

## 2019 GULF COAST BUSINESS COUNCIL MASTERS LEADERSHIP PROGRAM BLUEPRINT GULF COAST INITIATIVE – YEAR 3: THE EVOLVING ECONOMY

### INTRODUCTION

The Gulf Coast Business Council launched the Masters Leadership Program in 2007, bringing a new class of emerging leaders together each year to act as a regional “Think Tank” for the year. The primary goal of the program is to develop the Mississippi Gulf Coast into one of the most livable regions in the United States. Since 2010, the Masters Leadership Program has been researching key factors for past and present obstacles to the goal and have been developing solutions to conquer these issues for regional success.

The program has published white papers and recommendations in the following key areas:

- *Early Childhood Education*
- *Capturing the Creative Class*
- *Smart Growth Policies for the Coast*
- *Leveraging the Scientific and Military Assets of the Coast*
- *Leveraging the Gulf of Mexico for Regional Viability*
- *Broadband for the Coast*
- *Blue Print Gulf Coast Initiative- Year 1: Pillars for Prosperity*
- *Blue Print Gulf Coast Initiative- Year 2: Community Development*

The 2019 Masters Class explored the extensive topic of Economic Development. During the year, we had the opportunity to study a variety of influential leaders among the Coastal Mississippi community. These speakers shared their thoughts and experiences on assorted industries and arenas, such as tourism, business development, education, and infrastructure. Through garnering various professional perspectives, and by sharing our own personal experiences, it quickly became apparent that Economic Development may be as vast or as finite as the situation calls for.

## SWOT ANALYSIS

There are a multitude of factors that create a healthy economy, and equally as many contributors to the discipline of Economic Development; therefore, this class developed categories of Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) as they apply to economic development along the coast (Figure 1).

S STRENGTHS	W WEAKNESSES	O OPPORTUNITIES	T THREATS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gulfport-Biloxi International Airport</li> <li>• Gaming</li> <li>• Geographical location</li> <li>• Affordability</li> <li>• Entertainment</li> <li>• Beaches</li> <li>• History</li> <li>• Friendliness</li> <li>• Proximity to New Orleans and Mobile</li> <li>• Federal allocations</li> <li>• Military presence</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Coordination between cities/counties</li> <li>• Vision</li> <li>• Roadway accessibility</li> <li>• Beach closures</li> <li>• Low wage employment</li> <li>• Public transportation</li> <li>• Growth rate</li> <li>• Market-rate housing</li> <li>• Developable land</li> <li>• Zoning inconsistencies</li> <li>• Inclusivity</li> <li>• Hurricane resiliency</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Public-private partnerships</li> <li>• Small business development</li> <li>• Blue and Space economy</li> <li>• Education and workforce development</li> <li>• Expressway</li> <li>• Federal funding</li> <li>• Infrastructure</li> <li>• Walkability</li> <li>• Community relations with military</li> <li>• Nonprofit groups</li> <li>• Broadband internet</li> <li>• Flood zone revisions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gulf of Mexico ecosystem health</li> <li>• Natural and man-made disasters</li> <li>• Brain drain</li> <li>• Government contracts</li> <li>• Government closures</li> <li>• Restrictive regulatory laws</li> <li>• State laws</li> <li>• Negative State perceptions</li> <li>• Automation</li> </ul>

Figure 1. SWOT Analysis

These categories are essential in identifying recommendations for economic development along the Coast as it applies to the evolving economy.

## STATE OF THE ECONOMY

Coastal Mississippi has paced its real gross domestic product (GDP) with the State – meaning there has been no upward momentum since the 2008 recession. In all actuality, our region is underperforming the national average. Real GDP is defined by the U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis as a comprehensive measure of U.S. economic activity. GDP is the value of the goods and services produced in the United States. The growth rate of GDP is the most popular indicator of the nation's overall economic health. Real GDP for the Mississippi Gulf Coast has continued to decline in years 2012 to 2014 and 2016 to 2017. The decrease Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) for military bases, Hurricane Katrina, Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill, and other federal budget sequestrations have contributed significantly to this stagnation.

The Mississippi State Auditor, Shad White, recently wrote that the key to rising through the national ranks of economic success is dependent on three important concepts:

1. Attract higher margin employers
2. Produce a labor market of college-educated and/or skilled people working together
3. Use the state's natural advantages to create and attract high margin businesses

The 2019 Business Council's Masters Leadership Program has identified several key steps towards achieving these objectives.

## Workforce

According to a November 2018 study performed by the Mississippi University Research Center, employment has declined significantly since 2000, and although there have been ebbs and flows, the employment rate on the coast has had no significant change since 2013 (Figure 1). In contrast, the population in our region has increased every year since 2010 and is expected to keep this upward momentum (Figure 2).

