THE BIG TABLE®
GREATER PEORIA

Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy

2026–2030

Greater Peoria does not lack vision or effort. What it needs is alignment and resources!.

PEORIA · TAZEWELL · WOODFORD · LOGAN · MASON

A five-county Economic Development District in central Illinois

GREATER PEORIA Economic Development Council

E·D·A U.S. ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

APPROVED BY THE GPEDC BOARD JULY 7, 2026 · PUBLIC LAUNCH SEPTEMBER 2026

Acknowledgments

This Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy was shaped by 480+ community members and partner organizations across five counties, a CEDS Committee organized into five goal-area subcommittees, and partner organizations that have taken named responsibility for the work ahead.

Goal-area subcommittees

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EDA funding statement

Contents

Theme 1
Business Growth and Innovation

Theme 2
Economic Participation

Theme 3
Place and Quality of Life

Colour key introduced here and carried through the theme dividers, strategy pages and evaluation tables. Page numbers hyperlinked in the interactive PDF.

Executive Summary

Greater Peoria enters the next five years with a clear-eyed understanding of itself. The region does not lack vision or effort. What it needs is alignment and resources. That conclusion was not written by a consultant or a committee working behind closed doors. It emerged, in nearly identical words, from 480+ community members who gathered across five events in five counties through the Big Table 2025 process. The line residents repeated most often became this plan's reason for being: "If the programs and resources exist, people can't find them."

This Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) is the five-county region's answer. It organizes the work of the next five years around three questions the community is asking:

480+

community members and partner organizations shaped this plan

Source: GPEDC, Big Table 2025 Report

01 What infrastructure makes growth possible?

02 Who gets to participate in the economy?

03 What kind of place do we want to be?

Each question becomes a theme. Section 1 records how the plan was built, Sections 2 and 3 describe the region and test it against a SWOT analysis, and Section 4 sets out the goals, objectives, and strategies that answer these three questions.

01 Business Growth and Innovation

What infrastructure makes growth possible?

Building the physical, technological, and institutional conditions for businesses to start, grow, and compete.

02 Economic Participation

Who gets to participate in the economy?

Ensuring every resident has equitable access to the services, resources, and opportunities needed to participate fully.

03 Place and Quality of Life

What kind of place do we want to be?

Investing in the places, experiences, and opportunities that attract and retain residents, visitors, businesses, and entrepreneurs.

The strategy that follows describes the region as it is today, presents the SWOT analysis that grounds the plan, details the goals, objectives, and strategies the region will pursue, and establishes how progress will be measured and how the region will build resilience against the disruptions it can foresee and the ones it cannot.

Most importantly, this CEDS is designed to be used. The intent is for partner organizations across the five counties to take ownership of specific objectives, so that regional decisions in the years ahead can be tested against a single question: "Is this aligned with the CEDS?"

THE ALIGNMENT TEST

"Is this aligned with the CEDS?"

01

How This Plan Was Built: The Big Table 2025

Most strategic plans are written first and shared later. Greater Peoria reversed the order.

In 2025, the Greater Peoria Economic Development Council (GPEDC) set one regional summit and four Rural Big Table sessions across the five counties, inviting the community to shape the next CEDS before a word of it was drafted. In total, 480+ community members and partner organizations participated across five events in five counties.

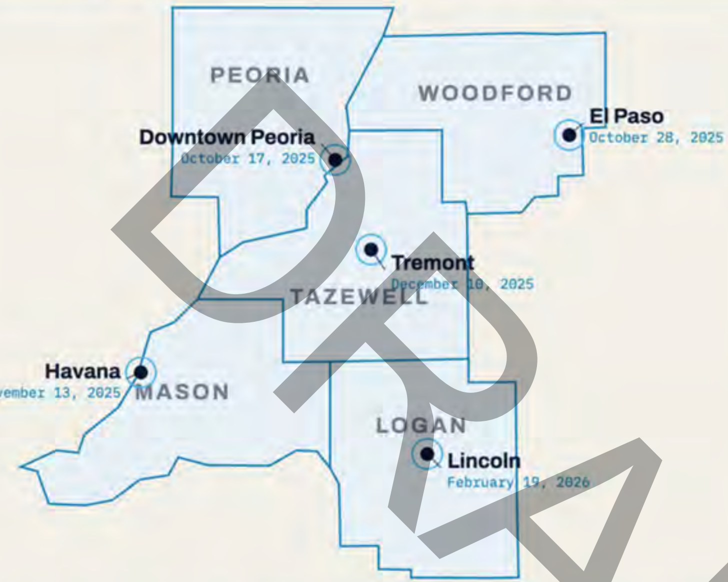
Participants engaged in structured dialogue around four core themes: Access to Opportunity; Workforce & Talent Pipeline; Innovation & Entrepreneurship; and Livability & Quality of Place.

480+ community members and partner organizations	**5** events	**5** counties	**4** discussion themes

Five events, five counties

CHART C1

Five events, five counties, 480+ voices



- THE BIG TABLE – MAIN EVENT
  Downtown Peoria
  Peoria County · October 17, 2025
- RURAL BIG TABLE
  El Paso
  Woodford County · October 28, 2025
- RURAL BIG TABLE
  Havana
  Mason County · November 13, 2025
- RURAL BIG TABLE
  Tremont
  Tazewell County · December 10, 2025
- RURAL BIG TABLE
  Lincoln
  Logan County · February 19, 2026

Source: GPEDC, The Big Table: Greater Peoria 2025 Report. County boundaries: U.S. Census Bureau TIGER.

Source: GPEDC, The Big Table: Greater Peoria 2025 Report.

What the region said

> "Some of the resources exist. People can't find them."
>
> RECURRING PARTICIPANT SENTIMENT, BIG TABLE 2025

Across five counties, urban and rural, the message was remarkably consistent. Residents did not describe a region short on assets. They described a region whose assets are disconnected: training programs that employers don't know about, services that residents can't navigate, communities solving the same problems separately.

The main event featured keynote speaker Victor W. Hwang — founder of Right to Start, former Vice President of Entrepreneurship at the Kauffman Foundation, and author of The Rainforest — who challenged the region to treat entrepreneurship as a civic priority.

The five pillars of the Big Table 2025 Report

01 Remove structural barriers to participation

02 Align and strengthen the talent pipeline

03 Strengthen the entrepreneurial ecosystem

04 Invest in livability as economic strategy

05 Redesign communication and regional alignment

Those conversations, tested against regional data and a review of existing plans, produced the strategy that follows.

02
Summary Background: The Region Today

2.1 Historical Overview

The Greater Peoria we call home today is rooted in a phenomenal natural history. Retreating glaciers left behind the fertile land that established a dense and diverse tallgrass prairie teeming with life. Animals, plants, soil, and waterways shaped a symbiotic and cooperative landscape. That glacial history also set the stage for the Kankakee Torrent, which cut the Illinois River valley, a natural centerpiece of this part of the state.

It was this natural abundance that first attracted people to this place. Just as the tallgrass prairie once held deep and diverse roots, the human history and community of Greater Peoria also run deep here. A multitude of Native American tribes traversed and settled in the area for generations, from the Peoria, Woodford and Tazewell County shores of Peoria Lake, once called Pimiteoui, a place of abundance, to the mound builders along Mason County's banks of the Illinois River, to the Kickapoo village at Elkhart Hill in Logan County.

A storied history exists between those first inhabitants and today, from the arrival of French colonialists to the inclusion of the Illinois Country into the expanding United States, to towns born of pioneer farmers, to Black southern migrants seeking refuge from slavery, to the hometowns and stomping grounds of U.S. Presidents, to the birthplace of numerous inventions and businesses both small and large, local and global.

