

A CEDS people can actually use



EARPDC

Building a living regional dashboard before the five-year update



Build the tool first. Then update the strategy.

The dashboard became a test bed for what communities would actually use, and what the next CEDS should improve.

We started with assets we already had

A familiar platform

EARPDC was already using mySidewalk for transportation, grants, and planning. The team knew the tools, and the mobile-friendly format matched how community stakeholders work.

A hands-on partner

mySidewalk helped identify accessible data, shape the dashboard structure, and think through visualizations. That partnership accelerated the first build without adding a new technology stack.

Lesson learned: modernization can begin by recombining capacity you already possess.

Our first build followed a simple learning loop

1 | Frame

Use the steering committee to define a tool that communities could use—not simply a digital copy of the plan.

2 | Build

Organize available data into themes, regional views, and county-level pages using mySidewalk's existing datasets.

3 | Validate

Watch what users return to. County profiles emerged as the clearest sign of practical value.



The dashboard organizes the CEDS around decisions

Six regional themes

Economic activity & growth

Workforce & education

Innovation & entrepreneurship

Business dynamics

Quality of place & infrastructure

Community well-being & resilience

Plus a regional service-area view and ten county profiles.

Source: EARPDC CEDS Dashboard, mySidewalk

metrics that illuminate:



Economic Activity & Growth

How the region's job creation, unemployment trends, and gross regional product compare to statewide performance—and what these patterns reveal about East Alabama's industrial base, labor market, and long-term competitiveness.

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Innovation & Entrepreneurship

Patent activity, business formation, access to capital, and support for startups reflect the region's capacity to innovate. This section highlights existing assets—such as incubators, universities, and technical assistance partners—and identifies opportunities to strengthen East Alabama's entrepreneurial pipeline.

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Workforce & Education

The region's most important asset is its people. These indicators track graduation rates, degree attainment, workforce demographics, and the distribution of living-wage jobs to assess how well-positioned residents are for a changing labor market.

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Business Dynamics

Business survival rates, establishment patterns, and employer characteristics provide insight into the health and resilience of the regional economy. These indicators help communities understand how well they are supporting new and existing businesses.

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Quality of Place & Infrastructure

Housing affordability, broadband access, transportation patterns, and industrial site readiness shape the region's ability to attract talent, support employers, and enhance quality of life. These metrics underscore where East Alabama is competitive and where targeted investment is needed.

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Community Well-Being & Resilience

Access to healthcare, insurance coverage, poverty rates, and other measures of community stability reveal how social and economic conditions intersect. These factors are foundational to long-term prosperity and equitable growth.

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Local impact and branding make regional data useful and accessible

REGIONAL

One shared economic story

Common indicators help leaders see cross-county patterns and shared investment needs.

THEMATIC

Questions before datasets

Each section connects measures to a planning question—jobs, workforce, innovation, business, place, and resilience.

LOCAL

Ten county profiles

Developers can move from the regional narrative to current local data without rebuilding a separate profile.

