

EMERALD COAST REGIONAL COUNCIL COMPREHENSIVE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

2022-2026



2023 Annual Performance Report



Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy, June 2021

2023 Annual Performance Report, October 2023

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Additional copies of this report may be obtained by contacting:

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Steering Committee

The Emerald Coast Regional Council would like to thank the following steering committee members for the input and guidance provided during the 2022-2026 major CEDS update:

- Nathan Sparks, Okaloosa County EDO
- Danita Andrews, Florida West EDA
- Ted Everett, Washington County EDO
- Verdell Hawkins, Florida Power & Light
- Nicole Gislason, UWF Haas Center
- Shane Chadwick, Florida's Great Northwest
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List of Acronyms

AFB	Air Force Base
ATMS	Advanced Traffic Management Systems
BEA	Bureau of Economic Analysis
BLS	Bureau of Labor Statistics
EC-ARC	Emerald Coast Area Resilience Collaborative
ECRC	Emerald Coast Regional Council
EDA	Economic Development Administration
EDD	Economic Development District
EDO	Economic Development Organization
FDOT	Florida Department of Transportation
FL-AL	Florida-Alabama
ITS	Intelligent Transportation Systems
LEPC	Local Emergency Planning Committee
MGD	Millions of Gallons per Day
MIRR	Military Installation Resilience Review
MPOAC	Metropolitan Planning Organization Advisory Council
MSA	Metropolitan Statistical Area
NSF	National Science Foundation
TPO	Transportation Planning Organization
REEF	Research Engineering & Education Facility
UF	University of Florida
UWF	University of West Florida

Executive Summary

Since 1964, the Emerald Coast Regional Council (ECRC) has directed planning efforts impacting activities that involve interactions crossing jurisdictional boundaries. In 1995, the ECRC, then known as the West Florida Regional Planning Council, was designated an Economic Development District (EDD) by the U.S. Department of Commerce's Economic Development Administration (EDA). To maintain the status as an EDD and continue receiving grants and technical assistance from the EDA, a Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) is required. This document is updated annually and undergoes major updates (rewrites) every four years to encompass new developments and strategies for the region. An effective CEDS consists of a data-driven participatory process including the multifaceted leadership of a steering committee. The CEDS is also informed by community outreach and partnerships built through the range of ECRC programming during the year. This plan is unique from other regional plans as it focuses on the specific economic conditions of the region.

Figure 1. Emerald Coast Location



2023 Annual Performance Report

This report analyzes the region's current economic conditions and serves as a progress update towards reaching the regional goals and strategies of the CEDS Implementation Action Plan. In addition, this report includes an update on Projects to Watch throughout the region

Implementation Action Plan – 2023 Progress Report

This section evaluates progress made towards reaching the regional goals and strategies identified in the 2022-2026 Major CEDS Update.

Goal: Support educational programs, activities, and partners which encourage development of programs and opportunities that will meet the region’s educational and workforce needs.

Talent Supply & Education	Strategy 1. Assist partners throughout the region in maintaining and creating specialized educational programs and training to meet the region’s ever changing business needs.
	Action 1.1. Use the role of ECRC to coordinate leverage grant and low interest loan funding to support an education system responsive to business needs.

Implementation Progress:

We collaborated with the University of West Florida (UWF) on a National Science Foundation (NSF) Engines proposal for Clean Power Technology in Northwest Florida. This partnership resulted in the successful acquisition of a grant to develop a regional center focusing on research in clean power technology. This center will play a pivotal role in advancing our region's capabilities in sustainable energy solutions and military readiness while providing opportunities for workforce development and innovation.

The UWF Haas Center was awarded a five-year \$548,000 grant from EDA to promote business development and employment among Florida veterans and minority business owners.

Goal: Encourage innovation and foster robust entrepreneurial ecosystems to drive economic growth.

Innovation & Entrepreneurship	Strategy 1. Develop the region’s entrepreneurial hubs and connect them with industry clusters, assets, services, networks, facilities, tools, and expertise in order to facilitate business creation and retention.
	Action 1.1. Leverage federal grant and low interest loan funding to introduce more capital into the entrepreneurial landscape and assist small businesses.

Implementation Progress:

Community Enterprise Investments Inc., a Pensacola area nonprofit, established the Impact Loan Fund for Black and Brown Entrepreneurs. The loan fund targets business owners of color with operations within low- and moderate-income communities throughout the Emerald Coast region.

