

# **SODA**

**SOUTHERN OKLAHOMA  
DEVELOPMENT ASSOCIATION**

## **COMPREHENSIVE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY PLAN**

**FY 2017 - 2019**



# **I. INTRODUCTION**

## **A. Legal Authority and Structure of the Association**

SODA is the Southern Oklahoma Development Association and serves a ten county area in Southern Oklahoma. This council or government is a sub-state planning district; a voluntary association of local governments representing 62 incorporated cities, ten counties and ten soil conservation districts. SODA was created in 1966 in order to perform regional planning functions. To provide technical assistance, planning and coordination of economic development activities and perform other tasks as required in support of member entities. The legal authority of SODA is the Oklahoma Inter-Local Cooperation Act (74 O.S. Supp. 1981. Section 101 et. seq.). In February of 1967 SODA was formally designated by the U.S. Economic Development Administration, as an economic development district, thereby becoming the first Economic Development District in the nation funded by E.D.A. SODA receives funds through the Oklahoma Department of Agriculture to coordinate a district-wide Rural Fire Defense program. Other programs and services provided to members are community planning, 911 Coordination, analytical research and mapping with the Geographic Information System, SODA is also designated as the Area Agency on Aging, which provides senior citizens in the ten county region with services such as nutrition, transportation, legal counsel, outreach, etc.

1. Non-profit status: SODA is a certified U.S. Internal Revenue Service non-profit organization under Section 501 © of the I.R.S Regulation.
2. Governing board: The governing board of SODA is made up of directors appointed or elected from the membership which includes Boards of County Commissioners of the ten counties, Directors of the member Soil and Water Conservation Districts, for the cities and town in each county, and four members at large representing minority populations.

## **B. Area Included in CEDS**

The association's area is composed of Atoka, Bryan, Carter, Coal, Garvin, Johnston, Love, Marshall, Murray and Pontotoc Counties located in South Central Oklahoma. Further details are contained in the demographic/geographic data.

## **C. Organizing and Staffing for Economic Development Strategy**

### **STAFF: FY-2017**

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## **II. ANALYSIS**

### **Background Information**

#### **Geographic and Demographic Analysis General Description**

SODA is a ten (10) county Economic Development District comprised of the following counties: **Atoka, Bryan, Carter, Coal, Garvin, Johnston, Love, Marshall, Murray, and Pontotoc**. The SODA District, located in the southern section of Oklahoma, is approximately halfway between Arkansas on the east and the panhandle of Texas on the west. The EDD is equidistant between Dallas, Texas to the south, and Oklahoma City, to the north. The land area of the EDD consists of 4,409,332 acres or 6,704 square miles. The SODA EDD is geographically larger than the combined states of Connecticut and Rhode Island.

According to the 2010 U. S. Census Bureau, the population of the SODA EDD is 224,856 persons. This makes the district the third largest concentration of population in Oklahoma, exceeded only by the metropolitan areas of Oklahoma City and Tulsa. In addition, the EDD is geographically located within 500 miles of an estimated population of 38 million persons in the south-central section of the United States.

The 2010 U.S. Census indicates that about 63% of the population of the EDD lives in municipalities. The balance of the population 82,597 persons, live in rural areas. Atoka, Love, and Marshall Counties have a higher preponderance of rural residents than urban residents. The urban population centers and their counts for the SODA EDD are as follows: Ardmore, Carter County, 24,283; Ada, Pontotoc County, 16,810; and Durant, Bryan County, 15,856 persons. Since 2000, these urban areas have significantly grown in economic development, which has increased the population over the past five years, and continual growth is forecasted.

## **The SODA Counties**

### **Atoka County**

Atoka County is one of the more rugged counties in the SODA Region having the highest annual rainfall and the most productive forests and woodlands. The county has three characteristic topographical sectors: low hills and broad valleys in the southern sector providing a natural drainage system. Rocky Mountains with narrow valleys and forestland, in the northeast offering reservoirs and recreation, with a broad, flat northwestern sector with undulating valleys. The rugged mountainous region in the northeast is the most predominant environmental feature in Atoka County. The county does not have major areas of primary cropland soils except around the Town of Tushka, where several contiguous sections have been cultivated.

