

News

GRADD seeking feedback on 2021 CEDS draft

By Nathan Havenner Messenger Inquirer

Oct 1, 2021

The 2021 update of the Green River Area Development District's Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy is now available online for public comment from community members.

The update will be the last revision to the five-year plan, which has been in place since 2017.

Jessie Howard, public administration specialist, said Thursday that the document, known as CEDS, is required by the U.S. Economic Development Administration in order for GRADD to apply for any funding that comes through the federal agency.

"Also within that strategy, it outlines the economic priorities of the seven-county region, which can also help when you are trying to identify and leverage other grant resources," Howard said. "If you are able to reference that, it is something that helps accomplish one of those goals, then that can help boost your application."

Howard said that while much of what makes up the CEDS has remained the same since the current plan was put into place, broadband service is a highlight of the 2021 draft.

"I would say broadband is probably the No. 1 concern," she said. "The way that broadband and COVID-19 have intersected, each having an overarching reach into other sectors, how it has impacted our education system ... we highlighted broadband a lot through the document."

According to the 2021 CEDS draft, better broadband access is considered the greatest need for economic development in the GRADD region, which includes Daviess, Hancock, Henderson, McLean, Ohio, Union and Webster counties.

"Because GRADD is primarily rural, there are many areas where internet access is inadequate or even completely unavailable," the CEDS states. "One of GRADD's primary goals is to identify and pursue projects to improve broadband access in the region."

Daviess County Judge-executive Al Mattingly said in September that Fiscal Court would issue a request for proposal to provide fiber to every residence outside the Owensboro Municipal Utilities service area. Broadband is considered a qualifying use for the American Rescue Plan Act funds the county will be receiving.

According to the document's SWOT analysis, which identifies the competitive assets of a region, as well as factors that could possibly hinder economic development, the strengths of the GRADD region include a strong transportation network, low energy costs, higher education options and strong community college programs for workforce developments.

Weaknesses of the GRADD region currently include low post-secondary degree attainment, a lack of job opportunities for advanced degree holders and a lack of entrepreneurship. The SWAT analysis also reported the region's opportunities, which include development of new and innovative technologies, development of Interstate 69 and interstate spurs, as well as an enhanced opportunity for tourism.

Threats to the GRADD region reported in the SWAT analysis include decreasing state coal severance funds, broadband coverage deficiencies in many GRADD counties and poor health in the region.

Howard said that while the 2021 edition of the CEDS is not altogether different than when it was first put in place in 2017, GRADD will soon be completing a new CEDS plan that will take the agency from 2022-26.

While there will be some holdovers from the previous plan, Howard said GRADD will meet with community stakeholders to try and identify the priorities for the new CEDS.

"I am sure a lot of them are going to be the same, but we will refine them a little bit more and try to go forward for the next five-year period," she said.

Questions or comments about the 2021 CEDS draft, which is available on the GRADD website (<https://www.gradd.com>), can be emailed to jessiehoward@gradd.com.