As a regional entity, we are maintaining a seat on the Florida State University St. Andrews and St. Joseph Bay Estuary Program Management Council to coordinate and to establish the first Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan for St. Andrew Bay Watershed. This plan will foster grant opportunities to promote ecotourism which may assist established businesses and foster new business while protecting the area's estuaries.

Goal: Ensure the Emerald Coast’s Economic Infrastructure is state of the art and connects communities in every part of the region.

Infrastructure & Growth Leadership	Strategy 1. Plan, advocate for, and create a modern infrastructure network to support a competitive economy.
	Action 1.1. Use the role of ECRC to coordinate prioritization of regional transportation projects across jurisdictional boundaries.
	Action 1.2. Address congestion and commuter issues along major corridors such as US 98 and CR 30A through planning solutions and emerging technologies.
	Action 1.3. Develop and implement a rural regional transportation planning process for the area outside the Transportation Planning Organization boundaries to identify and prioritize projects based on local needs and a cost feasible plan.
	Action 1.4. Close the digital divide by investing in construction of fiber and wireless broadband for business retention and attraction.
	Strategy 2. Promote a regional approach to the multi-modal transportation system for people, goods, and services.
	Action 2.1. Coordinate and implement the design/build of a regional Advanced Traffic Management System (ATMS) and Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS) improvements that create a connected, computerized system that improves safety, mitigates congestion, and improves regional growth adaptability.
	Action 2.2. Coordinate TPO freight committees and pursue a regional freight plan to identify and resolve issues related to mobility and movement of goods and services.
	Action 2.3. Correct current deficiencies and create a more balanced transportation portfolio with a focus on bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure related policies, roadway design standards, and funding mechanisms.

Implementation Progress:

Our commitment to modernizing the region's infrastructure network to support a competitive economy is an ongoing effort. As the coordinator of our region's three Transportation Planning Organizations (TPOs), ECRC plays a pivotal role in coordinating the prioritization of regional transportation projects across jurisdictional boundaries. One pilot effort is the initiation of the Florida-Alabama (FL-AL) TPO Stormwater Resilience Project. This plan aims to align community needs with the stormwater management requirements associated with upcoming projects in the Florida-Alabama TPO's Cost Feasible Plan.

We continue to make progress in addressing congestion and commuter issues along major corridors. Through advancing traditional capacity projects along with innovative planning solutions and the integration of emerging technologies, we have taken steps to improve traffic flow and reduce commuting times for our residents and visitors.

Beyond the boundaries of our three TPOs, the development and implementation of a Rural Regional Transportation Planning process has been instrumental in identifying and prioritizing projects based on local needs from communities that have not traditionally been a direct part of the FDOT planning process. This effort ensures that transportation infrastructure extends beyond urban areas, benefiting communities in every part of the region. The plan establishes a priority transportation improvement list for the region's rural areas similar to the TPOs.

In our pursuit to close the digital divide, ECRC facilitated meetings and coordination with local governments in our region. There have been substantial investments in the construction of fiber and wireless broadband infrastructure. These projects are crucial for business retention and attraction, as they enhance our region's connectivity and digital capabilities.

We have been actively managing the design of a new regional Advanced Traffic Management System (ATMS) and Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS) improvements for the Florida-Alabama TPO. This connected system will enhance safety, mitigate congestion, and make our region more adaptable to growth.

To improve multimodal transportation options across our region, we have been actively working on policies, roadway design standards, and funding mechanisms that prioritize bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure. Our primary projects in this area include our support for our ECRC Regional Bike / Ped Committee, development of bike/ped plans for each of the TPO regions, and the administration of our region wide Safe Streets for All grant. These efforts align with our goal to promote sustainable and accessible transportation options.

ECRC hosted a Transportation Symposium in 2022 which brought together the country's top experts in their fields. The lineup of speakers and panelists included transportation field experts specializing in logistics, transit, tourism, and predictive trends. Discussion topics included freight, GIS mapping, micro mobility, and the economic impacts of tourism. The symposium brings together local government, legislative, and military leaders; professional consultants; and economic development and state transportation partners.

Goal: Bolster the Emerald Coast economy by recruiting new businesses and promoting the expansion of existing businesses.