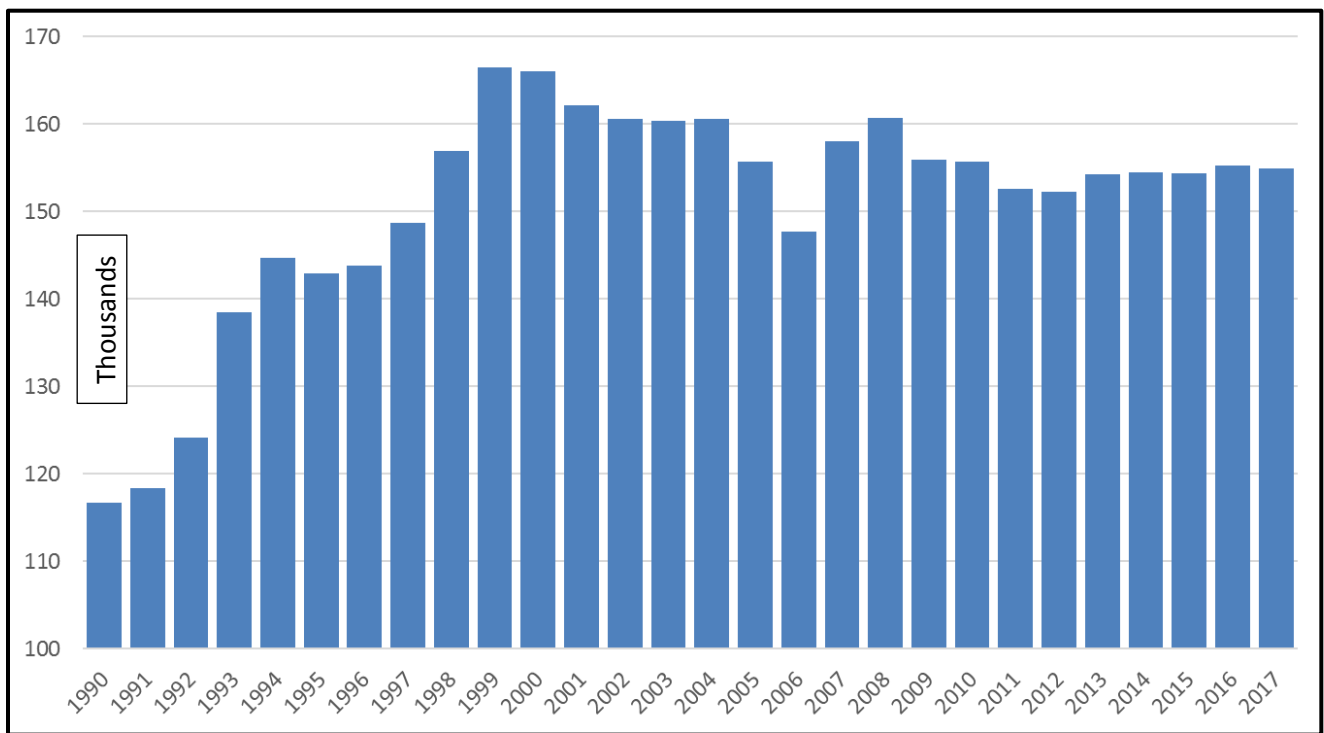
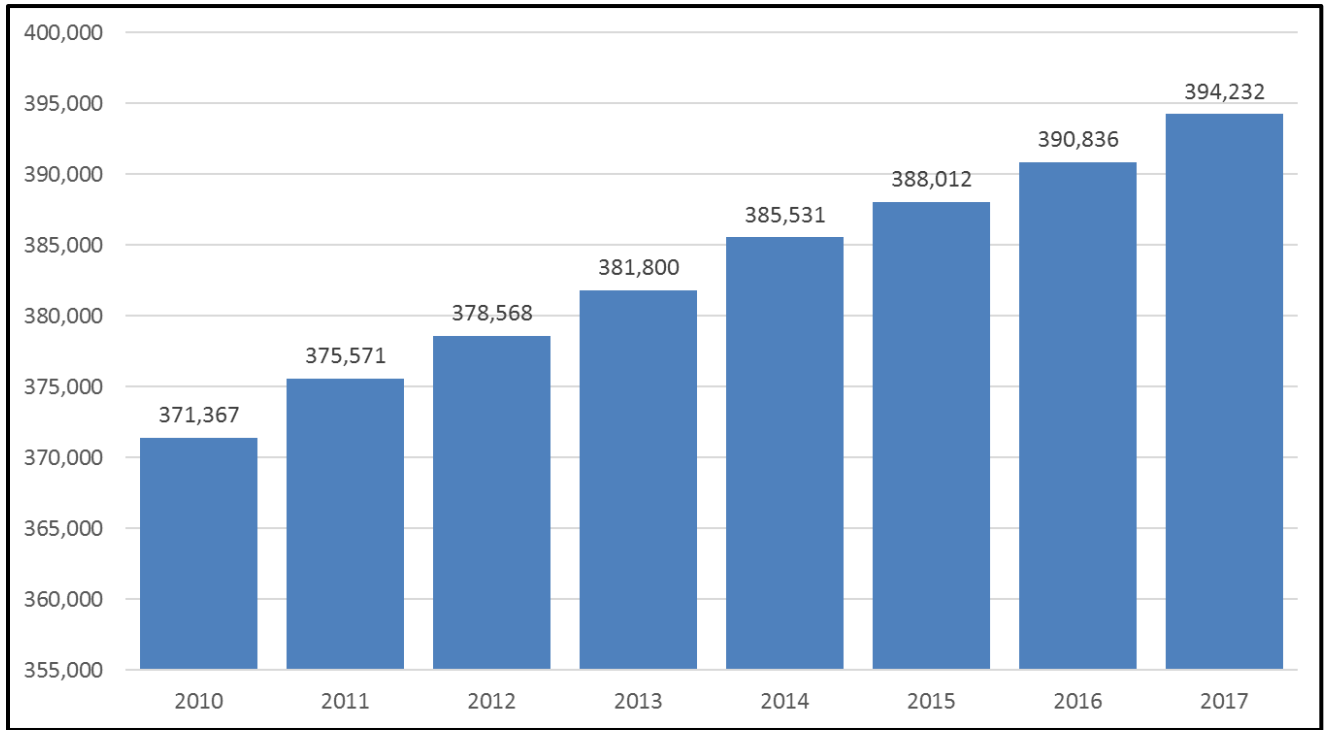
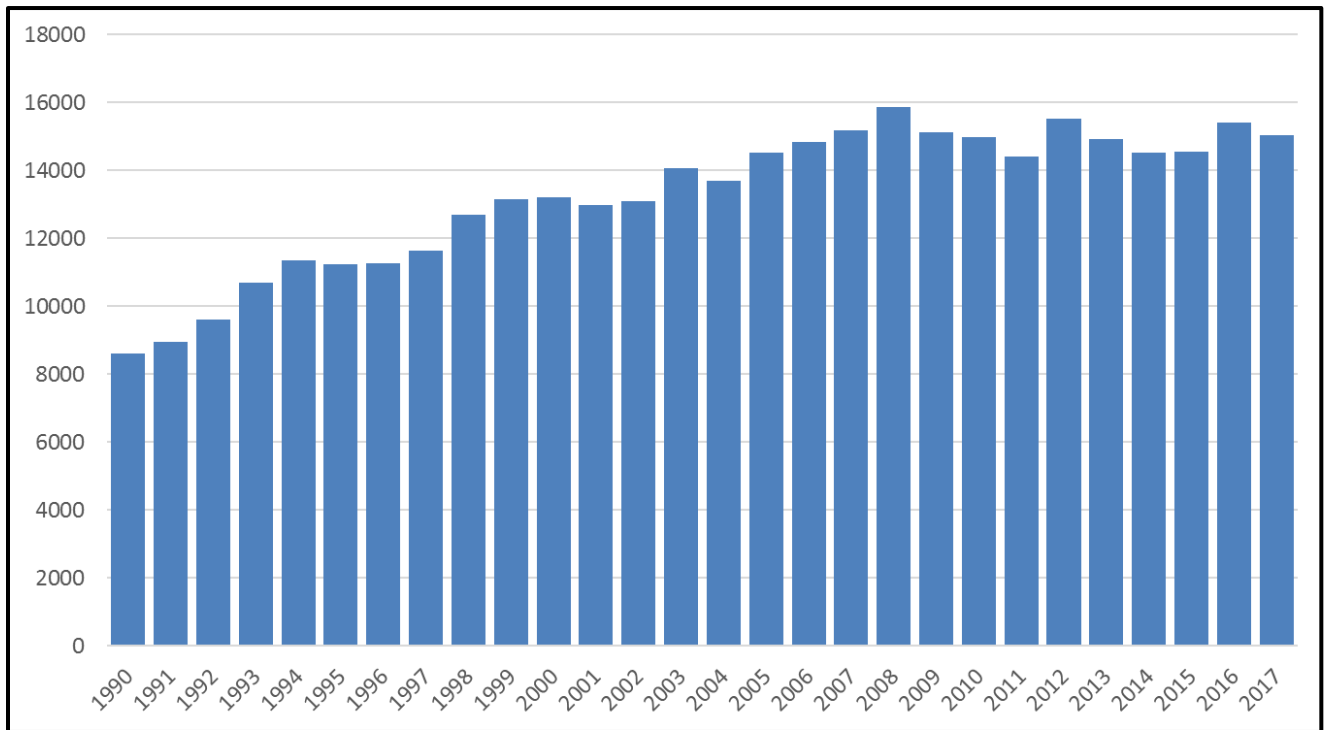


