COLES COUNTY BOARD
Regular Meeting
April 14, 2026

The Regular Meeting of the Coles County Board was called to order at 6:00 p.m. with the following members present, Bob Bennett, John Doty, Jeremy Doughty, Tad Freezeland, Brian Ingram, David Johnson, Nancy Purdy, Tom Royal, Rick Shook, Michael Watts, Bristole Zimmerman and with Chairman Darrell Cox presiding.

Invocation was given by Jeremy Doughty
Moment of Silent Reflection
Pledge to the Flag

PUBLIC COMMENT

Bill Lair	Mark Esarey	Michael Strack	Heather Strack
Rich Wandling	Charles Stodden	Sarah Wiseman	Johna Vonbehrens
Tom Sherman	Connie Winslow	Loret Newlin	

APPROVAL OF THE COLES COUNTY BOARD MINUTES

Motion was made by Freezeland, seconded by Doughty to approve the March 10, 2026 County Board Minutes.

AYES: Bennett, Cox, Doty, Doughty, Freezeland, Ingram, Johnson, Purdy, Royal, Shook, Watts, Zimmerman (12)
NAYS: None (0)
ABSENT: None (0)

RE-APPOINTMENT TO THE TB CARE & TREATMENT BOARD -ROBERT BATES APPOINTMENT TO THE SHELLHAMMER DRAINAGE DISTRICT- RICK SEAMAN

Motion was made by Darrell Cox to re-appoint Robert Bates to the TB Care and Treatment Board until June 2029.

Motion by Darrell Cox to appoint Rick Seaman to the Shellhammer Drainage District until September 2029, with the consent of the Coles County Board.

AYES: Bennett, Cox, Doty, Doughty, Freezeland, Ingram, Johnson, Purdy, Royal, Shook, Watts, Zimmerman (12)
NAYS: None (0)
ABSENT: None (0)

AN ORDINANCE ESTABLISHING SALARIES OF ELECTED COUNTY CLERK AND RECORDER, AND COUNTY TREASURER

For a copy of the ordinance see page(s) 7610 - 7611

Motion by Doty seconded by Watts

AYES: Bennett, Cox, Doty, Doughty, Freezeland, Ingram, Johnson, Purdy, Royal, Shook, Watts, Zimmerman (12)
NAYS: None (0)
ABSENT: None (0)

RESOLUTION FOR EXTENSION OF THE AUDIT OF THE CIRCUIT CLERK

For a copy of the resolution see page (s) 7612

Motion by Watts seconded by Doty

AYES: Bennett, Cox, Doty, Doughty, Freezeland, Ingram, Johnson, Purdy, Royal, Shook, Watts, Zimmerman (12)
NAYS: None (0)
ABSENT: None (0)

ADOPTION OF THE COLES COUNTY COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

For a copy of the Plan see pages(s) 7613 - 7824

Motion by Watts seconded by Doty

AYES: Bennett, Cox, Doty, Doughty, Freezeland, Ingram, Johnson, Purdy, Royal, Shook, Watts, Zimmerman (12)
NAYS: None (0)
ABSENT: None (0)

ROAD USE AGREEMENT WITH SERENITY SOLAR, LLC

For a copy of the agreement see page (s) 7825 - 7828

Motion by Doty seconded by Shook

AYES: Bennett, Cox, Doty, Doughty, Freezeland, Ingram, Johnson, Purdy, Royal, Shook, Watts, Zimmerman (12)
NAYS: None (0)
ABSENT: None (0)

RES: TO AWARD CONTRACT FOR BITUMINOIS PAVEMENT ON CH-35 (TRILLA ROAD) TO HOWELL INC.

For a copy of the resolution see page (s) 7829

Motion by Doty seconded by Ingram

AYES: Bennett, Cox, Doty, Doughty, Freezeland, Ingram, Johnson, Purdy, Royal, Shook, Watts, Zimmerman (12)
NAYS: None (0)
ABSENT: None (0)

RES: FOR IMPROVEMENT UNDER THE ILLINOIS HIGHWAY CODE WITH USE OF MOTOR FUEL TAX FUNDS ALLOTTED TO COLES COUNTY FOR CONSTRUCTION COSTS OF ROADWAY IMPROVEMENT PROJECT TRILLA ROAD

For a copy of the resolution see page (s) 7830

Motion by Doty seconded by Bennett

AYES: Bennett, Cox, Doty, Doughty, Freezeland, Ingram, Johnson, Purdy, Royal, Shook, Watts, Zimmerman (12)
NAYS: None (0)
ABSENT: None (0)

RES: TO AWARD CONTRACT FOR BITUMINOIS PAVEMENT ON CH-28 (LOXA ROAD) TO NE-CO ASPHALT COMPANY INC.

For a copy of the resolution see page (s) 7831

Motion by Doty seconded by Freezeland

AYES: Bennett, Cox, Doty, Doughty, Freezeland, Ingram, Johnson, Purdy, Royal, Shook, Watts, Zimmerman (12)
NAYS: None (0)
ABSENT: None (0)

RES: FOR IMPROVEMENT UNDER THE ILLINOIS HIGHWAY CODE WITH USE OF MOTOR FUEL TAX FUNDS ALLOTTED TO COLES COUNTY FOR CONSTRUCTION COST OF ROADWAYS IMPROVEMENT PROJECT-LOXA ROAD

For a copy of the resolution see page (s) 7832

Motion by Doty seconded by Doughty

AYES: Bennett, Cox, Doty, Doughty, Freezeland, Ingram, Johnson, Purdy, Royal, Shook, Watts, Zimmerman (12)
NAYS: None (0)
ABSENT: None (0)

APPROVAL OF CONTRACT BONDS FOR THE COUNTY AND TOWNSHIP SEAL COST PROGRAMS FOR FY26 FROM EARL WALKER CO. AND NE-CO ASPHALT CO.

For a copy of the contract see page (s) 7833 - 7841

Motion by Doty seconded by Ingram

AYES: Bennett, Cox, Doty, Doughty, Freezeland, Ingram, Johnson, Purdy, Royal, Shook, Watts, Zimmerman (12)
NAYS: None (0)
ABSENT: None (0)

APPROVAL OF BILLS – COLES COUNTY

Motion by Bennett, seconded by Ingram to approve the payment of the Coles County bills, with the approval of the County Board.

AYES: Bennett, Cox, Doty, Doughty, Freezeland, Ingram, Johnson, Purdy, Royal, Shook, Watts, Zimmerman (12)
NAYS: None (0)
ABSENT: None (0)

RES: TO SUBMIT AN ADVISORY REFERENDUM TO THE VOTERS OF COLES COUNTY REGARDING THE POSSIBILITY OF SEPARATING FROM COOK COUNTY TO FORM A NEW STATE

For a copy of the resolution see page (s) 7842 - 7843

Motion by Freezeland seconded by Johnson

AYES: Bennett, Cox, Doty, Doughty, Freezeland, Ingram, Johnson, Purdy, Royal (9)
NAYS: Shook, Watts, Zimmerman (3)
ABSENT: None (0)

ANNOUNCEMENT OF APPOINTMENTS

1. One appointment to County Board District #4
2. One appointment to the Senior Citizens Board
3. One appointment to the Housing Authority

PRESENTATION TO JEREMY DOUGHTY

Chairman Cox presented Jeremy Doughty a plaque for his years of service from December 2018 until April 2026 to the Coles County Board.

ADJOURNED

Upon motion by Doughty, seconded by Purdy, the Coles County Board was adjourned at 7:31 p.m. with the consent of the County Board.

YES: Bennett, Cox, Doty, Doughty, Freezeland, Ingram, Johnson, Purdy, Royal, Shook, Watts, Zimmerman (12)
NAYS: None (0)
ABSENT: None (0)

Julie Cox
County Clerk

COLES COUNTY, ILLINOIS
AN ORDINANCE ESTABLISHING SALARIES OF ELECTED
COUNTY CLERK AND RECORDER, AND COUNTY TREASURER

WHEREAS, the Coles County Board is statutorily required to determine the amount of compensation for the offices of County Clerk and Recorder and County Treasurer (55 ILCS 5/4-6001) and may not reduce or otherwise impair the compensation payable from county funds to a county officer if the reduction or impairment is the result of the county officer receiving an award or stipend payable from State funds; and

WHEREAS, the Coles County Board is required to fix the salary for each year of the 4-year term of the elected officials listed above; and

WHEREAS, the Coles County Board historically provides health insurance benefits for the County Clerk and Recorder, and County Treasurer equal to that of represented and non-represented full-time employee; and

WHEREAS, the FY2026 salary of the County Clerk and Recorder, and the County Treasurer is $69,784; and

WHEREAS, the Coles County Board must balance its duty to fairly and adequately compensate all elected officials including the County Clerk and Recorder, and County Treasurer with its duty to protect the public's tax dollars and provide County services effectively and efficiently; and

WHEREAS, the Coles County Board wishes to increase the annual salary of the County Clerk and Recorder, and the County Treasurer to the amount of $_____ for FY2027 and increase _____% for FY2028 and increase ____% for FY2029 and ending FY2030; and

WHEREAS, the Coles County Board wishes to provide health insurance benefits for the County Clerk and Recorder, and the County Treasurer equal to that of represented and non-represented full-time employees.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT ORDAINED BY THE COUNTY BOARD OF COLES COUNTY, ILLINOIS, THAT:

Section 1: The salaries for the elected official positions of County Clerk and Recorder, and County Treasurer shall be set as follows:

The salary for FY2027 is $90,000 effective December 1, 2026;
The salary for FY2028 is $92,700 effective December 1, 2027;
The salary for FY2029 is $95,400 effective December 1, 2028;
The salary for FY2030 is $98,100 effective December 1, 2029.

Section 2: The expected stipend amounts for the elected County Clerk and Recorder, and County Treasurer are as follows:

A. The stipend for the County Clerk and Recorder as set by 55 ILCS 5/4-6001 is $6,500 per year;

B. The stipend for the County Treasurer as set by 55 ILCS 5/3-10007 is $6,500 per year.

Section 3: Health insurance benefits will be provided to the County Clerk and Recorder, and the County Treasurer equal to that of represented and non-represented full-time employees.

PRESENTED, PASSED, APPROVED AND ADOPTED by the Coles County Board on this ____ day of _____, 2026.

_____
Chairman, Coles County Board

ATTEST:

_____
County Clerk

State of Illinois)
)ss.
County of Coles)

RESOLUTION FOR EXTENSION OF THE
AUDIT OF THE CIRCUIT CLERK

WHEREAS, Illinois Compiled Statutes requires an audit of the Circuit Clerk within six (6) months of year end; and

WHEREAS, the Circuit Clerk's fiscal year end is November 30, 2026 and the audit is due May 31, 2026; and

WHEREAS, the audit fieldwork is scheduled after that date; and

WHEREAS, a six-month extension may be granted by the County Board.

NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the County Board of Coles County, Illinois grant a six-month extension of time to file the annual audit of the Circuit Clerk.

DATED this ___ day of _____, 2026.

_____
Chairman

ATTEST:

_____
County Clerk

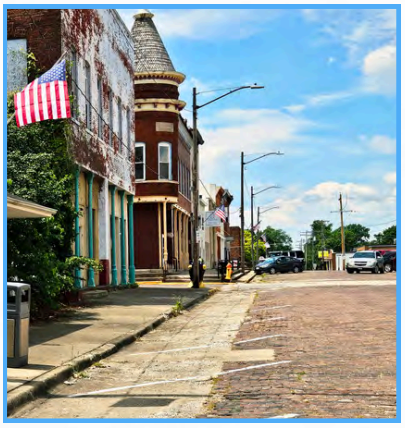
COLES COUNTY
COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

Created by: Coles County Regional Planning

CONNECTING WITH THE COMMUNITY TO CREATE PLANS FOR A BRIGHT FUTURE









Adopted by the Coles County Board on April 14th, 2026

INTRODUCTION & ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

In 2024, the Coles County Regional Planning & Development Commission was chosen to lead the update of the Comprehensive Plan for Coles County, Illinois. A dedicated Steering Committee was formed and met several times during the planning process. To get feedback from the public, a survey was created and shared. Additionally, the staff of Coles County Regional Planning worked with county officials on multiple occasions to keep them updated on the Plan's progress. The Comprehensive Plan was officially approved by Coles County on [insert date], 2026. This finalized document is expected to act as the main guide for the county's development in the coming years.

What is a Comprehensive Plan?

A Comprehensive Plan is a detailed and long-term (5 to 10 years) strategy meant to guide how a community or region grows and develops. It covers different aspects of the community, such as land use, transportation, tourism, economic growth, housing, and recreation, and connects these to the community's goals. The foundation of a Comprehensive Plan is the community's goals and objectives. These elements represent the future the community wants and serve as guiding principles for all future development decisions and policies, based on careful input from citizens and data analysis.

What is the role of the Steering Committee?

The Steering Committee comprises various stakeholders, including local government leaders, business leaders, and community members who want to help the county grow and improve. This committee helps create all the elements of the Comprehensive Plan. They guide the consultants in making the plan, reviewing drafts, and suggesting changes to ensure the plan meets the needs of Coles County.

The Steering Committee is proud to present the finished Coles County Comprehensive Plan.

A HEARTFELT THANK YOU FROM COLES COUNTY

Coles County extends its gratitude to the following individuals and organizations for their unwavering commitment and dedication to the committees they have served on throughout the past year. Their teamwork has been vital for Coles County's future. We deeply appreciate the impact and support of each member. Together, we've laid the groundwork for the 2026 plan. Your dedication ensures continued success. Thank you for your invaluable service.

Technical Committee Members

Mike Watts, Coles County Board
Rick Hall, Mattoon Mayor
Mike Staton, Coldwell Banker Real Estate
Kristin Iverson, Farm Bureau
Mike Clayton, Coles County Board
Chad Burgett, CUSD #1
Tom Sherman, Resident of Mattoon
Sarah Livesay, Executive Director of Grand Prairie Friends
Rick Johnson, County Highway Dept. Director
Darrell Cox, County Board Chair
George Edwards, Coles County Treasurer
Jeff Lahr, Coles Co Mental Health Board Administrator
Ronda Sauget, Executive Director of Coles Together

Subcommittees

Mattoon

Rick Hall, Mayor
Kyle Gill, City Administrator
Jeff Hilligoss, Fire Department Chief
Sam Gaines, Chief of Police

Charleston

Abby Youngblood, Community Development Director
Tina Held, Charleston CAN & Charleston Chamber of Commerce Board
Mike Watts, Coles County Board

Ashmore

Kurt Crail, President of the Board of Trustees
Jake Johnson, Superintendent of Public Works
Michelle Redd, Municipal Office Administrator

Recreation & Tourism

Lori Henderson, Charleston Tourism Supervisor
Angelia Burgett, Mattoon Tourism & Arts Director
Diane Ratliff, Charleston Recreation Director
Ed Dowd, Mattoon Chamber of Commerce Executive Director
Alexander Benishek, Mattoon Community Development & Planning Director, President of Mattoon in Motion
Darci Cather, Grant Writer for Mattoon
Tyler Yoder, Emerald Acres General Manager

Economy & Infrastructure

Kaycie Sanders, Program Director for Dial-A-Ride
Michael Staton, Coldwell Banker Real Estate
Steven Baldwin, CEO Coles-Moultrie
Ronda Sauget, Executive Director of Coles Together
Dave Clark, Director of Mattoon Public Works
Kory Culp, CEO of Clear Water Services Corp

Conservation, Preservation, & Agriculture

Jennifer Day Tariq, Executive Director of Douglas Hart Nature Center
Jenny Lee, Program Director at the Illinois University Extension Office
Malina Przygoda, Executive Director of the Coles County Soil & Water Department
Lori Henderson, Lincoln Log Cabin Foundation Board President
Kristin Iverson, Coles County Farm Bureau Manager
Kim Ross, Coles County Farmer & Edgar County Public Health Administrator

Stakeholders

Charlotte England, Coles County Arts Council
Kristin Davis, Region 4 Substance Use Prevention Integration Center
Kristen Holly, CUSD 1 Assistant Superintendent
Carolyn Cloyd, Coles County Historical Society
Hutton Township Council
Fox Ridge Foundation
Dorothy Macy, Charleston Resident
Kit Morice, Coles County Historical Preservation Advisory Council

Childcare & Education

Chad Burgett, Charleston CUSD #1 Superintendent
Jill Hutti, Associate Dean of the College of Health & Human Services at EIU
Kris Maleske, Mattoon CUSD #2 Community Service Director
Nate Pugh, Oakland CUSD #5 Superintendent
Charles Jarrell, Division Chair of Social Sciences and Education at LLC
Joy Kaurin, Perkins Specialist at LLC

Health & Social Services

Joe King, Executive Director of LifeLinks Behavioral Health
Kelly Hardy, Executive Director at HOPE of ECI
Jeff Lahr, Coles County Mental Health Administrator
Todd Foster, Executive Director of Matthew 25
Amy Card, SBLH Foundation Director
Amber Huston, Dep. of Child & Family Services
Jim Hilgenberg, Director of Coles County EMA Services

Coles County Regional Planning & Development

Samantha McCullough, Planner I
Allison Hudson, Planner II
Jackie Chism, Administration & Planning
Kelly Lockhart, Executive Director

A NOTE TO THE RESIDENTS OF COLES COUNTY

In creating this plan, the Coles County Regional Planning & Development Commission, along with the Technical Committee, worked diligently. Our goal was to get ideas from many different people, including local government officials, business leaders, non-profit groups, and community members. By working together, we wanted feedback that truly shows what the community needs and envisions for the future.

