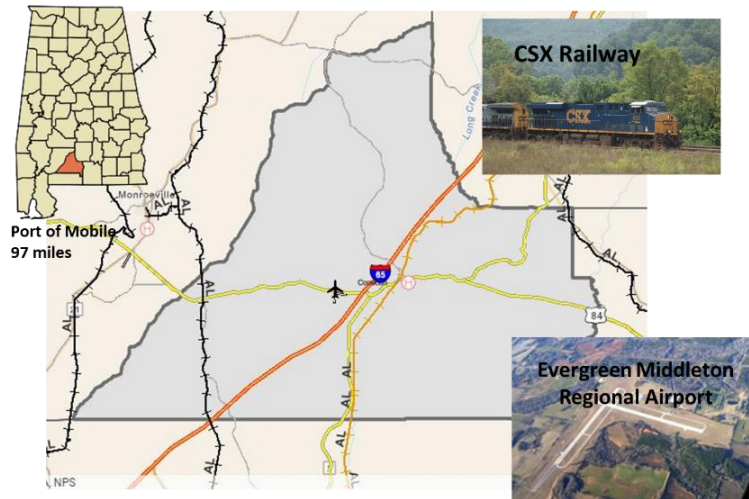


Conecuh County is strategically located between the metropolitan areas of Mobile and Montgomery Alabama; 97 miles from the Port of Mobile and 70 Miles from the City of Montgomery. The county is crisscrossed with major transportation corridors, Interstate 65 runs North and South through the county with over 70 million vehicles traveling the interstate. US highways 31 and Highway 84 are also central corridors for commercial traffic. Alabama highway 83 and 41 also serve as major transportation corridors.

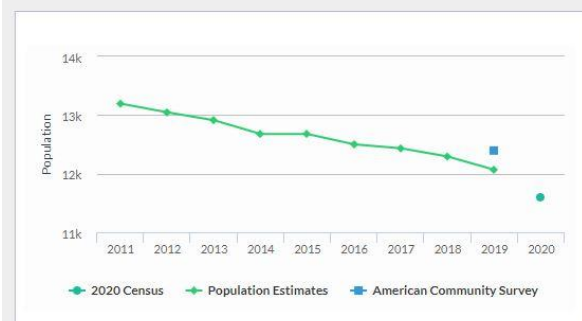
In addition to the highway system, Conecuh County has CSX and Norfolk Southern Railways active in the Conecuh transportation corridor. The coordination with the railway business developers is an area that is need of development and planning.

The Evergreen Middleton Airport is also a resource that is active resource, serving as a Naval training facility with over 7000 touchdowns a year. The advantages of marketing such a valuable resource have not been realized for the County. The Pandemic has shown all of us that our community is our home, survival during a deadly pandemic meant we needed to take care of each other, respect one another, and work together to overcome obstacles. In 2021, the County and the City of Evergreen united to develop a partnership to create the Conecuh Office of Economic Development.



Assessments of the county have concluded that Conecuh County Alabama is a community of people that is resilient and determined. A once booming railroad community with a rich history in agriculture, Conecuh has struggled for decades to overcome stagnation that resulted from the change from mixed passenger rail to freight only; even the addition of Interstate 65 could not stop the decline. Conecuh County lies just on the edge of two of Alabama's metropolitan areas, with Mobile 89 miles and Montgomery 70 miles, the community lies on edge of workforce regions, just on the line of three regions. With opportunities in the metropolitan areas and the decline in the family farm ability to compete, opportunity was only an hour drive north and south. Since 1940 the population in Conecuh County has declined, between 1940 and 1990 Conecuh's population declined 10% each decade, from a community of 25,489 to a current population of 11,617. The decline in population also lead to a decline in revenue needed to cultivate a climate for industrial growth, or even small business growth.

Conecuh County Population



Sources: United States Census Bureau. 2019 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates. U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey Office. Web. 10 December 2020.