Figure 1. Employment for Coastal Mississippi



**Figure 2. Population for Coastal Mississippi**

There has been very little upward momentum in real GDP along Coastal Mississippi since the recession through 2017 (Figure 3). However, according to the Open Data Network, the State of Mississippi has steadily increased real GDP each year from 2017 through 2019 by 2.5% in 2018, was projected to increase 0.6% in 2019, and is projected to grow another 0.6% in 2020.



**Figure 3. Real GDP for Coastal Mississippi**

A significant portion of the labor market on the coast, especially in Harrison County, is predominantly represented (10-12%) by the food and service industry, office administration, and sales. Traditionally, these are the lower paying jobs we are striving to get away from. Education and healthcare account for approximately 6% of the labor force. A much smaller percentage (primarily in Harrison County) of our labor force (2-4%) can be attributed to the business, financial, engineering, and computer science fields.

In Hancock County, higher paying jobs, predominantly in the engineering and science fields are associated with NASA, the Navy, and other tenants of the Stennis Space Center. Jackson County retains higher paying jobs as well in the fields of technicians, engineers, scientists, and administration. Their labor force is primarily composed of workers at Ingalls Shipbuilding, VT Halter Marine, and the Chevron Pascagoula Refinery.

## Workforce Recommendations

Joseph Schumpeter's long-held theory of "creative destruction" maintains that "economies grow when innovation kills off old, inefficient businesses and spawns new ones." By creating new professional opportunities, while supporting established industries to continue to drive and sustain our current economy, the coast can become a major contender in modern urban environments.

In order to support a successful economic development strategy throughout our coastal region, we must heed Shad White's advice. While maintaining the existing job market, we must attract new industries supporting innovative technologies which complement the existing natural and economic environment found along Coastal Mississippi. We must also implement workforce programs to educate and train our residents to fill the gaps in the labor force. Finally, it is imperative we incentivize the current and future college educated population to live and work within the three coastal counties.

Residents, public servants, and developers have traditionally relied on government contracts to produce manufacturing jobs, but as demonstrated in the documentary American Factory, by 2030 automation will create the need for 375 million new jobs for displaced Americans. Additionally, as automation takes root, the transition of American factories to foreign owners with lower wages is an unsettling reality.

Public-private partnerships are gaining momentum in Mississippi. According to Governor Phil Bryant's Mississippi Defense Initiative Strategic Plan, to fully capture the benefits for both Department of Defense and State of Mississippi with Public-Private and Public-Public Partnerships, the following are successful examples for development:

- *Partnership intermediary agreements*
- *Joint-use agreements*
- *Training agreements*
- *Gifting authority*
- *Intergovernmental support agreements*
- *Intergovernmental personnel agreements*
- *Enhanced use leasing and other property authorities*

Coastal Mississippi is in the unique position to grow in specific, correlated areas of technology that no other urbanized city can accommodate. This includes maritime, aerospace, technology,

research, industry, and the unique combination of each. However, negative national perceptions of our state continue to repel some businesses from investing their efforts in Mississippi and specifically Coastal Mississippi. To transition the current workforce to one prevalent in our growing Blue and Space Economy by 2030, the following workforce development goals must be a priority.

Short-Term Goals (1-3 years)

1. Embrace innovative strategies to attract and retain college graduates, entrepreneurs, remote professionals, and small businesses.
2. Create a database to be used as community profile tool to depict coast-wide information such as income, workforce, demographics, and land use strategies. This data can then be used for companies interested in locating to the area. The TNECD Community Profile Tool is an excellent example.
3. Provide funding for nonprofits to create programs to get people back in the workforce such as employing homeless and low-income population to clean and beautify public spaces, transportation corridors, and the beaches.
4. Form a Coastal Coalition for Economic Development centered around asset stakeholders such as the ports, economic development organizations, airports, etc., to report on capturing churn and capitalize on industry in our area. This will help to boost the coastal economy.
5. Lobby legislators to fund an organization to collect data and provide a report on gaps in Coastal Mississippi's workforce development. This will serve to bridge the gap between technical and college education programs with workforce development needs.
6. Develop a roadmap for a consolidated center of excellence for the Blue and Space Economy. This will create a common geographic location for physical and biological sciences associated with these areas of development as well as the accompanying engineering and technology fields.

Mid-Term Goals (4-6 years)

1. Provide government tax incentives and grant programs to encourage specific developments within specific districts, such as downtown entertainment areas, business districts, and cultural history districts. This will make Coastal Mississippi more attractive to tourists as well as current and future residents.
2. Invest in business accelerators/incubators at coastal colleges to facilitate innovative ideas and products. This will aid in creating jobs for students and develop ideas for future business.



3. Establish legislation that establishes an approved test range for unmanned systems along Coastal Mississippi. This will attract numerous businesses and government entities to the area in this emerging field.
4. Implement the initial presence for the Blue and Space Economy Center of Excellence.

Long-Term Goals (7-10 years)

1. Create programs to refine student loans and grants as well as offer stipends to Mississippi college graduates (entrepreneurs, coders, educators, oceanographers, aerospace engineers, etc.) to live on the coast for five years. This will allow Coastal Mississippi to increase the retention of the workforce in these key fields.
2. Implement the final stage of the Blue and Space Economy Center of Excellence on the Mississippi Coast. Additionally, incentives for more technological, health, and engineering industries to locate on the coast to encourage higher paying job growth as well as reduce the leakage of money leaving Coastal Mississippi for other states.
3. Acquire properties adjacent to economically significant areas such as the airports, ports, and industrial parks for future entertainment, residential, and business development.
4. Create incentives and advocate for promoting public-private partnerships for local government to enter an agreement/project with a private sector company. With the influx of federal funding, local capital paired with investments and these partnerships will exponentially increase the net value of individual cities and Coastal Mississippi.