As we continue to make plans for local towns and organizations, your input is crucial. We aim to better understand how to include everyone and engage with the community, but we know we can't fully understand every person's perspective. Often, we rely on your input to learn about your experiences, challenges, successes, and dreams for the future of our community and Coles County.

Why a Comprehensive Plan Matters to You

Why should you take the time to share your thoughts in local surveys, like the Census or Community Health Surveys by non-profits? When the County, towns, and businesses look for grant funding or new economic opportunities, having a current and well-thought-out Comprehensive Plan is important. It shows why these projects are needed and relevant.

What Role Do Community Members Play in Comprehensive Planning?

Community members are crucial to planning and shaping the future. Your participation ensures the plan meets Coles County's real needs. By sharing your thoughts and experiences, you help create a true picture of what is important to the community.

Taking part in surveys, meetings, and workshops lets residents share their ideas and concerns, influencing decisions about land use, infrastructure, and economic growth. This teamwork empowers and builds community pride.

Your involvement makes the process open and fair, allowing you to see progress and hold leaders responsible.

By participating, you help create a lively, sustainable future for Coles County that meets residents' needs and is ready for future challenges.



It’s safety, the community feeling, the low cost of living, and the friendliness of the people.

PUBLIC SURVEY PARTICIPANT

Oakland, IL, July 2025

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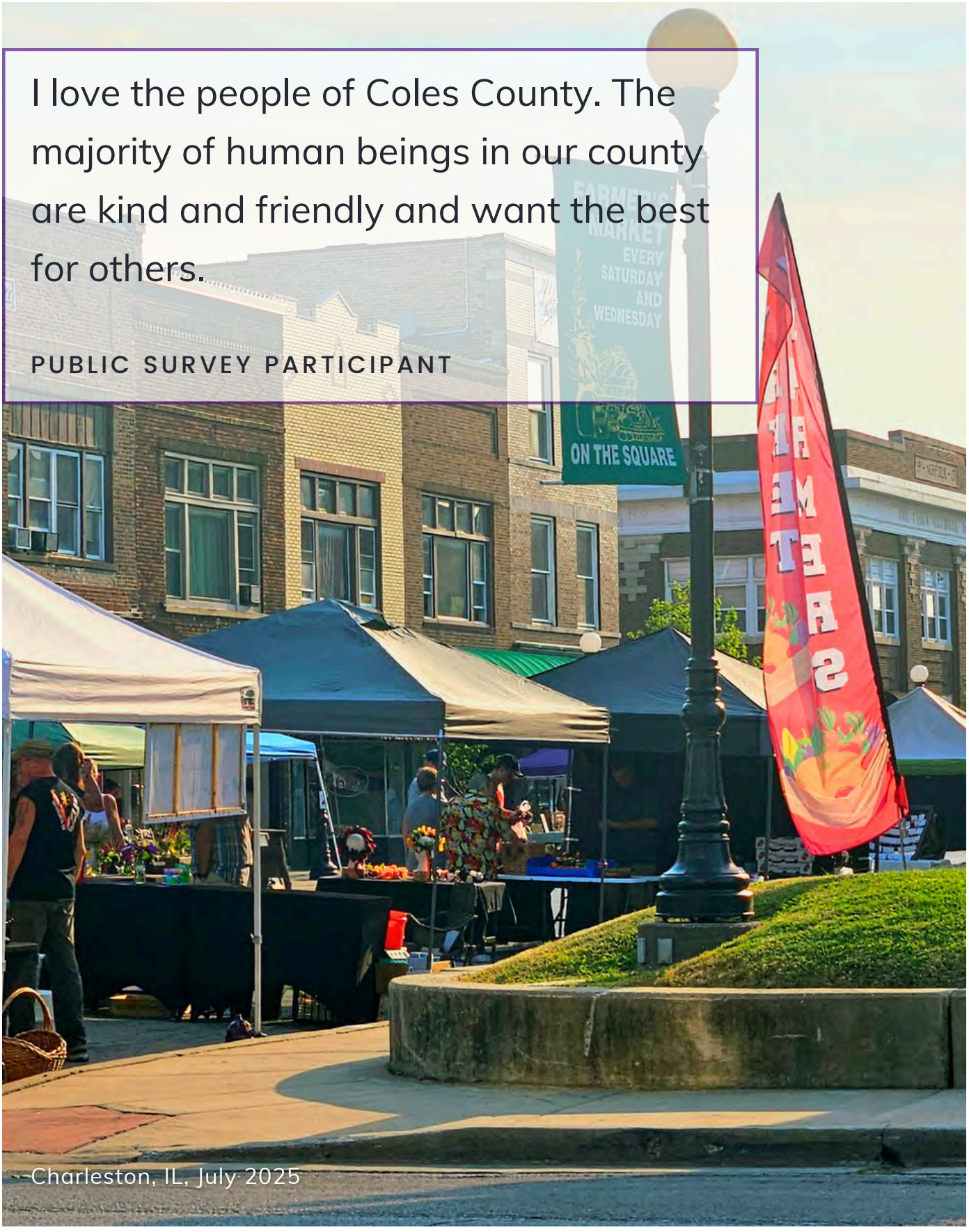
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28. Goal 1-9
29. Goal 1-9 Action Items
30. Maintenance & Investment Strategy Table



I love the people of Coles County. The majority of human beings in our county are kind and friendly and want the best for others.

PUBLIC SURVEY PARTICIPANT

Charleston, IL, July 2025

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Coles County Comprehensive Plan provides a long-term framework to guide growth, investment, and community decision-making over the next 20 years. Developed through data analysis, community engagement, and coordination with local partners, the plan identifies key strengths, challenges, and opportunities that will shape the county's future.

Key Findings

Stable Regional Anchor with Structural Pressures
Coles County serves as a regional hub for healthcare, education, manufacturing, agriculture, logistics, and retail services. However, the county faces population decline, workforce participation challenges, housing constraints, and aging infrastructure that may limit long-term competitiveness if not addressed.

Strong Economic Assets, Limited Site Readiness
Industrial parks, multimodal transportation access, and enterprise zone incentives position the county well for business attraction and expansion. At the same time, capacity limitations-some currently being addressed, infrastructure modernization needs, and workforce housing shortages constrain growth potential.

Housing Mismatch and Neighborhood Transition
While new housing incentives are expanding development opportunities, portions of older neighborhoods in Mattoon and Charleston are experiencing reinvestment challenges. A balanced housing strategy is needed to support both new development and reinvestment in existing communities.

Agricultural and Natural Resource Foundation
Agriculture remains a defining land use and economic contributor, though its overall share of the county's employment and economic output is modest relative to other sectors. Protecting working lands while encouraging value-added opportunities remains a priority.

Natural Systems and Infrastructure Interdependence
Water resources, drainage systems, and environmental assets are closely tied to agricultural productivity, flood resilience, and development patterns. Coordinated infrastructure planning is essential to protect long-term environmental health.

Community Identity and Heritage Assets
Historic sites, tourism resources, educational institutions, and cultural programming contribute to quality of life and economic vitality. These assets present opportunities for expanded heritage tourism and regional branding.

Plan Goals & Recommendations

Goal 1: Strengthen Coles County: Resilient Community Ecosystem
Foster a balanced system of people, land, infrastructure, and institutions adaptable to change, emphasizing coordination to ensure growth decisions support long-term stability.

Goal 2: Expand Housing Choice While Preserving Community Character
Enhance access to diverse housing options while reinvesting in neighborhoods and infrastructure to address limited variety, aging stock, and affordability issues.

Goal 3: Promote Sustainable Economic Development and Workforce Opportunity
Cultivate an economy supporting living wages and local investment, focusing on quality job creation and aligning land use with growth sectors.

Goal 4: Improve Transportation and Infrastructure Connectivity
Ensure reliable access to essential services, with infrastructure investments aimed at improving connectivity and closing service gaps.

Goal 5: Protect and Steward Natural Resources and Working Lands
Safeguard essential assets like farmland and water resources to ensure economic health and environmental resilience, prioritizing conservation and sustainable development.

Goal 6: Support Educational Assets and Lifelong Learning
Strengthen coordination between educational institutions and workforce programs to support economic mobility and retain young residents.

Goal 7: Promote Fiscal Responsibility and Collaborative Governance
Align planning and service delivery with fiscal sustainability, emphasizing prioritization and regional partnerships for long-term value.

Goal 8: Advance Accessibility and Quality of Life
Reduce barriers to opportunity, ensuring all residents have access to housing, transportation, and employment by considering the impact on vulnerable populations, especially the elderly.

Goal 9: Use Planning as an Ongoing Stewardship Tool
Ensure the comprehensive plan guides decisions and investments, with regular updates to respond to changing conditions.

Moving Forward

This Comprehensive Plan serves as both a policy guide and an implementation tool. Its recommendations are designed to support grant applications, infrastructure investment, housing development, and economic diversification. By aligning land use, economic strategy, environmental stewardship, and community development, Coles County can strengthen its regional role while preserving the character and assets that define it.

VISION & PLANNING PRINCIPLES

Our Vision is a clear, cohesive plan that guides sustainable development, improves quality of life, and supports economic prosperity for the community. It balances growth with the preservation of natural resources, continuously seeks to ensure equitable access to services, and fosters a resilient, vibrant community that meets the needs of current and future generations.

Why This Vision Matters

This vision reflects Coles County's shared commitment to a future that balances opportunity with stewardship. It expresses not just what the county is today, but what residents want it to become, a place where people can thrive at every stage of life, where growth strengthens rather than strains community systems, and where natural and cultural assets are protected as sources of long-term value.

By articulating a clear and inclusive vision, the Comprehensive Plan establishes a common direction for decision-making. It provides a framework that helps align public investments, private development, and community initiatives toward outcomes that support resilience, equity, and quality of life for generations to come.

Principles of Planning When Creating a County Comprehensive Plan

- **Community Engagement**: Involve residents, businesses, and stakeholders in the planning process to ensure diverse perspectives and needs are addressed.
- **Sustainability**: Focus on long-term environmental, economic, and social sustainability to ensure resources are preserved for future generations.
- **Integrated Approach**: Consider all aspects of community development, including land use, transportation, housing, and public services, to create a comprehensive and coordinated plan.
- **Fairness and Inclusivity**: Ensure that planning processes and outcomes are fair and inclusive, providing opportunities and benefits for all community members.
- **Data-Driven Decision-Making**: Use reliable data and analysis to inform planning decisions and predict future trends and needs.
- **Flexibility and Adaptability**: Design the plan to be flexible enough to accommodate changes and adapt to unforeseen circumstances while maintaining core objectives.
- **Visionary and Pragmatic**: Balance visionary goals with practical strategies that are achievable and measurable, ensuring tangible progress toward the community's desired future.
- **Collaboration and Partnership**: Work collaboratively with various levels of government, organizations, and neighboring communities to achieve regional goals and address cross-boundary challenges.

Our Planning Process

Phase 1: Project Initiation & Organization

1. Establish Leadership & Governance
   - Form a Steering Committee with key stakeholders.
   - Define roles for consultants, staff, and subcommittees.
   - Develop Scope & Work Plan.
2. Identify planning horizon (e.g., 20 years).
   - Outline key elements: land use, housing, infrastructure, etc.
   - Set schedule and engagement framework.

Phase 2: Community Engagement & Visioning

1. Stakeholder Mapping
   - Identify and include diverse stakeholders.
2. Public Engagement
   - Use surveys, social media, and outreach.
3. Vision Statement & Guiding Principles
   - Draft countywide vision and core values: equity, resilience, growth management, fiscal responsibility, sustainability.

Phase 3: Existing Conditions & Baseline Analysis

1. Demographics & Housing
   - Analyze population trends, housing conditions, and affordability.
2. Economy
   - Review workforce, employment, and business trends.
3. Infrastructure & Utilities
   - Assess transportation, water/sewer, broadband, and energy.
4. Natural Resources & Environment
   - Examine agricultural land, floodplains, and climate risks.
5. Community Facilities
   - Evaluate schools, health care, and emergency services.
6. Land Use & Development Patterns
   a. Review zoning, land use inventory, and development constraints.

Phase 4: Needs Assessment & Gap Analysis

- Conduct SWOT analysis.
- Identify gaps between current state and community goals (e.g., housing needs vs. supply, infrastructure).
- Compare with neighboring counties.

Phase 5: Draft Plan Development

1. Goals, Objectives, and Policies
   - Create land use map and categories.
   - Develop policies for housing, transportation, resources, economy, health, and infrastructure.
2. Implementation Strategy
   - Define actions, timelines, and responsible parties.
   - Outline funding strategies (grants, partnerships, capital planning).
   - Prioritize short, medium, and long-term goals.
3. Performance Measures
   - Track progress using metrics (housing starts, acres preserved, infrastructure investments, jobs created).

Phase 6: Review & Adoption

- Public Review
  - Release draft for public comment; address questions at hearings.
- Agency & Stakeholder Review
  - Collaborate with nearby governments.
- Formal Adoption
  - Obtain Planning Commission recommendation.
  - Secure County Board approval.

Phase 7: Implementation & Monitoring

- Integration
  - Update ordinances, regulations, and plans; report to County Board and community; adjust strategies as needed.
- Five-Year Update Cycle
  - Conduct mid-cycle evaluation and amend plan as conditions change.

A Community as an Ecosystem

When developing a comprehensive plan, it is helpful to think of the county as more than just land, infrastructure, and services. Much like a natural ecosystem, a county is a complex web of interdependent systems, each influencing the health and sustainability of the whole.

The Ecology Framework

- **Systems Thinking:** In nature, water, soil, plants, and wildlife form a network of relationships. In our county, people, neighborhoods, businesses, infrastructure, and natural resources form a similar network. No part functions in isolation.
- **Interdependence:** Just as plants rely on pollinators and predators balance prey, our housing depends on transportation, businesses depend on a skilled workforce, and residents depend on safe public services.
- **Resource Management:** Ecosystems require balance to avoid depletion. Likewise, our county must manage growth, land use, and infrastructure carefully to ensure that resources such as housing, water, and public services remain available and sustainable.
- **Resilience:** Diverse ecosystems recover more quickly from disturbances. Similarly, a county with diverse housing, industries, and transportation options is better able to withstand economic downturns, disasters, or demographic shifts.
- **Sustainability:** Healthy ecosystems maintain themselves for future generations. Our county's comprehensive plan is designed to guide development in a way that preserves environmental, social, and economic resources.



Figure 1. Prairie Grass Trail, East



Figure 2. Cross County Mall, Mattoon, DAR Bus



Figure 3. Mattoon, East Route 16



Figure 4. Farmers Market, Hazel Anne, Charleston

Understanding Coles County as an interconnected ecosystem is crucial for effective planning. Decisions in one area, such as housing availability, transportation access, or land-use choices, can significantly impact workforce participation, economic opportunities, water quality, public health, and infrastructure costs. This perspective encourages planners to avoid isolated (siloed) solutions and instead consider the cumulative effects of their decisions.

By recognizing these interdependencies, the Comprehensive Plan advocates for coordinated strategies that enhance the county's stability, adaptability, and ability to respond to change. Viewing the county as a living ecosystem underscores that every decision sends ripples through the community. It emphasizes the need for a healthy balance between growth and preservation, the inclusion of resilience and adaptability in policies, and the importance of safeguarding both natural and human systems for long-term sustainability.

This holistic approach helps residents and decision-makers understand the comprehensive plan's aim: not only to meet present needs but also to ensure the county's prosperity for future generations, much like a balanced ecosystem endures over time.