> But throughout time and place, the shared goal of this region's people remains the same: to know prosperity, attain a quality living for ourselves and our families, and sustain the region's natural assets.

PHOTO: Illinois River valley / tallgrass prairie

A river region on fertile ground

Greater Peoria sits at a geographically optimal location in Central Illinois and within the Midwest United States. The Illinois River, a critical inland waterway connecting the Great Lakes to the Mississippi River and ultimately to the Gulf of Mexico, runs through the region.

One of the major benefits of the rich, diverse tallgrass prairie of the past to the region's economy is the fertile soil and flat terrain that continue to support agricultural production. From this soil sprang modern industrial agriculture. Today, agriculture remains a cornerstone of the regional economy, with continued strength in row crops, specialty crops, organic operations, small farm operations, and soil health practices.

13M
tons of cargo through the Heart of Illinois Regional Port District each year

220M
gallons per day from the Mahomet Aquifer

500K+
residents served by the aquifer across 15 counties

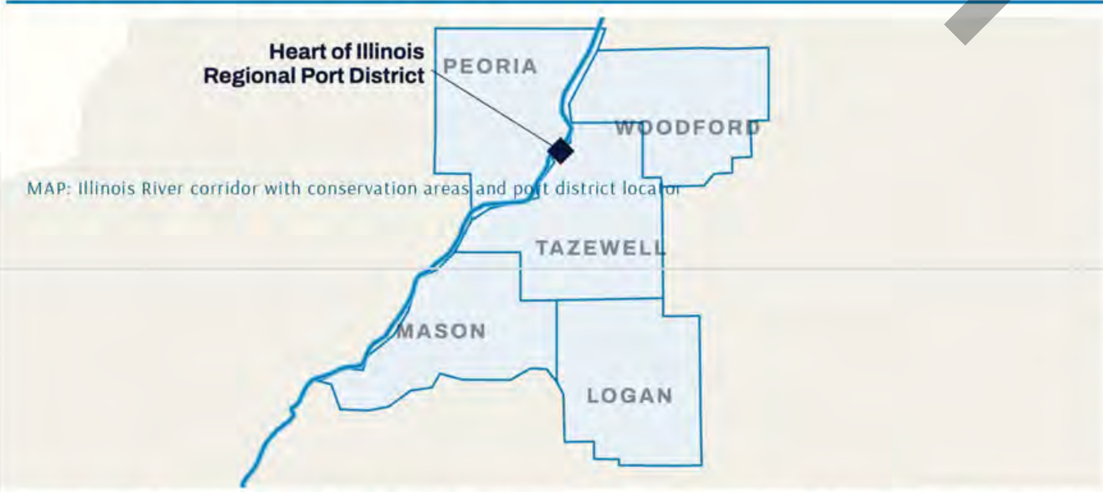
The resources of the Illinois River continue to support the regional economy. Each year, more than 13 million tons of cargo move through the Heart of Illinois Regional Port District in Peoria, sustaining the region's role as a major inland waterway hub. The river also faces long term environmental pressures, including invasive carp, sedimentation, and nutrient loss.

CONSERVATION AREAS ALONG THE RIVER

- Banner Marsh State Park
- Chautauqua National Wildlife Refuge
- Jake Wolf Memorial Fish Hatchery
- Emiquon National Wildlife Refuge

GEOGRAPHY AND NATURAL RESOURCES

The Illinois River corridor



13+ million tons
Annual cargo through the port district

5 of 6
National Class I railroads serving the region

220M gallons/day
Mahomet Aquifer supply to 500,000+ residents

Sources: Heart of Illinois Regional Port District; regional summary. River centreline: Natural Earth. Boundaries: U.S. Census Bureau TIGER.

An industrial region, a healthcare hub

Greater Peoria is a famed industrial area, a major regional healthcare hub, and an emerging innovation center, surrounded by some of the best agricultural land in the world. The area is served by a major waterway, an international airport, an extensive rail system, and a strong road network providing optimal logistics.

The region continues to expand its economy with healthcare, manufacturing, agriculture, and logistics and transportation as leading industries. Caterpillar and OSF HealthCare remain two of the region's largest employers, with recent employer data showing approximately 13,000 employees at OSF HealthCare and over 11,000 employees at Caterpillar. The region also has a notable concentration of employers in the insurance industry.

$28.6B
regional GDP, 2024 current dollars

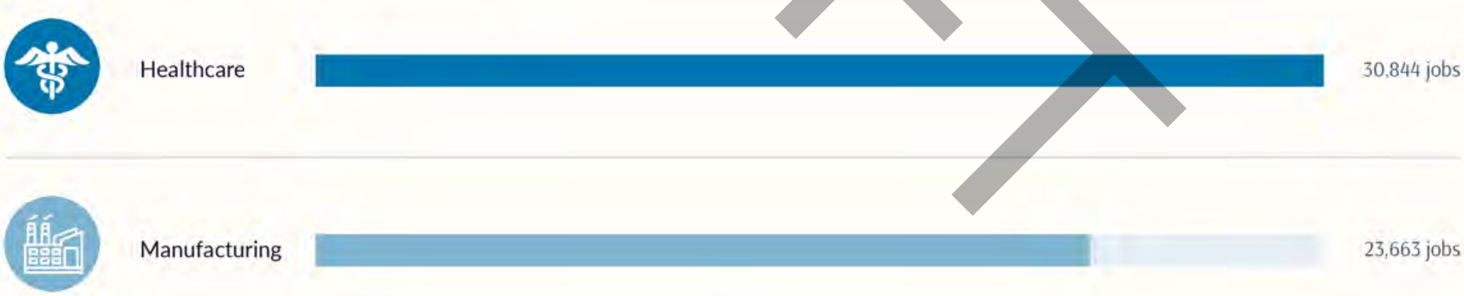
+23%
GDP growth since 2021

8,605
business establishments, 2023

13,000
employees at OSF HealthCare

Regional employment by leading sector

CHART C2



+25%
healthcare concentration above the national average

+54%
manufacturing concentration above the national average

Sources: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics QCEW; U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis; GPEDC analysis, 2024.

Healthcare

At the heart of Greater Peoria is a thriving healthcare industry that is anchored by established institutions and supported by innovative startups and research. Greater Peoria is home to 708 healthcare establishments that employ approximately 30,844 people. This cluster is responsible for about 18% of all regional jobs, and its concentration remains roughly 25% above the national average. Springfield Clinic continues to grow its footprint in the region with over a dozen stand-alone and co-located facilities in Greater Peoria.

Industry leaders include OSF HealthCare and Carle Health, with critical industry research and development taking place at OSF's Jump Simulation and the University of Illinois College of Medicine Peoria. While a considerable portion of the healthcare system is located within the urban core of the region, there are solid anchors in the region's more rural areas.

30,844	708	18%	+25%
jobs	establishments	of all regional jobs	concentration vs. national average

FOUR RURAL HOSPITALS

Mason District Hospital	Havana
Carle Eureka Hospital	Eureka
Hopedale Medical Complex	Hopedale
Lincoln Memorial Hospital	Lincoln

SPECIALTY INSTITUTIONS

- Illinois Cancer Care
- Bleeding and Clotting Disorders Institute
- OSF Cancer Institute
- Trillium Place Health (behavioral health)

Manufacturing

Greater Peoria has an extensive history in advanced manufacturing, particularly around metal manufacturing. In 2024, approximately 23,663 people in Greater Peoria worked in this sector across 356 establishments. The regional concentration of manufacturing remains about 54% higher than the national average, indicating that manufacturing continues to be one of the region's defining economic strengths.

The presence of OEMs like these in the region but also nearby in the industrial Midwest has spurred a robust set of suppliers to serve them. These range from second- and third-tier parts manufacturers to manufacturing service providers like industrial maintenance and performance improvement.

