

INTRODUCTION

Every five years, the Red River Regional Council creates a plan called the regional comprehensive economic development strategy (CEDS) for Region 4. Based on data, this plan looks at strengths and weaknesses, and gathers input from the community. The CEDS was built with the voices of nearly 2,000 people in the region.



The actions on pages 3-6 provide steps everyone can take to help reach the five-year vision of increasing resilience and building prosperity.

The strong foundations built across the region are setting Region 4 up for growth. By working together, we can increase resilience, create prosperity, and attract new residents. Many communities are investing in schools, flood prevention, healthcare, main streets, and new industries that focus on the future. Plus, people are full of energy, bringing renewed vitality to the region's communities!

The future looks bright in northeast North Dakota!

View Full CEDS: redriverrc.com



GOALS & STRATEGIES

The following is a list of goals and strategies identified through public input, business interviews, and statistical analysis.

Economy: Build a strong, flexible, and fair economy that benefits everyone in the region.

- Develop industries
- Connect Grand Forks and small towns
- Support rural needs

Community Vitality: Create vibrant and inclusive communities through improved spaces, leadership, and engagement.

- Enhance public spaces
- Attract visitors
- Revitalize main streets
- Grow leadership

Housing: Provide more and better housing options for everyone, regardless of their situation.

- Expand housing development
- Increase housing supply
- Update existing homes

Workforce: Attract, retain, and develop skilled workers and entrepreneurs to drive economic growth.

- Overcome workforce challenges
- Enhance education
- Sustain workforce initiatives

Our Vision: We envision a future where communities are strong, the region is thriving, and everyone can prosper.

Our Mission: We are committed to supporting the people, communities, and businesses in Region 4 to develop, plan for, and respond to opportunities and challenges that will bring about a resilient and vibrant region that benefits everyone. To thrive, we need more people, more housing, and a unified regional approach.

NEEDS = OPPORTUNITIES

POTENTIAL REGIONAL POPULATION: 120,000 BY 2045



26,000 NEW RESIDENTS

1,000+ NEW JOBS IN UAS INDUSTRY IN NEXT 5 YEARS



4,800 NEW HOMES NEEDED IN SMALL TOWNS BY 2030



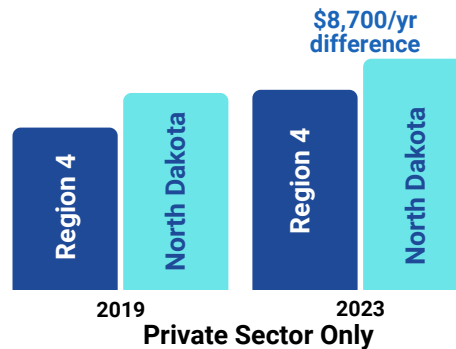
\$66 MILLION APPROPRIATED IN 2023



WIDESPREAD ISSUES WITH QUALITY, AVAILABILITY AND AFFORDABILITY REMAIN

HURDLES

Average weekly pay **up 23%** since 2019 yet is **14% below** state average.



Since 2015, Nelson, Pembina & Walsh have **lost 20% of their prime workforce**, age 35 to 54, to North Dakota's seven largest counties.

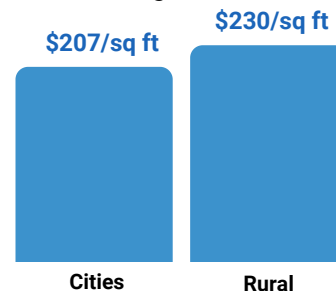


We Need to Get Them Back + More!

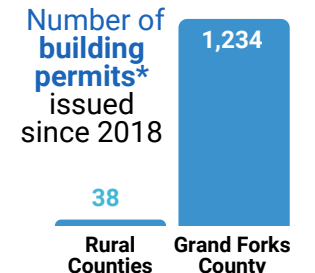


Families are paying **20-30%** of their income for childcare. (7% is considered affordable)

Rural construction costs are **11% higher** vs ND's 12 largest cities (2021)



Rural Building Lag



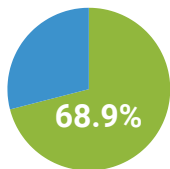
*Not all areas require permits



Region 4 is one of the most at-risk areas for flooding in the US. Annual FEMA loss estimates annual range from **\$342 per person in Grand Forks County** to **\$950 per person in Pembina County**.

