

# 1 – INTRODUCTION TO CEDS

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***Authors Comment – This public comment (#6) was received after Sections 1 and 2 were repaginated, thus some portions reflect comments on the Introduction to CEDS (Section 1) , and others to the Regional Overview (Section 2). We have included the comments in both sections, with current page numbers. We appreciate the well thought out comments and hope that readers of this CEDS document will consider their content as they review this plan.***

(6) “As a professional risk manager and community member, I am responding to point out that there are a number of statements in this draft that do not hold up to scrutiny and in some cases are patently misleading or not addressed in the plan goals. In order to publish a reliable and valid report, the authors should consider the following

With reference. Page 10 (**Section 2, p.4**) – SWOT analysis: Weaknesses – these are accurate, though the focus in inadequate infrastructure does not properly address the lack of support for seniors in a community where that population makes up a significant proportion of the area population. Threats – this is one of the most telling items in the plan – it indicates that “Regulatory Barriers” are viewed as a “Threat.” Regulation is NOT a threat – the actual threat is the failure of industry and businesses in those sectors to self-govern and conduct themselves in an ethical and same manner. That is why regulation is imposed on those industries.

Regional Overview Page 11 - 2 – (**Section2, p.5**) STRATEGIC DIRECTION – Regional Priorities and Projects Regional stakeholders have expressed a preference to use the terms Priorities (rather than goals) and Projects (rather than objectives).” This is not recognized as an effective way to guide planning – by either funders or local stakeholders. This quoted statement means you go can sidestep the real needs of the region by setting priorities and then not have to meet any “stated goals;” and that you can fund projects, whether they meet strategic objectives or not. So of course, regional stakeholders that have power favor this approach. I’m a regional stakeholder and I think this is a damaging statement about our governing stakeholders who openly choose not to be responsible or accountable to taxpayers (not all companies or stakeholders are taxpayers).

The bottom line with the earlier description sections of the plan that talk about our region is that, this report is a pretty story being told rather than actual fact about the real circumstances on the ground in our region. I have supported businesses in our region for nearly 15 years and speak from experience.

***Authors Comment – the ideas expressed in Section 1, p.3-4 reflects a future vision rather than a current reality. These principles were submitted by focus groups during the 2011 CEDS Update, and we believe they continue to reflect a regional philosophy based on stakeholder input.***

Page 5 (**Section 1, p. 3**) – “A sustainable community meets the basic needs of all people. These include air, water, food, shelter, health, safety, autonomy, connectedness, meaning and purpose.” While this

statement is correct – these are the hallmarks of a sustainable community – Region 9 falls short on many of these basic needs, including the basics of food, shelter, health, safety, autonomy, and connectedness. Workers in our region do not have affordable housing and often have to choose between shelter and safety (e.g., living in a boarding house with individuals who are dangerous to their health and safety – this is not conjecture, but known fact). Domestic violence is rife in our region (read the police reports). Autonomy is challenged in our region by the “old boy network” that runs the state, region, and the county.

Page 5 (**Section 1, p. 3**) – “Damage from invasive weeds has been reduced and our native species are thriving. As extractive industries develop and decline, disturbed lands are successfully reclaimed and utilized.” This is simply unfounded. Invasive weeds are a significant and mounting problem in SW Colorado, and in Archuleta County. This problem has been radically mismanaged for the past decade and we are seeing the dramatic impact from those practices on the ground now. Page 5 – “Our agricultural industry is thriving as a result of increased local markets and innovative programs that ensure agricultural viability without regulations that diminish land value.” Developments are being allowed in flood plains and are taking place without proper regard to water needs. Development is displacing agricultural land.

Page 6 (**Section 1, p. 3**) – “Diversity in our community is valued and celebrated. People from different age groups, cultures, backgrounds, and interest frequently come together to participate in local activities, events, and projects. The local economy provides opportunities for all people, young and old, to grow their families, advance their careers and be productive members of the community. Our communities provide opportunities such as lifelong learning programs, quality recreational facilities, available childcare, and equal access to affordable health care and housing.” In fact, older adults are not valued overall in our region (especially Archuleta County). affordable housing is NOT available throughout our region and is a significant barrier for hiring and stable employment, negatively impacting both employers and employees. This shortage also forces choices for health decisions and ability to afford health care that are detrimental to those in all age groups who fall into lower income brackets (not just poverty level, but below middle class income).