23,663
jobs, 2024

356
establishments

+54%
concentration vs. national average

2,500+
engineers at Caterpillar alone

METAL & EQUIPMENT MANUFACTURERS

Caterpillar · Komatsu · Case New Holland · Eaton · Liberty Steel · Kress Corporation · Precision Planting

FOOD & CHEMICAL MANUFACTURERS

BioUrja · Alto Ingredients · Evonik · Ingredion · Nestle Libby · PMP Fermentation

Agriculture

$1.72B	4,066	1.6M	+56.4%
Market value of agricultural products sold, 2022	Farms across the five counties	Acres in farms	GDP growth 2017–2022, fastest of any regional industry

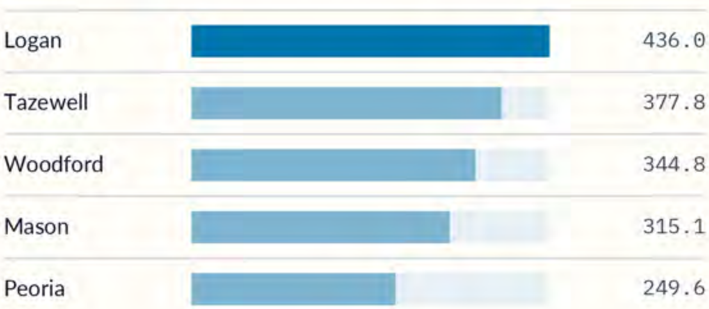
Agriculture is one of Greater Peoria's largest industries and, by output growth, its fastest growing. The region's 4,066 farms work 1.6 million acres and sold $1.72 billion in agricultural products in 2022, nearly 90 percent of it crops. Between 2017 and 2022, agriculture recorded the fastest gross domestic product growth of any industry in the region at 56.4 percent.

The scale is the story. The average Greater Peoria farm covers 395 acres and sells $424,000 a year, and 43 percent of the region's farms sell more than $100,000 annually. Growers harvested 155.4 million bushels of corn and 39.1 million bushels of soybeans in 2022, working with $1.12 billion in machinery and equipment.

Production at that scale sustains a dense supply chain that is a regional industry in its own right: equipment and agricultural technology firms including Precision Planting, the federal research capacity of the National Center for Agricultural Utilization Research, and the grain elevators, seed dealers, agronomy services and fuel suppliers operating in nearly every community across the five counties.

The farm economy is also more varied than its scale suggests. Mason County's sand-country ground supports 143,216 irrigated acres, 71 percent of all irrigated land in the region and the basis of its specialty crop production. Woodford County remains one of Illinois' leading counties for USDA certified organic operations, with Tazewell among the state's strongest. Pumpkins, specialty crops and rising cover crop acreage sit alongside commodity corn and soybeans. The future of food, fiber and fuel production holds real potential for new business and job creation.

Agricultural products sold by county, 2022 ($ millions) C5



Farms by size (share of all farms) C6

Source: USDA Census of Agriculture, 2022, five-county totals. GDP growth: Newmark targeted industry analysis, 2017–2022.

Logistics and transportation

Greater Peoria is accessible to the world through a mix of transportation infrastructure: air, rail, river, and road. Five of the nation's six Class I railroads, as well as a number of shortline railroads, serve the region. It is also home to Peoria International Airport with daily flights to Chicago, Dallas, Charlotte and Denver, and a U.S. Customs Port of Entry for air cargo.

The region's road network connects Greater Peoria to major metropolitan areas such as Chicago, St. Louis, Indianapolis, and Des Moines. Passenger rail access is available in nearby communities, including Lincoln, Normal, and Galesburg. The region is currently in the planning phases of connecting Peoria to Chicago via passenger rail.

13M+	5 of 6	4
tons of cargo annually through the port district	Class I railroads serve the region	daily nonstop air destinations

Regional logistics, transportation, and supply chain companies with operations in Greater Peoria include G&D Integrated and Risinger Bros. Transfer in Morton, Federal Companies and United Facilities in East Peoria, and TRIGO SCSI in Peoria.

Human services

The region's human services sector continues to play an important role in both the economy and quality of life. Human service organizations support residents through family services, behavioral health, community health, housing support, education, disability services, crisis intervention, and other essential community support services.

LARGER ORGANIZATIONS

Children's Home Association · Easterseals of Central Illinois · Heartland Health Services · Center for the Prevention of Abuse · Goodwill Industries · EP!C

Direct Flights Map from Peoria International Airport

Insurance

Although not technically an industry cluster, the region is home to a notable number of insurance companies and people employed in the insurance industry. RLI, Pekin Insurance, Pearl Insurance, and Illinois Mutual are located here, and State Farm, headquartered in nearby Bloomington, employs a number of the region's residents. This concentration continues to contribute to Greater Peoria's broader professional services economy and reinforces the region's mix of corporate, financial, and administrative employment.

Innovation

> "The intersection of dreamers and doers."
>
> A NATIONAL SITE SELECTION CONSULTANT, ON GREATER PEORIA

While the region has long been considered a "blue collar" factory town, the reality is that the manufacturing industry here is a mixture of innovating and engineering next generation technologies and building those products. Caterpillar employs over 2,500 engineers in the region and companies like Komatsu, Philippi Hagenbuch, Precision Planting and others also design the products they make here.

The region has worked to leverage these assets to inspire, encourage, equip and support more entrepreneurs and innovators in an effort to broaden the economy and make it more resilient.

In 2007, the community opened the Peoria Next Innovation Center to help accelerate this initiative. Now managed by Bradley University, Peoria Next features the only publicly available wet lab space outside of the Chicago metropolitan area and Champaign-Urbana. In 2024, Distillery Labs opened in downtown Peoria, adding 30,000 square feet of makerspace, commercial kitchen, co-working space and entrepreneurial programming to the region's innovation infrastructure. Together, these physical places are bolstered by a growing ecosystem of entrepreneurial support organizations.

REGIONAL INNOVATION ASSETS

National Center for Agricultural Utilization Research	The country's largest federally funded agricultural laboratory
University of Illinois College of Medicine Peoria	Cancer research center
Bradley University · Illinois Central College · Eureka College	Academic research capacity
OSF HealthCare	Groundbreaking clinical trial program and a large innovation studio
Distillery Labs, opened 2024	30,000 sq ft: makerspace, commercial kitchen, co-working and programming

Distillery Labs, downtown Peoria. Opened in 2024, the facility anchors the region's entrepreneurial ecosystem with a makerspace, commercial kitchen, co-working space and year-round programming.

Employment has been a roller coaster

Employment and jobs have been a roller coaster over the past five years with some dramatic fluctuations from month to month. When the CEDS was approved in March 2021, there were a total of 167,000 "employed persons" in the region. That number increased to 177,000 by July 2022, crashed back to 168,000 by January 2023, then rose and fell again through the end of 2024. Employment reached its high water mark of 179,000 in April 2025, retreated to 171,000 by April 2026, and has since climbed back to 178,357 (July 2026) — within striking distance of the high. The largest job losses were in the "Professional and Business Services" category, a sector that includes many of the temporary "agency" employees used as a flexible workforce during surges in manufacturing.