Business Climate & Competitiveness	Strategy 1. Encourage the development and growth of small businesses in rural and underserved communities.
	Action 1.1. Research capital seed funding.
	Action 1.2. Serve as a resource partner to local Economic Development Organizations.
	Strategy 2. Coordinate planning efforts with assistance for regional key industry clusters and supply chains.
	Action 2.1. Promote North Florida Manufacturing, Logistics, and Distribution Corridors through the platform of the TPO freight groups.
	Action 2.2. Use representation on the Florida Freight Committee to advocate funding for regional supply chain projects and promote significance of regional infrastructure for inclusion in national highway freight network.
	Strategy 3. Address site development to accommodate business expansions and relocations.
	Action 3.1. Conduct regional assessments of specific commercial and industrial-use accommodations in new and existing business parks.
	Action 3.2. Strengthen the role and presence of ECRC within local economic development organizations.
	Action 3.3. Research shared revenue models for business site development.

Implementation Progress:

Our collaboration with local Economic Development Organizations as a resource partner has played a pivotal role in supporting small businesses. We have actively engaged in grant writing and management, providing essential assistance to EDOs in securing the necessary funds to foster business growth.

Community Enterprise Investments Inc., a Pensacola area nonprofit, established the Impact Loan Fund for Black and Brown Entrepreneurs. The loan fund targets business owners of color with operations within low- and moderate-income communities throughout the region.

We have also coordinated the creation of a regional Freight and Rail Committee to enable us to identify and resolve issues related to the mobility and movement of goods and services within the region. This strengthens our logistics infrastructure and ensures that the projects proposed by each TPO to the State MPOAC Freight and Rail Committee reflect the needs of the industry.

Goal: Support high quality governance to sustain Florida’s economic and quality of life expectations.

Civic & Governance Systems	Strategy 1. Balance resources through sound management of physical development.
	Action 1.1. Coordinate economic development efforts with related land use planning for consistency among government departments.
	Strategy 2. Strengthen partnerships with local governments, agencies, and non-profits by identifying opportunities for joint projects.
	Action 2.1. Conduct workshops and roundtables on planning policies and procedure, economic development tools, and available funding programs.
	Strategy 3. Create a culture of informed civic engagement and participation.
	Action 3.1. Support early and continuous public involvement in development and implementation of plans and decision-making process through modern yet accessible methods.
	Action 3.2. Ensure equitable representation from small business owners, special populations, and traditionally underserved populations by creating outreach methods tailored to the audience.

Implementation Progress:

Through our work on the Northwest Florida Military Installation Resilience Review, we have pulled in land use planning professionals from across local governments and military installations. This coordination ensures consistency in our region's development initiatives, promoting efficient resource utilization and sustainable growth. Our commitment to minimizing incompatible land uses around our region's military installations enhances national security and fosters cooperation between the military and local communities.

Our direct support to member governments has strengthened their planning and coordination efforts, promoting effective governance. Our efforts to improve coordination between Century and Escambia County have led to more cohesive and synchronized development plans.

We continue to organize and staff the Okaloosa-Walton Cooperative to help coordinate transit between local governments, elected officials, and transit providers to assist underserved employees with gaining access to local businesses, small businesses, and employment centers.

We have actively supported early and continuous public involvement in the development and implementation of plans and decision-making processes. Utilizing modern and accessible methods, we have ensured that our community members are informed and engaged in shaping the future of our region.

Goal: Promote regional understanding of resilience and sustainability efforts and integrate the experience of advocates and practitioners into future planning endeavors.

Environmental Quality, Protection, & Resilience	Strategy 1. Assist regional communities' disaster resilience efforts through targeted capacity building.
	Action 1.1. Conduct workshops on environmental resilience planning that help create the connection between land use strategies, smart design, and economic impact.
	Action 1.2. Coordinate the Local Emergency Planning Committee and facilitate exercise drills for government entities such as health departments and airports.
	Action 1.3. Provide technical assistance to local jurisdictions on coastal management strategies.
	Action 1.4. Head up and coordinate a regional resilience collaborative to address regional resilience issues.
	Strategy 2. Support restoration and utilization of regional waterways and greenways as a stimulant for economic growth and improved quality of life.
	Action 2.1. Work with local governments and nonprofits to plan for greenway trails and connectivity.
	Action 2.2. Work to improve and protect waterways through coordination of coalitions and planning efforts
	Action 2.3. Plan and implement environmental education programs and events.
	Strategy 3. Support and promote the growth of resilience initiatives and projects within the region.
	Action 3.1 Create an annual Action Plan to plan for and implement resilience projects and initiatives in the region through the EC-ARC.
	Action 3.2 Host an online forum to harbor information on resilience projects and initiatives in the region.