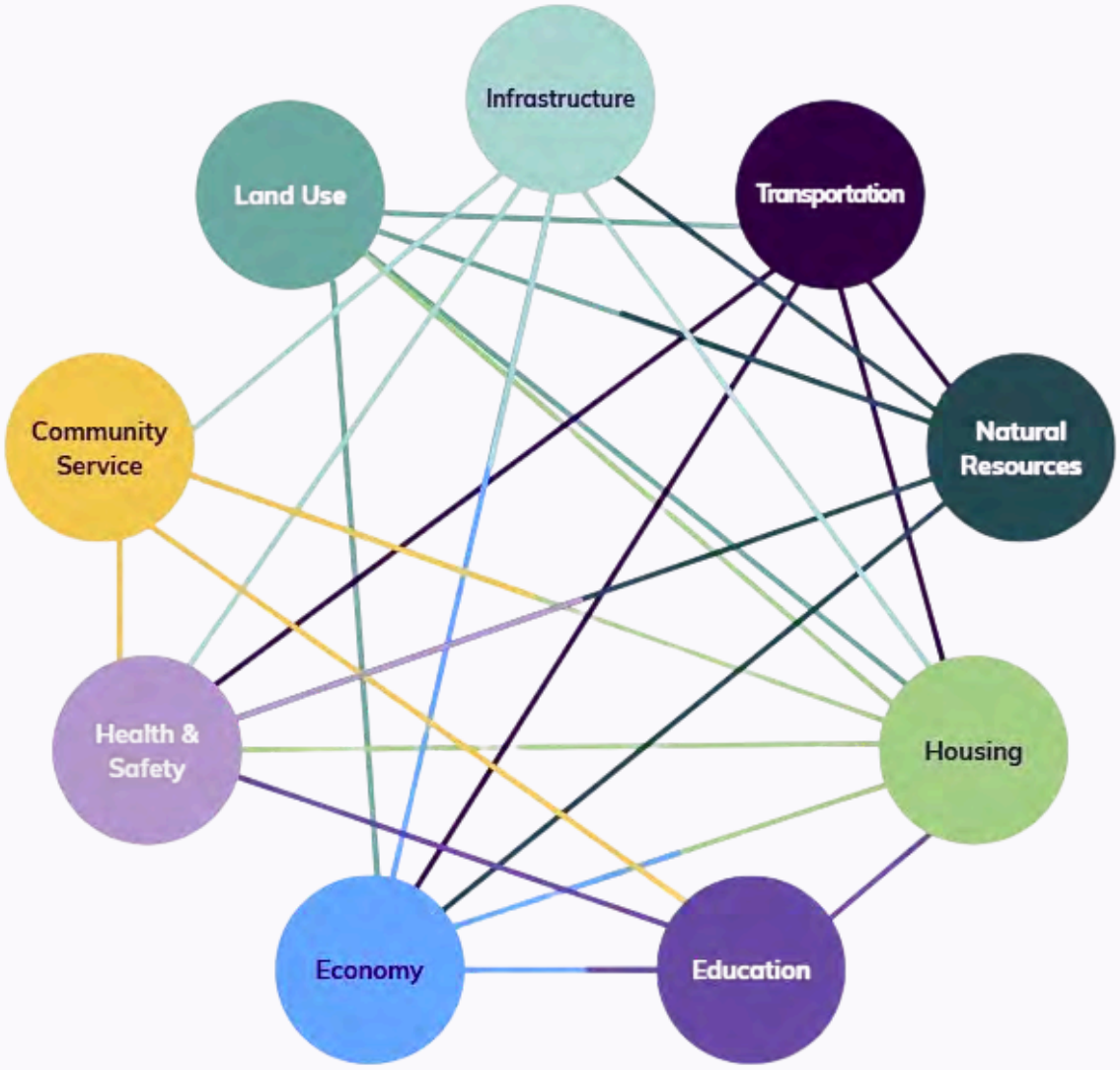


Figure 5. Community Systems Interface Diagram

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Coles County Regional Planning conducted an extensive survey throughout the county, gathering insights from respondents about their perspectives on various topics. These included their opinions on county services, the local economy, housing, conservation, preservation, recreation, zoning and permitting, along with inquiries about their motivations for residing in the area.

This survey was shared on social media and through Cromwell Radio Group's email and geofencing campaign. In addition to digital outreach, paper copies were distributed at key community events and public spaces such as libraries and community centers, ensuring accessibility for all residents. The aim was to capture a diverse range of voices, reflecting the rich tapestry of Coles County's population.

The 2026 Coles County Comprehensive Plan survey gathered 667 resident responses between October 2024 and July 2025. The survey provided insight into community perspectives on housing, transportation, economic development, public services, and conservation priorities. Responses were collected anonymously, offering a candid snapshot of resident sentiment and long-term community values.

This feedback serves as a foundation for aligning the County's policy objectives with the needs and aspirations of its residents.





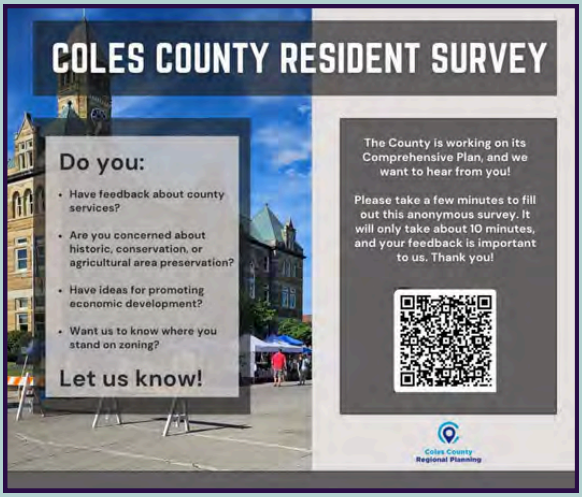


Figure 6. Coles Co. Resident Survey Facebook Posts

COLES COUNTY COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

Community Survey Results Summary

Between October 2024 and July 2025, Coles County conducted the aforementioned community survey, receiving 667 responses from residents. The survey was designed to guide the Comprehensive Plan by identifying community priorities related to housing, transportation, economic development, community services, natural resources, and overall quality of life.

Key Themes Identified

- **Quality of Life and Community Identity**
  - Respondents praised the sense of community, family ties, and small-town atmosphere. They appreciate the affordable living, rural character, and access to urban amenities and educational institutions.
- **Housing**
  - Concerns include housing availability and affordability for young families, seniors, and low- to moderate-income households. There's a call for reinvestment in aging homes, a higher level of code enforcement, and more diversity in housing stock.
- **Economic Development and Jobs**
  - A need for more diverse job opportunities, higher wages, and workforce retention was emphasized. Support exists for business attraction, entrepreneurship, and commercial redevelopment. Agriculture is valued, but diversification into technology, healthcare, and manufacturing is desired.
- **Infrastructure and Services**
  - Mixed satisfaction was noted, with priorities on road maintenance, broadband, and cell service. Improved healthcare, childcare, and mental health services are also being asked for.
- **Transportation**
  - Residents value connectivity that is present while also recognizing service gaps. There is a desire to see a higher level of accessibility for non-drivers, seniors, students, and low-income residents, possibly through expanded service hours and multimodal transportation improvements.
- **Natural Resources, Parks, and Conservation**
  - Parks and natural areas are valued for quality of life, but there are concerns about preserving farmland, open spaces, and historic resources amid new development.
- **Challenges Facing Coles County**
  - Challenges identified include population decline, poverty, substance abuse, and high taxes.

Community Survey Results Analysis

Responses reflect a mix of long-term residents and newer arrivals, representing both urban and rural parts of the county. The following sections interpret the results thematically, combining demographic context with major trends identified in each topic area.

Demographics & Community Identity

Most respondents are aged 35–74, especially 55–74, with over half living in Coles County for 30 years or more. The majority own homes and reside in both urban and rural areas, reflecting the county's geographic diversity.

Interpretation:

Coles County's community stability stems from generational continuity, with residents valuing safety, affordability, and familiarity. This fosters local engagement but may make them cautious about change. Younger or transient populations, like students and new residents, are underrepresented.

Planning Implications:

- Focus on community preservation in land use decisions.
- Promote aging-in-place programs for an older population.
- Develop strategies to retain youth and attract families to balance demographics.
- Enhance collaboration with educational institutions and use creative communication to reach transient populations for more representative participation.

HOUSING & NEIGHBORHOODS

Housing responses indicate that while many residents are satisfied with their homes, concerns about affordability and the age of existing housing stock are prominent. Some residents specifically cited a shortage of affordable or workforce housing and limited rental opportunities.

Interpretation:

Housing stability is strong due to high ownership rates, but affordability pressures may inhibit population growth and workforce mobility. These results mirror broader regional trends where construction costs outpace income growth.

Planning Implications:

- Expand housing diversity and affordability through zoning reform and public-private partnerships.
- Promote housing rehabilitation and modernization in older neighborhoods.
- Encourage mixed-use, infill, and multi-family development near major employment and educational centers.

TRANSPORTATION & MOBILITY

Transportation responses reveal overall satisfaction with road conditions and connectivity, but several residents called for expanded public transit service, including after-hours and weekend availability. Others expressed concern about rural road maintenance and the impact of solar developments on farmland and infrastructure.

Interpretation:
The county's transportation system meets most daily needs but lacks flexibility for residents without vehicles. Demand for transit improvements reflects growing awareness of equity and accessibility issues, especially among seniors and low-income households.

Planning Implications:

- Expand public transit through regional collaboration and funding diversification.
- Maintain critical rural roadways that support agricultural and commuter traffic.
- Integrate complete streets principles into urban areas to enhance walkability and safety.
- Continue Safe Routes for All initiatives on a local and regional basis, ensuring the completion of Safety Action Plans for cities.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT & EMPLOYMENT

A dominant theme throughout the survey is the need for more diverse job opportunities. Respondents noted limited employment options and called for incentives to attract new businesses while retaining existing employers. A few residents voiced concerns about high taxes or slow economic activity.

Interpretation:
Residents express cautious optimism about growth but stress the need for job creation that aligns with local values. The emphasis on business retention and targeted incentives suggests that economic diversification should remain a top priority.

Planning Implications:

- Support small business development and entrepreneurship programs.
- Encourage industrial and technology sector investment tied to workforce training.
- Establish economic corridors to attract sustainable industry while preserving community character.

COMMUNITY SERVICES & INFRASTRUCTURE

Residents are generally satisfied with public safety and utilities but often express concerns about broadband access, especially in rural areas. Healthcare access and senior services need improvement, and maintaining education quality is crucial.

Interpretation:
Service level differences between urban and rural areas are concerning. Broadband and healthcare are essential for economic resilience and quality of life.

Planning Implications:

- Expand broadband and digital equity initiatives through regional partnerships.
- Invest in countywide healthcare and senior services.
- Sustain and enhance public safety and education systems.

CONSERVATION, AGRICULTURE & NATURAL RESOURCES

Although fewer responses addressed environmental concerns, there was strong support for protecting farmland and responsible solar development. Balancing renewable energy growth with agricultural conservation is vital.

Interpretation:
Residents value Coles County's agricultural heritage. Solar farm siting concerns highlight the need for careful land-use regulation.

Planning Implications:

- Protect agricultural land through zoning and easements.
- Set renewable energy siting standards to avoid land use conflicts.
- Partner with conservation groups to preserve ecological corridors.

QUALITY OF LIFE & CULTURAL PRESERVATION

Residents value community connection, safety, affordability, and family ties. Key challenges include poverty, limited job growth, and high taxes.

Interpretation:
Quality of life is linked to social stability, not rapid growth. Economic uncertainty and youth retention are long-term challenges.

Planning Implications:

- Encourage community revitalization to strengthen identity and engagement.
- Support arts, culture, and heritage preservation.
- Promote economic strategies to reduce poverty and boost local opportunities.

SURVEY PARTICIPATION AND DATA LIMITATIONS

While the survey provided valuable insights, several factors may influence the representativeness of its findings.

Potential Limitation	Observed Effect	Recommendation
Voluntary Participation Bias	Respondents are more likely to be long-term, civically engaged residents. This may underrepresent renters, transient populations, and younger age groups.	Broaden outreach through schools, local colleges, and rental communities in future surveys.
Digital Distribution	Online surveys may exclude households without internet access, particularly in rural areas.	Earlier collaboration with libraries and senior centers to help with awareness and access.
Lower Participation Relative to Census Counts	Although 667 responses align with past planning surveys, participation remains below comparable community health and census response levels.	Partner with Eastern Illinois University, school districts, and civic groups to expand reach.
Self-Reporting Error	Open-ended and qualitative questions may reflect perception more than measurable conditions.	Pair survey findings with quantitative indicators (e.g., housing affordability index, traffic counts).
Limited Youth Input	Few responses came from younger residents, who represent future workforce and family demographics.	Consider targeted engagement strategies (e.g., student focus groups or youth advisory panels).

Table 1. Survey Participation and Data Limitations

Summary of Data Quality:

Though the participation rate aligns with past efforts, it falls short of actual population figures from the U.S. Census and community health data. This highlights the need for better collaboration with schools and innovative communication to reach frequently moving or hard-to-contact groups.

CONCLUSION

The 2025 Coles County Community Survey provides valuable insights into local residents' views and priorities. It shows a county that values stability, connectedness, and rural charm, while also being open to growth and modernization.

Residents are mostly satisfied with life in Coles County, highlighting safe neighborhoods, affordability, and community spirit. However, they also express concerns about economic opportunities, aging infrastructure, broadband access, and housing affordability. Addressing these issues strategically could boost the county's resilience and competitiveness in the future.

The survey stresses the need to balance preservation with progress. Residents aim to protect the county's agricultural roots and environmental resources while ensuring younger generations have access to jobs, modern housing, and quality services. This requires coordinated, data-driven policies and collaboration among local governments, institutions, and private partners.

By translating resident feedback into documented trends and planning implications, the survey ensures that recommended strategies respond to demonstrated needs and reflect community-identified values.

From a planning perspective, the survey suggests we focus on:

- Investing in community resilience with infrastructure, broadband, and housing improvements
- Encouraging local innovation and entrepreneurship to support diverse job opportunities and retain young professionals.
- Preserving the county's agricultural and natural heritage through proactive land-use planning and environmental stewardship.
- Promoting intergovernmental cooperation to align investments and avoid redundancy.

Ultimately, the survey reveals a community proud of its heritage but looking toward the future.

Coles County is at a pivotal moment, ready to use its strong sense of place and commitment to build a more connected, prosperous, and sustainable future.

Regional Context & Setting

Coles County, located in East-Central Illinois, serves as a regional hub for healthcare, education, and commerce. Home to 20,269 households and roughly 46,000 residents, the county offers a broader range of services than many neighboring rural areas. Institutions such as Eastern Illinois University and Sarah Bush Lincoln Health Center not only support local needs but also attract students, patients, and workers from across East-Central Illinois. While Coles County enjoys a strong foundation of educational, healthcare, and recreational amenities, opportunities remain to expand access in underserved areas and address service gaps.

The county's communities are tied together through a regional network of highways, rail lines, and shared cultural and economic connections. Interstate 57, U.S. Routes 45 and Illinois State Highways 16, 121, and 130, Canadian National Railway, and Amtrak service position Coles County as a critical transportation crossroads in East-Central Illinois. These connections support local businesses, facilitate the movement of goods and people, and link the county to broader markets. Continued investment in infrastructure will be essential to strengthen these corridors and ensure they remain resilient to future demands.

Coles County's heritage and cultural assets—festivals, historic districts, and community traditions—highlight its role as both a regional gathering place and a destination for visitors. At the same time, natural resources such as fertile farmland, forests, and waterways underscore the importance of balancing development with conservation. Ongoing efforts to preserve these assets while promoting sustainable growth will help maintain the county's quality of life and economic vitality.



Figure 7. Sarah Bush Lincoln Health System, Mattoon



Figure 8. Coles County Courthouse, Charleston



Figure 9. Coles Crossing , Charleston



Figure 10. LIFT, Mattoon

Ecoregion & Natural Landscape

Coles County is located within the Central Corn Belt Plains ecoregion, which features fertile soils, level topography, and a climate ideal for row-crop agriculture. Historically, tallgrass prairies and oak-hickory woodlands dominated the area, shaped by fire, glaciation, and river valleys.

Today, Coles County's landscape includes:

- **Soils**: Rich mollisols and alfisols, among the nation's most productive agricultural soils.
- **Topography**: Gently rolling plains with stream valleys and wooded corridors.
- **Hydrology**: The Embarras River watershed, part of the larger Wabash River basin.
- **Climate**: Temperate continental, with hot summers and cold winters, supporting agriculture and remnant woodlands.

Understanding Coles County's ecoregional placement explains its agricultural dominance and highlights its role in watershed management, soil conservation, and habitat connectivity in east-central Illinois.



Figure 11.Compilation of Coles County's Natural Landscape

Coles County, despite its agricultural dominance, offers several parks and natural areas that preserve its ecological heritage and provide recreation:

- **Fox Ridge State Park:** A 2,000-acre reserve in southern Coles County with woodlands, ravines, and upland habitats along the Embarras River. It offers trails, camping, and wildlife viewing.
- **Lake Charleston, Mattoon, Paradise, & Oakland:** Man-made lakes in the east of Charleston, southwest of Mattoon, and on the north side of Oakland feature fishing, boating, trails, and bird habitats and were created as recreational areas, primarily for fishing and boating. Lake Mattoon was also constructed for flood control and to supply water to the city of Mattoon.
- **Douglas-Hart Nature Center:** Located near Mattoon, this community-supported preserve offers restored prairie, wetlands, and forests, serving as an educational hub for conservation.
- **Warbler Ridge Conservation Area (Grand Prairie Friends):** One of the largest private conservation holdings in the region, spanning over 1,000 acres. The site includes forests, grasslands, and wetlands, with extensive hiking trails and opportunities for birdwatching. It provides critical stopover habitat for migratory warblers and other neotropical songbirds.

Environmental Features of Coles County: Fact Sheet

The information below serves as a quick reference for Coles County's environmental details. It offers an overview of the county's notable geological features and resources, which are essential for understanding its geological landscape.

Attribute	Description
Location	East-central Illinois, part of the Illinois Basin.
Topography	Gently rolling plains with low relief, part of the Till Plains section of the Central Lowland region.
Primary Soil Types	Mollisols (prairie soils) dominate, with Alfisols in wooded areas.
Parent Material	Glacial till, loess (wind-blown silt), and outwash from past glacial activity.
Bedrock Geology	Primarily Pennsylvanian-age sedimentary rocks, including shale, sandstone, limestone, and coal.
Coal Resources	Coles County is part of the Illinois Coal Basin, with historical coal mining activity.
Water Resources	Aquifers in sand and gravel deposits; shallow groundwater primarily from glacial drift.
Notable Features	Flat uplands with minor drainage systems leading to the Embarras River, the county's main waterway.
Mineral Resources	Sand, gravel, and clay deposits; minor limestone extraction.
Geological History	Shaped by multiple glaciations during the Quaternary Period, leaving behind rich, fertile soils.
Seismic Activity	Low seismic risk; distant from major fault lines, but potentially influenced by the Wabash Valley Seismic Zone.