### **Bryan County**

Bryan County is one of the most environmentally diversified counties in the SODA Region. Five identifiable primary cropland areas, and entire county border on a wooded section of Lake Texoma and expansive forests spreading eastward, the county offers lake country and woodland recreation, agriculture and industrial development in naturally zoned sectors. This diversity has prompted the county to take proactive steps to preserve the natural beauty and to conserve the resources.

Although Bryan County offers so much in the way of country recreation, the county also has the highest urban area percentage in the SODA District. This diversity, with the urban center mix, has caused the county to go through

tumultuous land use transitions. Over the last twenty years, the county has worked to develop the land uses in opportune ways to enhance its attractiveness to both visitors and commercial ventures.

SODA has recently closed a water infrastructure grant for a water storage stand pipe in City of Durant.

### **Carter County**

Carter County has the least amount of prime cropland of any county in the State of Oklahoma according to an Oklahoma Conservation Commission Study. However, other studies show that at least 5% of county land is classified as cultivated agricultural, though it is noted that most of this is on secondary soils. These studies also show that the area of cropland has decreased from 11% to 5% since 1967. This decrease is a result of a continuing conversion of small family farmland to large livestock enterprises. Caddo Creek and the Washita River have survived and provide the most extensive floodplain in the county with corresponding bottomlands of good primary cropland soils.

SODA is currently working with Southern Technology Center in Carter County on a Compressed Natural Gas Project.

### **Coal County**

Coal County is extremely rugged throughout, but especially in the northern areas. However, floodplains cover the entire north and east of the county's major city, Coalgate.

The county has seen a rapid conversion of cropland to pastureland, because the thin soils and erosion factor have made farming less cost effective than ranching. However, the amount of forestland in the county has actually grown in the preceding 20 years.

With the recent oil and gas drilling decline along with the burning of the only grocery store within the county has substantially decreased the county and City of Coalgate's tax base. A motel was built and RV parks dot the landscape to accommodate the workers, which are few compared to previous years.

## **Garvin County**

Garvin County strives continuously to balance oil and agricultural industrial productivity and as a result falls prey to boom and bust characteristics of the Oklahoma Economy. Three principal cities, Pauls Valley, Lindsay and Wynnewood have excellent prospects for growth during boom times and high potential for out-migration in bust periods. Although the county is within commuting distance to Norman and Oklahoma City, the emphasis within each of the principal cities is to diversify and stabilize local economies to sustain steady growth and viable communities.

Some of the most productive prime crop soils in the nation, Garvin County has remained primarily an agricultural force. However, the county's proximity to the state's central population center has invited heavy emphasis on oil field equipment industries and refining. Due to the recent drop in the price of oil Garvin County has seen a decline in jobs. Also, the expansion of wind turbine energy has also increased jobs in the area.

## **Johnston County**

In recent years, the economy of Johnston County has diversified with the conversion of acreage from cropland to pastureland and forestland more than in most other SODA Counties. However, the conversions have not had a great impact on the total crop productivity in the county indicating that only marginally productive cropland has been converted. Although crop production continues to provide the largest industrial base, county assets include a wildlife refuge and broad expanse of Lake Texoma Shoreline.

Johnston County is characterized by rather inaccessible prime cropland areas hidden in steep, forested valleys. As a result of this, the county has a more rural character. The towns of Ravia, Mill Creek and Wapanucka, however, overlap wide bands of prime soils.

## **Love County**

Land uses in Love County have changed dramatically over the past 20 years with more

conversion has been to rangeland and pastureland reflecting the low market conditions for produce and higher prices in livestock. However, a significant conversion to urban uses has also occurred, especially around the county's lone urban center, Marietta. Marietta is located within one of the many large expanses of primary agricultural soils characteristic of Love County. The City also lies on the highland dividing two watersheds (and their corresponding floodplain): Owl Creek to the northwest, draining into Hickory Creek and finally into Lake Texoma, and Bills Creek to the south draining into the Red River. Numerous floodplains cross the county north to south, but unlike other counties, these floodplain areas are usually associated with secondary soils rather than primary. Around Marietta, however, primary agricultural soils exist in abundance. Most of the conversions have been to rangeland and pastureland reflecting the low market conditions for produce and higher prices in livestock. However, a significant conversion to urban uses has also occurred, especially around the county's lone urban center, Marietta. Most of the conversions have been to croplands which now has more than any other county in the SODA Region.