Implementation Progress:

Our coordination of the LEPC has facilitated essential exercise drills for government entities, including health departments and airports. These drills have enhanced our region's preparedness for emergencies and disasters related to the discharge of dangerous chemicals.

The establishment of a regional resilience collaborative has fostered collaboration among stakeholders to address regional resilience issues effectively. This collaborative effort ensures that a wide range of perspectives and expertise are brought to the table in resilience planning.

We have worked closely with local governments and nonprofits to plan for greenway trails and connectivity. These initiatives promote not only economic growth but also healthier and more vibrant communities. ECRC is also assisting local governments in facilitating proposed trails in an effort to obtain funding for SUN Trail network gaps within our region.

Our coordination of coalitions and planning efforts has contributed to the improvement and protection of our region's waterway especially through the support of the future North Santa Rosa Regional Water Reclamation facility.

We have created an annual Action Plan through the EC-ARC to systematically plan and implement resilience projects and initiatives in the region. This approach ensures a structured and coordinated effort toward resilience.

Goal: Support the creation and maintenance of a diversity of housing options to support a competitive workforce and high quality of life.

Housing	Strategy 1. Encourage and implement programs that support development of a range of housing options to meet regional demand.
	Action 1.1 Perform housing research, support planning efforts, provide grant writing and technical assistance.
	Strategy 2. Develop a toolkit for local governments to understand the range of options to improve housing access, affordability, and accessibility.
	Action 2.1 Develop and share a toolkit highlighting options to improve housing for the region’s local governments.

Implementation Progress:

We conducted a comprehensive housing study for Bay County, providing valuable insights and data to inform housing development efforts. This research has been instrumental in identifying specific housing needs and trends within the region.

As part of the wider Military Installation Resilience Review (MIRR) process, we are developing and sharing a toolkit that highlights a range of options for local governments to enhance housing in the region. This toolkit will serve as a valuable resource, offering practical solutions and strategies for addressing housing challenges. This initiative aligns with the MIRR’s goal to ensure that our communities are able to provide quality housing for our military service members, civilian staff, and contractors.

ECRC Staff continues to administer the SHIP housing programs for the counties of Walton, Holmes and Washington. In addition, Staff successfully closed out the Hurricane Housing Recovery Program (HHRP) grant program for the counties of Holmes and Washington.

Projects to Watch – 2023 Update

Okaloosa County

Shoal River Ranch Gigasite: This is a 10,500-acre industrial park located at I-10 and U.S. Highway 90 being positioned for large scale economic development. The upcoming phase of the project will involve securing funding for intersection improvements and road construction. To accommodate continued residential, commercial, and industrial growth, the Okaloosa County Board of County Commissioners is actively working to site, permit, fund, and construct a brand new 1.5 MGD (Phase 1) wastewater treatment plant at the Shoal River Ranch Gigasite. At present, the target completion date for the project is December 2026.

Central Moloney Inc: This electric transformer manufacturer will be constructing a \$50M, 300,000 ft² production facility on a 48-acre parcel located within the Shoal River Ranch Gigasite. The project will take three years to design, permit, and construct, and is expected to employ 350 at full build out.

Project Sound: A defense contractor supporting the U.S. Navy by designing, engineering, and manufacturing integrated systems, weapons sensors, and training / support systems, has shortlisted Okaloosa County's Industrial Air Park for a \$15M High Volume Manufacturing facility that will employ 140+. A site selection decision is expected in early Q1 2024.

Bob Sikes Airport: Consideration is being placed on locating a manufacturing facility on a 20-acre parcel east of the runway. This project would require utility extensions, taxiway and apron construction, road extensions, and parking construction.

County / Federal Housing Partnership: The Okaloosa County Board of County Commissioners and Eglin Air Force Base are currently in the exploratory stages of a partnership that would result in the development of a mixed-used attainable housing community for military members and civilians alike. As envisioned, the project would be located on a 200-acre portion of the former north nine holes of Eglin Golf Club, just west of Northwest Florida State College on College Boulevard.