Page 7 (**Section 2, p. 1**) – “We strive to encourage economic development that preserves our small-town and traditional heritage, takes care of our natural resources, and provides opportunities for our children to stay in southwest Colorado.” Region 9 CEDS Mission Statement. Neither of these mission elements are being met - small town has welcomed Walmart (just for instance) - and we've seen the downfall of local businesses across the region. Opportunities to stay are hampered by high housing costs and employment obstacles, many related to inadequate affordable housing (both long term rental and purchase).

Page 8 (**Section 2, p. 2**) – discussion about internet: Repeatedly, area corporations have accepted federal and state funds to expand broadband into rural communities and then have instead used those funds to expand their suburban markets. The internet, and for that matter basic phone services, throughout Southwest Colorado remains intermittent and poor at best. These services are not even remotely adequate to encourage business or to sustain existing business in our communities.

Page 9 (**Section 2, p. 3**) – with reference to “business retention/expansion” – “If every business were able to support one additional employee, communities would see tremendous benefits. A related set of strategies focuses on improving the competitiveness of local firms.” This is a laughable statement in a market where existing businesses cannot find reliable or even appropriately trainable employees, even with good wages and benefits. See also note about page 8 on Broadband services.

Page 9 (**Section 2, p. 3**) – “Our region is serious about helping business recovery, and we need to back our intentions with real money utilizing all programs in the Federal business support toolkit such as...” Since the pandemic and the changes that has exerted on our regional economy, these sources have tightened considerably. For example, USDA Region 9 rules have been stringently tightened around low interest loans for infrastructure development.

## WHAT IS A COMPREHENSIVE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY?

A Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) is the result of a local planning process designed to guide the economic growth of an area. In July of 1995, the Region 9 Economic Development District of Southwest Colorado (Region 9) launched southwest Colorado's initial CEDS process by offering county-level data, a strategic planning component with visions, goals, and specific strategies for reaching those goals, and identified community projects.

The purpose of the CEDS is to create direction for retaining and creating better paying jobs, fostering stable and more diversified economies, as well as maintaining and improving the quality of life in southwest Colorado, which includes the five counties of Archuleta, Dolores, La Plata, Montezuma, and San Juan, plus the Southern Ute and Ute Mountain Ute Indian Tribes. This CEDS planning process provides an opportunity for economic developers, key community stakeholders, and the community at large, to unite behind a vision that works towards long-term economic resilience and sustainability, while protecting the natural and social assets that make the region distinct and attractive. The process, and the resulting CEDS document, is useful for everyone who desires to understand their local economy and work to improve the community in which they live.

The full CEDS is updated every five years; this 2021 document is the sixth full edition. Community Development Action Plans (CDAPs), which are the lists of identified projects, are updated on a two-year cycle. Annual CEDS Progress Reports are also submitted to the Economic Development Administration (EDA).

While the document is a product of Region 9 and is required to qualify for Economic Development Administration (EDA) assistance, the CEDS document is meant to be a working plan for all local governments, community entities and respective economic development organizations. A list of organizations that partner with Region 9 to provide economic resources and services can be found in [Appendix A](#). An acknowledgement of participants and contributors to the CEDS process is located in [Appendix B](#). Region 9 also works to disseminate the CEDS information to state, local, and regional organizations.

This CEDS information is a result of public input, meetings, personal interviews, surveys, a systematic review of planning documents, and active feedback from the EDA. The process was guided by the [Colorado Rural Economic Blueprint](#), a statewide strategy to spur Colorado's economy in communities outside of the front range. It is focused on expanding rural access to broadband services, tackling high health care costs, repairing rural roads and bridges, investing in rural economic development, and supporting our farming and ranching communities by connecting them to new markets. Further, it is dedicated to fulfilling every child's potential, and ensuring all Coloradans can benefit from the transition to cheaper and cleaner renewable energy sources. The CEDS process also integrates the [2020 Colorado Resiliency Framework](#). This Framework examines risks and vulnerabilities across four themes: adapting to our changing climate, understanding risks from natural and other hazards, addressing social inequities and unique community needs, and pursuing economic diversity and vibrancy.

