

STRONG ECONOMIES, RESILIENT COUNTIES

The Role of Counties in Economic Development



NACo WHY COUNTIES MATTER PAPER SERIES • ISSUE 1 • July 2014 • www.naco.org

UPSHUR COUNTY, WEST VIRGINIA

Supporting Economic Growth by Attracting Visitors

Upshur County is a small, rural county with a 2013 population of just under 25,000 residents, located in central West Virginia. Tourism is one of the top industries in the state of West Virginia and also plays an important role in the Upshur County economy. With its prime location in Appalachian Mountains, tourists visit the county for hiking and outdoor festivals in the spring and summer and beautiful foliage in the fall. The annual Strawberry Festival in Upshur County draws an estimated 100,000 visitors each year. To strengthen the county economy, the Upshur County Development Authority collaborated with the county's Convention and Visitors Bureau (CVB) as well as neighboring counties to promote tourism along a shared highway, Route 33.

Upshur County engages in economic development activities through an organization called the Upshur County Development Authority (UCDA). The Upshur County commission created the UCDA following a state statute that gives counties in West Virginia authority to establish development authorities. The UCDA is an independent organization and one county commissioner serves on the Board of Directors of the UCDA. The county provides additional guidance and funding to various economic development projects. UCDA staff work to recruit, encourage and assist new businesses to locate in the county and to aid current local businesses. The authority also opened a 300-acre industrial park for the county funded largely by federal and state grants in 2011.

Promoting Tourism and Infrastructure Development through Regional Collaboration.

In addition to the UCDA, the Upshur County CVB also takes a role in economic development in the county by helping promote tourism. In 2013, the Upshur County CVB partnered with the visitors bureaus of Lewis and Randolph Counties to promote tourism along their shared highway, Rte. 33. The visitors bureaus released a promotional video in February 2014, highlighting "33 things to do along Rte. 33," including sites and attractions from all three counties. Upshur, Lewis and Randolph Counties' visitors bureaus applied for a state grant to fund this tourism campaign. Along with the video campaign, the three counties began a targeted advertising campaign in May 2014. Both the video and advertising campaign are expected to increase tourism in the region in the coming year.

- Population, 2013: 24,665
- County Board size: 3

STRONG ECONOMIES, RESILIENT COUNTIES

The Role of Counties in Economic Development



NACo WHY COUNTIES MATTER PAPER SERIES • ISSUE 1 • July 2014 • www.naco.org

Upshur County, along with Lewis County and Randolph County, anticipate increased traffic and tourism not only from the promotional video but also following the completion of the Corridor H highway. The Corridor H is a four-lane highway expansion project that began in 1965 under the Appalachian Regional Development Act. Once finished, Corridor H will pass directly through Upshur County and connect Appalachian West Virginia to Interstate-66, allowing for easier access to and from Washington DC and other East coast destinations. Here again, the collaboration with neighboring counties is critical to the success of infrastructure development along Rte. 33. The UCDA has joined with Corridor H – A 2020 Vision and campaigns for the funding necessary at the federal and state levels to complete this project. As of 2014, the highway is 75 percent complete and is expected to increase to 87 percent complete by 2018.

Upshur County supports economic growth throughout the county through the UCDA, and targets growth in its tourism industry through the county CVB. Promoting tourism based on the natural beauty of the surrounding Appalachian Mountains is a key component of Upshur's economic development strategy and Upshur County has relied on partnerships with neighboring counties to support growth in its prominent tourism industry. Upshur County is engaging with other counties in an advertising campaign to entice visitors to the region, and supporting the improvement of transportation infrastructure to ease visitors' travel. These efforts show the county actively working to maintain growth in its prominent tourism industry.



Construction on Corridor H, a four-lane highway expansion project that will allow easier access to and from Washington D.C. and other east coast destinations.