## Education

Education encompasses a large range of issues, from Pre-K programs to 4-Year Universities, and everything in between. During multiple discussions, our class came to a consensus that education is truly the crux of developing our children, young adults, and non-traditional students into the workforce that Coastal Mississippi needs. We discussed many topics that we deemed pertinent, including the need for Pre-K programs, the need for consistent and complete data and statistics, and of course, funding for public education.

During a tour of a coastal high school vocational program, we were introduced to a teacher-training program where high school students interested in becoming a teacher can begin receiving training prior to college through the school's vocational program. Although Mississippi State University hosts a program that incentivizes these students to enroll in their school versus a different public university, there seems to remain a lack of intention in the other Universities to seek large numbers of current students who may be interested in enrolling in teacher programs to provide a pipeline for future Mississippi educators. It seems there needs to be a sincere scrutiny of education of our students from Pre-K all the way through graduation of a 4-Year University.

Upon analyzing the need for concerted and orchestrated education pathways, the 2019 Masters Class took the initiative to review the State's investment within the eight public universities through the Mississippi Institutions of Higher Learning. After obtaining the numbers and data publicly available on the IHL website, we created a data set to reflect the state's annual investment and divided that number by the number of degrees awarded per year to obtain the amount of dollars invested per degree by our State (Figure 4). We then ran the population numbers for the same years that we pulled the IHL data for (2014 - 2019) through the EMSI economic modeling system, which over the course of five years shows a decrease of 20% in the population of Mississippi residents ages 20 - 24, which is the typical age of a college graduate (Figure 5).

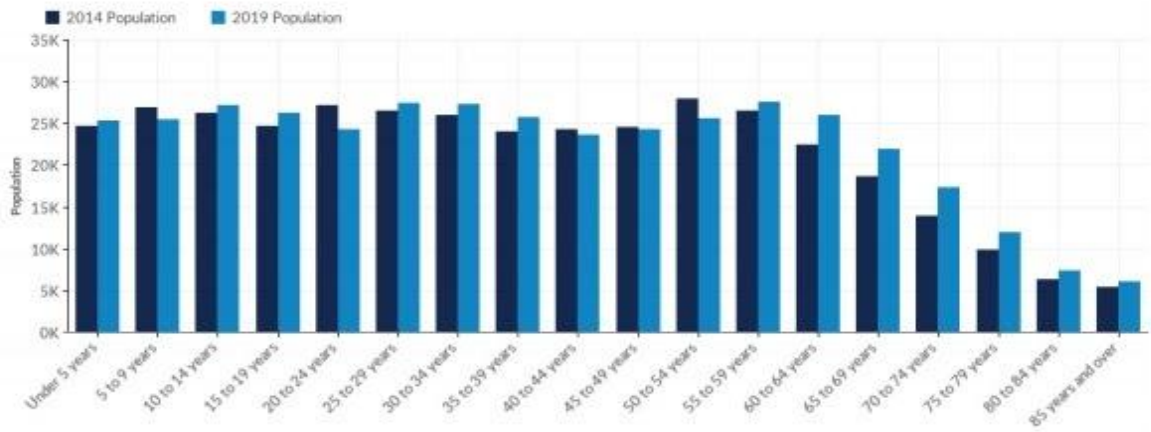
While we are not economists, our rudimentary efforts of collating the data from IHL and juxtaposing it with the population numbers of college graduates, our efforts roughly show that while the State is investing approximately \$700 million per year into our public universities, we are losing a large number of our residents ages 20-24 years of age.

Year	State Investment	Degrees Awarded	State Investment Per Degree Awarded
2014-2015	756,500,000	16,813	44,994.94
2015-2016	781,800,000	17,102	45,713.95
2016-2017	748,700,000	17,760	42,156.53
2017-2018	668,200,000	18,248	36,617.71
2018-2019	672,700,000	UNK	UNK

Data Set from Mississippi Institutions of Higher Learning, 2019  
Data represents State dollars spent and degrees awarded from MS's 8 public universities.

Figure 4. State Investments and Degrees Awarded

### Population by Age Cohort



Age Cohort	2014 Population	2019 Population	Change	% Change	2014 % of Cohort
Under 5 years	24,698	25,364	666	3%	6.41%
5 to 9 years	26,827	25,379	-1,448	-5%	6.96%
10 to 14 years	26,225	27,137	912	3%	6.80%
15 to 19 years	24,658	26,192	1,534	6%	6.40%
20 to 24 years	27,114	24,220	-2,894	-11%	7.03%
25 to 29 years	26,451	27,391	940	4%	6.86%
30 to 34 years	26,004	27,233	1,229	5%	6.74%
35 to 39 years	24,037	25,752	1,715	7%	6.23%
40 to 44 years	24,245	23,535	-710	-3%	6.29%
45 to 49 years	24,553	24,282	-271	-1%	6.37%
50 to 54 years	27,973	25,501	-2,472	-9%	7.26%
55 to 59 years	26,485	27,580	1,095	4%	6.87%
60 to 64 years	22,352	25,964	3,612	16%	5.80%
65 to 69 years	18,595	21,912	3,317	18%	4.82%
70 to 74 years	13,883	17,245	3,362	24%	3.60%
<b>Total</b>	<b>385,539</b>	<b>399,994</b>	<b>14,455</b>	<b>4%</b>	<b>100.00%</b>

Figure 5. 2014-2019 Population Changes

The next effort we undertook was to look at the percentage of individuals with a Bachelor’s or Master’s level degree from the same years (2014 - 2019) to see if the attainment level increased, decreased, or remained the same (Figure 6).