This 2021 CEDS update builds upon state and local initiatives by:

- Summarizing the economic conditions of each county in Region 9 and putting local economic development interests in a regional and international context.
- Identifying viable economic development projects and initiatives.
- Facilitating eligibility for federal and state economic development funding.
- Developing goals and strategies for implementing economic development projects and initiatives, and
- Identifying and recognizing trends, either positive or negative as they occur.

## Economic Resiliency as a Framework

As a society we are recognizing more and more the ways in which unexpected events disrupt our environmental, social, and economic systems and change our communities. Often, we do not have the power to stop these events, but we can prepare for them. Events such as a housing bubble or a recession, changes to our water quality and availability, or epidemic scale health concerns can move our region into unfamiliar and potentially costly scenarios. As such, strategies meant to encourage economic development in this region must be flexible and resilient so as to be able to respond to the unexpected and open our eyes to emerging opportunities.

Economic resilience has been defined as the ability of a region or communities to anticipate, withstand, and bounce back from any shocks to its businesses and overall economy, including:

- Pandemic
- Natural disasters or hazards (i.e., flooding or wildfires).
- The closure of a large employer (i.e., the oil and gas industry).
- The decline of an important industry (i.e., tourism).
- Changes in the workforce (i.e., out migration of skilled workers).
- Climate change (i.e., increasing temperatures, decreasing water availability).

These types of events can be divided into “steady-state” initiatives and “responsive” initiatives. **Steady-state** initiatives tend to be long-term efforts that seek to bolster the community or region’s ability to withstand or avoid a shock. These might include integrated planning efforts that involve extensive participation from the community to define a collective vision, diversifying the economic base, or by adapting business retention and expansion programs (such as economic gardening) to assist firms with economic recovery post disruption. Planning for and implementing resilience through specific goals or actions are addressed in this region through the SWOT analysis and strategic plan prepared for each county, which have identified a number of vulnerabilities that could lead to major economic disruptions.

**Responsive** initiatives include establishing strategies to address the region’s recovery needs following an incident. Responses to natural and other disasters (such as the COVID-19 pandemic) have been addressed in the updated Regional Disaster Preparedness section of the 2021 CEDS ([Appendix C](#)). The goals and strategies outlined in that document provide the foundation for improving all-hazards preparedness and resiliency, leading to fewer lives lost, reduced economic impacts in affected communities, improved response capabilities, and faster recovery time. That document is due for an update after county emergency plan revisions have been fully developed. In addition, the region follows the guidelines provided by the Colorado Division of Homeland Security & Emergency Management.<sup>1</sup>

To unify the region in disaster recovery, Region 9 funds support a variety of regional initiatives. First, Southwest Colorado Disaster Assistance (SWCODA) is a grassroots effort that shares resources and raises awareness during emergencies by matching those who want to help, with those who need help. This website was previously used during emergencies such as the 416 Fire in 2018 that primarily impacted La Plata and San Juan Counties. It was reactivated in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and expanded to include all five counties and two Native American tribes in southwest Colorado.<sup>2</sup> Region 9 supports this website as the new hub for all five counties' recovery work. One key purpose it serves is to reduce duplication of resources and provide tools for communities that do not have the financial or technical support needed for today's on-line communications. The SWCODA website provides a much-needed platform that ties them into the larger regional recovery efforts and resources.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://dhsem.colorado.gov/>.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.swcoda.org/>.

In addition to being proactive through the development of strategic plans for each community, as a regional economic development organization Region 9 is particularly concerned with post-disaster economic recovery. Long-term recovery efforts focus on redeveloping communities and restoring the economic viability of disaster areas, including:

- Restoring the economic base of disaster-impacted communities, including lost jobs and employment opportunities; and
- Identifying hazard mitigation opportunities and implementing long-term hazard mitigation plans, projects, and measures (e.g., land use plans, hazard-zone restrictions and building codes).

