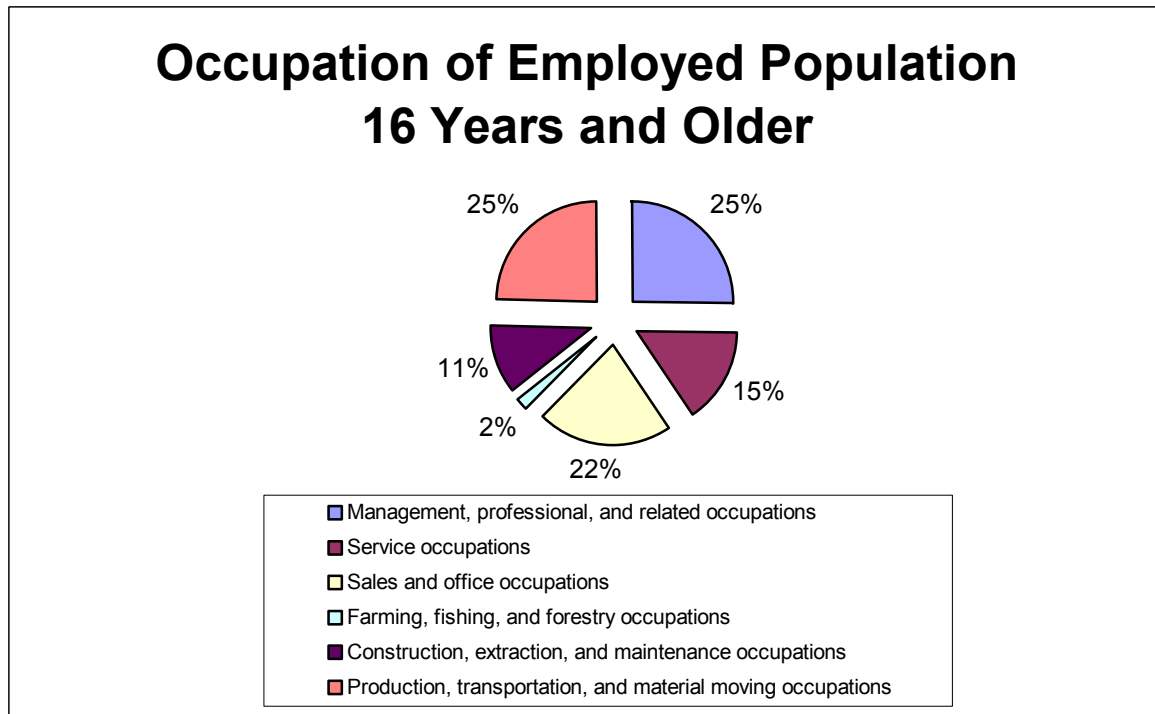


## Chapter 5 –Economic, Labor, and Income Profile

As of 2000, the employed civilian population of Van Buren County over 16 years of age was 35,625. Figure 12 represents the occupational breakdown of the employed population (over 16 years of age) in Van Buren County:

**Figure 12**



For the most part, the people who work in Van Buren County are residents of the County, as shown by Table 14.

**Table 14**

People Working in County in 2000			
	Number	Rank in State	Percent
Total	23,721	28	100.00%
Living in County	17,387	28	73.30%
Living Elsewhere	6,334	27	26.70%

Source: US Census Bureau (Includes only domestic commuting for workers over 16 years old.)

However, there are a large number of residents who commute to other counties, mostly Kalamazoo and Berrien, to work, as seen below in Table 15. Especially in the east side of the County, these commuters reside in recently developed subdivisions. Consequently, as this area develops as a “bedroom” community, the economics of the region greatly impact Van Buren County.