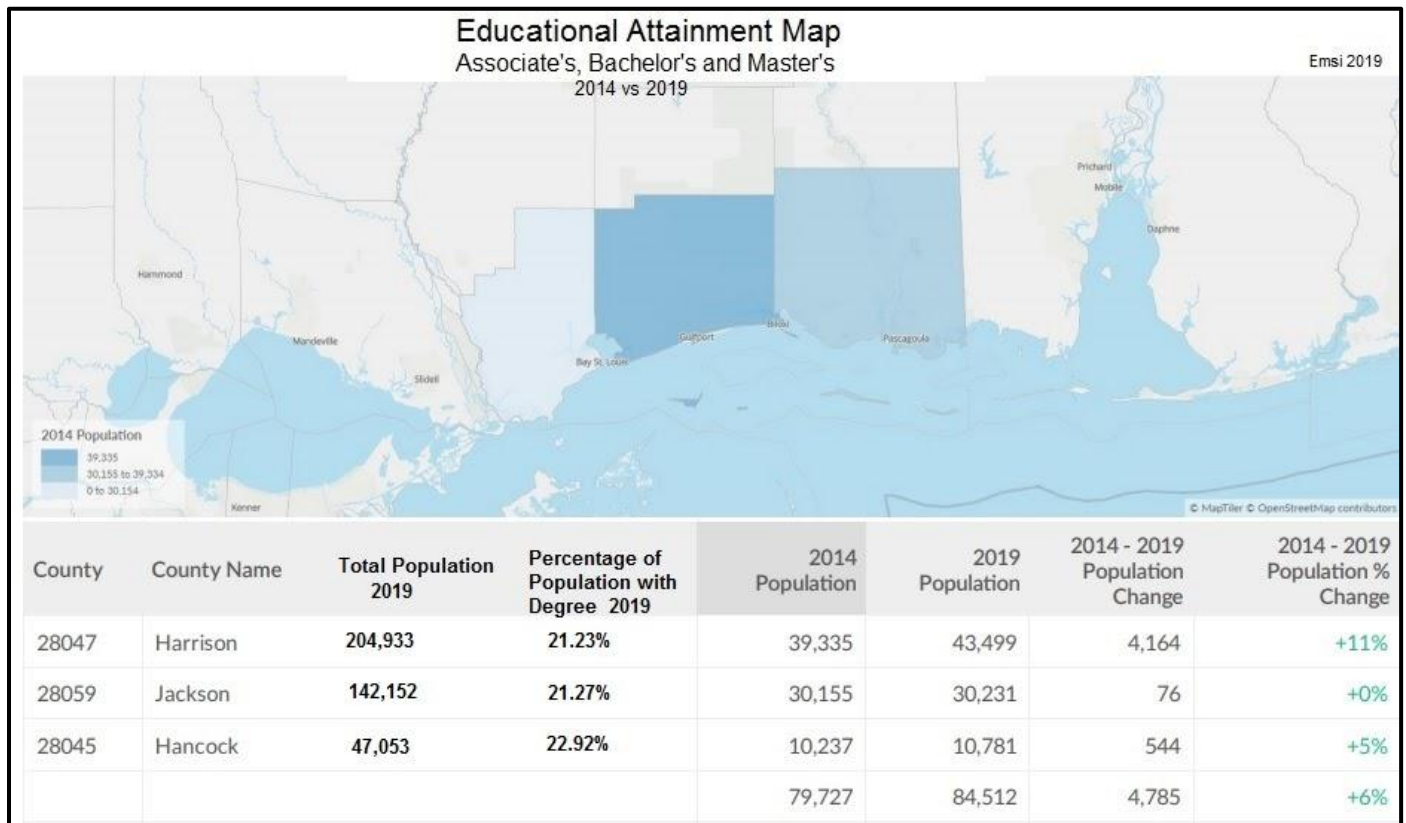


Figure 6. Educational Attainment in Coastal Mississippi

The EMSI map shows that the educational attainment level of Coast residents increased from 79,727 to 84,512 (6% over 5 years) coast wide. However, Harrison Co decreased 11%, while Hancock increased 5%, and Jackson County had no change.

Overall, the data we pulled and triangulated clearly shows a decrease in the population of Mississippi residents ages 20 - 24 over the last few years, some of which may be attributed to BRAC, pointing to a loss of investment on behalf of the State. At the very least, the State should receive a return on the annual investment of approximately \$700 million into the eight public universities.

An article published by The Sun Herald on December 27, 2019 referenced the well-known “Teacher Crisis” within the State of Mississippi in which reference was made that the Mississippi Department of Education (MDE) claims that their organization neither has nor collects data from the local school districts to collect and report information regarding the actual numbers and/or data sets to reflect the current standings on teacher vacancies throughout the state (Davis, Sun Herald 2019).

This is an excellent example of the lack of data and information our state currently possesses to address the issues our education system faces. While legislators have taken steps in the past to enact legislation to help in recruiting teachers for the State of Mississippi, it seems there has been no requirement of information to be reported directly as a result of these initiatives - in other words, there is not an information loop that ensures our legislators, and our tax payers, are receiving a benefit from the policies and/or investments that have been established. The MDE does not have the data as most districts do not collect it nor do they report said data to reflect real-time data of teacher vacancies, etc.

### Education Recommendations

Coastal Mississippi’s education system contributes to shape the future economic success of Hancock, Harrison, and Jackson Counties by preparing the workforce to both compete for existing jobs, and secure future employment opportunities. Coastal Mississippi has the opportunity to become the premier destination for innovative “blue” technologies and state-of-the-art research centered around coastal and marine environments. Additionally, as William Carey University continues to flourish as the primary center for advanced education in healthcare, we can increase our labor force in the healthcare industry.

As stated by MDE within the Sun Herald article, sufficient data currently does not exist to know if Mississippi faces a teacher shortage, specifically state-wide. After a cursory review of current job openings within school districts along the Gulf Coast, we feel that while a teacher shortage may or may not exist throughout the state (data insufficient), it seems the Gulf Coast does not face the same issue. This is an important indicator that while legislation affects the entire state, the Gulf Coast should be analyzed differently, due to economic factors, such as available workforce, etc.

Throughout our class, an area of education that was discussed multiple times is the idea that Gulf Coast schools are different from schools throughout the state, in terms of enrollment, funding, and test scores. Our class members represented myriad fields, and some class members are

employed by major industry along the Coast. Throughout our discussions about the education system, a recurring complaint included the difficulties that major employers face hiring an external workforce due to the general view of Mississippi school systems— not necessarily Coastal school systems. It was found that while potential employees of major industry initially had negative views of the local education system, once recruiters discussed statistics of Coastal schools, the potential employees were more likely to consider employment on the Gulf Coast. As such, we recommend marketing effort for major industry to showcase Coastal school statistics for use in recruiting efforts for potential employees.

Short-Term Recommendations (1-3 years)

1. Publicly fund pre-kindergarten programs coast-wide to encourage mandatory early education and development classes. These early education and development programs will allow for better productivity and educational achievement by producing individuals with the capacity to fill technical and professional positions needed to capitalize on future economic development. This will also create employment opportunities for daycares.
2. Develop community seminars on how to implement the “whole family” approach to education within individual households. This approach will help encourage educational development outside of the school system from infancy throughout grade school.
3. Ensure vocational and technical (vo-tech) education continues to be reintegrated into area high schools. There remains a high demand for welders and other fields related to vo-tech.
4. Fund a Coding Academy for recent high school graduates and non-traditional college students to encourage the supply for technical jobs along the coast.
5. Require specific Research & Development from the eight public universities throughout the State to specifically address the issues that our state faces in terms of education, including the proposed teacher shortage. Task one of the universities to address coast-specific data as all indicators point to Coastal schools being separate from the state statistics as a whole. The data collected will help Mississippi, and specifically Coastal Mississippi to understand the current standings of our education system, thereby allowing our legislators to understand the issues and create policies and performance indicator thresholds to start pushing our education system in the right direction.

6. Require information and/or data sets to create a performance indicator for MDE and/or individual school districts (k-12) in order to receive funding on an annual basis. The data collected will close the gap in terms of lack of information needed to understand the current standings of teacher vacancies throughout the state, which is required to understand and address the ‘teacher crisis’ within the state.