Table 2. Environmental Features of Coles County: Fact Sheet

Locality & Connectivity

Coles County is one of the 102 counties in Illinois and is located in the east-central region of the state. It spans approximately 510 square miles, predominantly comprising land, with only a minor portion designated as water.

Within this county, you will discover:

- **Three cities**: Charleston, Mattoon, and Oakland
- **Three incorporated villages**: Ashmore, Lerna, and Humboldt

Coles County is bordered by:

- **Douglas County** to the north
- **Edgar and Clark** counties to the east
- **Cumberland and Clark** counties to the south
- **Moultrie and Shelby** counties to the west

These neighboring counties exhibit similar characteristics in terms of transportation, infrastructure, and natural resources.

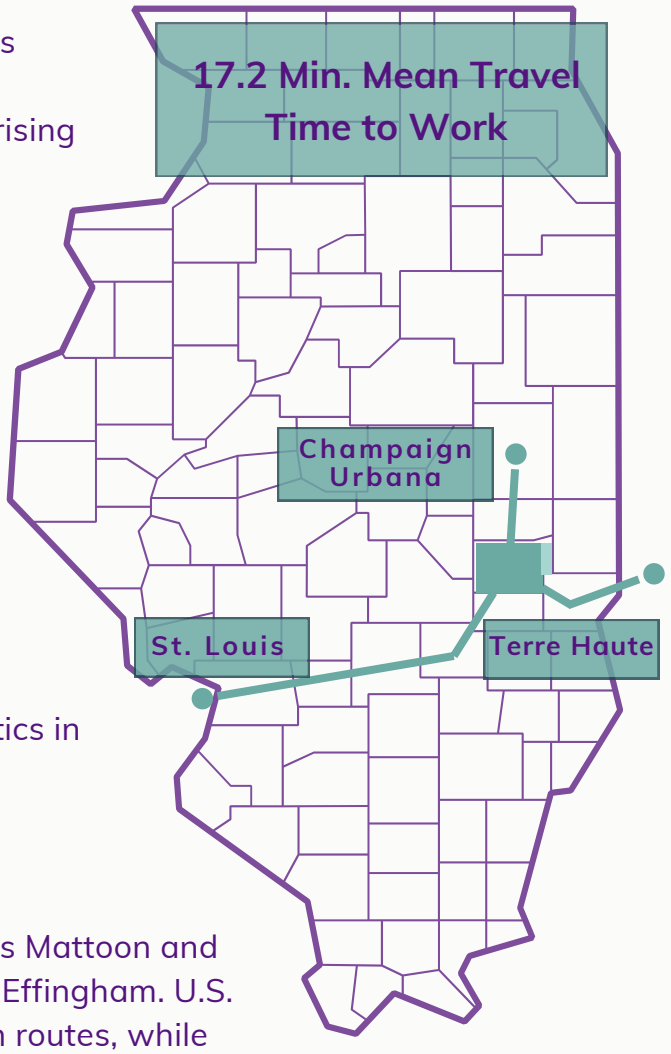


Figure 12.Coles County Proximity and Travel Time

Transportation Services

Coles County has key highways: Interstate 57 connects Mattoon and Charleston to Champaign, Bloomington, Chicago, and Effingham. U.S. Route 45 and State Highway 130 serve as north/south routes, while State Highways 133, 16, and 121 run east/west. The County also has passenger rail access through Amtrak, connecting it to nearby cities like Champaign and Carbondale, and Chicago.

Coles County currently partners with Dial-A-Ride for public transportation services that can be arranged in advance and two deviated, fixed routes that facilitate travel between its two largest cities during weekdays. For students, the EIU Panther shuttle offers access to various areas of Charleston, along with limited, break-related service to the Amtrak station in Mattoon and Coles County Airport.

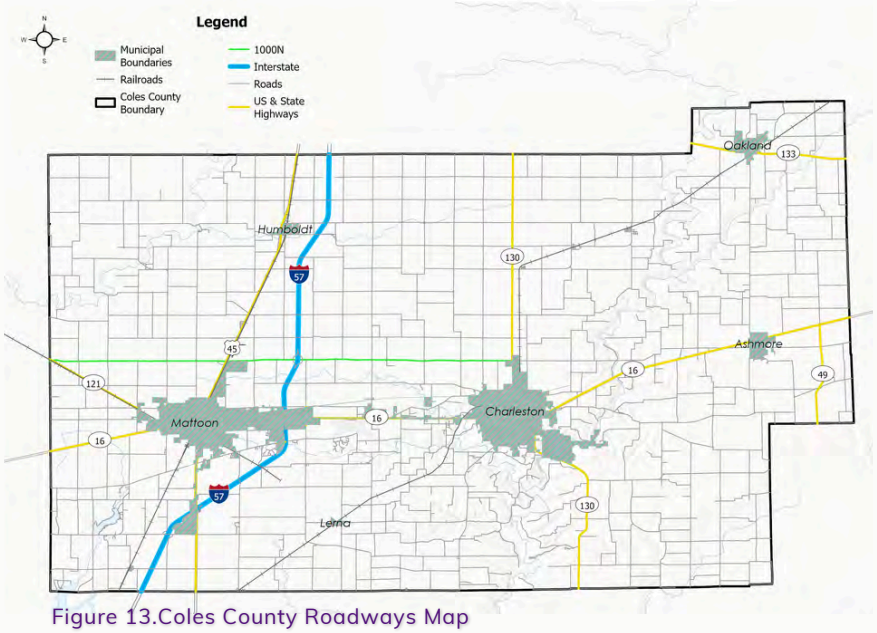


Figure 13.Coles County Roadways Map

Community Profile & Demographic

In 2020, the county's population was 46,863, which is a 13% drop since 2000. **The latest estimate is 46,423, showing that the population is still slowly declining.** The charts below show how the population is spread across different age groups and the dependency ratio, with about one dependent for every two working-age adults, and more elderly dependents than young ones.

Percentage of Coles County Population by Age Group

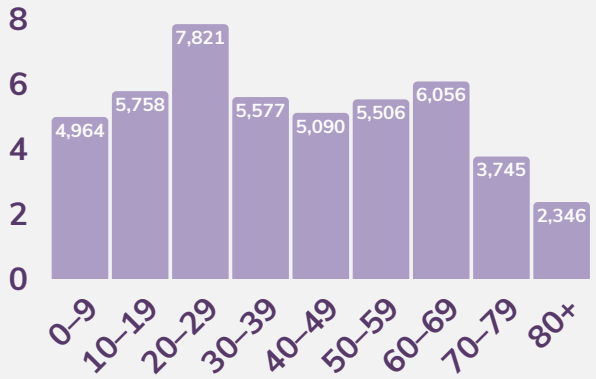


Figure 14. Coles County Population by Age, 2020

Youth Dependency Ratio: ~22.8 dependents per 100 working-age residents



Old-Age Dependency Ratio: ~27.1 dependents per 100 working-age residents



Total Dependency Ratio: ~49.9 dependents per 100 working-age residents



Figure 16. Dependency Ratios, 2020 Census

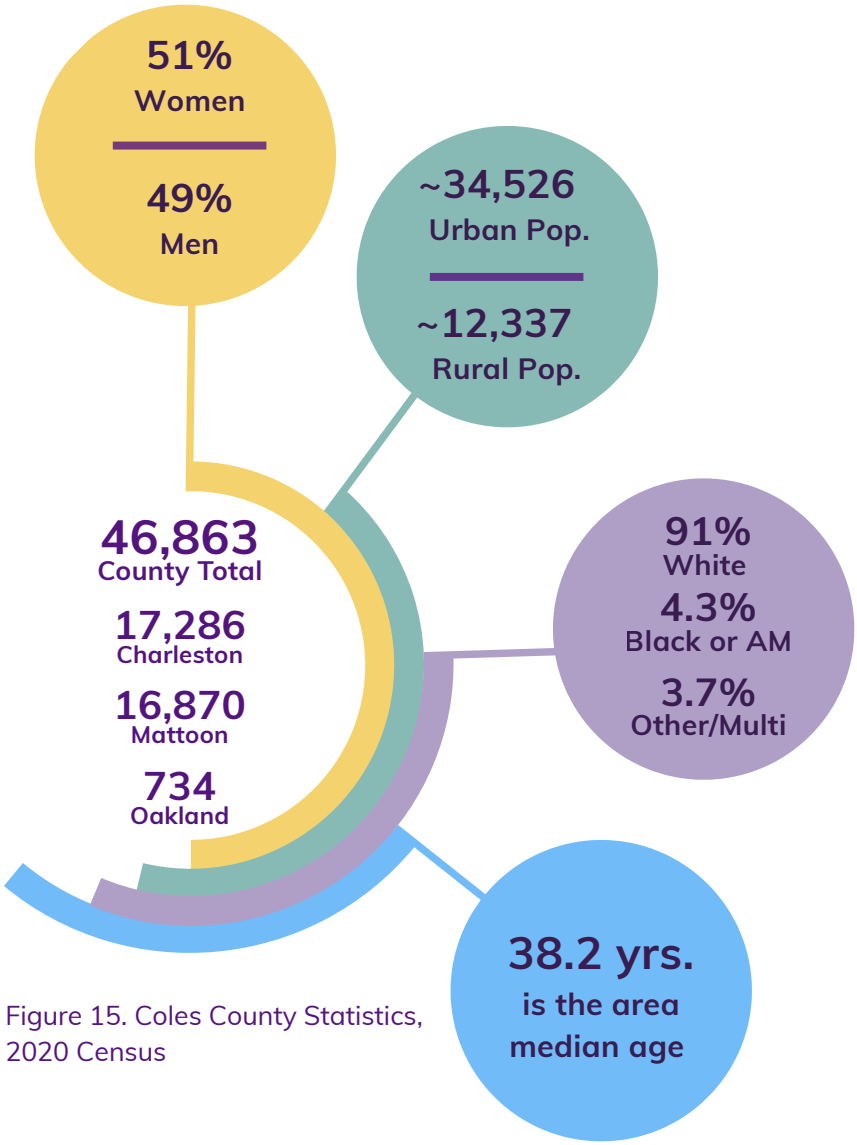


Figure 15. Coles County Statistics, 2020 Census

The dependency ratio compares the number of people aged 0-14 and over 65 to those aged 15-64. This helps us understand how many aren't working and its impact on the economy and taxes. Although it's an estimate, as some start working in their late teens or twenties, and others work into their sixties and seventies, it helps policymakers decide on social and economic support. More young people mean investing in schools and childcare reasources, while more older people highlight the need for healthcare and retirement plans. This knowledge is key for balanced community growth and meeting everyone's needs.

At-Risk Populations

Certain residents are considered “at-risk” due to socioeconomic, demographic, or health factors and are more likely to face barriers such as poverty, food insecurity, poor health outcomes, lack of access to services, underemployment, or housing instability.

Here are some key points from the chart and figures on the right that highlight areas needing attention:

- **Poverty Rates**: The county's poverty rate is higher than both the state and national averages, indicating many residents lack resources.
- **Children & Youth**: Over 20% live in poverty, making programs in early childhood development, school support, nutrition, childcare, and afterschool activities essential. All of which are very limited or difficult to access in Coles County.
- **Racial/Ethnic Disparities**: Poverty rates are much higher among Black residents and those identifying as Two or More Races, stressing the need for fair policies and access to jobs, education, housing, and healthcare.
- **Seniors:** While seniors have lower poverty rates, issues with fixed incomes, healthcare, transportation, and social isolation persist.
- **SNAP & Food Security:** This figure of about 17% of households relying on SNAP benefits highlights food access as a concern..
- **Transportation Barriers:** Around 1,500 households lack vehicle access, limiting mobility for jobs, healthcare, groceries, and social opportunities.

An understanding of at-risk populations is crucial to Coles County’s economy and planning. Poverty and SNAP reliance indicate a diminished spending power and tax revenue, while barriers like childcare, training, and transport hinder current workforce participation.

Poverty Rates in Coles County
by Subgroup from the 2020 Census

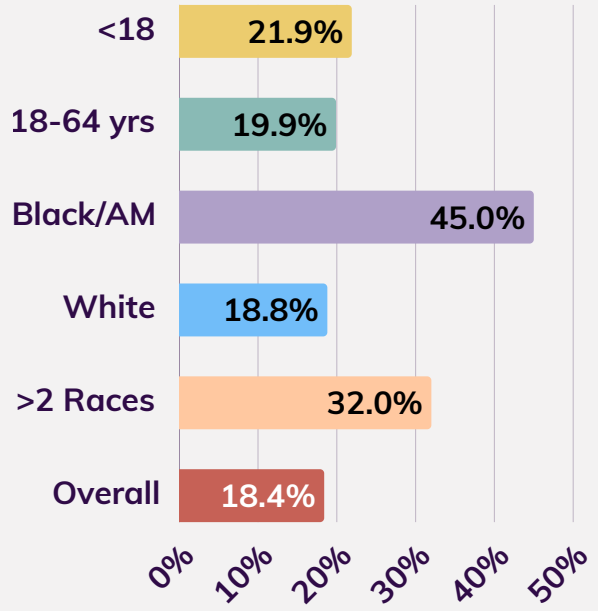


Figure 17. Poverty Rates, 2020 Census

17.2% of households receive SNAP

12% of people under age 65 have a disability

6.3% of residents under 65 lack health insurance

7.3% of households do not have access to a vehicle

Economic Snapshot

Key Economic Drivers

- Healthcare
- Education
- OEM & Metal Manufacturing
- Food & Agricultural Manufacturing
- Logistics & Supply Chain
- Retail HQ / Regional HQs
- Sports Marketing / Tourism

Key Industry Clusters

- Education & Research
- Healthcare & Social Services
- Food & Beverage Manufacturing
- Agribusiness
- Logistics & Transportation
- Retail & Services

30 min. Drive-time Population: 89,064
30 min. Drive-time Labor Force: ~45,425

60 min. Drive-time Population: ~490,342
60 min. Drive-time Labor Force: ~234,686

Major Employers

Sarah Bush Lincoln Health Center	3,204
Eastern Illinois University	1,191
Charleston & Mattoon Public Schools	732
Rural King- Corporate Headquarters	705
Lake Land College	400
Grupo Bimbo Bakeries USA	350
Mars Petcare	285
First Mid Bank & Trust	270
Consolidated Communications	243
Blue Cross Blue Shield	225
Justrite Manufacturing	215

Industrial Parks

Coles Business Park
Mattoon Enterprise Park
CN Mattoon Prairie Park
Charleston Industrial Corridor
Coles Business Centre
1000 North Industrial Corridor

Tertiary Market with Regional Function

Distributed governance for economic development.

Estimated County Labor Force ~24,388

Regional Economic Development Partners

Coles Together EDO
Small Business Development Center (EIU)
Elevate Innovation Center, LLC
East Central Illinois Development Corporation
Oakland, Mattoon & Charleston Chambers of Commerce

Median & Per Capita Income by County

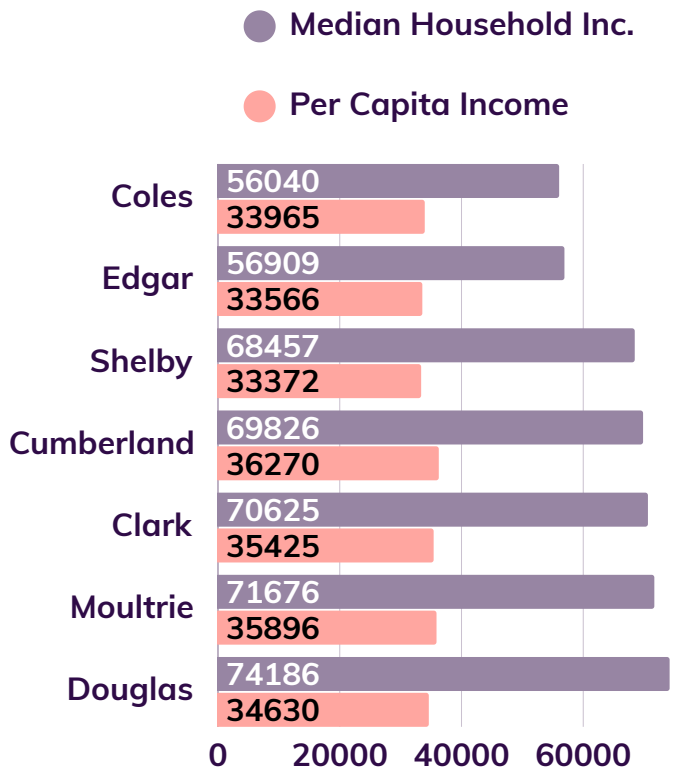


Figure 18. Median & Per Capita Income by County

Coles County's economic landscape shows both opportunities and stress points: median household and per capita incomes of $56,040 and $33,965 lag behind neighboring counties, creating gaps between wages and the cost of living. These disparities act like stressors on a natural ecosystem, highlighting where households struggle and where economic pressures threaten the county's overall resilience. That being said, understanding economic security in Coles County requires more than median income statistics. The table below presents living wage estimates, poverty thresholds, and benchmarks from the MIT Living Wage Calculator. Unlike median income, living wages reflect the earnings needed to cover essentials such as housing, food, and healthcare.

Closing these gaps requires a coordinated effort to nurture Coles County's economic "ecosystem." Strategies include diversifying employment, a topic raised in the community survey, as well as raising wages and supporting entrepreneurship to stabilize the local workforce. Another way to nurture the economic ecosystem of the county is through strengthened partnerships with educational institutions like Eastern Illinois University and Lake Land College. Aligning career pathways with local industry clusters and economic drivers, paired with expanded access to childcare, broadband, and transportation, can increase workforce participation, especially among historically oppressed populations and lower-income households. The Economic section on page 114 continues to explore more details about Coles County's current economic state, assets, challenges, and plans.