**Table 15**

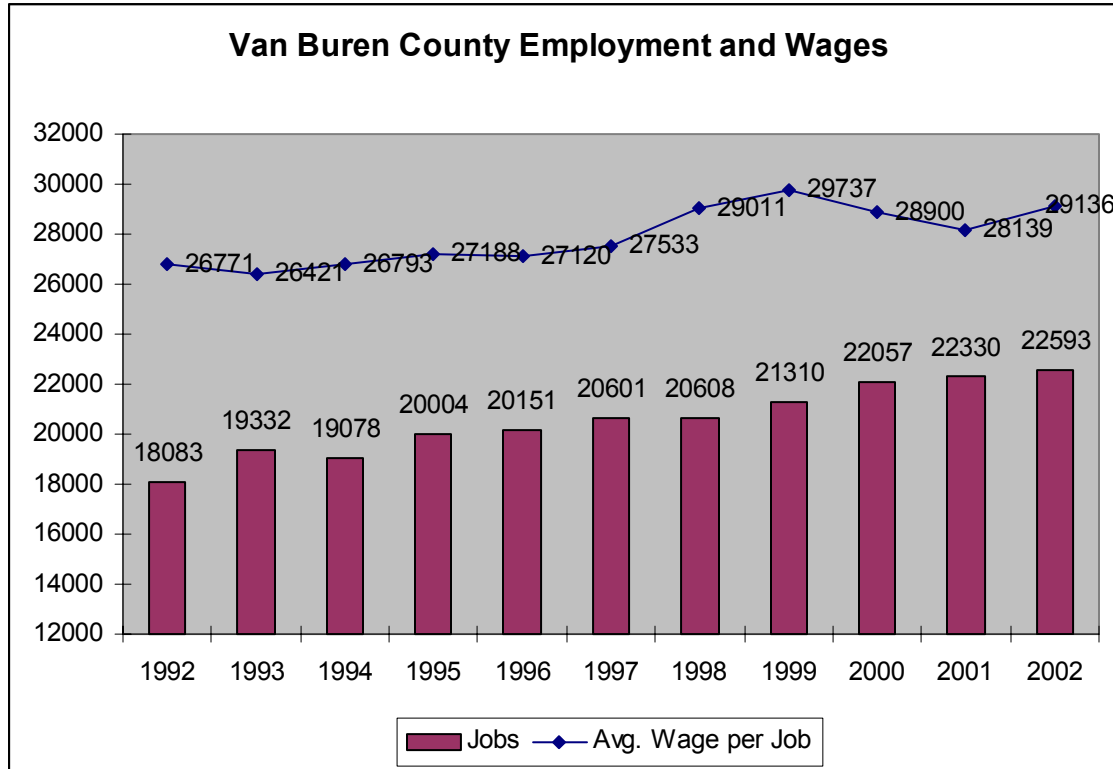
<b>Workers Living in County in 2000</b>			
	Number	Rank in State	Percent
Total	34,754	25	100.00%
Working in County	17,387	28	50.00%
Working Elsewhere	17,367	18	50.00%

Source: US Census Bureau (Includes only domestic commuting for workers over 16 years old.)