Mid-Term Recommendations (4-6 years)

1. Encourage autonomy in our local school systems to transform traditional education, such as Vocational-Technical programs and Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) programs.
2. Subsidize youth development organizations such as Scouts BSA and Girl Scouts, Boys and Girls Club, tutoring programs, STEM schools, etc. These programs will help create youth that will be both good citizens and prepared for the workforce.
3. Mississippi’s public universities should correlate their offerings and degree programs based upon current need in the local job market throughout the state. There should be overlap between our State’s need for certain careers and the degree opportunities available at our universities.
4. Invest in workforce training by creating dual enrollment programs between high schools and colleges. This will allow students an earlier advantage to progress in direct employment placement, continuing education, and higher learning.

Long-Term Recommendations (7-10 years)

1. Promote William Carey University as an emerging major healthcare campus, which will expand healthcare opportunities along the coast and eliminate leakage of healthcare dollars from the State of Mississippi.
2. Invest in a major research university by leveraging the building blocks we have with the University of Southern Mississippi’s Marine Education Center and the Center for Ocean Enterprise with technologies, Mississippi State University Science and Technology Center being developed through the Mississippi Aquarium, Infinity Science Center, Pascagoula River Audubon Center, Institute for Marine Mammal Studies, Inc., the John C. Stennis Space Center, etc.
3. Create an innovation center that funnels opportunities to market research and development (R&D). This will help bridge the gap between workforce development and labor force needs, as well as produce jobs in the research field.



## Infrastructure

After almost 15 years, parts of Coastal Mississippi are still recovering from Hurricane Katrina. However, the overall population has recovered and continues to grow at a healthy rate of 3,000 people per year from 2015 to 2018 (Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis). Open Data Network for the Gulfport Metro Area even predicted a significantly larger population increase of 17,000 (4.1%) from 2018 to 2019.

Since Hurricane Katrina, most of the focus in the coastal cities has been on repairing damaged infrastructure, and little work has been done to construct or improve roadways that will facilitate new growth and development. For instance, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) funded Biloxi infrastructure project that addresses outdated/damaged infrastructure is still ongoing, while other areas along the coast are in dire need of renovations. This project has exceeded estimated completion dates, allocated funds, and has had irreparable damages to area residences and businesses (Figure 7).



Figure 7. Biloxi's Infrastructure Project

Another result of Hurricane Katrina has been the growth and development of our region north of I-10. This shift in population coupled with the continued growth and development south of I-10 have increased the need for more efficient north-south connectors to provide access to our urban areas. Furthermore, improvements to critical east-west routes within the areas South of I-10 are also needed for regional connectivity. The Gulf Regional Planning Commission (GRPC) recently identified priority transportation improvements that are currently unfunded and necessary to improve connectivity throughout Coastal Mississippi (Figure 8).

Priority projects of regional significance include:

- *East-West Corridor from Pass Christian to Biloxi*
- *Beatline Road from Highway 90 to I-10 in Pass Christian*
- *Construction of SR 601 from the Port of Gulfport with a new I-10 interchange*
- *Popp's Ferry Road Connector from Biloxi to Woolmarket*
- *SR 609 improvements From Highway 90 to I-10 in Ocean Springs*
- *Old Fort Bayou Road Improvements from Highway 90 to a new I-10 interchange*
- *Highway 57 improvements from I-10 to Vancleave*
- *Highway 90 improvements from Ocean Springs to Gautier*



**Figure 8. GRPC Transportation System Unfunded Needs**

A common complaint voiced by residents and visitor alike is related to litter, lack of maintenance, and overall look of our major transportation routes within Coastal Mississippi. Furthermore, the major thoroughfares have inconsistent signage, inadequate lighting, and poor landscaping (Figures 9 and 10). For instance, nearly all the I-10 interchanges have a different look and feel. Moreover, MDOT has only budgeted for grass cutting along the interstate twice per calendar year. This does not portray the image of a thriving coastal community.



Figure 9. I-10 Interchanges



Figure 10. Coastal Mississippi City Signage

The Coast Transit Authority provides public transit coast-wide but not to all communities. Downtown areas within our coastal cities lack adequate pedestrian and bicycle facilities that new businesses and developments have come to expect. This creates a lack of engagement between local groups and visitors as well as enthusiasm to take alternate, environmentally friendly modes of transportation such as walking and bicycling. In 2018 Jackson County create a bicycle, pedestrian, and trails master plan to identify priority areas for installing these facilities within each of the cities and the unincorporated county (Figure 11).