DYNAMICS

Workforce Participation Rate



North Dakota has the highest workforce participation rate in the country at **68.9%**.

Foreign Born Labor



Growing dependence on foreign born labor with **nearly 1,000 H2A visa farm workers** in the region in 2024.

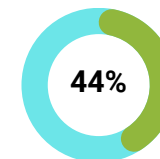
Business Want to Grow



Major Employers (Healthcare & Manufacturing) have expansion plans!

Region 4 has a **21.5% increase in new business starts** since 2019 vs. 2014-18.

Interdependence



Grand Forks and the rural region are interdependent. **Nearly 44% of people employed in Grand Forks reside outside the city.**

People Potential



45% of people know someone who would move to the rural region if they could find housing.

DID YOU KNOW?

Nearly 100% of people say they want more businesses in their town.

Goal 1: Foster a resilient, generative, and equitable regional economy so that businesses, communities, and people can prosper.

	Who can help? Creating collaborations.					
	Business	City/Local Groups	County / JDAs	Region	State	Other*
Complete Business Incubator						
Finish construction of the regional business incubator, develop leadership team, sustainable funding, and activation plan.						
Build a supportive ecosystem and peer-learning for micro, home-based, and local foods businesses.						
Strengthen Rural Entrepreneur Support and Resources						
Encourage business growth and new business starts.						
Connect entrepreneurs with capital, coaching, mentorship, and establish peer networks to build collaborative culture.						
Encourage healthy competition among local businesses.						
Provide Funding						
Offer grants to establish regional rural business ecosystems/projects to create equitable development.						
Provide matching funds required for business growth, infrastructure, and incentivize improvements. Create non-traditional financing tools for emergent entrepreneurs.						
Grow Economic Diversification and Innovation						
Be open to fresh ideas and find ways to support them.						
Continue to grow and support local foods production, peer learning, and food product development with North Central Regional Food Business Center, ND Department of Ag, USDA Rural Development.						
Create regional partnerships and initiatives to spur economic expansion and diversity based on assets and talent.						
Complete regional livestock and economic diversification planning identifying opportunity zones. Pursue new development.						
Strengthen regional planning/implementation for with large, high impact efforts such as Grand Sky and Air Force Base initiatives.						
Conduct Data/Trend Analysis and Planning/Implementation						
Identify and fill local business gaps for community growth.						
Evaluate programs to ensure everyone benefits, regardless of community size.						
Keep an eye on industry wages to stay competitive.						
Conduct regular business visits to assess needs/opportunities.						

*Other: Banks, foundations, associations, federal, SBDC, WBDC, Impact Dakota, industry groups, higher education



Community Vitality Action Plan

DID YOU KNOW? 89% of people would love to see their community grow!

Goal 2. Foster vibrant, revitalized, inclusive communities through destination development, placemaking, and leadership growth.

	Who can help? Creating collaborations.					
	Business	City/Local Groups	County/JDAs	Region	State	Other*
Implement the Destination Red River Plan						
Develop and share curriculum with local teams, hold monthly training webinars, and set up peer-to-peer learning (18 months).						
Fund a full-time regional tourism director to lead and market the region.						
Create network of community-level grassroots teams to enhance visitor experiences and implement the plan.						
Support and Improve Regional Tourism						
Offer matching grants for placemaking, recreation, and destination projects, from small improvements to large regional amenities/expansions.						
Provide resources for regional initiatives and integrate local art, history, and unique assets.						
Fund unique lodging, dining, venue expansions, and niche experiential businesses.						
Enhance Community and Visitor Experiences						
Improve downtown aesthetics with storefronts, signs, and gathering spaces. Enhance customer service to welcome visitors and newcomers.						
Create regular events like Junk Shop Hop and geocaching to connect communities and encourage regional movement. Encourage community connections with regular programming, events, gatherings, supporting volunteers and new ideas.						
Showcase success stories and boost tourism efforts and investments.						
Support Family-Friendly, Inclusive Growth and Health and Wellness						
Provide matching grants for family-friendly amenities and integrate regional marketing with state efforts.						
Strengthen inclusivity for newcomers, minorities, and mobile workers, and create volunteer awareness.						
Provide matching grants for updating and creating new amenities.						
Foster Regional Leadership Growth/Excellence and Philanthropy						
Develop a leadership program to support diverse new leaders.						
Create a database of elected positions and host candidate forums.						
Increase philanthropy by connecting donors with quality projects and supporting local endowments and launch regional community foundation.						
Encourage and support new, diverse ideas mindful of inclusion.						
Showcase newcomers, community people, gatherings, and share stories.						

