual update summarizes the progress SARPC's Region, which includes Mobile, Baldwin, and Escambia Counties, has made towards combatting area challenges and fulfilling regional needs. The entire CEDS document can be found on SARPC's website at: www.sarpc.org.

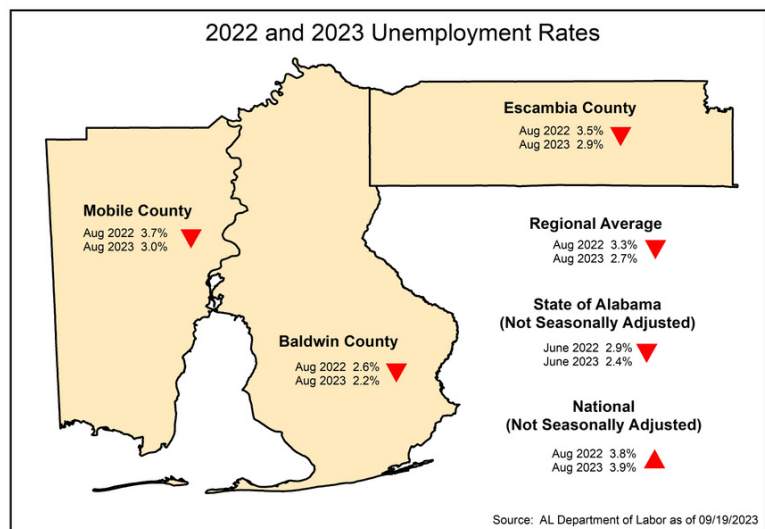
II. ECONOMIC UPDATE

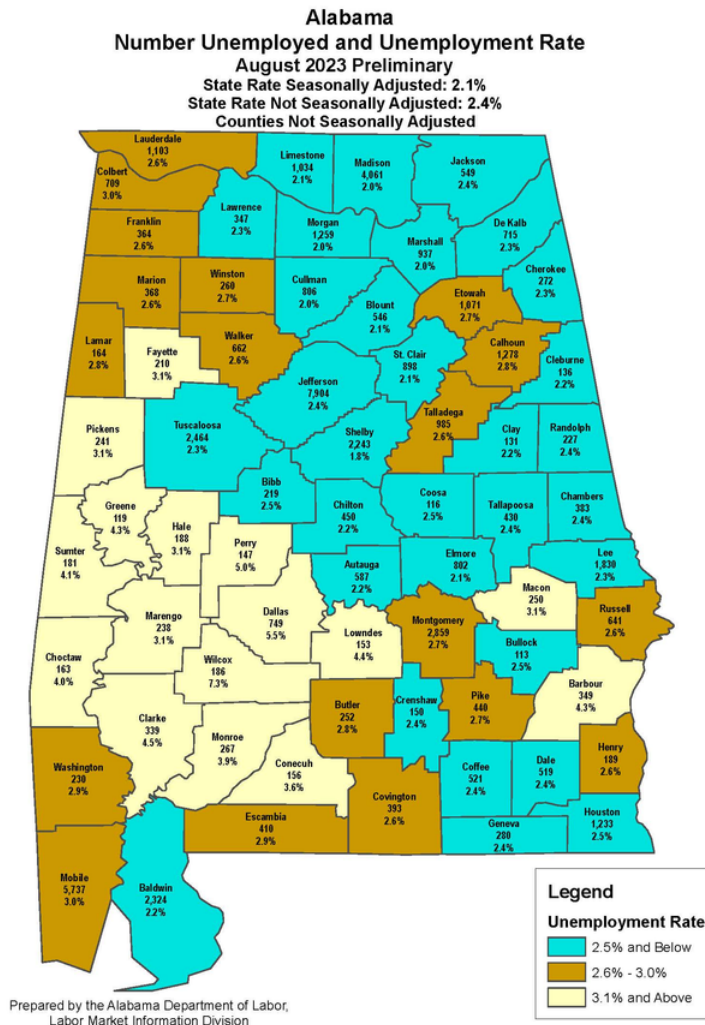
The Alabama Department of Labor reports the unemployment rates have continued to decline over the past year in SARPC's Region as well as state-wide. Alabama's Labor Force Participation Rate (LFPR) remained unchanged in August 2023 at 57.0 percent. This is up from last August's rate of 56.9 percent. The "prime-age" participation rate, which measures the labor force participation rate for individuals aged 25-54 remains 77.8 percent in Alabama.