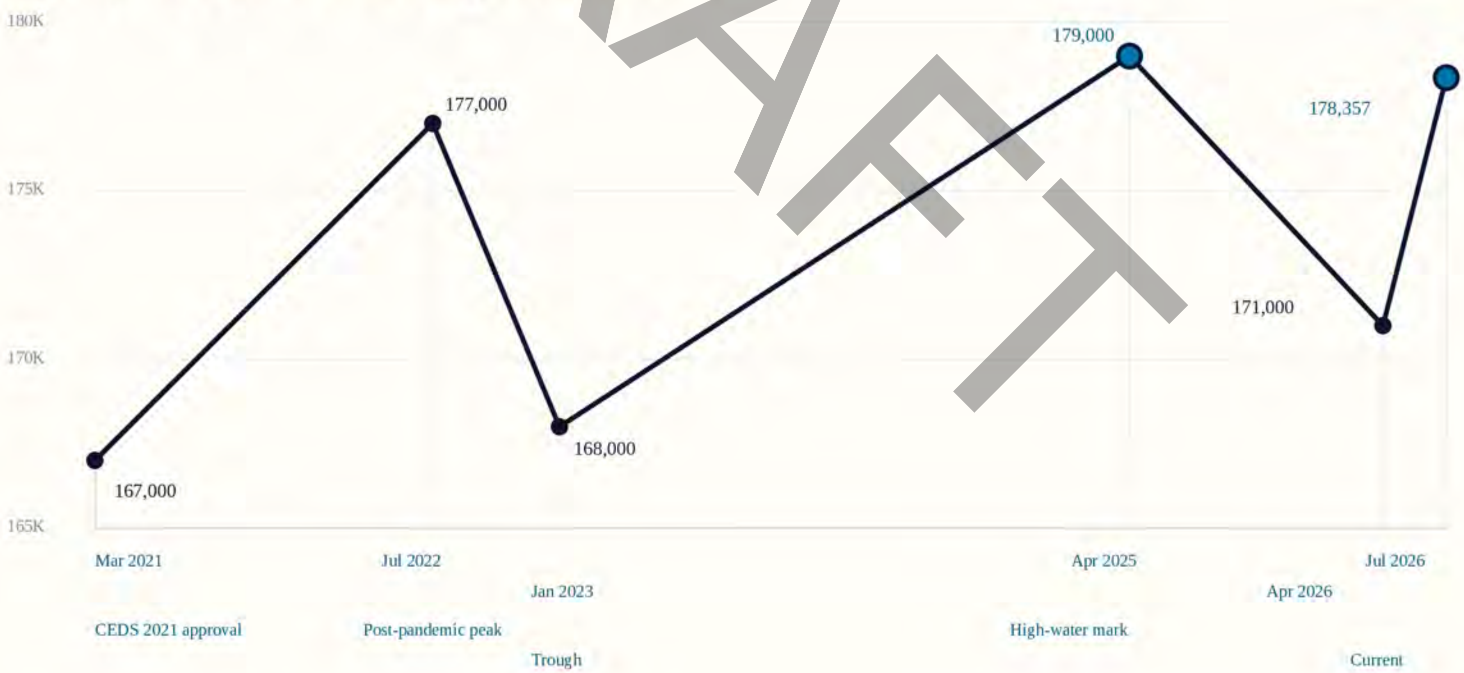
178K
employed persons,
July 2026

179K
high water mark,
April 2025

167K
at CEDS 2021 approval,
March 2021

Employed persons in the region, 2021–2026

CHART C7



Source: BLS (employed persons, five-county region); GPEDC analysis.

Where the region has invested

There is evidence of business growth and investment over the past five years. The strongest evidence is in the healthcare sector, which continues to grow and has become a critical piece of the regional economy.

$120M	**OSF HealthCare headquarters, downtown Peoria** Opened December 2021; anchors a downtown revitalization
$230M	**OSF Cancer Therapy Center** Plus the OnCall digital healthcare hub in a former Caterpillar office building
100 beds	**Meadowview Behavioral Hospital** OSF partnership with US HealthVest
$30M	**Carle Health** Trillium Place for children and adolescents; renovations at Methodist and Pekin hospitals
$28M	**Komatsu administration and engineering facility** New build on the Peoria campus
$40M+	**Caterpillar** Renovation of a vacant office building for a larger engineering force; investments at Morton, Mapleton and downtown Peoria

Springfield Clinic continued its expansion, including opening a new ambulatory surgery center. Liberty Steel has discussed significant plans to modernize its Bartonville steel mill.

The region has also attracted a number of new companies, including a proposed medical device factory in Pekin, an electric bus manufacturer in Peoria, and an airplane maintenance operation in Peoria County.

A region of 386,306, getting older

Greater Peoria is also aging. Median age ranges from 38.1 in Peoria County to 45.4 in Mason County, with Tazewell at 41.9, Logan at 41.1 and Woodford at 40.4. This aging trend has implications for workforce availability, healthcare demand, housing needs, transportation access and long term community planning. At the same time, the region's gender distribution remains nearly even across the five counties.

Population change is uneven across the region. Woodford County remains comparatively stable and has maintained a stronger long term growth trajectory, while Mason County continues to experience sustained population loss and remains the smallest county in the region.

386,306
residents, July 2025 estimate

38.1
median age, Peoria County, the region's youngest

45.4
median age, Mason County, the region's oldest

Median age by county

CHART C11

Every county in the region except Peoria now has a median age above 40. This aging trend has implications for workforce availability, healthcare demand, housing needs, transportation access, and long term community planning. At the same time, the region's gender distribution remains nearly even across the five counties. The region remains majority White while continuing to diversify: Black or African American residents make up the region's largest community of color, with the City of Peoria continuing to hold the majority of the region's Black population.

Source: Population, U.S. Census Bureau Population Estimates Program, Vintage 2025. Median age, U.S. Census Bureau, ACS 2020–2024 5-year, Table B01002.

Incomes and poverty vary county by county

Economic conditions vary significantly across counties and communities. The region's median household income is approximately $67,000, with county medians ranging from about $62,127 in Mason County to $85,629 in Woodford County. Housing remains relatively affordable for many owner occupied households, particularly compared with larger metropolitan markets. Rental affordability is more uneven, especially in communities where lower household incomes, older housing stock, transportation costs, and proximity to employment centers shape household stability.

Median household income by county

CHART C9

[TO COME] Peoria, Tazewell and Logan county values pending an ACS pull; the chart shows the region and the two stated endpoints.

Poverty

Poverty also remains unevenly distributed. Woodford and Tazewell Counties report lower poverty levels, while Peoria County continues to experience the region's highest individual poverty rate. Within the City of Peoria, poverty is especially concentrated in several neighborhoods and ZIP codes, including 61605, 61603, and 61604.

Rural poverty also remains a concern in Mason County, where lower median incomes, transportation constraints, population loss, and limited employment access create additional barriers for some residents.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, ACS 5-year.

Educational attainment

Educational attainment remains both a regional strength and a continuing challenge. Recent estimates show strong high school, some college, associate degree, certificate, and technical training patterns in Greater Peoria. Roughly 47 to 48 percent of adults ages 25 to 60 hold a postsecondary credential, and local colleges and training institutions reported 5,558 program completions in 2024.

However, the region continues to trail state and national averages in bachelor's and graduate degree attainment, making talent retention, adult education, technical training, and workforce aligned credentials important priorities.

47–48%
of adults 25–60 hold a postsecondary credential

5,558
program completions, 2024

<3%
of the largest district's students participate in CTE

STRONGEST COMPLETION FIELDS, 2024

Health professions	Business	Liberal arts
Engineering	Information technology	Technician programs

Alignment between student career pathways and employer needs remains a critical gap across the region. Less than 3% of the largest school district's population participate in Career and Technical Education (CTE) programming of any type, and low concentrations participate in CTE programs for targeted industries, leaving the region unprepared for future needs.