Public Workshop on Corridor Improvements in Santa Rosa County

SOURCE: ECRC

Futures Park/PARRCS: A potential park project has been conceptualized for an 80-acre Enhanced Use Lease opportunity on federal land. This project is envisioned as a research and development-oriented park near Eglin's AFB's west gate and directly adjacent to University of Florida's Research Engineering & Education Facility (UF REEF).

Fort Walton Beach Commerce & Technology Park: This project is a 300-acre park including a wide range of tenants such as Boeing and Lockheed Martin that has recently undergone a comprehensive master planning process. The Master Plan proposes several transportation improvements.

Holt Industrial Park: This is a small, industrial enclave located on I-10. Businesses located there are currently on septic and sewer situated 12 miles away.

Escambia County

OLF-8: This is Escambia County's proposed 500-acre mixed-use commerce park located adjacent to Navy Federal Credit Union off I-10. The Master Plan includes residential, retail, public amenities, office, commercial, and light industrial uses. The County is currently seeking a buyer to purchase and develop the property.

The Bluffs: The Bluffs is Northwest Florida's Energy Intensive Industrial Park and is undergoing the next steps in marketing and infrastructure development.

Co:Lab Expansion: Escambia County and Pensacola's 22,000-square foot business incubator and growth accelerator is undergoing expansion efforts.

American Rescue Plan Build Back Better Regional Challenge Application: An application is being developed to submit for the ARPA Build Back Better Regional Challenge to grow regional industry clusters around manufacturing, Department of Defense growth, and aviation-related industries. Efforts would develop new and scale existing industry clusters through planning, infrastructure, innovation and entrepreneurship, workforce development, and access to capital.

MxD West Florida: MxD (Manufacturing x Digital) West Florida is an effort by the University of West Florida to create a regional version of the MxD in Chicago. This facility would harness many of the natural assets in downtown Pensacola, proximity to the Port of Pensacola for blue technology development, and existing UWF infrastructure in the downtown area. The expansion/new build would allow growth of current laboratories near the port to accommodate more projects, as well as train a larger number of students downtown.

Port of Pensacola Upgrades: The Port of Pensacola is continually seeking improvements to increase the region's freight capacity including: Berth #6 Rehabilitation, Internal Heavy Load Roadway and Project Cargo Working Area Reinforcement, Upland Cargo Improvements, On-Port Rail Resiliency and Efficiency Enhancement, and the construction of a Manufacturing Complex with a Dry Storage Facility, Small Boat Launch, and Marine Industry Training and Manufacturing Facility.

Bay County

Commerce Park: The City of Lynn Haven is in the process of planning its third commerce park to accommodate current and future business expansion and relocation needs. The next steps of the project include identifying the ideal site and securing funding for required infrastructure.

Port Panama City: The Port recently completed construction of a new biomass dome storage facility. The facility expands the Port's storage capacity and allows its tenant Enviva to increase exports. Enviva is the world's largest producer of sustainable wood pellets. The project was made possible by a \$10 million grant from EDA. Total project costs were approximately \$16 million. ECRC Staff provided grant writing and grant management services to the Port. In addition, the port completed Phase I of the East Terminal in late 2022. The project will allow more ships to drop off and load cargo and includes a new warehouse and more space for ships to dock. The next phase will allow the East Terminal to have two large vessels import goods at the same time.

Santa Rosa County

Whiting Aviation Park: Whiting Aviation Park is a 239-acre commercial/industrial park adjacent to Naval Air Station Whiting Field in Northwest Florida. Through a limited-access use agreement between Santa Rosa County and the United States Navy, civilian tenants of the Aviation Park will be able to use the Navy's airfield facilities. The agreement allows up to 75 operations by civil aircraft per day with access to two active bi-directional runways. The Navy provides runway access and monitors airspace.

North Santa Rosa Water Reclamation Facility: This new advanced wastewater treatment facility will allow the City to stop using its current plant which is at capacity and discharges directly into the Blackwater River. The new plant will increase resilience and expand capacity to accommodate the growth of North Santa Rosa County.

Northwest Florida Industrial Park @ I-10: The buildout of and development of the Northwest Florida Industrial Park @ I-10 is nearing completion. Only six acres of property remain available.