The seasonally adjusted August unemployment rate held steady at its record low 2.1 percent. August's rate is well below August 2022's rate of 2.6 percent. The August 2023 rate represents 48,605 unemployed persons, a new record low, compared to 48,789 in July and 60,200 in August 2022.

The number of people counted as employed increased by 32,631 over the year to a new record high of 2,259,025. The civilian labor force also reached a new record high of 2,307,630, with 21,036 more people joining the labor force over the year.

Over the year, wage and salary employment increased by 38,100 to 2,149,800 with gains in the leisure and hospitality sector (+4,900), the private education and health services sector (+7,100), the government sector (+5,900), the trade, transportation, and utilities sector (+8,100), and the professional and business services sector (+6,000), among others.





III. RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

The Mobile area is experiencing unprecedented economic growth with a growing number of jobs in aviation, shipbuilding and repair, advanced manufacturing, logistics, healthcare, engineering, construction and business. This growth presents a difficult challenge in the need to produce a much larger number of adequately skilled workers.

The Mobile Area Workforce Alliance was recently created to produce the needed workforce for the Mobile area and to facilitate communication, collaboration, and mutual accountability through regular meetings. This Alliance is comprised of local school systems including Chickasaw, Mobile County, Saraland, and Satsuma. Members also include: the Mobile Area Education Foundation, Bishop State Community College, Coastal Alabama Community College, The University of South Alabama, Alabama Industrial Development Training, Southwest Alabama Partnership for Training and Employment, South Alabama Workforce Development Council, and The Mobile Chamber.

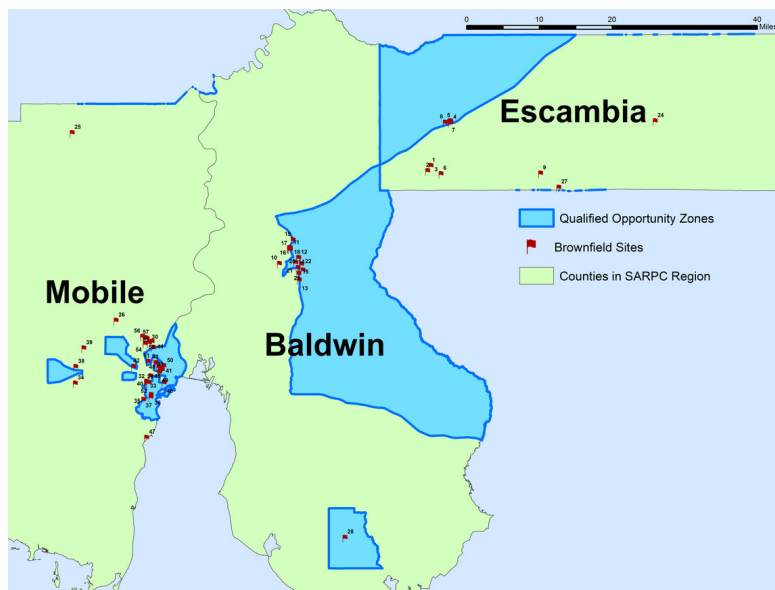
SARPC AWARDED EPA BROWNFIELD ASSESSMENT GRANT

In May 2023, SARPC was awarded a \$500,000 EPA Brownfields Assessment Grant, which will allow SARPC to develop a regional brownfield inventory, complete environmental assessments, and develop site specific cleanup plans throughout our Region. The Commission is working with PPM Consultants to conduct the project over the next four years.

These funds can help pay for environmental assessments, which is a large cost when redeveloping property. Often times, developers don't have the funds to complete the assessment and the end result is development does not occur and abandoned property remains, creating blight in the community. This grant gives SARPC the ability to pay for the assessment and clean up a contaminated site so it's available for a new development. Additionally, SARPC can utilize the Revolving Loan Fund to provide the needed financing a developer might need to start the small business.

The two programs combined are perfect partners to spur economic growth. SARPC sees this as yet another valuable service in it's arsenal we can offer to member governments and others and will continue to apply for this annual funding opportunity from the EPA in efforts to better serve our Region and create new businesses.