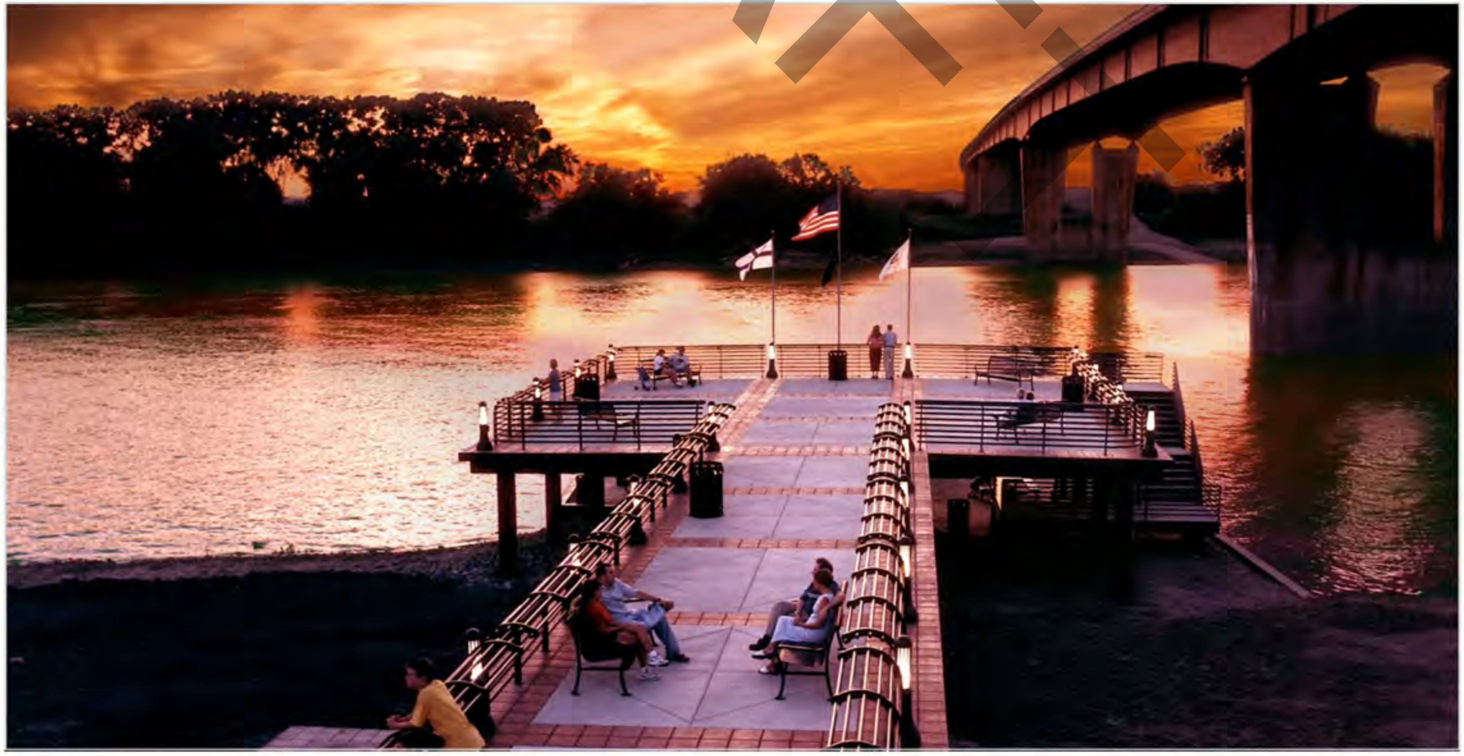
Urban, rural and the digital divide

The region's urban and rural mix remains central to its identity and economic development strategy. Peoria, Tazewell, and Woodford Counties contain the region's primary population and employment centers, while Mason and Logan Counties retain more rural characteristics tied to agriculture, lower density settlement patterns, and distance from major urban cores. These distinctions matter for infrastructure planning, program eligibility, broadband investment, agricultural competitiveness, and community development.

BROADBAND STRONGEST	BROADBAND WEAKEST
Peoria · Woodford · Tazewell	Logan · Mason

Digital access continues to affect workforce participation, education, healthcare access, and economic mobility. Yet, Peoria County also faces an urban digital divide related to internet subscriptions, computer access, affordability, and reliance on cellular service. As basic broadband availability improves in some communities, digital literacy, affordability, reliable service quality, and technology workforce readiness remain important regional issues.

> Together, these demographic and community conditions show a region with significant assets, including affordability, educational institutions, healthcare access, technical training capacity, and a strong mix of urban and rural communities. They also point to long term challenges related to population decline, aging, uneven household income, concentrated poverty, digital access, and workforce availability.



The SWOT that grounds the plan

The Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) analysis is foundational to the goals and action plan presented in this document. The analysis was informed through several different methods including a focus group session with the region's CEDS Committee, broad community input, and a cross-analysis of regional plans.

01	**CEDS Committee focus group**	Evaluated the SWOT analysis from the 2021–2025 CEDS, identifying pressing themes, pinpointing gaps, and eliminating aspects no longer relevant to the region's needs.
02	**Big Table community input**	Discussions across all five counties invited residents to assess issues, brainstorm solutions, and identify future actions; notes and themes were integrated into the SWOT.
03	**Cross-analysis of regional plans**	Municipal comprehensive plans, a long-range transportation plan, industry analyses, a labor shed study, and organizational strategies were examined.

The result is a regionally sourced SWOT backed by community input, planning expertise, and data.

S 11	**W** 12	**O** 6	**T** 10
Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats

SWOT at a glance

Informed by a CEDS Committee focus group, the Big Table conversations across all five counties, and a cross-analysis of municipal comprehensive plans, a long-range transportation plan, industry analyses, a labor shed study, and organizational strategies.

S STRENGTHS · 11

- Region's vast agricultural and natural resource assets
- Low cost of living comparable to national averages
- Low cost of doing business, with lower labor costs in comparison to state and nation
- Key transportation infrastructure in the region including an airport, interstates, rails, and ports
- Growing broadband infrastructure concentrated in urban and suburban corridors; active expansion efforts underway in underserved rural areas
- Entrepreneurial spirit is alive and well in the region, with key assets for developing an innovation ecosystem
- Strong and engaged network of higher education institutions invested in workforce programming and developing stronger partnerships
- Community has both existing buildings available for business expansion/attraction and land available for development
- General climate resilience compared to other regions
- Diversity of people, places and lifestyles across the region
- Robust network of human service agencies and organizations

W WEAKNESSES · 12

- Pockets of persistent poverty across region in both urban and rural communities
- Lack of affordable housing options as well as diversity in housing stock across the region
- Racial economic inequality
- Limited resources for early- and mid-stage small businesses including funding, appropriate graduation spaces and mentoring opportunities
- Fragmented networks amongst service providers impacting navigation of workforce, business, and social service programs
- Workforce development in the region is resource-rich, but needs better alignment; young people pursuing programs not always aligned with employer needs
- Lack of reliable transportation is a major roadblock to employment, education, and healthcare, with rural areas and lower-income communities facing significant gaps in transit options
- Access to affordable daycare options constrains workforce
- Lack of social spaces, after-hours activities, and youth programming in many communities
- Negative perceptions of region hinder pride and growth mindset
- Aging infrastructure, balancing costs with needs
- Historical reliance on large employers

O OPPORTUNITIES · 6

- Diverse natural, cultural, and recreational assets create opportunity to expand tourism as a driver of local spending and community pride
- Established regional concentration in healthcare, manufacturing, and education creates a foundation for cluster-based growth and supply chain attraction
- River access and natural resource assets optimal for inland port logistics and outdoor recreation economy
- Compete for talent and new residents by investing in quality of life, placemaking, and remote work infrastructure
- Regional strengths in food manufacturing and logistics create opportunity for focused business attraction
- Regional healthcare specialization and anchor institutions create potential to further develop as medical destination

T THREATS · 10

- Population decline in the region is leading to a shrinking and aging workforce with long-term impacts on the tax bases across the region
- Disruption of jobs due to AI & automation growth
- Rising energy prices and availability of energy infrastructure
- Ravine and stream erosion threaten properties, transportation infrastructure, and water quality in connected lakes and streams
- Funding and stability of social service providers reliant on grant funds
- Loss of anchor institutions, higher education assets and large employers
- State legislative environment and high tax rate for businesses
- Federal legislative environment's impact on global trade and population patterns
- Vulnerability to flooding, extreme wind and tornados
- Nationwide rise of commodities and impact on cost of living and cost of business

3.2 Strengths

The Greater Peoria region has several differentiating strengths priming the region for future growth and maintaining satisfaction amongst businesses and residents. Across the strengths listed in the SWOT, they fall into four major themes: Location, Affordability, Infrastructure, and Human & Institutional Capital.