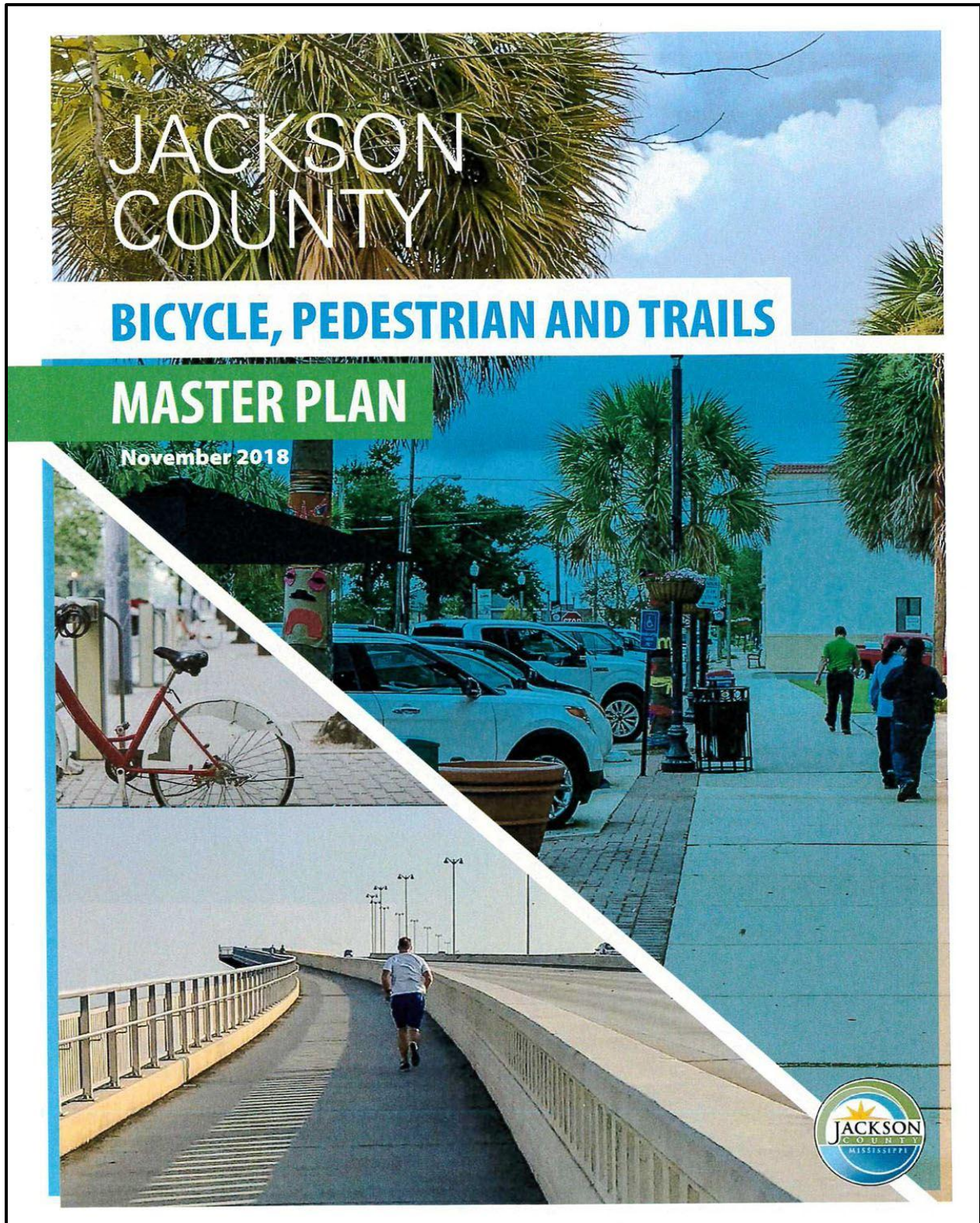


Figure 10. Jackson County Bicycle, Pedestrian, and Trails Master Plan

As for potable water and sanitary sewer, following Hurricane Katrina, special legislation was passed allowing for the creation of county-wide utility authorities to serve areas that were previously uncertificated. Funding for the utility authorities created new backbones for water and sewer systems, enabling areas north of I-10 to continue to expand and develop. This also gave utility authorities the ability to service areas that were initially certificated by another entity if agreeable to both parties. According to the Mississippi Public Service Commission's Public Utilities staff, there are 73 utility companies in Coastal Mississippi – 19 in Hancock County, 27 in Harrison County, and 27 in Jackson County.

Another major component to our infrastructure is related to broadband internet service. Privately-owned utility companies are now starting to invest in fiber optic technology which, if done correctly, has the potential to revolutionize Coastal Mississippi from an economic development perspective.

### Infrastructure Recommendations

In order to enhance the growth and development of Coastal Mississippi, significant investments in infrastructure are necessary. Aging water, sewer, and stormwater infrastructure within coastal cities contribute to flooding, inflow and infiltration, boil water notices, and coastal beach closures. For utilities to thrive under current and future development, resources will need to be allocated to address these aging infrastructure issues.

The overall look and feel of our existing roadway network, as well as new roads that connect our urban centers, are critical. Furthermore, bicycle and pedestrian facilities, cutting edge technology, and preparing for passenger rail travelers are key to the success of our region.

There doesn't seem to be a master plan or an initiative to ensure broadband internet service is installed in a way that will guarantee the capacity and connectivity needed to make Coastal Mississippi prevails with cutting edge technology.

#### Short-Term Recommendations (1-3 years)

1. Encourage GRPC and Coastal Mississippi to apply for BP-Gulf Coast Restoration funds to clean up, landscape, and install new signage and lighting at all I-10 interchanges from Louisiana to Alabama. This will distinguish Coastal Mississippi from the rest of the state and other regional destinations.
2. Identify bicycle and pedestrian facility needs within Coastal Mississippi and have cities and counties adopt programs to include these improvements when other roadway improvements are made within the identified areas. This will help cities prioritize improvements in key areas and consolidate funding efforts.
3. Plan for passenger rail stations and create a welcoming environment for visitors who come to Coastal Mississippi via Amtrak with new lighting, signage, sidewalks, and landscaping. This will help attract new and repeat visitors who may be encouraged to relocate here.
4. Work with telecommunication utility companies to identify existing and future fiber optic communication networks and help plan for future 5G capacity. This will help identify future gaps and needs.
5. Work with GRPC, MDOT, and other agencies to identify potential funding for unfunded transportation needs. This will help plan and implement key strategies in transportation funding going forward.

#### Mid-Term Recommendations (4-6 years)

1. Take advantage of existing federal funding through GRPC to invest in bike/pedestrian facilities that enhances existing and encourages new downtown development.
2. Provide incentives for telecommunications/utility companies to install innovative infrastructure, such as 5G and other technologies. This will help bring technology to Coastal Mississippi, providing an edge to attract businesses and inspire entrepreneurship.
3. Lobby MDOT, state legislature, and federal delegation to help fund major transportation projects within our region. This will bring better connectivity throughout Coastal Mississippi and facilitate further economic development.

Long-Term Recommendations (7-10 years)

1. Advocate for consolidation of utility districts, companies, and cities through county-wide utility authorities. This reduces duplication of services and efforts.
2. Find a long-term funding source for public infrastructure needs such as a local option sales tax, sales tax diversion, gas tax, etc. This will help plan and prioritize infrastructure demands when funding becomes available.
3. Invest in the safety and aesthetics of major thoroughfares within Coastal Mississippi. This will build pride within our residents as well as provide an overall, more attractive destination for visitors.



## QUALITY OF LIFE

Quality of life is quickly rising to the top of the list when attracting and retaining a higher wage workforce. Remote workers coupled with technological advances are shifting some of the traditional workforce from offices to convenient remote settings located just about anywhere there are available high-speed internet connections and adequate transportation to commute. Coastal Mississippi must evolve to meet these needs as part of offering a desirable place to live and work that builds upon the natural charm that a coastal lifestyle offers.

The tourism industry in Coastal Mississippi generates \$2.12 billion which represents approximately 32.6% of the State's overall tourism revenue. Since 2018, our region has seen well over \$668 million in announced projects that include new attractions, lodging, and restaurants to support and expand the tourism industry and amenities available to coastal residents. Planned community events, such as Cruisin' the Coast, Mardi Gras, and the Peter Anderson Festival, are a great way to showcase Coastal Mississippi throughout the nation. Increasing these amenities and events serves not only to entice short term visitors that support our robust tourism economy, but also improves our quality of place and the vibrant community needed to attract and retain the talent and employment base to grow the economy in Coastal Mississippi.