**Wages**

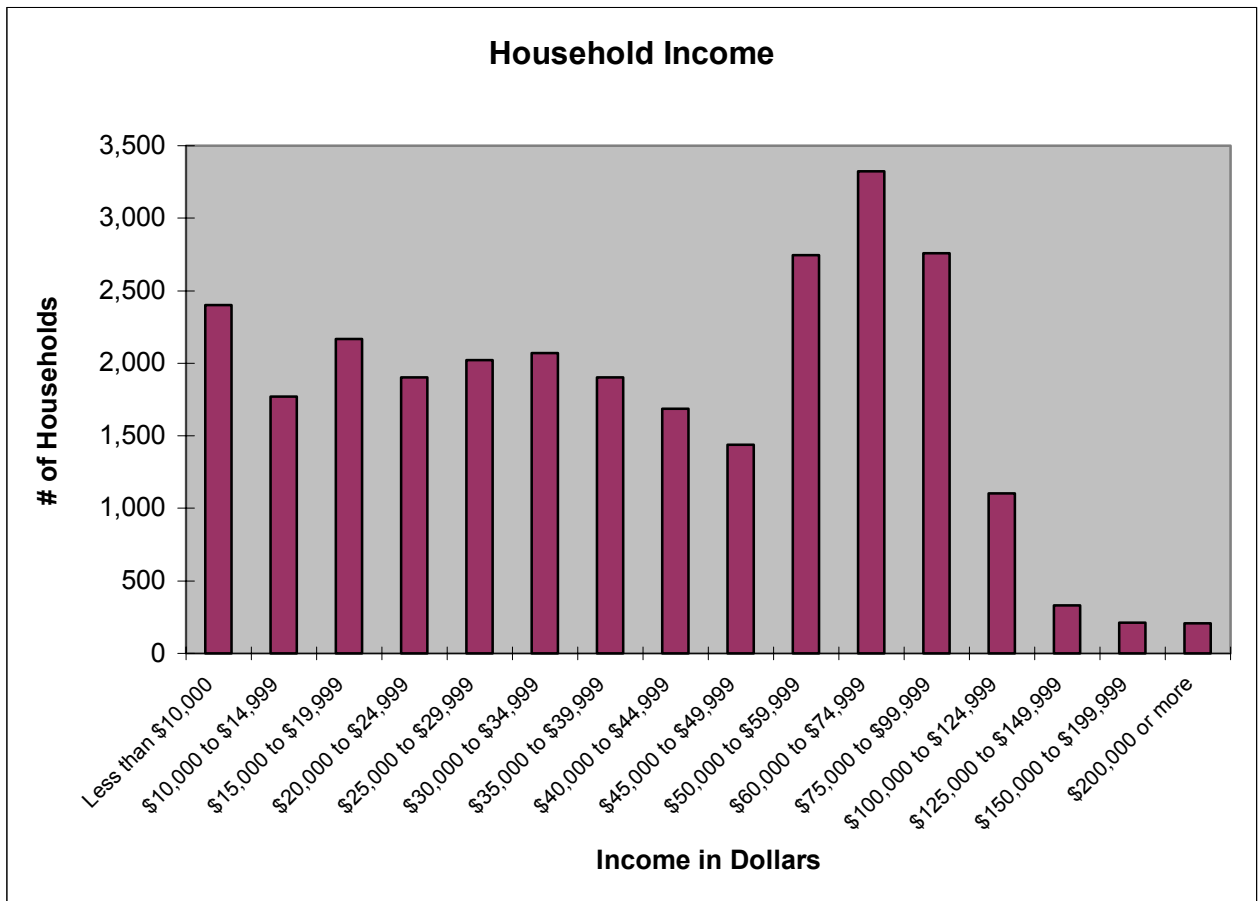
Overall, in 2002 there were over 22,000 jobs in Van Buren County and the average wage per job was \$29,136.00. Figure 13 breaks down the employment and wage Trends for Van Buren County throughout the past decade:

**Figure 13**



According to the 2000 Census, the median household income in Van Buren County was \$39,365. A more detailed breakdown of household income is illustrated in Figure 14:

**Figure 14**



**Important Industries**

Agriculture has been a dominant factor in the economic base and lifestyles of the residents of Van Buren County for many years. The 2002 USDA Agriculture Census reports that Van Buren County hosts 1,160 farms covering 176,260 acres. Furthermore, 2002 farm production expenses were in excess of 82 million dollars, and the market value of all agricultural products sold was over 96 million dollars (See Tables 16 and 17). It is also important to note that Van Buren County ranks highly within the state and in the entire county for its production in several items. For example, for all berry production, the county ranks 1<sup>st</sup> in the state and 6<sup>th</sup> in the country; for harvested vegetables, the county ranks 2<sup>nd</sup> in the state and 61<sup>st</sup> in the country; and for cut Christmas trees/short rotation woody crops, the county ranks 7<sup>th</sup> in the state and 51<sup>st</sup> in the country. In addition, many major employers are tied to fruit or other agricultural production and processing (see Table 18).

**Table 16**

<b>2002 Census of Agriculture, Van Buren County Profile</b>			
<b>Item</b>	<b>Quantity</b>	<b>State Rank</b>	<b>U.S. Rank</b>
<b>MARKET VALUE OF AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTS SOLD (\$1,000)</b>			
Total value of agricultural products sold	96,724	12	539
Value of crops including nursery and greenhouse	84,835	7	190
Value of livestock, poultry, and their products	11,889	35	1737
<b>VALUE OF SALES BY COMMODITY GROUP (\$1,000)</b>			
Fruits, tree nuts, and berries	34,503	1	61
Vegetables, melons, potatoes, and sweet potatoes	16,259	5	119
Cut Christmas trees and short rotation woody crops	1,024	7	51
Nursery, greenhouse, floriculture, and sod	19,272	9	143
Hogs and pigs	5,051	14	478
Sheep, goats, and their products	98	20	822
Poultry and eggs	79	24	1,366
Grains, oilseeds, dry beans, and dry peas	12,710	32	900
Milk and other dairy products from cows	4,971	36	632
Horses, ponies, mules, burros, and donkeys	188	37	1161
Cattle and calves	1,319	48	2,424
Other crops and hay	1,067	48	1,173
<b>TOP LIVESTOCK INVENTORY ITEMS (number)</b>			
Sheep and lambs	1,933	11	572
Hogs and pigs	24,985	12	432
Broilers and other meat-type chickens	1,774	15	776
Cattle and calves	7,805	39	2258
<b>TOP CROP ITEMS (acres)</b>			
All Berries	7,840	1	6
All Vegetables harvested	10,553	2	61
Corn for grain	31,870	28	644
Soybeans	19,321	29	731
Forage - land used for all hay and haylage, grass silage, and greenchop	12,623	42	1538