One Adult				Two Adults (One Working)			
0 Children	1 Child	2 Children	3 Children	0 Children	1 Child	2 Children	3 Children
$18.29	$31.20	$39.81	$47.30	$26.60	$31.80	$35.40	$40.35
$7.52	$9.83	$12.81	$15.46	$10.17	$12.81	$15.46	$18.10
$15.00	$15.00	$15.00	$15.00	$15.00	$15.00	$15.00	$15.00

Two Adults (Both Working)			
0 Children	1 Child	2 Children	3 Children
$13.30	$18.47	$22.68	$25.62
$5.08	$6.41	$7.73	$9.05
$15.00	$15.00	$15.00	$15.00

Wage Type Color Key

The colors below represent different wage types.

Living Wage

Poverty Wage

Minimum Wage

***The amounts provided indicate the dollars per hour required to reach the specified color level.**

Table 3. Wage Calculations for County Costs of Living

Educational Overview

Education in Coles County significantly shapes the region's workforce, quality of life, and economic stability within the context of east-central Illinois. The area is served by public school districts like Charleston CUSD #1 and Mattoon CUSD #2, alongside smaller rural districts providing K–12 education and a few private schools such as St. John's Lutheran and Maranatha Christian Academy. The Regional Office of Education #11, headquartered in Charleston, coordinates services across Coles and five neighboring counties, supporting consistent education through professional development and special programs that meet the unique needs of this part of Illinois.

Coles County is home to two major higher education institutions: Eastern Illinois University (EIU) in Charleston and Lake Land College in Mattoon. These schools play a pivotal role not only in providing advanced education and technical training but also in driving workforce development across a broad region. Local schools benefit from partnerships with these institutions, which contribute to teacher preparation and career pathway programs, ensuring that educational offerings align with regional economic needs.

Further enriching the educational landscape, Mattoon hosts LIFT, a Regional Innovation and Technology Center, which stands out in Central Illinois. Lift supports regional high schools by guiding students in career discovery, hands-on experience, and connections with local industry leaders. Students have the opportunity to explore diverse fields such as child care, communications, culinary arts, HVAC, green energy, IT, leadership, manufacturing, and construction, supporting youth opportunities and economic priorities in the region.

In Coles County:

- **8 School Districts**
- **88.6% Enrolled in Public School**
- **11.34% Enrolled in Private**



Figure 19. Illinois School District Maps

Primary Educational Institutions in Coles County

Oakland CUSD 5
Two schools, 245 Students Enrolled

Charleston CUSD 1
Six schools, 2,481 Students Enrolled

Mattoon CUSD 2
Six schools, 3,003 Students Enrolled

LIFT, Mattoon Regional Innovation & Tech. Center
257 Students Enrolled

Lake Land Community College, 4,138 Students Enrolled

Eastern Illinois University, 8,505 Students Enrolled

Figure 20. Primary Educational Institutions in Coles

Public Education Program Breakdown

Charleston CUSD #1

- Ashmore: K-4
- Project Help: PK
- Mark Twain: PK-K
- Carl Sandburg: 1-3
- Jefferson: 4-6
- Charleston Middle: 7-8
- Charleston High: 9-12

Mattoon CUSD #2

- Arland D. Williams Jr.: K-5
- Franklin: PK
- Riddle: K-5
- Mattoon Middle: 5-8
- Mattoon High: 9-12
- LIFT: 11-12

Oakland CUSD #5

- Lake Crest Elementary: PK-8
- Oakland High: 9-12

Lake Land College

- **Associate Degrees:** e.g., Accounting, Agriculture Business, Allied Health, etc.
- **Certificates & Short Programs:** Career-focused options like Medical Assistant, Commercial Driver Training
- **Career & Technical Education:** Programs in business, agriculture, health, technology, trades
- **Career & Technical Education:** Programs in business, agriculture, health, tech., and trades.
- **Dual-Credit & Transfer:** High school dual credit with "Laker Connect," transfer agreements with universities, and two-plus-two pathways with EIU.
- **Continuing Education:** GED, ESL, workforce development, and community classes.

Eastern Illinois University

- **Bachelor's Degrees:** Over 90 undergraduate majors in areas such as
  - Arts & Humanities (English, History, Arts)
  - Business & Technology (Accounting, Management, Finance)
  - Education (Elementary, Secondary, Special Education)
  - Health & Human Services (Nursing, Kinesiology, Communication Disorders)
  - Sciences & Mathematics (Biology, Chemistry, Physics)
  - Social Sciences (Psychology, Anthropology, Criminal Justice)
- **Graduate Programs:** 30+ master's and advanced degrees for deeper academic or professional specialization.
- **Minors & Pre-Professional Programs:** Nearly as many minors as majors to complement students' primary fields.

Level of Educational Attainment

in Coles County

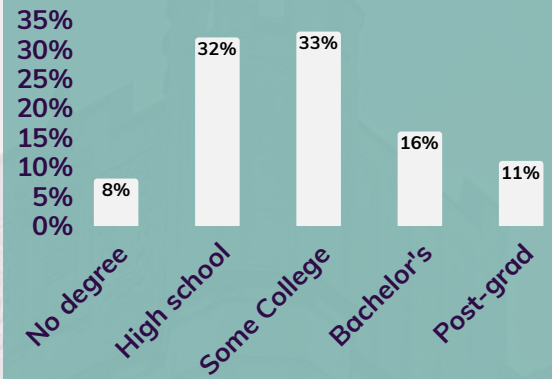


Figure 21. Level of Educational Attainment

Graduation Rates

2019-24 for Districts in Coles County

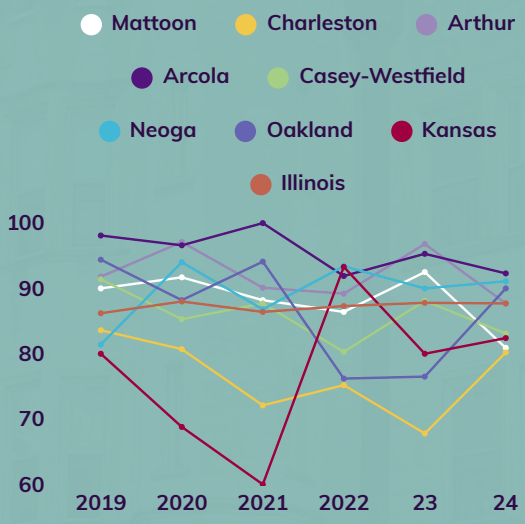


Figure 22. Graduation Rates

Total Expenditures for Elementary & Secondary Education

in 2021-22 for Districts in Coles County

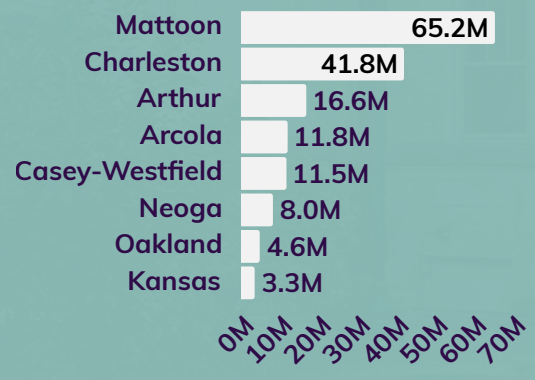


Figure 23. Education Expenditures by City or Town

REGIONAL AND LOCAL PLANNING DOCUMENTS

Coles County Transportation Plan (2025)
Sets goals, priorities, and strategies for transportation access and mobility across Coles County, including roadway improvements, safety, multimodal connectivity, and coordination with regional and state transportation initiatives.

Coles County Hazard Mitigation Plan (2025)
Identifies natural and man-made hazards affecting Coles County, assesses vulnerability and risk, and outlines mitigation strategies to reduce impacts to people, property, infrastructure, and critical facilities.

Coles County Enterprise Zone Guidelines (2026)
Defines the policies and eligibility requirements for the Coles County Enterprise Zone, which spans approximately 20 square miles. The program offers incentives such as property tax abatements and sales tax exemptions on building materials to encourage investment, redevelopment, and, for the first time, qualifying residential development.

Six County Solid Waste Management Plan (2026)
A regional plan involving Coles, Clark, Cumberland, Shelby, Douglas, and Edgar counties. The plan addresses waste reduction, recycling, disposal capacity, and long-term solid waste management strategies in compliance with state requirements.

City of Charleston Comprehensive Plan (2020)
Provides a long-range framework for Charleston's future growth and development, including land use, housing, transportation, infrastructure, and community revitalization. The plan emphasizes infill development, efficient use of existing infrastructure, and neighborhood reinvestment.

City of Mattoon Comprehensive Plan (In Progress)
Guides land use, housing, transportation, and economic development decisions within Mattoon. The plan establishes policies to support community growth, redevelopment, infrastructure investment, and quality of life improvements.

Village of Oakland Comprehensive Plan
Outlines Oakland's vision for future development, focusing on land use, housing stability, infrastructure needs, and small-community revitalization while maintaining rural character.

Mattoon Housing Study (2023)
An Illinois Housing Development Authority–funded assessment evaluating housing supply, demand, affordability, and conditions in Mattoon. The study incorporates community input and provides recommendations to guide future housing development, rehabilitation, and policy decisions.

Mattoon in Motion Broadband Study
Examines broadband availability, gaps in service, and connectivity needs in Mattoon. The study identifies strategies to improve digital access for residents, businesses, education, and healthcare.

Coles County Comprehensive Plan (2026)
Provides a countywide framework for future growth and development, addressing land use, housing, transportation, infrastructure, economic development, environmental resources, and intergovernmental coordination.

Mattoon Safety Action Plan (2025)
The Mattoon Safety Action Plan aims to reduce serious injuries and fatalities by improving safety on high-risk streets for all users. It uses data-driven and equity-focused strategies to prioritize roadway improvements and position the city for state and federal safety funding.

STATE PLANNING DOCUMENTS

Illinois 2021–2025 Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP)
Guides statewide priorities for outdoor recreation, conservation, and open space. The plan identifies recreation demand, equity gaps, and funding priorities used to allocate state and federal recreation and park grants.

Illinois Renewable Energy Access Plan (REAP)
Establishes a framework for renewable energy development and transmission planning under the Climate and Equitable Jobs Act (CEJA). The plan identifies renewable energy zones, grid needs, and strategies to expand clean energy access statewide.

Illinois 2024 Economic Growth Plan ("Open for Business")
Provides the State's strategy for economic development, workforce readiness, business attraction, and infrastructure investment. The plan emphasizes regional competitiveness, talent retention, and alignment of housing, transportation, and economic policy.

Illinois Nutrient Loss Reduction Strategy (NLRS)
Outlines statewide goals to reduce nitrogen and phosphorus runoff entering Illinois waterways. The strategy identifies best management practices (BMPs) for agriculture, wastewater, and stormwater systems and guides implementation through local and regional partnerships.

Connect Illinois Broadband Strategy
Sets the State's roadmap for expanding high-speed internet access, with the goal of achieving universal broadband coverage. The strategy prioritizes unserved and underserved areas and guides state and federal broadband funding investments.

Illinois State Water Plan
Identifies statewide water resource priorities, including source-water protection, drought preparedness, flood resilience, and long-term water supply sustainability. The plan provides guidance for regional and local water planning efforts.

Illinois Wildlife Action Plan / Illinois Forest Action Plan
Identifies priority habitats, species of concern, and conservation opportunity areas across Illinois. These plans guide habitat protection, forest management, and land stewardship activities in coordination with local land use planning.

Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO) Planning & Business Support Resources
Includes statewide economic development programs, community development grants, small business assistance, workforce programs, and incentive tools that support local planning and investment initiatives.

Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT) Active Transportation Plan (2024)
Establishes a statewide vision to improve walking and bicycling infrastructure. The plan identifies policies, funding strategies, and performance measures to support safe, accessible, and connected active transportation networks.

Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT) Long-Range Transportation Plan (2024)
Provides a comprehensive, 20–30 year strategic framework for Illinois' transportation system. The plan outlines statewide goals, investment priorities, and policy directions for roads, transit, freight, rail, and multimodal transportation.

REGIONAL & STATE PLANNING AGENCIES

East Central Illinois Development Corporation (ECIDC)
ECIDC is the regional economic development body for Coles County, focusing on business attraction, entrepreneurship, and investment in manufacturing, logistics, and healthcare. It offers technical assistance, coordinates marketing, and fosters collaboration among local entities to align strategies for better funding and growth.

Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Regional Workforce Boards:
Coles County is part of a workforce region led by Lake Land College, Illinois workNet, and the East Central Illinois Workforce Board, which manage training funds, set priorities, and support employer engagement.

IDOT District 5
Coles County's transportation planning falls under IDOT District 5, working on road, bridge, and transit improvements, alongside long-term planning for freight, cycling, and pedestrian connectivity.

Eastern Illinois University & Lake Land College:
EIU and Lake Land College are key educational partners, with EIU focusing on research and workforce development, and Lake Land College on technical training, impacting the local labor market.

Regional Conservation and Land Trust Partners:
Organizations like Grand Prairie Friends and the Douglas-Hart Nature Center, alongside the Illinois Department of Natural Resources, manage land preserves and integrate biodiversity into local land use.

Illinois Comprehensive Housing Plan (IHDA)
Defines statewide housing needs, affordability challenges, and investment priorities. The plan guides allocation of Low-Income Housing Tax Credits, HOME funds, and other state housing resources.

Illinois Climate Action Plan (CEJA Implementation Framework)
Supports implementation of the Climate and Equitable Jobs Act by addressing emissions reduction, clean energy deployment, workforce development, and climate resilience across sectors.

Illinois State Hazard Mitigation Plan
Identifies statewide hazard risks and mitigation strategies, providing the framework required for local governments to remain eligible for federal hazard mitigation funding.

Illinois Land Use Planning Program Guidance (DCEO)
Provides technical assistance, best practices, and grant support for local and regional comprehensive planning, zoning updates, and land use coordination.

Regional Social Service Collaboratives

Coles County collaborates with regional and local organizations to provide housing, health, and human services, enhancing housing stability, public safety, recovery, and family well-being.

South Central Illinois Continuum of Care (SCILCoC)
Manages homelessness prevention and housing programs with ERBA as the lead for Coles County and nearby areas.

Embarras River Basin Agency, Inc. (ERBA)
Offers energy assistance, weatherization, housing counseling, and rapid re-housing for low-income households in multiple counties.

LifeLinks of Eastern Illinois
Provides mental health and substance use services, including therapy, crisis resources, and housing support.

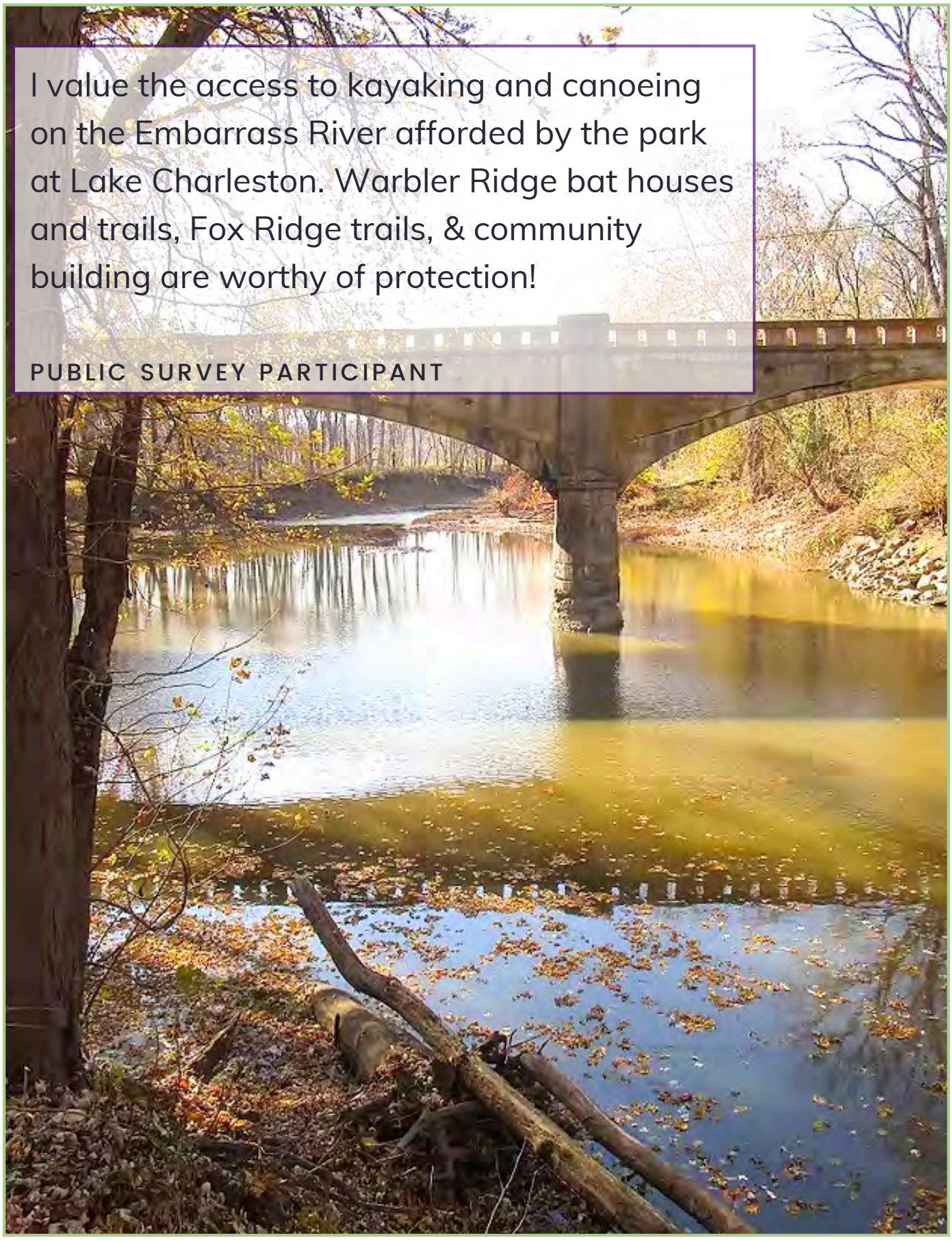
HOPE of East Central Illinois
Offers domestic violence services such as a crisis hotline, shelter, legal advocacy, and counseling.