Downtown areas across the coast should be key focal points that can be used to leverage residential and business opportunities by creating a critical mass of economic activity. Some downtown areas are lacking in the ability to attract new business and embrace an exciting atmosphere without a coordinated effort to develop city centers. This may be due to a lack of funding for planning or the absence of policies that promote mixed-use, higher density development that creates a center for residential space and business opportunities, green space, and other amenities. Desirable downtown districts are critical for attracting entrepreneurs, tourists, and millennials while promoting a dynamic environment to work, live and play

Our region is surrounded by an abundance of natural resources with the Mississippi Sound, barrier islands, coastal beaches and bays, wetlands, and vast coastal habitats that make our coast what it is. These natural resources support our recreational and commercial fisheries, provide a sense of identity for many of our residents, and are an essential part of our tourism economy and coastal lifestyle. Conserving and protecting these resources is critical to maintaining and improving the quality of life on the coast. Creating additional opportunities for public access to enjoy these resources serves to attract visitors through ecotourism and provides increased opportunities for coastal residents.

## Quality of Life Recommendations

Coastal Mississippi has many advantages that people are seeking in a place to live and work. Our mid-size cities can offer a smaller local feel and community while still providing the amenities of a thriving larger city without the concerns of traffic congestion and safety that some larger metro areas may experience. However, it is important to promote innovative projects such as transformational mixed-use developments consisting of high quality residential, commercial, office and retail spaces that incorporate green space and walkability to encourage our downtown areas to develop.

Protecting and conserving our coastal resources that, in many ways, are the backbone of our coastal economy is equally important to protecting and building upon our quality of life. Improving water quality, conserving green space, and protecting the Mississippi Sound are all key components to protecting our quality of life.

We also want to portray an open, welcoming environment.

### Short-Term Recommendations (1-3 years)

1. Develop a grant program for municipalities to use for preparing downtown development planning and zoning studies. These studies will help cities determine their needs, individual identity, future growth and development, and incentives or policies that will help their downtown areas thrive. Mixed-use development, higher density, and downtown living coupled with walkable infrastructure and dedicated green space should be components of the downtown planning efforts.
2. Prioritize projects to improve water quality in the Mississippi Sound and along our coast to end beach closures. It is not enough to improve aesthetics without addressing the underlying issues of water quality that plague our coast and close our beaches.
3. Improve access to greenways and blue ways for visitors and residents to enjoy outdoor experiences. This will create more opportunities to enjoy inland activities in addition to saltwater fishing, boating, etc. in the Mississippi Sound and bay areas.
4. Remove negative policies and symbols such as the state flag to promote the image of Mississippi and the Mississippi Coast as a welcoming and inclusive environment that is not alienating to talented workers and businesses that would otherwise locate here.

Mid-Term Recommendations (4-6 years)

1. Develop policies to promote natural infrastructure and the use of green space. Utilizing techniques such as living shorelines and permeable pavements protects our natural resources and improves water quality while increasing the use of green space and natural infrastructure bring the environment into our communities and improve resiliency.
2. Provide funding for public improvements within downtown areas based on planning studies, and revise zoning to encourage developers to build and coordinate a thriving, walkable community attractive to people and businesses.
3. Improve the development and coordination of coastwide events to maximize marketing and spread the benefit across the coast. Events like Cruisin' the Coast are able to coordinate activities that span Coastal Mississippi over a period of time. Similar events such as a coastwide music festival, art showcases, and other events could become similar signature attractions for the entire coast.

Long-Term Recommendations (7-10 years)

1. Facilitate an environment that encourages development of major amenities and attractions such as the Mississippi Aquarium and MGM park, to diversify visitor experiences. This will add to a variety of attractions and enhance a higher-quality of life.
2. Develop large scale and transformational projects with the BP funding that will have lasting positive impacts on our coastal environment by conserving and restoring green space, improving water quality, creating public access, and providing coastal resiliency.
3. Improve and market existing recreational opportunities such as state parks, fishing, boating, hiking, camping, paddle boarding, and birding to promote outdoor tourism and local leisure activities.
4. Embrace and capitalize on Mississippi's cultural diversity and history through the development of ethnic and cultural areas that provide walkable, educational and unique perspectives of the fabric of the Mississippi Coast. For example, the Vietnamese community is deeply rooted in Coastal Mississippi, providing jobs in fisheries, food and entertainment and a walkable district similar to a "China Town" in other urban areas would create a specific niche attractive to a variety of people and showcasing the diversity of the coast.

## CONCLUSION

Coastal Mississippi has missed several opportunities in economic development over the past 20 years, somewhat due to BRAC, Hurricane Katrina, the 2010 Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill, and federal sequestration. Furthermore, a lack of market rate housing and shopping in certain areas, like Hancock and Jackson counties with large, single employers (Stennis Space Center and Ingalls Shipbuilding), causes urban sprawl to northern counties and neighboring states.

A new economic development playbook is emerging, and local, regional, and state-wide policy changes are a critical step in moving forward. We have spent the year assessing improvements to workforce development, education, infrastructure, and quality of life. We are confident that many of these recommendations will improve our area and help put Coastal Mississippi in a better position to compete in the evolving economy.

Coastal Mississippi can no longer solely rely on manufacturing jobs, since increasing automation will influence the loss of 375 million jobs in America. Because of our unique position, we must revolutionize the structure of our current workforce by transitioning from government contracts and manufacturing to growing industries in the Blue and Space Economy while maintaining the quality jobs we currently provide.

To truly prosper as a world-renowned center of excellence, the education system must be reformed to a more wholistic approach, which will require large investments. Our education system must encompass early childhood education, K-12 education, career and technical education, workforce training, higher education (bachelor's degrees), advanced degrees, and continuing professional education. The rate of return on a major education overhaul, will be instrumental to industrial, business, and entrepreneurial economic investments, while retaining a workforce currently succumbing to relocation.

Significant investments to create resilient infrastructure ensures the ability for Coastal Mississippi to quickly recover from natural disasters, such as Hurricane Katrina. This will help assure future developers that the dynamic environment experienced on the coast will not hinder our ability to continue to do business and generate economic output. Major strategic roadway improvements for Coastal Mississippi will facilitate our future growth and development. Updating and installing broad band internet coast-wide allows students, remote workers, entrepreneurs, businesses, and STEM industries to succeed at a rate consistent with other major urban areas. This is essential in attracting and retaining these groups in Coastal Mississippi.

In order to attract the new mobile workforce and businesses, maintaining and improving our quality of life on the coast is critical. Walkable, environmentally friendly communities are

attracting more and more businesses, college-aged adults, and families to settle in urban areas. Coastal Mississippi must develop our downtown areas for higher-density and mixed-use development attractive to visitors, remote workers, businesses, and academia. At the same time, it is equally important to focus on growth through conservation and preservation of our coastal resources.

The 2019 Gulf Coast Business Council Masters Class has carefully explored the expansive topic of the evolving economy. Coastal Mississippi is so fortunate to have the opportunities in place to create a dynamic urban environment that produces a thriving workforce for higher-wage jobs, excellence in education, resilient and innovative infrastructure, and last but certainly not least, a community that is welcoming to a people from a variety of cultures and regions throughout the world.