While many farms in the county sold less than \$20,000 in 2002, over 100 farms sold more than \$100,000, indicating a strong presence of larger, profitable farmers in Van Buren County.

**Table 17**

<b>Economic Characteristics</b>	
Farms by value of sales	Quantity
Less than \$1,000	333
\$1,000 to \$2,499	130
\$2,500 to \$4,999	100
\$5,000 to \$9,999	111
\$10,000 to \$19,999	105
\$20,000 to \$24,999	35
\$25,000 to \$39,999	82
\$40,000 to \$49,999	30
\$50,000 to \$99,999	95
\$100,000 to \$249,999	30
\$250,000 to \$499,999	34
\$500,000 or more	45
Total farm production expenses (\$1,000)	82,685
Average per farm (\$)	70,671
Net cash farm income of operation (\$1,000)	26,545
Average per farm (\$)	22,688

Furthermore, regional fruit markets have been a significant outlet for Van Buren County fruit growers. The Benton Harbor fruit market is important for wholesale buyers, and other markets, such as those in Kalamazoo and Holland are important for consumers.

For more information and data on agricultural production in Van Buren County visit the USDA Census of Agriculture website at <http://www.nass.usda.gov/census/>.

The largest private employers in Van Buren County are provided in Table 18, below. As previously mentioned, four of the top employers are tied to agriculture: Minute Maid, Welch's, Honee Bear Canning, and Knouse Foods Co-Op, Inc.

**Table 18**

<b>Ten Largest Private Employers</b>				
<b>SIC</b>	<b>Firm</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b># Employed</b>	<b>Product</b>
3089	Engineered Plastic Components	Mattawan	700	Plastic electrical engine equipment
2033	Minute Maid	Paw Paw	550	Bottle Juices, boxes and pouches
4911	Consumers Power Company	Covert	484	Electric Services
8731	MPI Research LLC	Mattawan	300	Commercial Physical
2033	Welch's	Lawton	280	Juices, drink; jellies and jams
3089	Clarion Inc.	South Haven	240	Custom plastic injection molding
3444	Pullman Industries Inc.	South Haven	240	Metal Rolling, forming and stamping
5311	Wal-Mart Stores Inc.	South Haven	230	Department Store
2033	Honee Bear Canning	Lawton	200	Vegetable and Fruit Canning
2099	Knouse Foods Co-Op Inc.	Paw Paw	200	Applesauce, juice and pie fillings

The largest private employers in Van Buren County and beyond cover an array of industries and occupations, in addition to the occupations available in health care and the public sector. According to the W.E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research, (<http://www.upjohninst.org/regional/June2005Busout.pdf>), employment gains in Western Michigan are, in fact, found most often in the service-providing sector. Table 19 provides a more specific breakdown of the number of jobs by occupation of the residents within Van Buren County:

**Table 19**

<b>Occupation of Employed Population 16 years and older, 2000</b>		
<b>INDUSTRY</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting, and mining	1,353	3.8
Construction	2,670	7.5
Manufacturing	9,473	26.6
Wholesale trade	1,043	2.9
Retail trade	3,998	11.2
Transportation and warehousing, and utilities	1,949	5.5
Information	382	1.1
Finance, insurance, real estate, and rental and leasing	1,638	4.6
Professional, scientific, management, administrative, and waste management services	1,952	5.5
Educational, health and social services	6,579	18.5
Arts, entertainment, recreation, accommodation and food services	2,273	6.4
Other services (except public administration)	1,418	4.0
Public administration	897	2.5