*Other: Banks, foundations, associations, federal, SBDC, WBDC, Impact Dakota, industry groups, higher education

DID YOU KNOW? *43% of people would sell their home if there were available, suitable options in their community.*

Goal 3. Increase the supply of all housing options, so everyone has a place to call home, regardless of income or circumstances.

	Who can help? Creating collaborations.					
	Business	City/Local Groups	County/JDAs	Region	State	Other*
Regional Housing Projects						
Lead regional projects to strengthen lending, developers and builders.						
Co-develop new housing: planning, funding, construction, and sales. Move-up and move-over housing to create movement within local markets and opportunities for varied demographics.						
Create regional projects that achieve scale and efficiencies.						
Create funding programs to support large- and small-scale projects including innovative approaches that require non-traditional funding.						
Continue housing rehab programs for disadvantaged homeowners, create low interest financing to incentivize upkeep on older homes.						
Fund Regional Ecosystem and New Development						
Strengthen regional ecosystem by providing base funding for nonprofits.						
Advocate for increased private and public funding for rural housing.						
Create a flexible regional investment pool with private/state matching grants.						
Implement Region 4 Housing Plan and Invest in Regional Capacity						
Lead implementation of Region 4 Housing Study and Action Plan.						
Provide long-term base funding for rural nonprofit developers to develop pilot projects which minimize and share risk, educate regional leaders, and demonstrate workable solutions.						
Provide grants and deferred loans to support partnerships with CTEs.						
Develop Resource Development and Planning						
List vacant lots, plan infrastructure, and review zoning. Identify dilapidated buildings that could be removed to accommodate infill.						
Identify vacant buildings that may be redeveloped.						
Keep property assessments up-to-date and create an online database.						
Develop Innovative Housing Solutions						
Research and partner with innovators for micro and modular homes, accessory dwelling units, and workforce housing. Integrate energy efficiency components.						

*Other: Banks, foundations, associations, federal, SBDC, WBDC, Impact Dakota, industry groups, higher education

DID YOU KNOW? 90% of businesses have growth plans!

Goal 4. Grow, attract, and retain people and entrepreneurs to fuel a prosperous and resilient economy.

	Who can help? Creating collaborations.					
	Business	City/Local Groups	County/JDAs	Region	State	Other*
Improve Childcare, Especially in Rural Areas						
Assess childcare needs, forecast needed slots, and develop solutions to increase providers and improve access and affordability.						
Support efforts to expand financial and technical assistance for childcare providers.						
Help Communities Support Foreign-Born Workers and Immigrants						
Collaborate with CATCH and other ecosystem partners to address needs and barriers for resettlement, integration, hiring, and housing visa workers.						
Create efforts to welcome and integrate visa workers into communities.						
Create New Methods for Talent Attraction and Retention						
Create regional collaborative effort to support employers and communities developing and attracting a diverse workforce.						
Conduct a regional study to identify barriers faced by newcomers, young professionals, women, and people of color, and to develop solutions.						
Promote innovative attraction and retention strategies for those with diverse talents and skills and share successful initiatives.						
Strengthen Youth Future Workforce Development						
Expand hands-on learning pathways from kindergarten to career, focusing on regional industry clusters and in-demand jobs.						
Continue funding and leveraging the ND Career Builders program.						
Increase workforce program participation (especially underrepresented students), emphasizing entrepreneurial opportunities and emerging industries.						
Stabilize Regional Capacity for Talent Development and Attraction						
Provide stable, long-term funding to strengthen regional capacity and marketing to continue Real. Good. initiative supporting companies in developing, retaining, and attracting talent.						
Create new pathways for diverse talent, including remote workers and entrepreneurs, by increasing awareness of opportunities, supporting industry-led efforts, and collaborating with other attraction campaigns.						
Develop and share success stories.						