Prevail Illinois
Supports sexual assault survivors with advocacy, counseling, and prevention education.

The Hour House
Provides substance use disorder treatment, recovery support, and prevention programming.

ROSC Council
Builds peer-support and recovery services for substance use disorders in multiple counties.

Birth to Five Illinois
Coordinates early childhood services, including family support and childcare, through regional councils.



I value the access to kayaking and canoeing on the Embarrass River afforded by the park at Lake Charleston. Warbler Ridge bat houses and trails, Fox Ridge trails, & community building are worthy of protection!

PUBLIC SURVEY PARTICIPANT

Natural Resources & Environment

Geology & Soils

Coles County is a part of the geological structure known as the Illinois Basin and is covered by the Mattoon, Shelburn-Patoka, Bond, and Carbondale Formations. The county also includes portions of the Embarrass Bedrock Valley on its southeastern side, where it has Illinois Bedrock underneath.

Buried beneath glacial till from the Illinoian and Wisconsin glaciations, Coles County's geological structures are rich in limestone, sandstone, shale, coal, gas, and oil. These resources have significantly contributed to the economy, with limestone and sandstone vital for construction, and hydraulic fracturing enhancing shale's role. Although coal mining has waned, it once fueled local industries. Oil and gas exploration continues to thrive, aided by new drilling technologies that enable efficient, sustainable extraction while supporting environmental goals. The community prioritizes balancing resource use with ecological preservation, maintaining the area's natural beauty and health.

Soil Types

Coles County soils originate from glacial till, outwash, loess, and alluvium from the Wisconsin glaciation, mainly in the north. Key soil associations include Drummer-Flanagan, Drummer-Raub-Dana, and Miami-Russell. About 86% of the county has fertile prairie soil ideal for agriculture, while 12% consists of less fertile forest-derived soil. Human activities have reduced phosphorus and organic matter in some areas. The fertile soils support a strong agricultural industry, with corn and soybeans as key crops, while the less fertile soils support wildlife habitats and biodiversity.

Bedrock Geology of Coles County Area

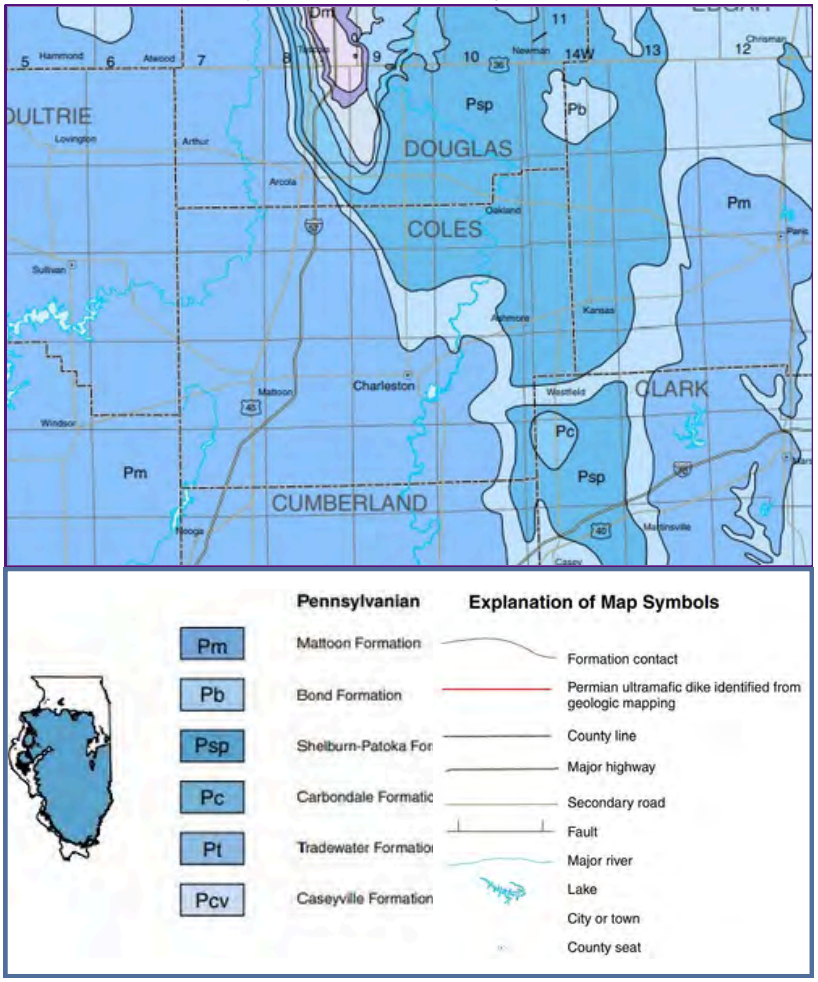


Figure 24. Bedrock Geology of Coles County Area

Soil Order of Coles County

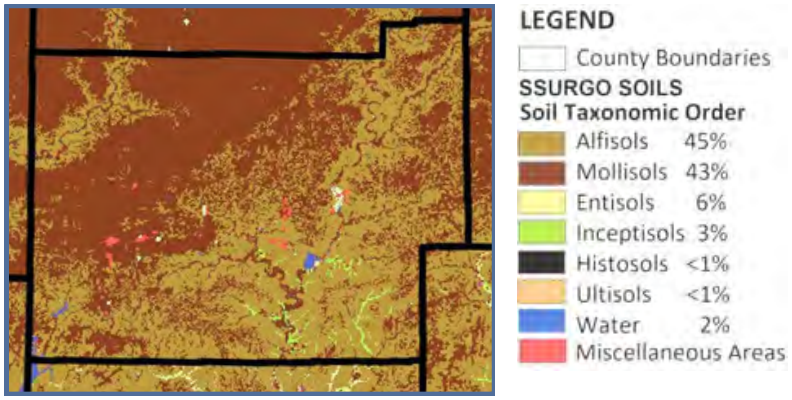


Figure 25. Soil Order of Coles County

Coles County features Lake Mattoon, Lake Charleston, Lake Paradise, and Lake Oakland. These lakes are essential for recreation and wildlife, offering scenic spots for fishing, boating, and picnicking. Lake Mattoon, set in rolling landscapes, is ideal for water sports and community events with its public beach and campgrounds. Lake Charleston is known for its trails, kayaking, parks, and wildlife observation. Lake Paradise, though smaller and a “no wake’ lake, offers a tranquil escape into nature, also featuring trails. Lake Oakland is a reservoir and recreational fishing spot for the city of Oakland.

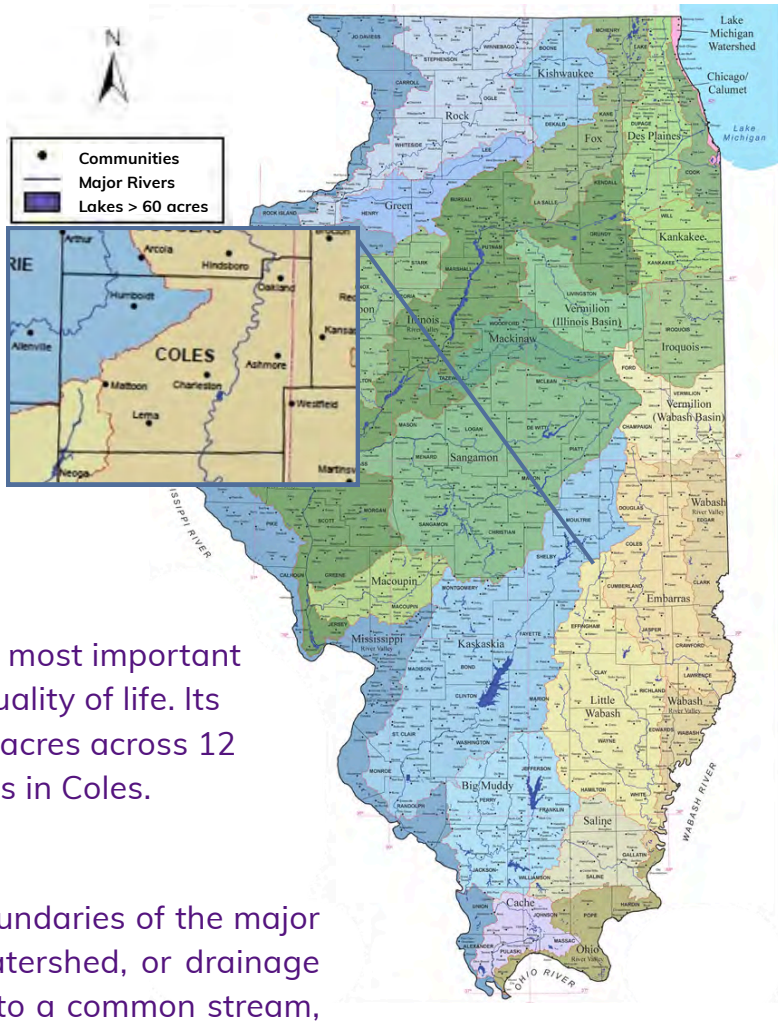


Figure 26. Illinois Watersheds

The Embarras River is one of Coles County’s most important natural features, both ecologically and for quality of life. Its watershed covers approximately 1.5 million acres across 12 Illinois counties, including significant portions in Coles.

Overview of Illinois Watersheds

The map to the right depicts the general boundaries of the major watersheds in Illinois. In this context, a watershed, or drainage basin, refers to the land area that drains into a common stream, river, or lake.

Key Features of the Map

- The watershed boundaries illustrated were derived from topographic mapping of the land surface; thus, the accuracy of the map features is limited to the scale of the original mapping.
- In certain areas (not all represented on this map), artificial drainage structures, such as canals, may redirect water across natural watershed boundaries.

Color Coding

- Shades of blue and green represent watersheds within the Upper Mississippi River basin.
- Watersheds in shades of green are part of the Illinois River basin.
- Shades of yellow and brown indicate watersheds belonging to the Ohio River basin.

The Importance of the River and Its Watershed

The river and its surrounding watershed provide essential benefits, including:

- Flood mitigation
- Recharge for drinking water
- Opportunities for recreation and tourism
- Ecosystem services, such as water purification and habitat support

Any upcoming developments near the river or its tributaries, whether for housing, roads, or agriculture, must take into consideration:

- Stormwater management
- Riparian buffer zones
- Soil conservation

There are opportunities to tap into state and federal funding aimed at improving watershed and water quality, as the river is recognized as a priority watershed in state strategies. By leveraging funding opportunities, local authorities can implement projects that not only enhance water quality but also foster community engagement through educational programs and volunteer activities focused on conservation efforts. Collaborations with local schools, environmental organizations, and businesses can further amplify these initiatives, creating a sense of shared responsibility and pride in maintaining the health of the river ecosystem.

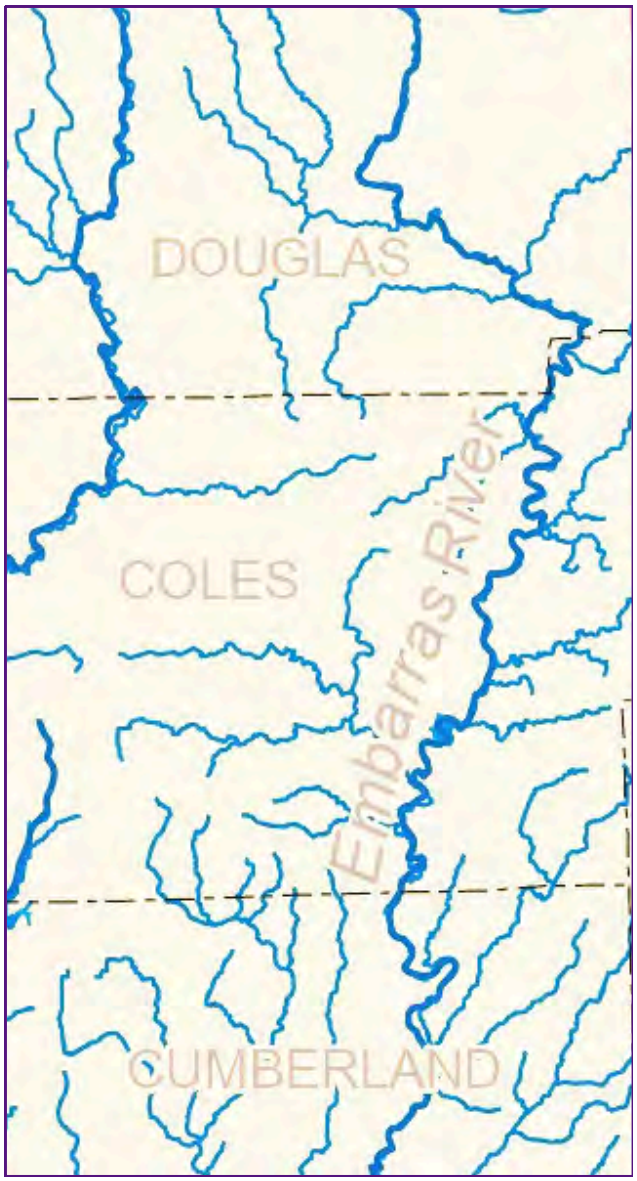


Figure 27. Rivers and Tributaries of Coles County

Integrating sustainable practices into development plans will ensure that economic growth does not come at the expense of environmental integrity. Encouraging green infrastructure, such as permeable pavements and rain gardens, can effectively manage stormwater and reduce runoff, while also beautifying urban landscapes.

As we look towards the future, the river and its watershed stand as both a vital resource and a cherished natural heritage. Through thoughtful planning and community involvement, we can protect and enhance this invaluable asset for generations to come, ensuring it continues to provide life-sustaining benefits and inspire a deep connection to the natural world.

Within this larger ecological setting, Coles County contains diverse but fragmented natural communities. While agriculture dominates the landscape, important remnants of native vegetation and wildlife habitat persist.

- **Woodlands:** Scattered oak-hickory stands remain, primarily along river corridors and in undeveloped parcels. These provide habitat for deer, turkey, songbirds, and other species.
- **Prairie remnants**: Very limited patches of native tallgrass prairie survive, often in rights-of-way, cemeteries, or conservation areas. These areas support pollinators and serve as genetic reservoirs for native plant species.
- **Riparian and wetland systems**: The Embarras River, Kickapoo Creek, and associated wetlands form critical aquatic and riparian habitats. These areas filter water, reduce flooding impacts, and provide corridors for fish, amphibians, and migratory birds.
- **Agricultural habitat:** Row-crop fields with fencerows, grassed waterways, and farm ponds provide secondary habitat for species adapted to agricultural landscapes.
- **Conservation lands**: Fox Ridge State Park, Lake Charleston, Warbler Ridge, and smaller preserves are core habitat areas that anchor the county's biodiversity.



Figure 28. Fox Ridge



Figure 29. Lake Paradise



Figure 30. Lafayette Township

Vegetation and Habitat in Comprehensive Planning

In comprehensive planning, vegetation and habitat resources play a crucial role in shaping land-use policy. They help determine where development should be concentrated to safeguard sensitive areas, identify opportunities for restoration projects that can enhance ecosystem services, and explore ways to broaden recreational and educational activities through conservation efforts.

Collaborations between counties, landowners, park districts, and state agencies can lead to:

- Expansion of pollinator corridors
- Establishment of riparian buffers
- Creation of conservation easements

These initiatives work to prevent habitat fragmentation, curb the growth or planting of invasive species, and mitigate nutrient runoff that impacts river and wetland habitats.

7660

Coles County's wildlife and biodiversity reflect its position in the Central Corn Belt Plains ecoregion, where rich soils and agricultural dominance have greatly shaped the landscape. While much of the county is intensively farmed, its remaining forests, prairies, wetlands, rivers, and conservation areas continue to support a variety of native species. Protecting and enhancing this biodiversity is vital not only for ecological health but also for recreation, tourism, and community identity.