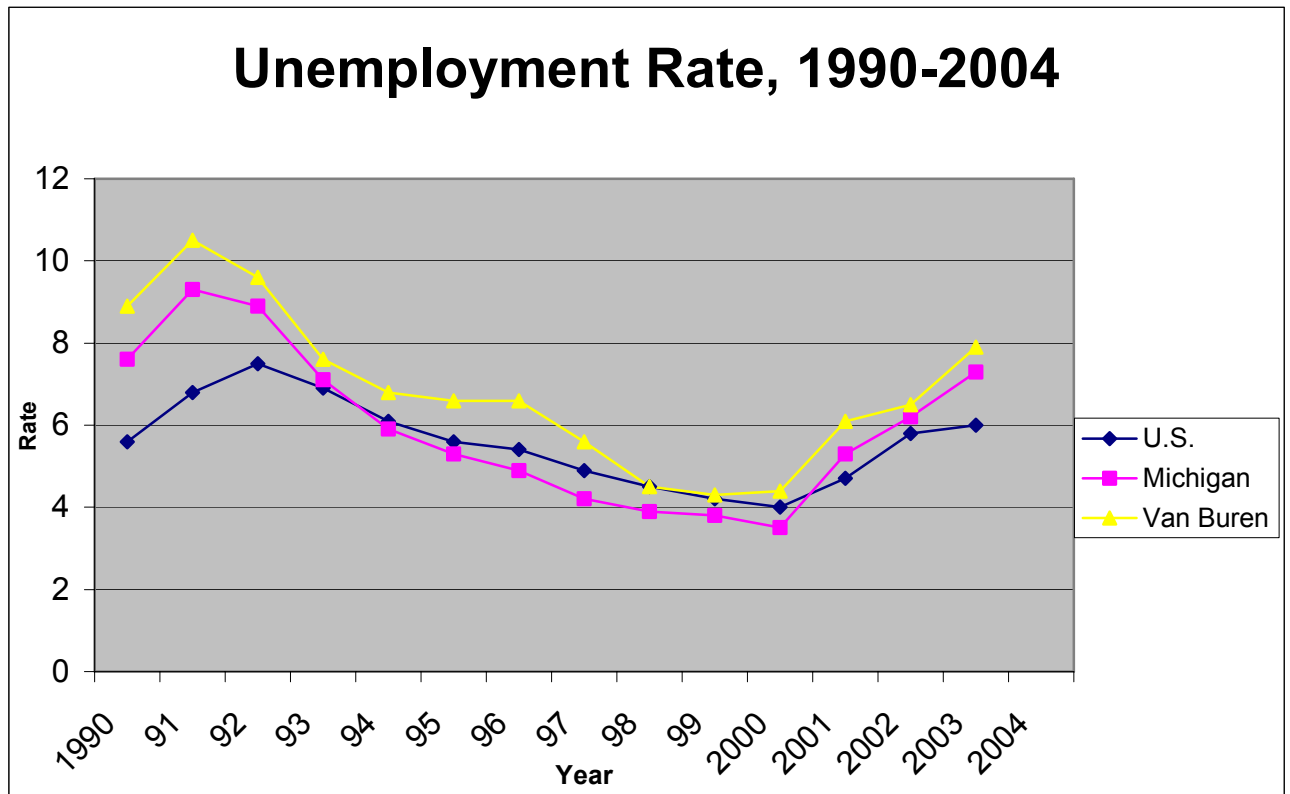
In 2003, the Michigan Land Use Council released a report entitled *Michigan's Land, Michigan's Future*, in which tourism was identified as an important industry for the state. It was reported that tourism accounts for 350,000 jobs and \$12 billion directly to Michigan's economy. Furthermore, according to Land Use Council, land-resource based industries such as agriculture, forestry, mining, and recreation and tourism account for 17 percent (\$37.6 billion) of Michigan's total economy, and Michigan's agricultural products are the second most diverse in the nation, after California. Indeed, Van Buren County, with its rural character, prime farmland, scenic views, and plentiful water bodies, recognizes this

importance. Tourism in this county is tied to the landscape. However, Michigan is expected to lose a quarter of its fruit-growing land over the next 40 years (PSC 2001), threatening both agriculture and tourism industries, and further establishing the need for preservation strategies.

### Unemployment and Poverty

Since 1990, unemployment rates in Van Buren County have remained slightly above the State of Michigan rates. Figure 15 displays the unemployment trends in Van Buren County, the State of Michigan and the national rate from 1990-2004:

**Figure 15**



However, even though the unemployment rate was at about 6.5 percent in 2002, employment in the county has remained higher than a decade ago (see Table 20).

