

Introduction

The Northeast Florida Regional Council (NEFRC) is a dynamic network of local governance, serving the seven counties of Baker, Clay, Duval, Flagler, Putnam, Nassau, and St. Johns and their 26 municipalities. The Council is a designated U.S. Department of Commerce Economic Development Administration Economic Development District, and leads the economic development planning process (EDA, 2019) to establish a strategy-driven plan for regional economic development known as the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDs). Economic Development Districts (EDDs) are entities, commonly composed of multiple counties, and leverage public involvement across sectors for regional collaboration.

The CEDs is a document that helps regions identify strengths and gaps, fosters collaboration, and assist regions in the economic development planning process (CEDs Central, 2019). Northeast Florida has decided on an approach to “harmonize” the plans and strategies impacting economic development in the region. The 2019-2023 CEDs is a harmonization based principally on the Elevate Northeast Florida (Elevate). The CEDs report in turn will be harmonized with the Northeast Florida Regional Council’s (NEFRC) guiding document, the Strategic Regional Policy Plan, which includes the region’s long term vision plan: First Coast Vision. As other plans are created or implemented in Northeast Florida (examples include the Affordable Housing Needs Plan, and the Regional Action Plan for Thriving Small Business), these too will be updated and implemented with harmonization in mind. The CEDs serves as a guide for policies, programs and investments that ensure the region’s dynamic economy.

A key element in the CEDs process is the CEDs Committee, as members act as the facilitators of the process to develop and update the CEDs. The Elevate Stakeholders group deserves praise for representing diverse and economic interests in the region and working to establish the strategy. Thanks to these committee members for providing Elevate’s strategies, and now the CEDs’, which can be used to address the economic issues and potential of the region. The CEDs Committee met in the Spring of 2019, in advance of a public comment period and ultimately, consideration by the NEFRC Board of Directors. The development of the CEDs is guided by representatives of both the public and private sector.

The Northeast Florida Regional Council would like to thank the following Committee members for the guidance and insight provided during and beyond the development of the CEDs update.