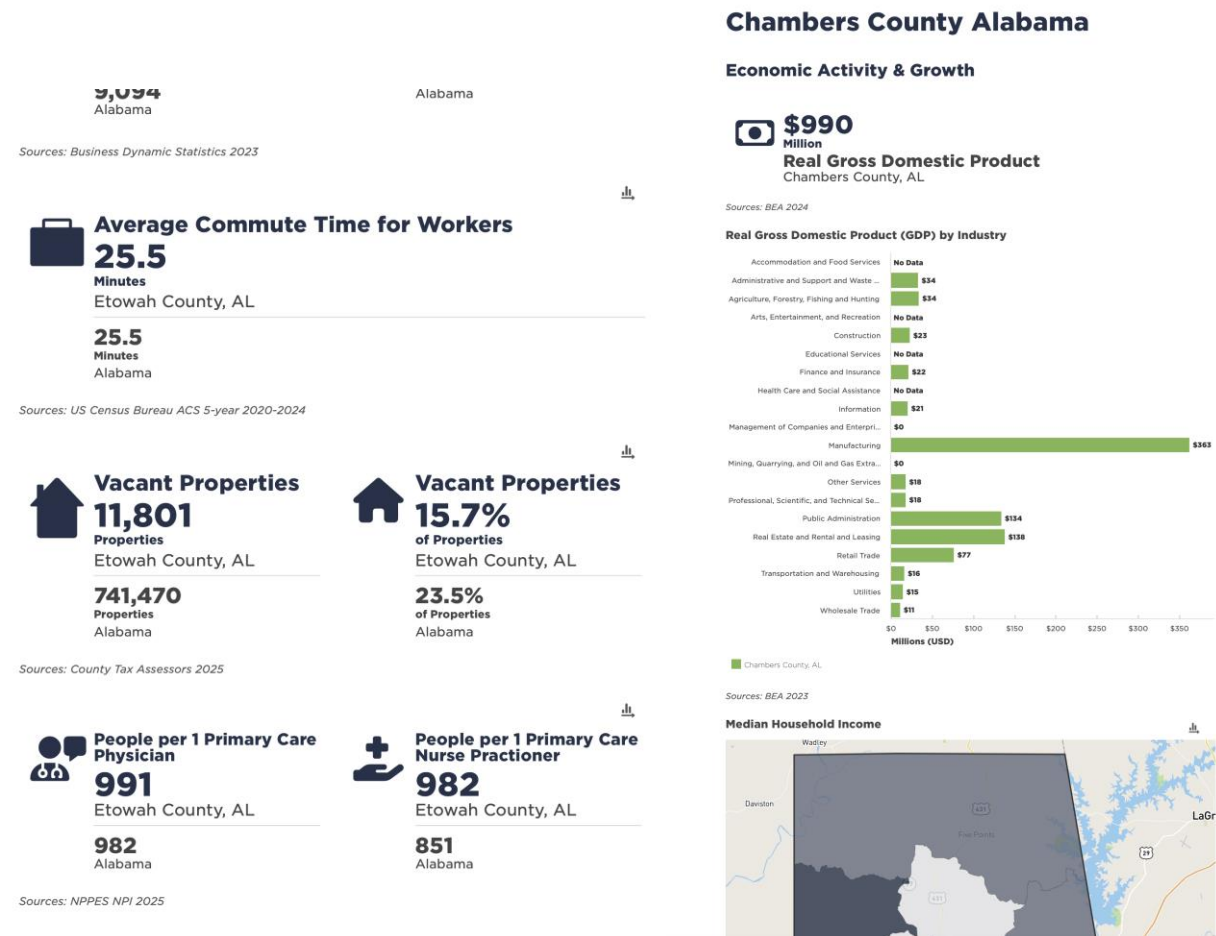
The local doorway is what turned the dashboard into an useful tool.

County profiles became the most-used product

Why our developers return

- Current data
- Mobile-friendly access
- A consistent regional format
- A ready reference for local conversations

Usage showed us where to invest next.



Version 1.0 taught us where digital adds value

What worked

- Build on a platform the team already knows
- Use a partner to accelerate data and design decisions
- Make the product mobile-friendly
- Give communities a local entry point

What we would change

- Engage more users during dashboard design
- Define custom data needs earlier
- Plan maintenance and ownership from day one
- Treat the first release as a learning version



Version 2.0 moves from available data to regional intelligence

VERSION 1.0

Start with data that is easy to access

Build the structure, publish the first useful tool, and observe how communities use it.



VERSION 2.0

Add data only the region can provide

Use the five-year update to add custom sources, locally collected information, and measures tied more directly to strategy.

The upgrade is not more data. It is better alignment between data, strategy, and local decisions.

A practical playbook for a digital CEDS

01 Start with the user

Name the decisions and recurring tasks the tool should support.

02 Reuse capacity

Build on platforms, staff knowledge, and partnerships already in place.

03 Publish a useful first version

Do not wait for a perfect dataset before creating value.

04 Watch actual use

Let repeated user behavior guide the next investment.

05 Plan version 2.0 from day one

Add custom sources, ownership, maintenance, and deeper engagement as the tool matures.

A modern CEDS is not just easier to read.

It is easier to use, update, and bring into the next decision.

Explore: dashboards.mysidewalk.com/earpdc-ceds-dashboard