Region 9's Rise and Recover funding focuses staff efforts to help ensure the region recovers and thrives with measurable progress beyond the two-year grant cycle. Region 9 participates on the county recovery taskforces to engage in recovery efforts that serve the local communities and align strategically to the region's efforts.

### **What are the Benchmarks of a Sustainable Community?**

A sustainable community is one that preserves and restores the integrity of its natural environment, nurtures healthy human and other living systems, and maintains a vital self-reliant economy, generation after generation. Environmental considerations play a key role in southwest Colorado's economic development activities. Residents of our communities value the high quality of life provided here, including clean air and water and scenic views. An environmental overview of the region is provided in [Appendix D](#).

A sustainable community meets the basic needs of all people. These include air, water, food, shelter, health, safety, autonomy, connectedness, meaning and purpose. Meeting these needs in a sustainable way also entails meeting the needs of all life in the local environment. These principles were examined by focus groups during the 2011 CEDS Update, and we believe they continue to reflect a regional philosophy. In addition, comments were solicited during a public review process from July 15<sup>th</sup> through August 15<sup>th</sup>, 2021. These comments were incorporated into the 2021 CEDS Update and are found in Appendix E.

### **Where would we like to be in the foreseeable future?**

The vision is that our region develops on principles that respect and protect our private property rights, our natural, cultural, and heritage assets while providing opportunities for our diverse population to thrive in southwest Colorado. We take a big picture view in planning and employ effective principles to achieve our desired development patterns. To protect our rural lifestyle, we grow around designated centers integrating new and old neighborhoods while supporting agricultural lands. These centers are serviced by a well-planned infrastructure and multimodal transportation system. Groups work together to maximize scarce resources. Local governments guide development in a way that is symbiotic with local municipalities, sovereign nations, neighborhood communities and property owners.

Our local businesses are prosperous, our economy is diverse, and our counties are fiscally healthy. We approach economic development with a long-term view and seek cooperative, integrated, and creative solutions to foster regional economic growth. Businesses support a work environment that values productive employees, innovative personnel practices, and continuous workforce development to ensure services are delivered in an efficient, ethical, and responsible manner.

Our communities support the protection and enhancement of a healthy natural environment on a local, regional, and global scale. We are a leader in environmental stewardship for our proactive and balanced approach to conserving natural resources. We enjoy a healthy environment with clean air and water, and dark night skies. Wildlife corridors connect natural areas throughout the region, creating ecosystem linkages and improving wildlife vitality. Damage from invasive weeds has been reduced and our native species are thriving. As extractive industries develop and decline, disturbed lands are successfully reclaimed and utilized.

Our agricultural industry is thriving as a result of increased local markets and innovative programs that ensure agricultural viability without regulations that diminish land value. Our agricultural system is an important provider of food to our community and to the world. We recognize water is a finite resource and plan based upon that understanding. We are proactive in addressing impacts of drought and potential water shortages. Our planning considers the unique characteristics and needs of each watershed and ensures a reliable water supply for all users.

We are a national leader in conventional and renewable energy industries. As a region we invest in efficient, safe, and healthy resource technologies. Thus, we are renowned for our energy independence and as an exporter of conventional/traditional and renewable energy. Locally we reduced energy demand through efficiency, conservation, and design.

Within each county, and throughout the region, we ensure efficient multi-modal transportation systems that complement our land use strategies. Walking, cycling, and equestrian routes connect our neighborhoods, towns, and employment. Roads and public transportation networks are well planned to enable people of all ages and abilities to get around safely, efficiently, and conveniently through the county. Our airports connect us to the rest of the world, contributing to our economic vitality. Our region is a vibrant and exciting destination that shows off our natural assets, rich heritage, and diverse cultures.

Diversity in our community is valued and celebrated. People from different age groups, cultures, backgrounds, and interest frequently come together to participate in local activities, events, and projects. The local economy provides opportunities for all people, young and old, to grow their families, advance their careers and be productive members of the community. Our communities provide opportunities such as lifelong learning programs, quality recreational facilities, available childcare, and equal access to affordable health care and housing.

### MAP OF REGION 9