Figure 31. White Tail Deer in Charleston, IL

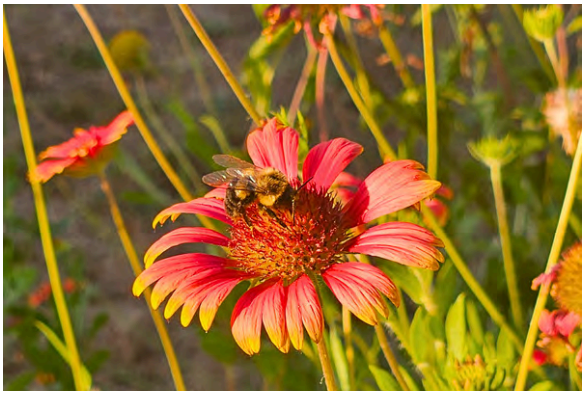


Figure 32. Bumble Bee on Flower in Charleston, IL



Figure 33. Douglas Hart Nature Center Trail

Key Habitats and Wildlife

- **Forests and Woodlands:** Oak-hickory forests and riparian woodlands provide habitat for white-tailed deer, wild turkey, barred owls, woodpeckers, and numerous songbirds. These areas are most intact at Fox Ridge State Park, Warbler Ridge Conservation Area, and along the Embarras River corridor.
- **Prairie Remnants and Grasslands:** Once the dominant ecosystem, tallgrass prairie now persists only in small remnants, restorations, and roadside corridors. These habitats support pollinators such as monarch butterflies, native bees, and grassland birds like meadowlarks and bobolinks. Douglas-Hart Nature Center and Grand Prairie Friends' restoration sites maintain examples of prairie habitat.
- **Wetlands and Aquatic Systems:** The Embarras River, Kickapoo Creek, and associated wetlands host amphibians, reptiles, and aquatic species including fish, herons, and waterfowl. Wetlands provide critical ecosystem services: flood control, water filtration, and nursery habitat for wildlife.
- **Agricultural Landscapes:** Although dominated by row crops, farmland also provides habitat at its edges — fencerows, grassed waterways, and farm ponds support pheasants, rabbits, amphibians, and migratory birds adapted to agricultural environments.

Biodiversity Resources

Coles County is home to valuable biodiversity, including:

- Habitats for migratory birds are found along river areas and forest preserves.
- Corridors for pollinators that are vital for both local ecosystems and farming.
- Rare and endangered species living in isolated prairie patches, wetlands, and woodlands.
- Conservation lands managed by public and nonprofit groups, like Fox Ridge State Park, Lake Charleston, Douglas-Hart Nature Center, and the Warbler Ridge Conservation Area, run by Grand Prairie Friends.

Why It Matters

The existing biodiversity in Coles County provides many ecosystem services: pollination, erosion control, water filtration, carbon sequestration, habitat for game and non-game wildlife, and aesthetic/cultural value. Preserving and enhancing biodiversity supports resilience to climate changes, improves water and soil health, and makes the county more livable in both rural and urban portions.



Figure 34. Heron at Lake Charleston

Coles County features important natural areas like riparian corridors, small woodlands, and wetlands, alongside farmland and developed areas. The Embarras, Kickapoo, and Riley Creek systems are key for wildlife movement and breeding. The county is home to state and federally listed species, including aquatic mussels, fish, reptiles, birds, and rare plants. It also lies on the Mississippi Flyway, making it a crucial stop for migratory birds.

Corridors & Habitats

- **Embarras River Riparian Corridor:** The forests along the Embarras River, including Warbler Bottoms North, are vital for birds and other wildlife to nest, rest, and feed. These areas are key landscape connectors in Coles County.
- **Woodlots, Bluffs, and Reserves**: Scattered protected areas like Ambraw Woods and Embarras Ridges allow wildlife to move between larger forests, crucial for species' resilience.
- **Agricultural Matrix:** While much of the county is farmland, features like drainage ditches and hedgerows provide paths for smaller animals and pollinators, especially where riparian buffers exist. Connectivity depends on farming practices and buffer widths.

Migratory Bird Flyways in North America



Figure 35. Waterfowl Flyway Map of North America by U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Migration Routes and Seasonal Movements

- **Bird migration — Mississippi Flyway:** Coles County is part of the Mississippi Flyway, a major north-south route for migrating birds (40%) like waterfowl, shorebirds, and songbirds. Local streams, wetlands, and forests serve as stopover points for these birds during spring and fall migrations. Tools like Audubon's Migration Explorer and national flyway maps help identify specific stopover needs and timing for the area.
- **Amphibian & reptile movements:** Amphibians and some reptiles migrate seasonally to wetlands, ponds, and upland areas for breeding in spring and dispersal in summer. Keeping wetland networks intact and ensuring safe road crossings during migration times helps reduce deaths and supports breeding populations.
- **Fish and mussel movement:** Streams in the Embarras/Kickapoo system are crucial for native fish and mussel movements. Their connectivity can be disrupted by in-stream barriers, altered water flows, and damaged riparian habitats.



Figure 36. Yellow-Rumped Warbler, Myrtle Subspecies

Climate

The changing climate in Illinois significantly impacts health and safety. Recent shifts in precipitation and temperature have intensified weather events, affecting communities, economies, and infrastructure. These changes challenge agriculture, resource management, ecosystem preservation, and community resilience to climate extremes.

Coles County experiences a humid continental climate characterized by hot summers and cold winters. Here are some key details regarding the climate and weather:

- **Climate Type**: Humid continental — featuring four distinct seasons with warm summers, cold winters, and moderate humidity.
- **USDA Hardiness Zone**: Zone 6a, with an average annual extreme minimum temperature ranging from –10°F to –5°F.
- **Average Elevation**: Approximately 690 feet above sea level.

Additional averages can be found in the boxes below, while monthly averages are presented in the tables on the following pages, showcasing Coles County's weather patterns.

TEMPERATURE

Ave. Temperature: 53°F (11.7°C)

July High: 85°F (29°C)

January Low: 18°F (–8°C)

Record High: 110°F (July 1954)

Record Low: –27°F (January 1994)

PRECIPITATION

Ave. Annual Precipitation: 40–42 inches

Ave. Annual Snowfall: 15–18 inches

Wettest Months: May–June

Driest Months: January–February

WIND & STORMS

Prevailing Winds: Southwest

Severe Weather Season: April–August (peak for thunderstorms, hail, and tornadoes).

Tornado Risk: Moderate, with approx. 2 tornadoes per decade

Ave. An. Thunderstorm Days: ~50

SUNSHINE & SEASON

Ave. Annual Sunshine: ~200 sunny days per year

Ave. Growing Season: 185–190 days (mid-April through mid-October).

Last Spring Frost: Around April 15

First Fall Frost: Around October 20

Coles County Monthly Weather-Related Averages: January - June

Months	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun
Ave. Temps.	Hi 35°F / Lo 20°F	Hi 40°F / Lo 24°F	Hi 52°F / Lo 33°F	Hi 64°F / Lo 43°F	Hi 73°F / Lo 53°F	Hi 82°F / Lo 62°F
Ave. Wind Speed	11.8 mph	11.8 mph	12.3 mph	12 mph	10.3 mph	8.6 mph
Average Rainfall	1.6 in.	1.6 in.	2.4 in.	3.7 in.	4 in.	3.9 in.
Avg. Snow Fall	4.4 in	3.7 in	1.5 in	0.2 in	0 in	0 in
Avg. Dry Days	20	18	22	21	21	21
Ave. Cloud Cover	55%	55%	52%	48%	49%	43%
Solar Energy (kWh)	2.2	3.1	4.3	5.5	6.2	6.7
Avg. Hours of Sun	9.8 Hrs.	10.8 Hrs.	12 Hrs.	13.3 Hrs.	14.4 Hrs.	14.9 Hrs.

Table 4. Coles County Monthly Weather-Related Averages: January - June

Recent Trends & Resilience

- Increasing precipitation variability, more intense spring rains and localized flooding events.
- Warmer winters and earlier springs are affecting planting and runoff timing.
- Resiliency focus: Floodplain management, green infrastructure, and stormwater design to handle heavier rainfall events.

Coles County Monthly Weather-Related Averages: July - December

Months	July	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Ave. Temps.	Hi 83°F / Lo 67°F	Hi 82°F / Lo 65°F	Hi 77°F / Lo 59°F	Hi 65°F / Lo 48°F	Hi 51°F / Lo 37°F	Hi 41°F / Lo 29°F
Ave. Wind Speed	7.5 mph	7.4 mph	8.6 mph	10.1 mph	11.3 mph	11.4 mph
Average Rain fall	4.8 in.	4.1 in.	3.2 in.	4.5 in.	3.7 in.	3.4 in.
Avg. Dry Days	22	23	24	23	24	21
Ave. Precip. Days	9	8	6	8	6	8
Avg. Snow Fall	~0 in	~0 in	~0 in	~0 in	~0.7 in	~3.7 in
Solar Energy (kWh)	6.7	6.2	5.2	3.8	2.5	1.9
Avg. Hours of Sun	14.9 Hrs.	14.6 Hrs.	13.6 Hrs.	12.4 Hrs.	11.1 Hrs.	9.4 Hrs.

Table 5. Coles County Monthly Weather-Related Averages: July- December

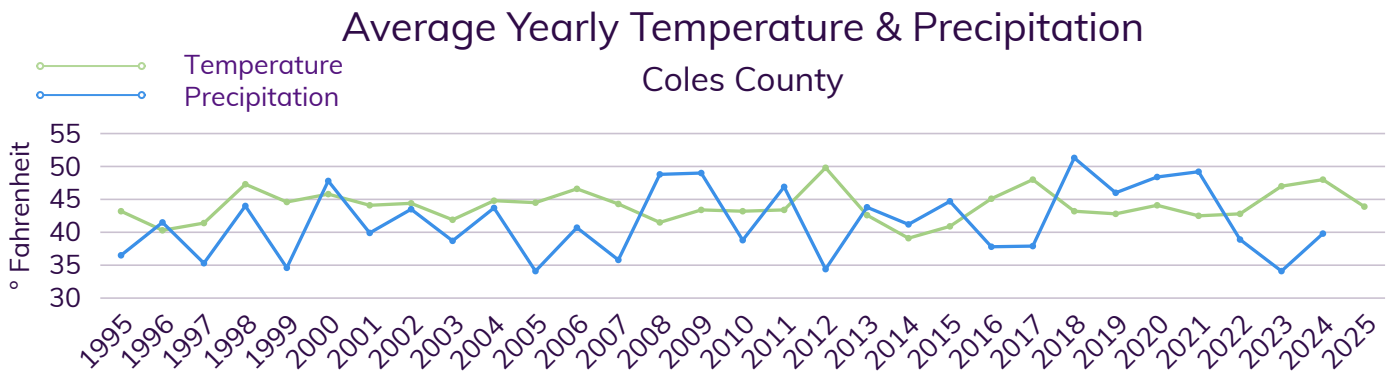


Figure 37. Average Yearly Temperature & Precipitation

Long-term climate records reveal that winters in Coles County have become warmer over recent decades. Analyses at both state and local levels indicate a steady rise in average winter temperatures across Illinois. The Charleston station, which serves Coles County, confirms this regional warming through its winter norms and monitoring records. These warmer winters have led to reduced snowpack in some years, earlier spring thaws, and altered freeze–thaw cycles, impacting road maintenance, stormwater management, agriculture, and water-supply planning.

Key considerations include:

- Anticipating milder average winter temperatures and more variable precipitation, resulting in less persistent snow cover and more frequent mid-winter thaws.
- Planning for earlier spring runoff and adjusting the timing for agricultural planting and reservoir recharge.
- Accounting for increased salt and maintenance needs, as well as stormwater management costs due to variable freeze–thaw cycles and more frequent mid-winter melts.
- Updating the county's infrastructure standards, such as pavement, culverts, and stormwater systems, along with emergency plans, to adapt to changing winter conditions.
- Ensuring local tourism and recreational activities are adjusted and supported to accommodate the shift

Climate Factors Influencing Tourism & Recreation

The tourism score (filled area), and its constituents: the temperature score (red line), cloud cover score (blue line), and precipitation score (green line)

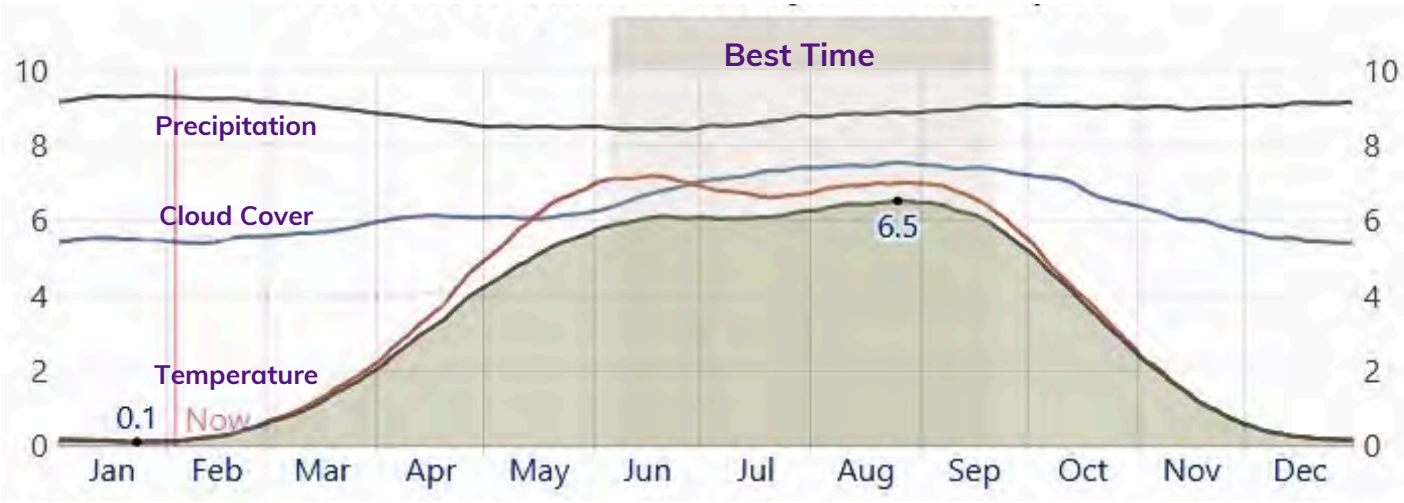


Figure 38. Climate Factors Influencing Tourism & Recreation

Extreme Temperatures

Coles County experiences significant temperature swings, with record highs of 110°F in July 1954 and lows of -27°F in January 1994. Recently, extreme heat days have increased, with heat indices often over 100°F in July and August. In January 2023, Charleston's temperatures were 9.6°F above average, and December 2021 saw temperatures nearly 11.4°F above normal, highlighting recent winter warming trends.

Flooding

Illinois' most significant weather challenge has been the rise in heavy rainfall events since the 1940s, leading to increased river flooding. Mattoon and Charleston have experienced numerous floods throughout the past century, particularly in June 1902, 1998, May 2002, and June 2008, which resulted in state disaster declarations. Notably, Mattoon recorded an impressive monthly rainfall of 14.83 inches in June 1902.

Thunderstorms

Thunderstorms make up a lot of Illinois' yearly rain, especially from April to June, making up half of all storms. Lightning strikes often happen during these storms, with over 11 cloud-to-ground strikes per square mile. Hailstorms are also common, with about 3.3 hail days each year in the southern part of the state.

Tornadoes

Illinois gets tornadoes every year, mostly from April to June. The state usually has four tornado-related deaths each year, but this can fluctuate. Coles County recorded about 34 tornadoes from 1950 to 2022, according to the National Climatic Data Center.

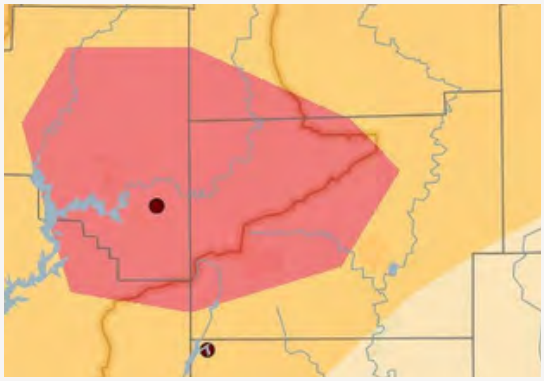


Figure 39. Drought Zones, 2025



Figure 40. Flooding in Mattoon *



Figure 41. Storm System Over Charleston 2023



Figure 42. Tornado Damage, Coles Co.

Climate and Weather-Related Sustainability

Sustainability strategies addressing climate change in Coles County focus on mitigation, reducing emissions, adaptation, and managing climate effects. These efforts enhance resilience, protect resources, and stabilize economic growth and quality of life amid environmental changes.

- Reduce Energy Demand and Emissions
  - Promote energy-efficient buildings, weatherization, and facility upgrades.
  - Explore opportunities related to renewable energy technologies.
  - Encourage clean transportation and EV charging infrastructure.
- Increase Climate Adaptation and Resilience
  - Integrate climate data into infrastructure and planning.
  - Expand green infrastructure, rain gardens, bioswales, and urban tree canopy.
  - Strengthen drought preparedness and water-supply redundancy.
- Protect Agricultural Viability
  - Support soil health and water retention to reduce erosion.
  - Encourage crop diversification and flexible planting schedules.
  - Collaborate with SWCD, USDA, and Illinois Extension on climate-smart agriculture.
- Enhance Community Awareness and Collaboration
  - Work with Eastern Illinois University, Lake Land College, the University of Illinois, and other partners on research.
  - Engage the community through workshops and incentives.
  - Create an online “Sustainability Dashboard” to track energy, emissions, and resilience.