Though the county's major economic emphasis has long been crop production, in particular peanuts and associated food processor capabilities. A new emphasis is emerging now: tourism. This new emphasis is primarily the result of environmental considerations related to the county's proximity to Red River, Lake Texoma and Lake Murray.

## **Marshall County**

Marshall County has, over the past 20 years, made major adjustments to its land use emphasis. Like all of SODA's Counties Marshall County has converted much of its cropland to other uses. In the case of Marshall County, cropland has converted to rangeland in pursuit of economic incentives provided by the cattle industry in recent years. But, more importantly, Marshall County has the second greatest access to water (Lake Texoma) and the greatest access to tourism in the SODA Region.

Although the county is predominantly rural with an agricultural based economy, development of recreation and tourism has long been of major emphasis in Marshall County. Crop production, manufacturing and wholesaling have supportive roles to Lake Texoma activities and their associated retirement and recreational developments. The extensiveness of the Marshall County Rural Water Corporation

and its many miles of water lines is an indication of this local support. Marshall County has the greatest number of miles in rural water lines of any of the ten SODA Counties. Growth issues will center on the lake's frontage, Madill and the Town of Kingston (near Lake Texoma).

Madill lies within the fork of Marshall County's longest floodplain (Glasses Creek) practically surrounded on all sides. Large tracts of secondary soils lie southwest and southeast of the town. Kingston lies south of Madill in some steeply sloping hills characteristically dispersed among the county. To the immediate southeast of Kingston lies one of two large patches of primary agricultural soils in the county. This area is criss-crossed by rural water lines.

## **Murray County**

Murray County is located at the north edge of the Arbuckle Mountains, where rolling topography and scenic vistas protect forests, lakes and clear running streams. The county is host to a premier national park and the City of Davis has two of the most popular tourist parks in the state.

Chickasaw National Recreation Area, just south of Sulphur, is the only national park in the state. Originally created in 1906 as Platt National Park. Congress combined the new Lake of the Arbuckles (known as Arbuckle Recreation Area) in 1976 establishing the current name and a renewed emphasis to preserve the special natural features, especially the mineral and fresh waters.

The Arbuckle Mountains run east to west, in contrast to the continent's predominantly north-south mountain trends. The mountain "uplift" is nearly vertical, as can be seen in the highway cuts of Interstate 35 just south of Davis. The mountains, believed to once be as massive as the Rocky Mountains, are now so old that they are worn down to their very roots. The rock in the Arbuckle Mountains may be the oldest visible on the surface of the earth having been formed over 300 million years ago.

Cropland has never been extensive in Murray County, yet much of what was cultivated has now been converted to pastureland. Many very large ranches and land holdings can be found in the Arbuckle Mountain Area. The conversion process has caused a minor loss of forestland in the county. However, woodlands and



prairies continue to abound and with abundant year round fresh water, the county has maintained a relatively clean and beautiful environment for the development of its tourism industries.

The other dominating feature of the Murray County topography, adjoining the mountains, is the large Washita Floodplain running the length of the county from north to south. Primary cropland soils are generally found in the bottom lands of the Washita Floodplain, especially in the central part of the county. Other areas of primary soils are found in minor extensions of the central floodplain running south into Sulphur, south into Lake of the Arbuckles and north of Davis. Steep slopes and marginal soils lie to the northeast of Sulphur, while the City of Davis, is practically surrounded by floodplain to the west and north.

### **Pontotoc County**

Pontotoc County is home to the City of Ada, a primary growth center in the SODA Region. As one of the three main trade centers in Southern Oklahoma, Ada exemplifies the complex issues of market demands and natural resource usage.

Cropland uses in the county have decreased substantially in the past 20 years, while pastureland has been the only usage increase. Forestland has also declined. However, industrial growth pressures have had the largest long-term impact on the county, especially in Ada. The county does not have an abundance of prime cropland soils and even smaller proportion of these soils is found around the industrial center. These facts may justify the city's future as an industrial hub in Southern Oklahoma.