As surrounding counties grew, the Port of Mobile began experiencing exponential growth and the regional location of major automotive manufacturer Hyundai and its Tiered suppliers ushered in an opportunity with more pay that more than made up for the drive time and expense, and an exodus of the county's workforce began once again. The population sought higher paying jobs and benefit packages that were more competitive than local industry. Compounding the workforce hurdles was the realignment of the State Workforce Region; while we are serviced by a region, the needs in Conecuh require a concerted in-county effort. This effort must include mobilization of the business and industry sector, education and training programs and active recruitment to the workforce. Today **over 50%** of the available County workforce commutes out of the county to work, creating a deficit for existing industry. With Alabama Career Centers located in neighboring counties, the population is forced to exit the county to even look for work opportunities. **This project proposes to build the capacity of the existing workforce resources and connect to the available resources from the State and Regional Workforce Initiatives through a Workforce and Economic Development Specialist.** The individual will work to implement the Governor's Statewide Workforce Vision in Conecuh by developing partnerships and promoting program utilization with Reid State Technical College, Conecuh County Workforce Development Center, and local business and industry. The Conecuh Workforce Liaison will work in tandem with the Conecuh Evergreen Joint Office of Economic Development.

Of the remaining working age population, 40% of the in-county workforce are dedicated and resemble a time when working for the same company all your life was still a reality; the average employment life with the same company in Conecuh is approximately 20 years; commitment to an employer is part of the heritage of the community. The **average age is 45** and the younger generations are leaving for better opportunities. The remaining **working age population in the county receive some form of public assistance.**



A targeted effort must be developed to encourage the community to, not just go to work, but to develop a Career Pathway. The development of a coordinated task force for workforce development will be developed to assist in the shaping of the strategic economic initiatives of the County. This project proposes to establish a part

time workforce development coordinator within the economic development office. Workforce and Economic Development (WED) Project Manager \$50,000 and will conduct planning sessions with each board to assess the business and industries to assess and identify barriers to workforce participation. The WED will also host training sessions quarterly on targeted topics such as disability and government assistance recipient workforce participation, migrant workers, and other topics. The WED will work with the South Alabama Workforce Development Council to bring programs to Conecuh County and will liaison with the workforce boards of the region.

The decline in population and the growth of the regional economy did not stop efforts to develop an economic effort. The organizations developed within the City of Evergreen have determined a proactive effort instead of a reactive effort is required to compete in today's recruitment efforts. The City of Evergreen has an Industrial Development Board that has created opportunities for the community, but it too has struggled as revenues in the city and county to support their development efforts dwindled; the capacity of the boards has dwindled through the years, as members have passed away, retired or left the city. The City of Evergreen, in early 2023, had to replace 5 board members. The new members are energetic and eager to build their capacity to improve the economic opportunities in the community. ***This project proposes to create opportunities for the new members of the board to learn today's economic process***, to breath life into an industrial park, and to market the excellent amenities the City of Evergreen can provide to an industry.

The City of Evergreen also has incorporated an Cooperative Improvement District for Retail development, and a Downtown Revitalization Board. The Improvement District is eager to gain the capacity needed to complete the building, recruitment and establish the sustainability needed for the growth of retail development in Evergreen. As a board of community and business leaders the capacity needed to be successful can only be achieved with training and education. ***This project proposes to provide the training and education, capacity, and outreach efforts to complete the mission of the board to build a robust retail development along I-65.*** In addition, the capacity issues of the board, the development of the board needs, the development of the district cannot be adequately marketed in its current state of development. The district is in need of engineering assistance to plot the developable land of the district and to assess the current infrastructure for capacity. The District has been successful in recruitment of the Tesla SuperCharger Station, adding approximately 500 visitors a month to district; with anticipated growth to 1500 (per Tesla projections during project development). Hilton Brand Hotels has also approved the development of an 82 bed Hampton Inn. Both of the developments identified that additional engineering and the addition of a retention pond for stormwater was needed. Subject matter experts that have visited the site estimate approximately \$80,000 for the engineering. The City and County have committed to support the project by providing \$200,000 in-kind site preparation work for the retention pond.