The map shows Brownfield sites in the Region and their proximity to Certified Opportunity Zones. Check out the map in the interactive version of our 2022 CEDS on the homepage of SARPC's website for more information. Contact Nicole Taylor, Director of Community Planning and Development to apply for funding..



THE MAJORITY OF BROWNFIELD SITES ARE LOCATED WITHIN THE REGION'S QUALIFIED OPPORTUNITY ZONES, HELPING MAKE BROWNFIELD REDEVELOPMENT EVEN MORE ATTRACTIVE AND FEASIBLE TO DEVELOPERS.

IV. NEW BUSINESSES AND BUSINESS EXPANSIONS

The table shows the new and expanding businesses and industries in SARPC's Region over the last year. Please note that Escambia County did not have any new or expanding businesses added to its inventory during this time.

New and Expanding Businesses & Industries October 2022 – September 2023				
BALDWIN COUNTY				
Company	Location	Jobs Created	Investment	Product/Service
New Businesses & Industries				
Expanding Businesses & Industries				
E-Covery	Loxley	35	\$20,000,000	Metals/Advanced
Viridi RNG	Summerdale	7	\$11,052,085	Energy/ R&D
Home Depot	Loxley	20	\$2,200,000	Warehouse/ Distribution
Total-Baldwin County		137	\$50,252,085	
MOBILE COUNTY				
New Businesses & Industries				
Peak North America USA	Irvington	175	\$24,000,000	Sawmill equipment
Ray-Mont Logistics	Mobile	50	\$30,867,500	Distribution
Superior Air Parts	Creola	180	\$24,150,000	Aerospace
Expanding Businesses & Industries				
Canfor	Axis	0	\$210,000,000	Sawmill
Great Southern Wood	Irvington	12	\$13,789,734	Treated wood
Gulf Distributing Company	Mobile	25	\$32,500,000	Beverage distribution
Airbus	Mobile	0	\$150,000,000	Aerospace
Chart Industries	Theodore	59	\$73,000,000	Industrial machinery
Vertex	Saraland	0	\$115,000,000	Chemical
VT MAE	Mobile	200	\$510,000	Aerospace
Core Industries	Theodore	28	\$8,750,000	Wood pellets
Total- Mobile County		729	\$682,567,234	
TOTAL – SARPC REGION		866	\$732,819,319	

Sources: Baldwin County Economic Development Alliance and Mobile Area Chamber of Commerce

V. CURRENT AND COMPLETED PROJECTS

The following is a list of on-going, completed, and upcoming grant-funded community development project that SARPC has assisted with over the last year. The list includes the grant funding agency, the grant award amount and the municipality in which the project is located.

(I) Coastal Zone Management (CZM) & National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA)

1. City of Semmes - Comprehensive Plan \$60,000 (ongoing)
2. City of Citronelle - Zoning Ordinance \$60,000 (ongoing)
3. Town of Dauphin Island – Zoning Ordinance \$60,000 (complete)
4. City of Creola – Zoning Ordinance \$60,000 (complete)
5. City of Robertsedale - Comprehensive Plan \$90,000 (beginning October 2023)
6. Town of Magnolia Springs – Comprehensive Plan \$90,000 (beginning October 2023)

(II) Economic Development Administration (EDA)

1. City of Atmore – Rail Spur \$2 million (complete)
2. City of Brewton – Provalus-Water Infrastructure Improvements \$2.8 million (scheduled completion date OCT 2023)
3. North Baldwin Utilities (Novelis) – 2-million Gallon Elevated Water Tank \$2.5 million (construction to begin in late 2023)
4. University of South Alabama (USA) – Emergency Generators \$3.8 million (ongoing)

(III) Delta Regional Authority (DRA)

1. City of Atmore – Rail Spur \$300,000 (complete)
2. City of Atmore – Industrial Access Road \$300,000 (ongoing)
3. City of Brewton – Water Well \$700,000 (ongoing)
4. City of Brewton – Road Infrastructure & Drainage Improvements \$1.2 million (pending approval from DRA)
5. City of Atmore – Economic Development Plan \$125,000 (in works)
6. Poarch Creek Indians (PCI) – Broadband Plan \$125,000 (TBD)
7. SARPC- Grant Support Specialist-LDD Support \$24,000