*Other: Banks, foundations, associations, federal, SBDC, WBDC, Impact Dakota, industry groups, higher education



“We have a lot of strengths, but we cannot improve our local community without growth. I would love to see additional housing added for young people through elderly. I would like to see old houses and an old school and rest home and elevator torn down. In their place: New homes, businesses and last, but not least, storage garages or buildings.” **Woman, Age 61+ Michigan**

“The local business cannot survive on local traffic. We need to create new wealth and develop the amenities and recreation with a managed plan while still keeping our natural beauty. We need good leadership because negativity and poor leadership are major challenges.”

Woman, Age 61+ Walhalla

“They all tie together- you need more daycare providers, more housing and more amenities to draw more jobs, especially higher-paying jobs.”

Woman, Age 31-45 Drayton

“I have suitable housing, however, my son and his family AND my daughter would like to live in our county and are unable to find affordable, size-appropriate, move-in ready housing. I am also a leader in a local business and there is an extreme deficit in housing for people we are hoping to hire.”
Age 46-55 Walsh County Resident

“Our hospital, clinic, nursing home, school, dam and parks are strengths. But our big challenges are funding and a lack of good-paying jobs. I'd like to see more business or a manufacturing company of some kind, and the county being more involved in development.”

Man, Age 31-45 McVile



REGION 4 SENTIMENTS

—” —
“Our challenges are trying to support local, knowing it will cost much more; lack of jobs and opportunities for younger generations, and the cost of building a home is much more than the future resale value. I would love to see my community grow.” **Man, Age 31-45 Larimore**

—” —
“I'd like to see new businesses, and more grants for new businesses to try to grow early on. More networking among counties/businesses to coordinate events and not make people choose between them. ”

Woman, Age 19-30 Hoople

““ We have a good school system and fire department, but we are challenged with a lack of community involvement within the city, with the expenses of maintaining city infrastructure, and keeping local businesses open. I would love to see more homes being built. The city has lots for sale but there hasn't been much interest in them. Our roads are gravel and they are not in the best shape. If we could improve them I think we could attract new residents.

Woman, Age 46-60 Reynolds

“INVEST IN THE FUTURE OF THE REGION”

Man, Age 19-30 Grafton



REGION 4 SENTIMENTS

“I’d like to see more regional collaboration. Each town should find their niche to make a regional network of reasons why we work together. The ‘good-enough’ mindset and competitiveness between neighboring communities are barriers.”

Woman, Age 31-45
Crystal

“I’m very pleased with the young people who have stepped up to make Cavalier a better place to live. I would hope more would join in to help. The older generation did NOTHING for years in Cavalier because they didn’t want to pay for it. I would rather see people moving in versus moving away.”

Woman, Age 61+
Cavalier

“I would like to see more economic growth/stability and retain young residents. I believe that retaining or encouraging younger populations to live in our community will help keep our economy stable and growing. The area is great for new businesses and home-based business.”

Woman, Age 31-45
Lakota

“We need new residents, but I believe that one of the main concerns to people looking at moving here is good, nice available and affordable housing. I think our greatest weakness is we don’t have marketing, and we need to do better at making newcomers feel comfortable (not an outsider) in our small towns.”

Man, Age 31-45
Pekin

“If the region wants the youth to move back after college or as young adults with families, there has to be spaces and activities for them to engage in. Moving back to the area because your family is from there or you grew up there isn’t sustainable long-term.”

Age 26-35
Grafton

“INVESTING IN IMPROVEMENT PLANS SUCH AS FACADES, NEW BUSINESSES, AND EXISTING AND NEW HOMES.”

Woman, Age 36-45
Fordville/Lankin

“I’d like to see well-paying jobs (there are none), continuing education in smaller centers, and more programs for the poor. Our town is slowly dying.”

Man, Age 31-45
St. Thomas

“We need growth. Maintaining is not adequate. We need to bring young families to the community. I would like to see a 5-to-10-year plan put forth by the city that would include, economic development, job creation, and also address adequate housing.”

Man, Age 61+
Walhalla

“Our challenges include a lack of entertainment for teens, lack of sidewalks and exercise paths, and a lack of variety of restaurants and franchises. We don’t have the community support to allow school growth, nor the infrastructure to support more homes.”

Woman, Age 46-60
Thompson

“We need rental properties to attract young professionals as well as building houses they can afford to own.”

Woman, Age 31-45
Grafton