Walton County

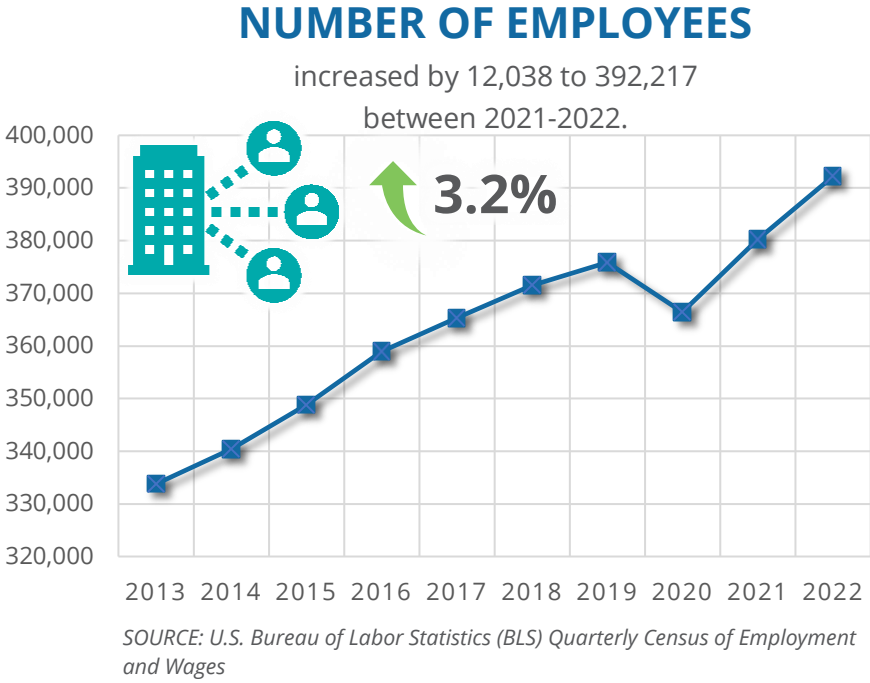
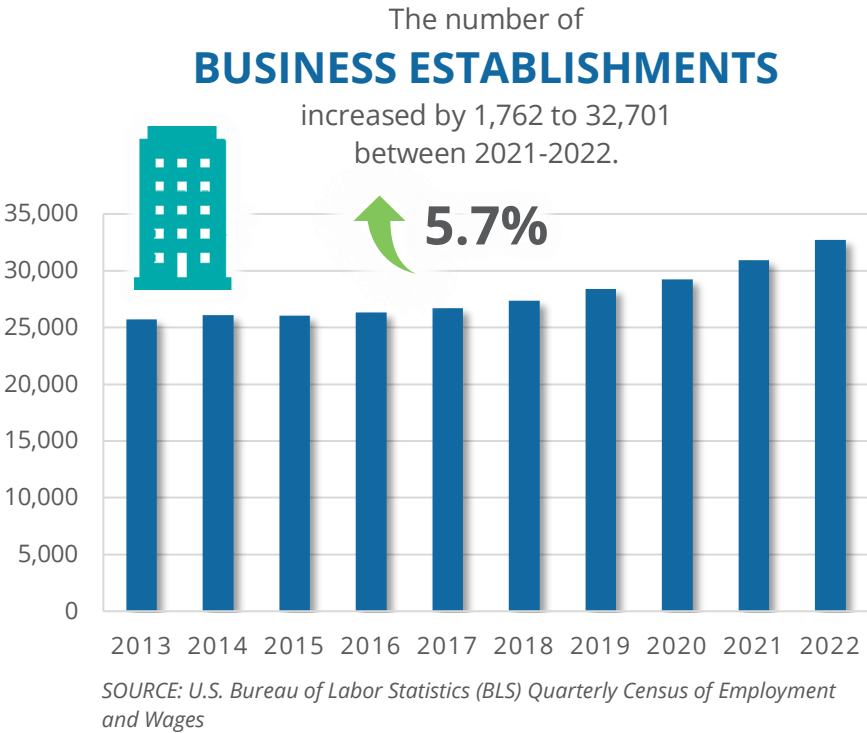
North Walton Rural Hospital: A former hospital building may be purchased and reopened. This will allow for planned emergency care services, laboratory services, radiology services, surgical services, and 10 inpatient rooms.

Potential New Land for Development: A 100-acre parcel of land located at the northwest corner of I-10 and U.S. 331 was purchased by two companies in hopes of selling the unused portions to developers. This could result in nearly 80-acres of developable land ready for business expansion or the recruitment of new firms to the area.