(IV) Alabama Department of Economic & Community Affairs (ADECA)

1. City of Brewton – Water Infrastructure Improvements (Provalus) \$1 million (complete)

(V) Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)

1. SARPC- Brownfield Assessment & Redevelopment Project- Region-wide (Atmore Hwy 31 & Creola Hwy 43 specific) \$500,000 (underway)

(VI) Southeast Crescent Regional Commission

1. SARPC-Grant Support Specialist- Mobile and Baldwin Counties \$21,000

VI. RESILIENCY EFFORTS

In efforts to establish improved resiliency efforts and promote unified regionalism throughout our Region, SARPC is currently in the process of seeking funding for the potential development of a Regional Resilience Plan for Mobile, Baldwin, and Escambia counties in Alabama. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) recently announced a funding opportunity made possible by the Inflation Reduction Act titled, NOAA Climate Resilience Regional Challenge. This grant program focuses on collaborative approaches to achieving resilience in coastal regions and advancing NOAA's efforts to build Climate-Ready Coasts.

Serving in our capacity as the Regional Planning Commission, SARPC plans to apply for these grant funds as the lead applicant on behalf of the counties and communities we serve throughout our Region with the support of our Region's primary coastal organizations and resource managers. The vision of this group effort is to engage Mobile, Baldwin, and Escambia counties and their municipalities in the development of a regional resilience plan. The resilience plan will address the following six themes which will be led by area experts: emergency preparation; natural environment protection; renewable energy and energy efficiency changes; improved health outcomes; strengthening the built environment; and economic and workforce development.

- Theme 1: Preparing for and recovering from emergencies- Mississippi Alabama Sea Grant Consortium, Tracie Sempier Lead
- Theme 2: Caring for our natural environment- Mobile Bay National Estuary Program, Roberta Swann Lead
- Theme 3: Embracing renewable energy, Lead-TBD
- Theme 4: Improving health and wellbeing- University of South Alabama Center for Healthy Communities, Ashley Williams Hogue Lead
- Theme 5: Enhancing neighborhoods and the built environment- Smart Home America, Julie Shyou- Woodard Lead
- Theme 6: Strengthening the economy and workforce- Southwest Alabama Workforce Development Corporation, Bridgete Wilson Lead

The goals of this initiative are to:

- 1) Expand cross boundary resilience leadership;
- 2) Improve resilience collaboration, coordination, and action;
- 3) Create process for institutionalizing resilience plan at member government scale;
- 4) Establish expanded services to member governments to create and maintain continuous adaptation practices. The outcome of this initiative—a coastal Alabama region, organized to actively collaborate to improve the resilience of the natural resources, economies, and ALL communities through a shared vision, agreed upon resilience practices, and prioritized actions providing co-benefits to each community which reduces risks from future weather and climate change impacts.

Per the requirements of the NOAA Resilience Challenge grant opportunity, this group has prepared and submitted a Letter of Intent (LOI) that outlines our proposed project and is awaiting a response from NOAA as to whether or not our project will be asked to move forward. SARPC requested the each member government sign a Letter of Support (LOS) so that SARPC may demonstrate to NOAA they have the full support of the Region should we be invited to submit a proposal. SARPC has received a LOS from each member government.

If awarded, SARPC will use the grant funds to hire a Chief Resiliency Officer who will coordinate with the partners listed to create a resource our member governments can use to increase resiliency into their individual communities. SARPC's vision is for all its member governments, including the Poarch Band of Creek Indians, to actively participate in a Tri-County Collaborative to improve the resilience of their natural resources, economies, and communities, including those who have been marginalized, underserved, or underrepresented. Where all have adopted a common vision, a set of resilience practices, and have incorporated those into their local planning and regulatory documents, laying the groundwork for future equity and adaptation related actions to respond to weather and climate related impacts.

Strategic Direction

MISSION.....

SARPC's mission and the mission for this CEDS is for the Region to continue to aggressively recruit growth to the Region. Utilize the unique assets each county offers to attract targeted development. Build a skilled and trained workforce. Serve the Region as an effective, contributing partner in economic development .Brand the Region as the Southeast's most economically diverse and competitive market.

VISION.....

*What priorities do we as a Region want to achieve in the next five years.
What priorities should we be focusing on?*

The Strategic Direction and Action Plan was developed through an internal and external analysis of the SWOT and the Asset Based Approach. Additionally, the CEDS Strategy Committee was presented the above question via an online survey to help determine the vision for our Region.

GOALS.....

Goals are broad outcomes or general intentions that build upon the desired vision for the Region.

Objectives are quantitative, directional statements that support the vision.

Strategies define the means to achieve the goals and objectives.

STRATEGIC GOALS

1

IMPROVE AND INCREASE INFRASTRUCTURE TO PROVIDE SUFFICIENT CAPACITIES TO ACCOMMODATE POPULATION GROWTH & TRAFFIC CIRCULATION

2

DECREASE UNDEREMPLOYMENT BY INCREASING WAGES TO CAPTURE & RETAIN WORKFORCE

3

ADVANCE THE REGION'S ECONOMY & INVEST IN DOWNTOWN DEVELOPMENT & COMMUNITY ASSETS

4

BUILD A SKILLED & TRAINED WORKFORCE TO FILL THE NEEDS OUR INDUSTRIES REQUIRE

5

PROTECT & FOSTER THE UTILIZATION OF OUR NATURAL ASSETS

6

BUILD A UNIFIED IDENTITY & BRAND FOR THE REGION

STRATEGIC GOALS

OBJECTIVES

- DEVELOPING STRONG WORKFORCE SOLUTIONS; COLLABORATE WITH WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT PARTNERS
- FOSTER RELATIONSHIPS WITH THE REGION'S EMPLOYERS TO ASSESS AND OFFER ALTERNATIVES TO FILL THEIR WORKFORCE NEEDS
- CONNECT WITH KEY EDUCATION AND TRAINING PARTNERS SUCH AS LOCAL UNIVERSITIES, LOCAL COMMUNITY COLLEGES, CAREER CENTERS, MOBILE COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEM AND ITS SIGNATURE ACADEMIES TO INCREASE STUDENT ENGAGEMENT WITH EMPLOYERS.
- CONTINUE INVESTIGATING THE FEASIBILITY OF NEW CAREER TECHNICAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS, INTERNSHIPS, APPRENTICESHIPS AND EMPLOYER-RELATED SCHOLARSHIPS WITH PARTNERS.
- RECRUITING YOUNG, SMART TALENT TO THE AREA
- BUILD AND SUPPLY STATE OF THE ART TECHNOLOGY
- SUPPORTING DOWNTOWN DEVELOPMENT AND OTHER QUALITY-OF-LIFE ASSETS FOR THE COMMUNITY.
- ESTABLISH A CONSISTENT BRAND AND IDENTITY
- MAKE THE REGION A HUB AND POWERHOUSE FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
- INFRASTRUCTURE IMPROVEMENTS LIKE TRANSPORTATION ARTERIES, PARKS, HOUSING, PUBLIC SAFETY AND EDUCATION
- IMPROVE MOBILE'S "QUALITY OF PLACE" FOR BUSINESS GROWTH AND INVESTMENT
- INCREASE THE POPULATION IN MOBILE

STRATEGIES

- Build a bridge over the Mobile River on I-10
- Support the development of diverse, reliable and cost effective energy sources and systems to meet the Region's economic and environmental goals
- Seek state and/or federal funding for utility improvements and expansion
- Develop and maintain suitable telecommunications infrastructure to bring high-speed internet service to the underserved areas of the Region
- Expand options for high school students to become industry certified while still in high school
- Integrate education, training and workforce development
- Offer more quality job options vs. quantity of jobs to capture quality and loyal employees to decrease underemployment and job turnover rates
- Seek funding for downtown development
- Support businesses and programs that support downtown revitalization
- Encourage responsible development practices that are environmentally friendly
- Create awareness and promote environmental responsibility in the community
- Work with local governments to update their development regulations to include low impact standards
- Support the continued development of the eco-tourism industry through forest recreation, fish and wildlife, and scenic and heritage-based strategies
- Support and seek opportunities for value-added manufacturing that utilizes commodities originating within the Region
- Seek federal funds to identify contaminated sites available for brownfield redevelopment