Although industrial growth is impacting the county, agricultural growth remains the major element in the county's economy. Primary soils, floodplain and water extensions will continue to be relevant issues concerning the development future of the county. Mapping provided by a previous SODA Study in the county shows relatively small amounts of prime agricultural soils primarily located in the steep topographies of a random group of floodplain pathways. Potential new prime croplands appear to be confined to smaller land areas than in the other SODA Counties.

# REGIONAL VISION STATEMENT AND ACTION PLAN FOR PROGRAM YEAR 2017 - 2019

## REGIONAL VISION STATEMENT<sup>1</sup>:

1. Public investment in infrastructure and services to support development of regional and local economy.
2. Workforce Development through quality technical education and higher education, which will be available and accessible to all residents of the region in order to improve wages and benefits in the ten county region.
3. Development of affordable housing opportunities.
4. A diverse and sustainable economy, including agriculture and forestry, small businesses, manufacturing and commerce, education, health care and tourism in order to increase per-capita income in the region.
5. Availability of accessible and quality health care in the region.
6. Development of programs to assist elderly citizens in the region.

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<sup>1</sup> *Ranking based on Committee priority.*

## ASSUMPTIONS:

The following assumptions have been made about the economy of the SODA Economic Development District (SODA EDD) based on the material that has been previously presented in this Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy Report. These assumptions are made for the current report period.

1. Agriculture and mineral extraction will continue to be important components of the economy in the SODA EDD area.
2. No economic forces is foreseen in the near future that will change the performance of agriculture and mineral extraction in the EDD, state and/or nation.

3. Population growth will occur primarily as a result of development in the areas of service industries and expanded tourism.
4. The general educational attainment level of the population in the EDD will remain below the general attainment level of the State of Oklahoma.
5. A slow but steady growth can be expected in the area of manufacturing.
6. Transportation will continue to drive the growth in our region.
7. Primary growth in the EDD will occur in the EDA designated growth centers of Ada, Ardmore and Durant.

## **GOALS AND ACTION PLAN:**

Comprehensive economic development in the SODA EDD can only be accomplished through a coordinated program of development implemented by a set of goals aimed at alleviating the most critical weaknesses in the EDD. The efforts of the Association will most certainly be directed by those goals that will create the greatest positive economic impacts.

The pursuit of these goals must be premised on the fact that implementation is contingent upon the cost and availability of financial resources. Furthermore, the relative priority of the broad-based development goals listed below are almost certain to change significantly when specific cost estimates are implemented.

The development of a coordinated program for the SODA EDD, based on these and other goals will also be contingent upon the public's interest throughout the EDD. Moreover, attitudes of change and cooperation must be present for the goals and programs to be implemented successfully.

***1. GOAL: Attract potential new industrial and commercial development into the area, as well as promote the expansion of existing commercial and industrial development ventures within the EDD.***

**ACTION:** Assist Chambers of Commerce and local development groups in the EDD

with technical assistance, which will provide them with the capacity to develop and/or implement local commercial and industrial development programs.

ACTION: Conduct workshops in order to develop partnerships among various organizations both private and public. Define the roles of such organizations.

ACTION: Develop and maintain directory and contact persons of such organizations within SODA EDD.

ACTION: Develop a regional marketing strategy in order to market the region as a whole to potential new industries and commercial developments.

ACTION: Develop a strategy to replace smoke stack chasing policy within SODA EDD.

***2. GOAL: Promote, develop/redevelop and publicize both existing and potential recreational resources; natural, historical, man-made; private and public, for tourism expansion purposes.***

ACTION: Participate and work with those organizations within the SODA EDD as well as the State of Oklahoma to help realize the regional tourism potential of the EDD.

ACTION: Examine the tourism and recreation industry within the EDD to determine its effect on the economy of the area and develop recommendations as to the best potential locations for tourist attractions.

ACTION: Assist smaller communities to tap the tourism for economic development.

***3. GOAL: Develop, to the fullest potential, the industrial airpark facilities to complement and enhance the commercial and industrial development of the EDD.***

ACTION: Work with local governments and various local organizations that are involved with the development of industrial airpark facilities to promote and enhance the commercial and industrial development potential in these facilities.