The region benefits from a resource-rich environment with diverse agricultural assets and a geography that places urban amenities in close proximity to farmland and natural resources. Additionally, its location in the Midwest offers meaningful climate resilience relative to regions facing significant and growing environmental threats.
In an era of rising costs nationwide, the Greater Peoria region maintains relative affordability, with labor costs below state and national averages.

That affordability is anchored by vital physical infrastructure including an airport, connected interstates, rail, and ports. Finally, the region's human and institutional capital rounds out its asset base. A strong network of higher education institutions actively invests in workforce programming and regional partnerships. A robust human services network supports residents across the region, and a large hospital system anchors the healthcare sector as both an economic driver and a quality of life asset.

Location	Affordability	Infrastructure	Human & institutional capital

3.3 Weaknesses

While those assets exist as foundational strengths, the region recognizes weaknesses across four main areas: Workforce, Infrastructure, Inclusive Growth, and Mindset.

As population patterns trend downward and the skilled workforce retires, Greater Peoria faces urgent pressure to build its talent pipeline and reverse population decline. As the region pursues growth, it faces structural challenges in distributing that growth equitably. Pockets of persistent poverty exist across both urban and rural communities, and racial economic inequality remains high. Lack of affordable housing, childcare, and transportation prohibit communities of color and rural communities from fully participating in the economy.

Infrastructure presents as both a strength and weakness. The region grapples with aging systems and deferred maintenance across transportation, utilities, and the built environment. Despite these challenges, Greater Peoria can often be its own enemy and threat. Investing in growth requires risk tolerance and a willingness to recognize and champion the region's own assets, yet the region often defaults to risk aversion and a pessimistic self-image that hinders investment, pride, and talent attraction.

Workforce	Infrastructure	Inclusive growth	Mindset

3.4 Opportunities

Between the strengths and weaknesses, three thematic opportunities emerged: Strengthening and Innovating Current Industries and Assets, Talent and Population Growth, and Affordability as a Competitive Advantage. Greater Peoria's established industry clusters in manufacturing, healthcare, logistics, and agriculture create a strong foundation for cluster-based growth, supply chain attraction, and innovation.

Building industry strength alone is insufficient without a parallel strategy to attract and retain people. Placemaking investments, particularly in downtown corridors and along the riverfront, offer the region an opportunity to not only attract new talent, but address its own mindset around community pride through enhanced livability. Cost of living is rising nationally, and this affordability advantage uniquely positions the region to compete.

3.5 Threats

The region recognizes these strengths, opportunities and weaknesses exist within the context of larger threats: Policy Legislation, Compounding Economic Pressures, and Institutional and Economic Stability. Illinois's business tax climate and regulatory environment present ongoing challenges to business attraction and retention. At the federal level, shifts in immigration policy threaten to further constrain an already shrinking population and workforce, while evolving trade policy creates uncertainty.

Beyond the policy environment, compounding economic pressures such as automation, energy scarcity, environmental vulnerabilities and rising commodity prices endanger regional goals and priorities. Overreliance on federal grant funding leaves social service providers exposed, while dependence on a small number of large employers and anchor institutions concentrates risk. Population loss compounds all of these by disrupting the tax base.

While the region cannot entirely control for these impacts, the goals and actions that follow are designed with this context in mind, and work to address preparation at the local level where possible.

3.6 CONCLUSION — THREE QUESTIONS

As the region looks toward the next five years of economic development, a clear throughline emerges from the SWOT. The region is asking three fundamental questions:

What infrastructure makes growth possible?

Who gets to participate in the economy?

What kind of place do we want to be?

The goals and action plan that follow are organized around these questions.

How to read the action plan

The action plan is organized into three themes, each answering one of the questions that closed the SWOT analysis. Each theme carries a goal, three objectives, and the strategies the region will pursue.

Theme	Answers one of the three questions and carries a single goal statement. Three themes in the plan.
Goal	The condition the region is working toward. One per theme.
Objective	A distinct line of work under the goal. Numbers restart at 1 within each theme.
Strategy	The specific approach the region will pursue. Numbered to carry its objective number — 2.3 is the third strategy under Objective 2. The evaluation framework in Section 5 references these exact numbers.

How to use it

The strategies that follow are the framework the region measures itself against, not a work plan for any one organization. Objectives are written to be recognizable to many different actors at once, so that a municipality, an employer, an institution, or a community organization can each locate its own work inside them and pursue it at the pace its capacity allows.

01
Business Growth and Innovation
12 strategies

02
Economic Participation
8 strategies

03
Place and Quality of Life
9 strategies

The plan at a glance

Three themes, nine objectives. Objective numbers carry through the strategy pages in this section and the evaluation tables in Section 5.

01
Business Growth and Innovation

THE QUESTION What infrastructure makes growth possible?

GOAL

A region that builds the physical, technological and institutional conditions for businesses to start, grow, and compete.

3 objectives

12 strategies

10 trackable indicators

Growth does not happen by exhortation. It happens where a founder can find capital and a first customer, where a manufacturer can find a shovel-ready site with utilities in place, and where an established employer can find the technology and the talent to stay competitive. The Big Table conversations and the SWOT point to the same conclusion: Greater Peoria has the raw material for growth — sites, institutions, infrastructure, and an entrepreneurial spirit — but the connective tissue between them is thin. The objectives below build that tissue.

Objective 1	Objective 2	Objective 3
Build a connected innovation ecosystem	Strengthen the business climate	Develop and modernize infrastructure

OBJECTIVE 1

1 Build a connected innovation ecosystem that activates regional assets and embraces emerging technology.

1.1 **Develop a connected regional innovation network** — aligning entrepreneurs, universities, investors, and support organizations around shared goals, resource navigation, and coordinated startup support.

1.2 **Support adoption of emerging technologies across regional industries** — strengthening industry, education, and research collaboration and convening forums around ag-tech, robotics, automation, data systems, and advanced manufacturing.

OBJECTIVE 2

2 Strengthen the business climate to support entrepreneurship, business growth, and attraction.

2.1 **Create a more founder-friendly operating environment** — policies, procurement pathways, low-barrier spaces, and graduated-rent partnerships with owners of vacant properties.

2.2 **Strengthen capital formation pathways for entrepreneurs and small businesses** — cultivating relationships between startups and angel, venture, philanthropic, institutional, and alternative funding sources.

2.3 **Cultivate entrepreneurial interest and early-stage readiness** — programming that educates, inspires, and supports current and aspiring entrepreneurs.

2.4 **Attract and retain businesses and entrepreneurs aligned with regional strengths** — marketing and relocation strategy, business retention and expansion, and targeted attraction in leading clusters.

OBJECTIVE 3

3 Develop and modernize infrastructure to attract new business and support expansion.

3.1 **Prioritize development of site-ready properties and industrial parcels** — a coordinated site-readiness framework and accessible property and infrastructure databases.