Impact Dashboard

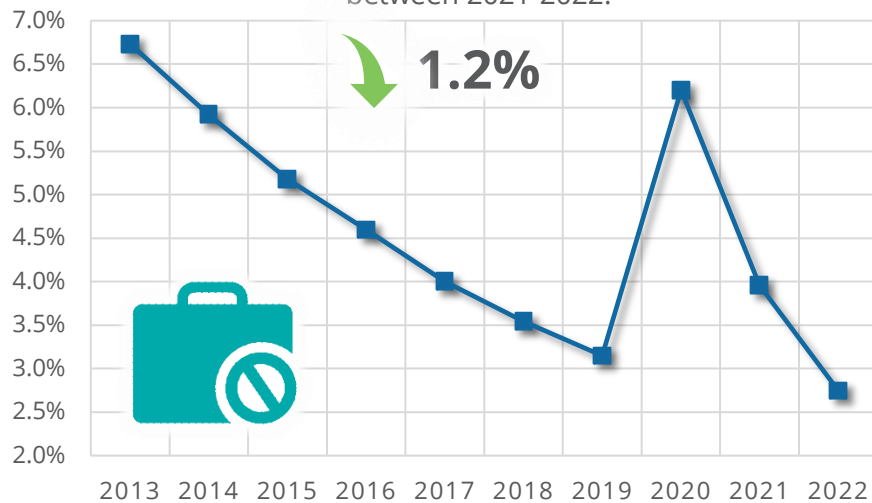
The success of desired outcomes is tracked through monitoring specific metrics that reflect the outlook of the region. The following charts show data trends over the past ten years and highlight the past year's growth or decline. At the time of this update, the most recent Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) annualized data was for 2022, while the Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA) annualized data was for 2021.

Unless otherwise noted, the data shown is for the entire Emerald Coast Region.



UNEMPLOYMENT RATE

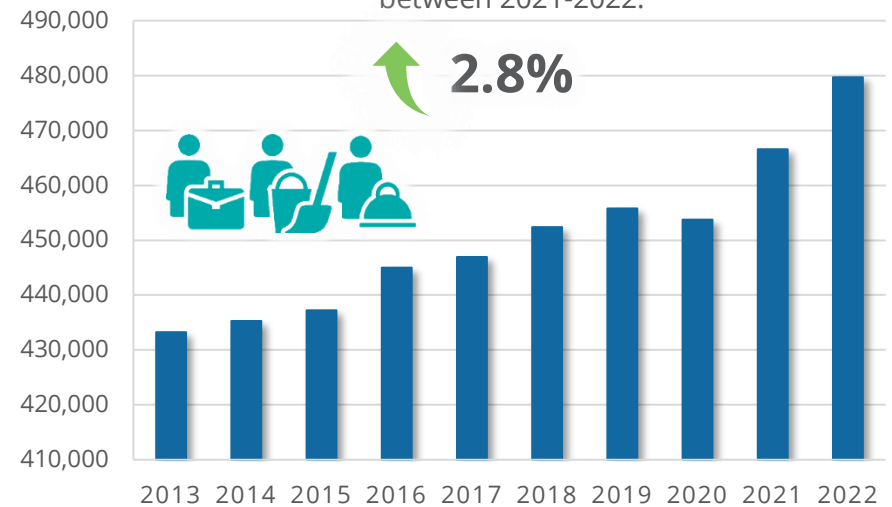
decreased by 1.2% to 2.7%
between 2021-2022.



SOURCE: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS)

LABOR FORCE

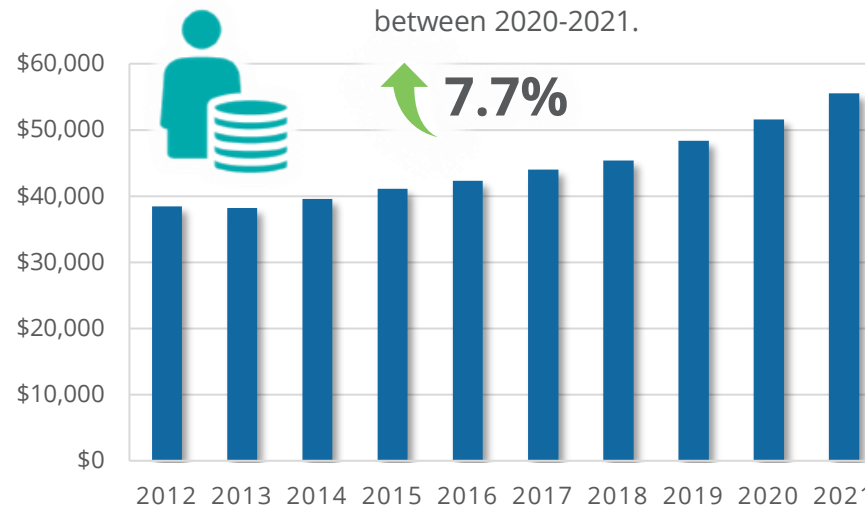
increased by 13,193 to 479,735
between 2021-2022.