The Downtown Revitalization Board is a three-member board with the mission to encourage and grow the opportunities for small business in the downtown area of the City of Evergreen. This board is in need of strategic planning and development. Created with good intentions, the board has not been active and *is in need of revitalization of purpose and the creation of a development plan that will guide the growth of the downtown for all people of the community.*

The County incorporated the Industrial Development Authority to create economic growth beyond the incorporated limits of the City of Evergreen. This board has resumed activity and in the last year has made significant strides in creating opportunity for the County. However, as with many small communities the county seat is the City of Evergreen and the City and County leaders often were at odds on the priorities for economic growth. As we develop the strategic plans for the City of Evergreen, the County Industrial Development Authority also needs a

strategic pathway forward. A plan that will create a harmony of efforts to recruit and grow business and industry in the City of Evergreen and Conecuh County.

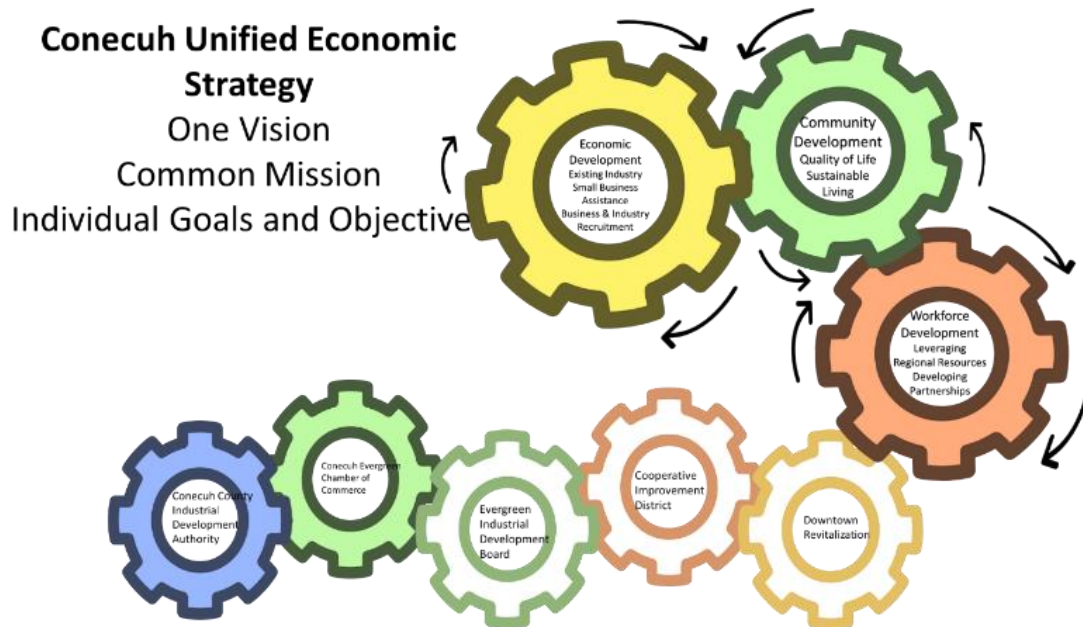
The Conecuh County acquired a former Louisiana Pacific timber yard, which is approximately 123 acres with two industrial buildings on site; a 100,000sq ft Industrial Building and a 12,300 sq ft building. Both buildings are in very good condition, with some minor roof repairs needed for the smaller 12,000sq ft building, estimated roof repairs or replacement is \$80,000. The damage to the roof is the result of straightline winds and tornadic damage from The site has been dormant for many years and site preparation and cleanup are needed. ***This project proposes Site Restoration assistance in preparing to clear the spur and brush adjacent to the CSX track; which will include spraying a herbicide and developing a burn plan for underbrush on the property.*** Estimates have been submitted by the County Engineer of approximately \$100,000

Each of the entities created by the City and County serve a purpose and can be extremely beneficial to incentivizing economic growth. In 2017, the county began efforts to implement a strategic action plan for the County. Momentum once again was on Conecuh's side, a Manufacturer's Coalition was begun, the Conecuh Sausage Festival was born, and then a virus was found and a Global Pandemic was upon us.

Yet, with all of these boards and community effort, growth has continued to escape the county. ***This project will be capacity by providing monthly education and outreach community group meetings, bringing resources to the awareness of business and industry, elected, and community leaders.*** Through education and outreach the goal is to build more participation and involvement in the economic boards of the City and County.

The Conecuh Office of Economic Development will utilize these grant funds to develop the Conecuh Unified Economic Strategy. Each of the County's economic development organizations will develop a strategic plan that includes a united vision for the county and an individual mission and set of goals for each organization.

Scope of Work –



The project will result in the following:

- Identify and retain the Workforce and Economic Development Project Manager \$58,500
 - Outcome: Conduct listening and learning sessions with each board and the business and industries in their target areas.
 - Economic and Workforce Development training sessions quarterly
 - Identify barriers and developing resolutions to workforce participation
 - State and Federal Resources available to communities
 - Provide quarterly Workforce Trends
 - Education and Training Workshop – what resources are available to the average person in Conecuh County
- Conduct 3 Assessment and Planning Workshops with existing economic development organizations in Conecuh County
 - Outcome: 5 Strategic Plans
 - 1 Conecuh Unified Economic Strategy
 - Each of the identified organizations will have a strategic plan that includes targeted priorities in workforce development, a process for economic lead generation, existing industry assistance, targeted outreach regarding available amenities and properties of the communities of Conecuh. Each of these developed plans will be incorporated into an overall Conecuh Unified Economic Strategy. \$40,000
 - The final plan will include a master plan for industrial and retail development that includes an inventory of all available properties, recommendations for improvements, and a targeted outreach effort.

- 5 boards – 3 meetings – assessment and ideas, review and coordination of mission and goals, and final review.
- Conduct comprehensive site analysis and on Conecuh industrial properties. \$110,000
 - Outcome: Engineering and land surveying for the Conecuh Evergreen Capital Improvement Cooperative District, approximately \$80,000
 - Outcome: Engineering and Site assessment for the Louisiana Pacific Industrial Site \$30,000
 - Each organization will receive a customized data package of the proposed site to be used in recruitment.
- Develop County wide outreach program to encourage education and training for business and industry. \$40,000
 - Outcome: community education and training events providing opportunities for sustainability, employment and connection with business and industry.
 - Outreach and Education campaign
 - Small Business and Entrepreneurship workshops
 - Community Involvement workshops – How to get involved in your community
 - Business and Industry Forums and Federal program’s introduction

Partnerships

Reid State

SAWDC

Alabama Department of Labor

Alabama Department of Commerce

Alabama Tombigbee Regional Commission

Conecuh County Engineering Department

Conecuh County Commission

Conecuh County EMA

Conecuh County Board of Education

Conecuh County Workforce Development Center

Alabama Cooperative Extension Service – Conecuh County

Conecuh County Industrial Development Board

Conecuh Evergreen Capital Improvement Cooperative District Board

Evergreen Industrial Development Board

Evergreen Downtown Revitalization Committee

Activity	Principal partners	Target Audience	Deliverable	12 Month Project											
				1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Conecuh Unified Strategy Process Introduction	Conecuh ED Office, CEDA, Commission, City, Mayors,	EDOs, Elected Officials	MOUs - EDOs participating												
Contract with the Alliance to conduct the planning and site review	Commission	Engineering Firms, land management firms, etc.	RFP												
Solicit Bid for Site portfolios and engineering	Commission	Public	Announcement												
Engineering Contractor conducts Assessments	Contractor, CIDA, CIDB, Improvement District, Mayors		Portfolio of sites with recommendations												
Presentation to Elected Officials and EDOs Recommendations	Contractor	CIDA, EIDB, Elected Officials	Report presentation												
Issue Solicitation for Workforce and Economic Project Manager	Economic Development Alliance	Public	RFP												
Award Project Management contract	Economic Development Alliance	Public	Named Workforce Project Manager												
Project Manager on Boarded and Oriented	Economic Development Alliance	Public													
Design EDO assessment program	EDA, WE Project Manager	EDOs	Assessment methodology report												
Conduct Assessment and Planning Meetings	WE Project Manager	EDOs	Attendance Report												
Review Strategic Plan and Adjust	EDA, WE Project Manager	Public EDOs	Draft plan												
Adopt Strategic Plans for Each EDO		EDOs	Final Plan												
Workforce and Economic Outreach event coordination with Conecuh K12 and Reid State.	Conecuh Board of Ed. Hillcrest WDC, Reid State	Public	4 public outreach events												