3.2
- 3.2.1 Align infrastructure and long-range transportation priorities across municipalities, utilities, transportation entities, and economic development partners.
- 3.2.2 Advance port and marine infrastructure development.
- 3.2.3 Invest in rail, multimodal, and freight infrastructure that improves regional connectivity and export efficiency.
- 3.2.4 Expand broadband infrastructure and digital connectivity.

3.3 **Advance brownfield assessment, remediation, and redevelopment** to activate underutilized industrial and waterfront properties.

NUMBERING

Objective numbers restart at 1 within each theme. Strategy numbers carry the objective number; 3.2 breaks into four sub-points, the only place in the plan where a third level is used. The evaluation framework references these exact numbers.

How this theme is measured

Theme-level metrics

METRIC	2026 BASELINE	DIRECTION
Number of employer establishments	8,605 (2023, BLS QCEW)	INCREASE
Total number of jobs		INCREASE
Businesses choosing the region for expansion or relocation		TOTAL COUNT
Gross regional product	$28.6B (2024, BEA)	INCREASE
Industrial and commercial property equalized assessed value		INCREASE

Baselines shown are the most recent available year. Remaining baselines will be finalized in the published version.

Strategy-level indicators

12 POINTS · 10 TRACKABLE

STRATEGY	PRIMARY MEASURE	SOURCE
1.1 Regional innovation network	Organizations in recurring, documented innovation collaborations	GPEDC annual partnership log
1.2 Emerging technology adoption	*Measurement under development*	—
2.1 Founder-friendly environment	Total employer establishments (five counties)	BLS QCEW
2.2 Capital formation pathways	SBA 7(a) and 504 approved dollars (five counties)	SBA FOIA data
2.3 Entrepreneurial readiness	Percent of employed residents who are self-employed	ACS S2408
2.4 Aligned attraction & retention	Employment in target industry clusters	BLS QCEW
3.1 Site-ready properties	Properties meeting GPEDC site-readiness checklist	GPEDC LOIS/Lasso records
3.2.1 Infrastructure & transportation alignment	Projects in adopted regional TIP	Tri-County RPC
3.2.2 Port & marine infrastructure	Annual waterborne freight tonnage (Peoria area geography)	USACE Waterborne Commerce
3.2.3 Rail, multimodal & freight	*Measurement under development*	—
3.2.4 Broadband & digital connectivity	Percent of locations with 100/20 Mbps fixed service	Illinois Office of Broadband
3.3 Brownfield redevelopment	Brownfield properties returned to use	EPA Cleanups in My Community

02 Economic Participation

THE QUESTION

Who gets to participate in the economy?

GOAL

A region where every resident has equitable access to the services, resources and opportunities needed to fully participate in the economy.

3 objectives

8 strategies

5 trackable indicators

The sentence residents repeated at every Big Table — "the programs exist; people can't find them" — belongs to this theme more than any other. Greater Peoria has a robust network of human service agencies, training providers, and support programs, but fragmentation keeps them from reaching the people they were built for. And for too many residents, three practical barriers stand between them and work: transportation, child care, and navigation. This theme treats access as economic infrastructure, because a region cannot grow its workforce while structural barriers sideline willing participants.

Objective 1
Build sustainable talent pipelines

Objective 2
Remove barriers to workforce participation

Objective 3
Grow community connections and partnerships

OBJECTIVE 1

1 Build sustainable talent pipelines that connect residents to quality jobs in growing industries.

1.1 **Strengthen coordination among workforce, education, industry, and nonprofit partners** — regular regional gatherings of leadership that turn shared priorities into action.

1.2 **Prioritize targeted training programs that address regional skills gaps.**

1.3 **Connect job seekers with regional employment opportunities** — job fairs, visible job postings, and outreach targeting recent certificate and degree graduates.

OBJECTIVE 2

2 Remove barriers that prevent residents from fully participating in the workforce.

2.1 **Integrate wraparound support services** — transportation assistance, child care referrals, and digital literacy — into workforce and upskilling programs.

2.2 **Increase access to affordable child and dependent care** — expanding supply, building the early childhood workforce, and connecting families to providers and subsidies.

2.3 **Reduce geographical barriers affecting access to jobs** — demand-responsive and microtransit service, employer-aligned transit schedules, and multimodal connections.

OBJECTIVE 3

3 Grow community connections and partnerships that support economic mobility.

3.1 **Build trust and accessible pathways to services in underserved communities** — a unified navigation platform integrated with Heart of Illinois United Way 211, peer navigators, and community-based access points.

3.2 **Facilitate connections among social service and wraparound partners** — shared referral protocols, data-sharing agreements, and outcome metrics across providers.

BARRIERS

Three practical barriers stand between residents and work: transportation, child care, and navigation. Objective 2 addresses all three directly; Objective 3 addresses the navigation problem at the system level.

How this theme is measured

Theme-level metrics

METRIC	2026 BASELINE	DIRECTION
Number of employer establishments	8,605 (2023, BLS QCEW)	INCREASE
Total number of jobs		INCREASE
Businesses choosing the region for expansion or relocation		TOTAL COUNT
Gross regional product	$28.6B (2024, BEA)	INCREASE
Industrial and commercial property equalized assessed value		INCREASE

Baselines shown are the most recent available year. Remaining baselines will be finalized in the published version.

Strategy-level indicators

STRATEGY	PRIMARY MEASURE
1.1 Workforce partner coordination	Organizations active in a documented joint workforce initiative
1.2 Targeted training programs	Completions in selected priority CTE programs
1.3 Job seeker connections	Employment-to-population ratio, working-age residents
2.1 Wraparound supports in upskilling	*Measurement under development*
2.2 Child & dependent care access	Licensed child care capacity (five counties)
2.3 Geographic barriers to jobs	Annual vehicle revenue miles, regional transit agencies
3.1 Trust & accessible service pathways	*Qualitative indicator*
3.2 Social service partner connections	*Measurement under development*

Three of this theme's eight points are deliberately left unmeasured. In each case the framework judged that no credible recurring five-county statistic exists, and chose to leave the point unmeasured rather than invent a survey or substitute an unrelated statistic.

03

Place and Quality of Life

THE QUESTION What kind of place do we want to be?

GOAL

A region that attracts and retains residents, visitors and businesses by investing in the places, experiences and opportunities that make Greater Peoria a compelling place to live, work and play.

3 objectives

9 strategies

6 trackable indicators

Every economic development strategy ultimately competes on a simple question: why here? Greater Peoria's honest answer includes affordability, natural assets, and authentic communities — and an equally honest acknowledgment that the region has undersold itself for decades. This theme treats livability as economic strategy: activated downtowns, a tourism economy built on the region's natural and cultural assets, and a housing supply that works for the workforce the region intends to attract and keep.

Objective 1
Activate downtown corridors

Objective 2
Strengthen tourism through regional assets

Objective 3
Provide a continuum of quality housing

OBJECTIVE 1

1 Activate economic activity by investing in downtown corridors.

1.1	**Increase technical assistance and resources for municipalities pursuing downtown redevelopment.**
1.2	**Expand community planning that establishes a vision for downtown development.**
1.3	**Foster regional reinvestment and community-driven development.**

OBJECTIVE 2

2 Strengthen tourism through natural, cultural, and recreational assets.

2.1	**Expand recreational infrastructure, programming, and access.**
2.2	**Promote regional assets to strengthen tourism identity and visitor appeal.**
2.3	**Improve organizational capacity for tourism development.**

OBJECTIVE 3

3 Provide a diverse continuum of quality housing options.

3.1	**Enhance data-informed planning for housing development priorities,** including a funded regional housing study.
3.2	**Expand housing development capacity through local expertise and outside investment** — growing the developer pool, the trades workforce, and employer-assisted housing programs.
3.3	**Prioritize affordable and accessible housing,** including universal design standards that serve aging residents and residents with disabilities.