SOURCE: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS)

PER CAPITA INCOME

increased by \$3,979 to \$55,543
between 2020-2021.



SOURCE: U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA)

PENSACOLA - FERRY PASS - BRENT MSA

REAL GDP*

increased by \$1.2B to \$19.8B
between 2020-2021.



2012 2013 2014 2015 2016 2017 2018 2019 2020 2021
SOURCE: U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA)

CRESTVIEW - FORT WALTON BEACH - DESTIN MSA

REAL GDP*

increased by \$1.4B to \$15.6B
between 2020-2021.



2012 2013 2014 2015 2016 2017 2018 2019 2020 2021
SOURCE: U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA)

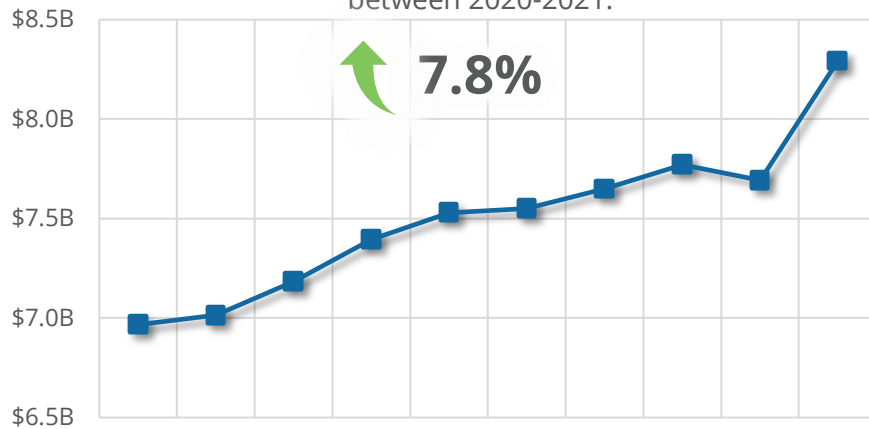


*Chained 2012 dollars, all industries.

PANAMA CITY MSA

REAL GDP*

increased by \$0.6B to \$8.3B
between 2020-2021.

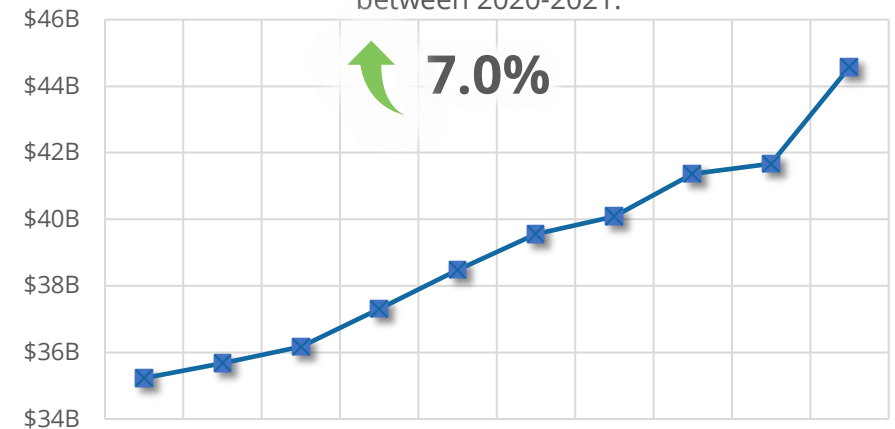


2012 2013 2014 2015 2016 2017 2018 2019 2020 2021
SOURCE: U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA)

EMERALD COAST REGION

REAL GDP*

increased by \$2.9B to \$44.6B
between 2020-2021.



2012 2013 2014 2015 2016 2017 2018 2019 2020 2021
SOURCE: U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA)