

## Chapter 1: Welcome

Eric Gubelman, Executive Director,  
Southern Colorado Economic Development District

Any regional planning document runs the risk of being either being a first-rate door stop or a third-rate planning tool. The former has the advantage of propping open an entrance, while the utility of the latter is merely as a safe home for the dust bunnies that live on our office shelves.

It is therefore with a sense of humility that we put forward this Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy, which seeks to ask and begin to answer this question: How do we make southern Colorado prosper?

A written plan suggests a conceit that the answer has been found—it's right here on the page, after



*Jones Theater, Westcliffe, Custer County, Upper Arkansas Region*

all! As is always the case with planning, the process is more important than the plan. The process involves getting people together to think and talk in the same room—or at least the same Zoom meeting. This conversation was singularly the biggest accomplishment of this CEDS update, with over 59 public meetings across 13 counties; talking and collaborating with local leaders and local business champions about the much-needed COVID-19 economic recovery efforts over the next five years.

It is in conversation where the magic happens—the “I” becomes “we” and “city and county” become “sub-region and

region.” Dreams take flight because fellow dreamers become steely-eyed problem solvers who become part of something bigger than themselves.

That is not to say that the plan that results is without worth. But to make it worth the toner sacrificed to produce it, you not only have to plan your work—you have to work your plan. We intend this CEDS to be a living document—consulted often, revised continuously, and put to good use. The CEDS update is not the end of a process nor is it intended to be merely a check-off requirement we all do so that we are EDA eligible to submit a grant

The CEDS are the first drafts of a roadmap. In a narrative and statistical fashion, it tells us where we are. By putting our ideas to paper, we announce to the world where we want to go. There are omissions. There are mistakes. There is too much



*Apishipa Arch, Las Animas County, South Central Region*

description and not enough analysis. There is duplication—and the line between realistic plan and wooly-headed pipe dream remains yet undefined.

SCEDD is like most economic development districts—we help plan for a defined region. We differ from most EDDs in a few fundamental ways.

First, our region is huge. We are 13 counties, spread out from Leadville in the northwest to Springfield in the southeast, a town in Baca County nestled near Kansas and Oklahoma.

Second, our region is the product of four sub-regions—the Upper Arkansas, South Central, Pueblo County, and the Southeastern Plains. One sub-region is known for mountain tourism, one as a central hub, another as the agricultural center, and one a mixture of outdoor recreation, agriculture, mining, and more.

Third, our EDD is emerging from an extended fallow period. Absent CARES Act funding, SCEDD would have remained largely irrelevant, a side paragraph in the stories of cities and counties working on behalf of themselves and with limited staffs trying to make lives better in their communities. This CEDS not only lays out a draft blueprint of how we get there, but it is also a plan to make SCEDD sustainable and relevant to make southern Colorado prosper.



*Riverwalk, downtown Pueblo, Pueblo County*



*Sunrise, Baca County*

Southeastern Plains are not western Kansas. Our Upper Arkansas sub-region is not the downscale Vail and Aspen.

We have rolled up our sleeves.

We are on the rise.

Regards,

Eric Gubelman

Amidst the negative aspects of unwieldiness, incredible diversity, and a recent history of a lack of planning capacity, there is a North Star that we focus on. As a region, we make sense. Pueblo is not just the poorer front range cousin. Pueblo is the southern Colorado metropole in a district defined largely by the meanderings of the Arkansas River. Our South Central sub-region is not northern New Mexico, and the