**4. GOAL: Promote the construction and/or upgrading of all proposed, planned and projected roads and highways within, and adjacent to, the area; and to assist in determining future roads and highways which will be needed to facilitate and sustain the overall economic growth of the SODA EDD.**

ACTION: Encourage the creation of origin and destination studies by the Oklahoma Department of Transportation within the EDD to determine the necessity of building/improvement of local, state and federal highways.

ACTION: Work with various transportation improvement groups within the EDD to develop and improve transportation facilities within the area.

ACTION: Develop a system of market-to-market thoroughfares within the EDD to expedite the safe and speedy movement of goods into, out of and within the area.

ACTION: Work with various transportation improvement groups in the development of I-35, Hwy 69/75 and Hwy 70 as the arteries of our region.

**5. GOAL: Promote the expansion of water distribution systems in the EDD in order to utilize the potable water resources of the area.**

ACTION: Develop innovative financing tools and techniques that will enable local units of government and/or local or regional development authorities to construct cost effective water distribution systems for both local and regional purposes within the EDD.

ACTION: Encourage rationalization of water and sewer systems in the region.

**6. GOAL: Promote the expansion of common school and vocational-technical education, and higher education programs to upgrade the general educational attainment level of the population of the EDD.**

ACTION: Work with common and vocational-technical schools and higher education institutions to develop programs that will increase the educational attainment level and upgrade the skills necessary for commercial or industrial employment in the EDD.

ACTION: Work with common and vocational technical schools and higher education institutions to develop programs that will both increase the educational attainment level and upgrade the skills necessary for attracting hi-tech (Electronics, internet, software etc.) companies to the region

**7. GOAL: *The safe and environmentally sound disposal of solid waste generated within the area of the EDD.***

ACTION: Promote the creation and operation of area wide solid waste disposal authority within the EDD for the most cost-effective disposal of solid waste produced.

ACTION: Promote recycling centers in all solid waste disposal management systems.

***ROLE OF SODA ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT DISTRICT***

SODA is the Southern Oklahoma Development Association; a non-profit council of government representing municipalities, Boards of County Commissioners and Soil Conservation Districts in Atoka, Bryan, Carter, Coal, Garvin, Johnson, Love, Marshall, Murray and Pontotoc Counties in a cooperative effort to improve the quality of life in Southern Oklahoma.

**ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

The Association is involved in long-range economic development planning and implementation for the region. Implementation includes providing assistance to business, industry and local units of government; helping determine appropriate public or private financing for business development and/or expansion. SODA is also involved in assisting firms prepare business plans, studies and the actual packaging of loans and other funding applications. SODA will also provide assistance to the cities involved in the Certified Cities Program of the Oklahoma Department of Commerce. SODA is committed to its program of the Oklahoma Department of Commerce. SODA is committed to its communities to assist and help in the Capital Improvement Planning Program (CIP).

## **COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT**

SODA supports municipalities, Boards of County Commissioners, Soil Conservation Districts, non-profit organizations, and service groups in determining the needs of the local unit; then assists in the identification of solutions and steps to meet those needs. If grant-in-aid assistance from the state or federal government is identified as a solution, SODA can assist in the preparation of the application for these funds. SODA is responsible for the regional coordination of CIP and creation of regional capital improvement plan.

## **COMPREHENSIVE PLANNING**

SODA provides assistance to local units of government in order to develop comprehensive land use plans, zoning ordinances and subdivision regulations. SODA is also involved with other land utilization issues such as: water resource management, soil loss, transportation studies and agriculture land preservation.

## **REGIONAL PLANNING**

SODA is a regional resource for cooperative planning of solid waste systems, water projects, tourism, industrial development and transportation. Research, design and facilitation of planning strategies are among the regional planning roles and responsibilities of Southern Oklahoma Development Association.

## **LEGISLATIVE INITIATIVES**

SODA has expanded its role in State and Federal Legislative affairs on behalf of its member units of local government. The Association establishes its own legislative agenda consisting of pertinent legislative concerns of Southern Oklahoma. This agenda is relayed to the legislative delegation with continued monitoring and follow-up. One of the priorities this year is the use of cell phones in the counties. The concern is if the cell phone was purchased elsewhere the county does not collect the usage of that cell in their county. The rate needs to be raised, as more and more households are doing away with land lines.