**Table 20**

<b>Labor Force Annual Averages in 2002</b>				
	Number	% of State	State	Rank in State
Total Labor Force	36,043	0.72%	5,001,124	25
5-year % change	-1.60%	-	0.80%	61
10-year % change	3.60%	-	6.60%	63
Employed	33,700	0.72%	4,691,095	26
5-year % change	-2.50%	-	-1.30%	57
10-year % change	7.10%	-	9.80%	61
Unemployed	2,343	0.76%	310,029	24
5-year % change	14.40%	-	48.50%	55
10-year % change	-29.50%	-	-25.60%	56
Unemployment Rate	6.5	104.84%	6.2	53
5-year % change	16.10%	-	47.60%	49
10-year % change	-32.30%	-	-30.30%	45

Source: US Bureau of Labor Statistics

Furthermore, the past ten years has witnessed an increase of over 4,000 new jobs in the county, as shown in Table 21.

**Table 21**

<b>Annual Covered Employment and Wages Over Time (NAICS)</b>					
Year	Establishments	Jobs	Average Wage Per Job (*adj)	Rank in State	Pct of State Avg Wage
2002	1,575	22,593	\$29,136	33	76.50%
2001	1,577	22,330	\$28,139	38	74.10%
2000	1,541	22,057	\$28,900	35	74.70%
1999	1,582	21,310	\$29,737	30	77.00%
1998	1,528	20,608	\$29,011	32	76.10%
1997	1,456	20,601	\$27,533	37	74.90%
1996	1,427	20,151	\$27,120	38	75.00%
1995	1,357	20,004	\$27,188	38	75.40%
1994	1,315	19,078	\$26,793	43	74.70%
1993	1,291	19,332	\$26,421	45	75.10%
1992	1,250	18,083	\$26,771	44	76.00%
10-Year Change	325	4,510	\$2,365		
10-Year Percent Change	26.00%	24.90%	8.80%	--	--

Source: US Bureau of Labor Statistics

\*adj = Adjusted for Inflation; D = Non-Discloseable Data; N/A = Not Available)

Van Buren County has worked hard on tackling poverty and since 1995, has seen some positive results lowering the poverty rate from 16 to 11.1 in a five-year span. Table 22 demonstrates this change.

**Table 22**

<b>Poverty Estimates</b>			
	Number	Rank in State	5-Year % Change
Poverty rate:			
In 2000	11.1	35	--
In 1995	16	14	-30.60%
Poverty rate for children under 18:			
In 2000	13.2	40	--
In 1995	24.6	13	-46.30%

### **Coordinated Economic Development Efforts**

In order to ensure a viable economic future, the county encourages regional planning efforts. One such effort has been the Red Arrow Corridor Study, which was conducted in December of 2001. Facilitated by staff from the Michigan State University Extension (MSUE), six communities along Red Arrow Highway (Mattawan, Paw Paw, Lawrence, Hartford, Watervliet, and Coloma) participated in a review process that was designed to “address common community and economic development issues.” Community Assessment Team (CAT) members, which included specialists in community and economic development, traveled throughout the communities and recorded their observations, common themes, and unique features. Then, the CAT met with local officials to discuss their observations, and a document was developed in order to report the findings of the study.

Each community was offered a sense of its current economic picture, strengths and weaknesses, and recommendations for future efforts. While each community has unique assets and needs, several common themes were identified:

- Agriculture, including festivals, U-picks, wineries, fall colors
- Water, including the Paw Paw River
- Healthcare, with connections to two prominent regional health care providers
- Antiques and specialty stores
- Ethnic specialty and recognized foods and restaurants, while limited, are present
- Cultural/Historical connections, including local historical sites, museums, and transportation routes
- Recreation, including water sports, camping, raceways, and festivals

In conclusion, the study encouraged continuation of coordinated planning and marketing efforts. Specific suggestions included formally reviewing marketing

capacity and customer knowledge, supporting technical training for community leaders and volunteers, conducting regional inventories of land, building, infrastructure, workforce, etc. capacities, reviewing master plans to encourage coordinated planning, enforcing ordinances and maintaining public spaces to improve downtown aesthetics, exploring connections to trails, and utilizing outside resources from organizations, including federal, state, and local governments.

While some of the communities have taken steps toward improvements suggested by the study, the county encourages additional efforts to comply with recommendations outlined by the CAT. This will not only benefit each local entity, but will be advantageous to the region as a whole.