How this theme is measured

Theme-level metrics

METRIC	2026 BASELINE	DIRECTION
Total population	386,306 (2026, Census)	INCREASE
Residential property equalized assessed value		INCREASE
Hotel occupancy		INCREASE
Annual visitor spending, five counties	$860.4M (2024, IL Office of Tourism)	INCREASE
Homeownership rate		INCREASE
Number of housing units added		TOTAL COUNT

Baselines · Hotel occupancy: 12-month average, July 2025–June 2026 (Discover Peoria), which corrects for seasonality. Visitor spending: $860.4M across the five counties in 2024 (Illinois Office of Tourism, county tables); 2025 report expected August 2026. Baselines shown are the most recent available year; remaining baselines will be finalized in the published version.

Strategy-level indicators

9 POINTS · 6 TRACKABLE

STRATEGY	PRIMARY MEASURE	SOURCE
1.1 Downtown technical assistance	Municipalities receiving documented downtown assistance	GPEDC annual assistance log
1.2 Downtown visioning & planning	Municipalities with downtown/corridor plan updated within 10 years	GPEDC plan inventory
1.3 Regional reinvestment	*Measurement under development*	—
2.1 Recreational infrastructure & access	*Measurement under development*	—
2.2 Tourism identity & visitor appeal	Employment in leisure and hospitality sector	BLS QCEW
2.3 Tourism organizational capacity	*Measurement under development*	—
3.1 Data-informed housing planning	Percent of households that are housing cost-burdened	HUD CHAS
3.2 Housing development capacity	Housing units authorized by building permits	Census Building Permits Survey
3.3 Affordable & accessible housing	Percent of renters paying 35%+ of income toward rent	ACS DP04

06
Economic Resilience

Resilience in this CEDS takes two forms: steady-state initiatives that make the economy structurally harder to knock down, and responsive capacity the region can activate when disruption arrives.

The SWOT's threat analysis is candid about what could knock the region off course: population decline, automation, energy costs and availability, environmental hazards, policy shifts at the state and federal level, grant-dependent social services, and concentration of employment in a small number of anchor institutions. This section describes how the region builds the capacity to anticipate, withstand, and recover from those disruptions.

6.1 Steady-state resilience: structural buffers

Economic diversification	The Business Growth and Innovation theme's emphasis on the entrepreneurial ecosystem, technology adoption, and attraction aligned with regional clusters reduces the region's historical reliance on a small number of large employers.
Workforce adaptability	Talent pipelines and targeted training under Economic Participation build a workforce able to move between sectors as automation and AI reshape job categories.
Infrastructure hardening	Site readiness, brownfield redevelopment, broadband, and multimodal investment modernize aging systems, while attention to ravine and stream erosion, flood exposure, and utility capacity addresses known physical vulnerabilities.
Population and talent strategy	Housing, downtown activation, and tourism under Place and Quality of Life work together with barrier-removal strategies to stabilize the tax base by making the region easier to move to and harder to leave.
Service-sector stability	The navigation platform and partner-connection strategies create shared visibility into the human services network, reducing the risk that the loss of any single grant-funded provider severs residents from support.

Capacity to act in disruption

Regional coordination infrastructure

The CEDS Committee, its five goal-area subcommittees, and the partner network built through the 2026 roundtable process give the region a standing table where public, private, education, and nonprofit leaders already work together — the same table a disruption response requires.

Information channels

The annual evaluation cycle and the regional economic dashboard double as an early-warning system for economic shocks, from plant closures to sector contractions.

Lessons carried forward

The region's experience implementing the 2021–2025 CEDS through the pandemic and recovery — including the uneven rebound of hospitality and the volatility of the temporary workforce — informs this plan's emphasis on diversification and flexibility.

THREATS THE SWOT NAMES

Population decline · Automation and AI · Energy costs and availability · Environmental hazards · State and federal policy shifts · Grant-dependent social services · Employment concentration

BUFFERS THIS PLAN BUILDS

Diversification · Workforce adaptability · Infrastructure hardening · Population and talent strategy · Service-sector stability · A standing coordination table · Annual early warning

07
Implementation & Alignment

A strategy about alignment cannot be implemented by one organization, and this one does not try. The objectives and strategies in Section 4 are a shared framework rather than a division of labor.

7.1 A shared framework

They are written to be recognizable to many actors at once, so that a municipality weighing a capital project, an employer designing a training program, a funder evaluating a proposal, or a nonprofit planning services can each locate its own work inside the plan.

Implementation is distributed by design. Communities across the five counties will pursue different objectives at different speeds, according to their own capacity, priorities, and timing. The region is not uniform and this plan does not ask it to be. What the plan asks is narrower and harder: that regional efforts point in the same direction, that duplicated work becomes visible, and that the resources the region already has become findable by the people they exist to serve.

Progress is therefore measured as a regional condition rather than as any organization's performance, and the evaluation framework in Section 5 is built on that principle.

"Is this aligned with the CEDS?"

The simplest implementation tool in this plan is a question. When a community weighs an investment, when an organization designs a program, when a funder evaluates a proposal, the region's test is that question.

Alignment does not mean uniformity — the five counties will implement differently — but it means the region's efforts point in the same direction, and its resources become findable by the people they exist to serve.

01
Business Growth and Innovation

02
Economic Participation

03
Place and Quality of Life

Appendices

		STATUS
A	**The Big Table: Greater Peoria 2025 Report** Published at greaterpeoriaedc.org/bigtable25-report	PUBLISHED
B	**Goal-area logic models and KPI worksheets** Five subcommittees	[TO COME]
C	**CEDS Committee and subcommittee membership roster**	COVER
D	**Implementing partner commitments** Post-roundtable	[TO COME]
E	**Data sources and methodology notes for Section 2 statistics**	[TO COME]

Related resources

The Big Table 2025 Report carries the full record of the five community events, the four discussion themes, and the five pillars that shaped this plan.

The GPEDC regional economic dashboard carries the recurring measures named in Section 5 and is updated in annual batches by source.

Notes and sources

Employment and establishments
U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, QCEW; GPEDC analysis, 2024.

Employed persons, 2021–2026
BLS (five-county region); GPEDC analysis. Anchor points shown; full monthly LAUS series available.

Regional GDP
U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis. 2024 current dollars; growth stated since 2021.

Population and median age
U.S. Census Bureau population estimates, 2024; ACS 5-year.

Median household income
U.S. Census Bureau, ACS 5-year.

Educational attainment and completions
Census ACS; NCES IPEDS, 2024.

Agriculture
USDA Census of Agriculture, 2022.

Port tonnage
Heart of Illinois Regional Port District.

Groundwater
Mahomet Aquifer figures as stated in the regional summary.

Community input
GPEDC, The Big Table: Greater Peoria 2025 Report.

Evaluation framework
GPEDC CEDS Evaluation Matrix (Lean Indicator Framework), 2026.

SWOT
CEDS Committee focus group; Big Table sessions; cross-analysis of regional plans.

A NOTE ON MEASUREMENT

Where a measure could not be sourced credibly and recurringly, this plan says so rather than substituting an unrelated statistic. Eight of the twenty-nine strategy points are deliberately left unmeasured on that basis.

Alignment does not mean uniformity. It means the region's efforts point in the same direction, and its resources become findable by the people they exist to serve.

SECTION 7.3 · THE ALIGNMENT TEST

GREATER PEORIA ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL

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A FIVE-COUNTY ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT DISTRICT

Peoria · Tazewell · Woodford · Logan · Mason
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GREATER PEORIA Economic Development Council

E·D·A U.S. ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

THE BIG TABLE GREATER PEORIA