Figure 43. EV Charging Area at Emerald Acres in Mattoon



Figure 44. Solar Project near Ashmore



Figure 45. Guest Garden at SBLHS in Mattoon

Climate considerations shape Coles County’s planning, impacting building standards, emergency preparedness, stormwater management, and agriculture. A sustainability-focused climate response mitigates environmental impact and boosts economic and ecological resilience. This strategy decreases vulnerability, attracts clean energy investments, and fosters a future-ready community. Emergency response details are in the Coles County Hazard Mitigation Plan, with sustainability addressed in each section.

Agriculture & Working Lands

Agriculture forms the economic backbone and primary land use of Coles County, with a strong emphasis on row crops such as corn and soybeans. While smaller sections are allotted for pasture, woodlands, and specialty farming, the region's agricultural landscape is experiencing changes. Recent USDA statistics reveal a moderate trend toward consolidation, with a decline in both the number of farms and total farmland since 2017. Despite this, the market value of production has increased. As of 2022, Coles County is home to 673 farms. However, like many parts of the Midwest, it confronts challenges posed by an aging demographic of operators, which risks farmland being removed from production without proper succession plans.



Figure 46. Number of Farms 1997-2022

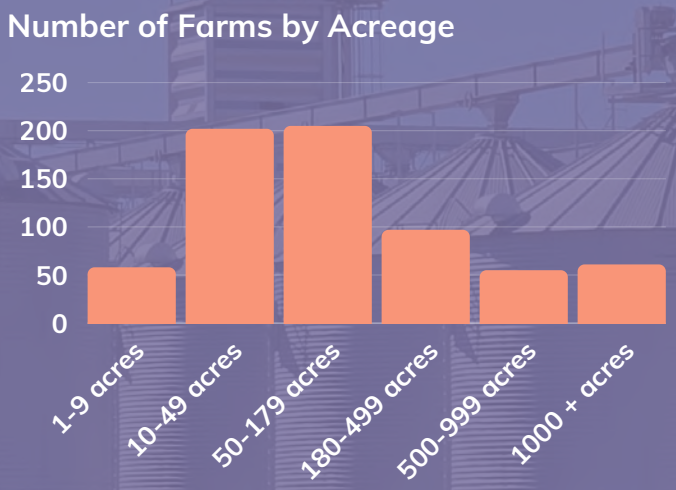


Figure 47. Number of Farms by Acreage as of 2022

Corn and soybeans are the primary crops in land use. According to county land-cover datasets, approximately 128,000 acres are dedicated to corn, while around 111,000 acres are allocated to soybeans, together accounting for the majority of agricultural land.

214,931
Acres of Farm Land

Rising land values raise entry costs for new farmers and may lead to land being converted for non-agricultural uses. Farmers also deal with fluctuating returns and rising input costs, straining smaller operations and encouraging consolidation trends.

1,143
Producers

Conservation & Protected Areas

Conservation and protected lands are essential for maintaining environmental health, economic stability, and quality of life within a county. They safeguard critical natural resources such as clean water, fertile soils, forests, and wildlife habitat, ensuring these assets remain viable for future generations. Protected lands, whether state parks, nature preserves, or privately conserved areas, help manage flooding, improve air and water quality, and support pollinators and biodiversity that benefit local agriculture.

These areas also provide recreational opportunities, enhance property values, and attract tourism and outdoor investment. By maintaining connected natural corridors and resilient ecosystems, conservation lands strengthen the county's capacity to adapt to climate change and sustain the working landscapes that define Coles County's character and economy.

Conservation & Protected Areas in Coles County, IL, as of 2024

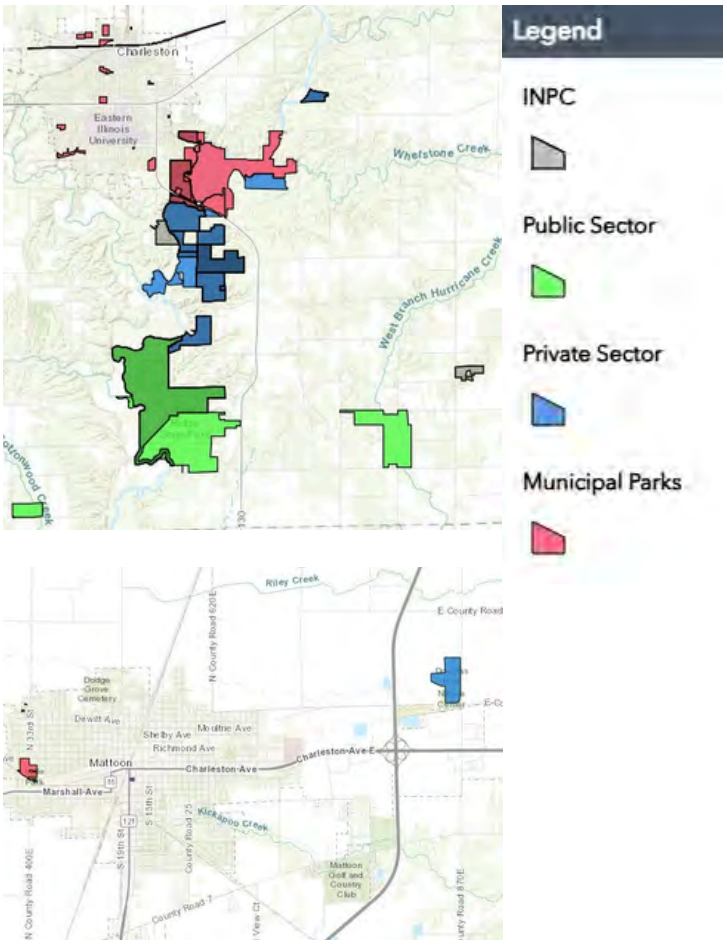


Figure 48. Conservation & Protected Areas in Coles County, 2024

Current Conditions

Coles County's largest conservation areas by acreage include:

- **Fox Ridge State Park** (≈2,064 acres) provides forested habitat, bluff landscapes, and public recreation.
- **Grand Prairie Friends (GPF),** a regional land trust, manages over 1,000 acres at Warbler Ridge Conservation Area in Coles County. GPF has expanded this preserve (including Warbler Crossing along IL-130), restoring floodplain forest, wetlands, and wildlife corridors.
    - GPF conducts restoration (prescribed burns, invasive control, reforestation, wetland creation, and bat habitat installation) and was recognized as "Conservationist of the Year" by the Coles Soil & Water Conservation Department (SWCD).
- **Capacity:** Local partners (Coles County SWCD, National Resource Conservation Service, Illinois Department of Natural Resources, University of Illinois Extension, and GPF) provide strong technical and stewardship capacity.

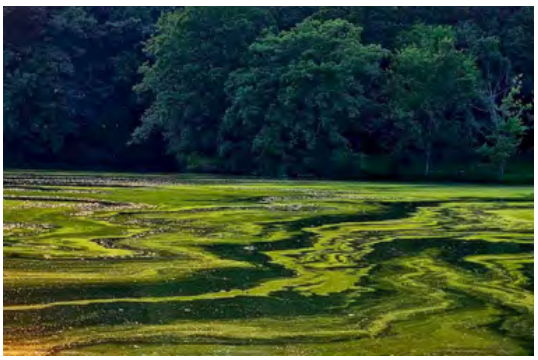


Figure 49. Lake Mattoon Algae Bloom, 2025



Figure 50. Development of Southeast Mattoon



Figure 51. Embarras River Erosion



Figure 52. Lake Mattoon

While the Embarras River is rich in natural, ecological, and cultural value, it faces several challenges:

- **Water Quality & Nutrient Pollution**
  - The watershed is a priority area for phosphorus reduction under the Illinois Nutrient Loss Reduction Strategy.
  - Non-point source pollution (runoff from agriculture, fertilizer, sediment) is a major source.
- **Sediment and Erosion**
  - Streambank erosion and sediment delivery into the river degrade habitat, reduce water clarity, and deposit sediment downstream.
- **Invasive Species:**
  - Non-native plants like bush honeysuckle, garlic mustard, and reed canary grass push out native plants.
- **Flooding and Land Use Pressure**
  - Portions of the watershed see flooding, especially during heavy rain. Land use (deforestation of riverbanks, impervious surfaces, poorly designed stormwater runoff) worsens flood peaks.
  - Urban expansion, agricultural intensification, and loss of riparian buffers increase flood risk and reduce ecosystem services.
  - Farming and city growth split natural areas, causing habitat fragmentation, make it hard for wildlife to move around.

Conservation Strategies and Opportunities

The natural resources and environment inform land-use policy, guiding where development should be clustered to protect sensitive areas, where restoration projects may enhance ecosystem services, and how recreational and educational opportunities can be expanded through conservation.

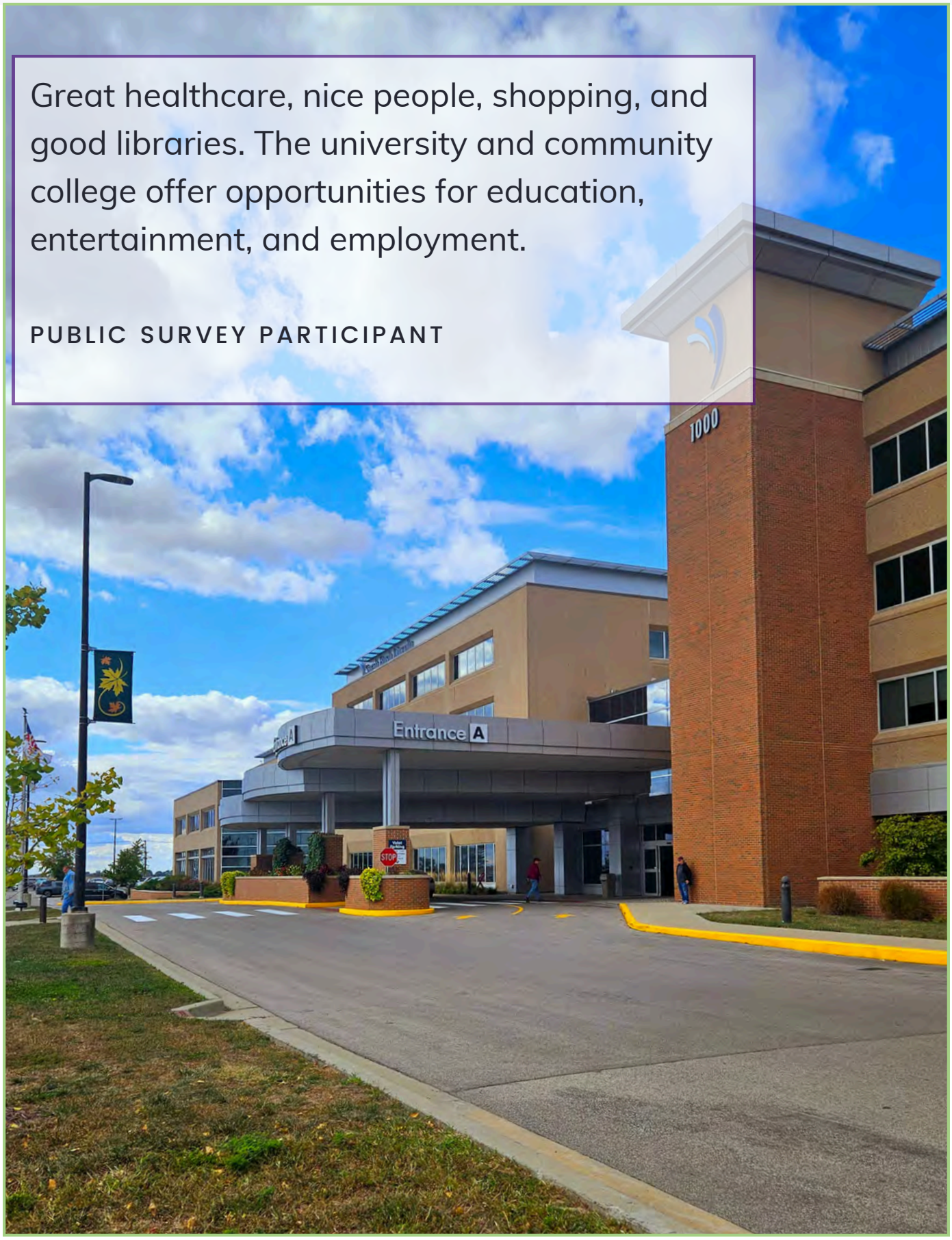
To protect and enhance the biodiversity of Coles County, several strategies and initiatives can be implemented:

- **Restoration Projects:** Encourage the restoration of native habitats by planting indigenous species and removing invasive plants, particularly in riparian zones and prairies.
- **Protect and Connect Natural Areas:** Support land conservation and voluntary easements to link fragmented habitats, creating wildlife corridors, especially along the Embarras River and its tributaries, allowing for safe wildlife movement and genetic exchange.
- **Expand Pollinator Habitat:** Encourage prairie plantings, pollinator strips, and roadside/native plant programs to benefit both biodiversity and agriculture.
- **Policy and Planning:** Collaborate with local government and organizations to integrate biodiversity considerations into land use planning and zoning regulations.
- **Research and Monitoring:** Support scientific research and monitoring to track the health of ecosystems and the effectiveness of conservation efforts, adapting strategies as needed based on findings.
- **Leverage Partnerships:** Collaborate with state agencies, municipalities, and nonprofit organizations such as Grand Prairie Friends and Douglas-Hart Nature Center to enhance biodiversity efforts.
- **Promote Education and Recreation:** Expand environmental education, birding, and ecotourism opportunities that connect residents to local biodiversity. Engage local communities through educational programs and volunteer opportunities to foster a sense of stewardship and awareness of local biodiversity.
- **Integrate Biodiversity into Land Use Planning:** Require consideration of sensitive habitats and wildlife corridors in development reviews and infrastructure planning.

With these efforts, Coles County can not only preserve its rich biodiversity but also enhance the ecological resilience and quality of life for its residents, ensuring a sustainable future for generations to come.

Great healthcare, nice people, shopping, and good libraries. The university and community college offer opportunities for education, entertainment, and employment.

PUBLIC SURVEY PARTICIPANT



Infrastructure

Coles County works like a network of connected habitats. Each part of its built environment, from the water plant to the hospital, from roads to libraries and community centers, supports and depends on the others. Together, they create an ecosystem that allows towns, farms, and neighborhoods to thrive.

Infrastructure acts like the soil and roots of this living system. It moves resources, supports growth, and links the many spaces where people live, work, and gather. When one part of this system struggles, a road in need of repair, a park that is neglected, or a library that is underused, the effects spread to other parts. Careful planning keeps every part of this county ecosystem strong, connected, and resilient.

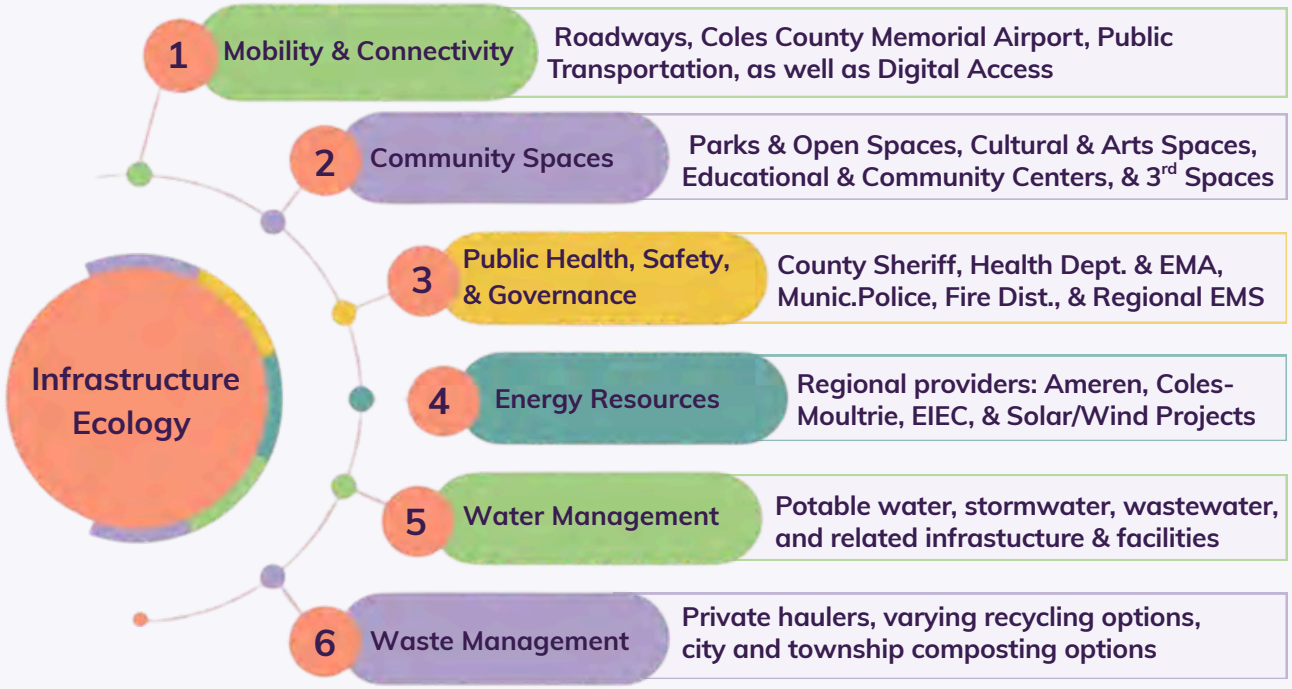


Figure 53. Infrastructure Ecology Diagram

The diagram illustrates how mobility, connectivity, community spaces, public safety, energy, utilities, water, and waste management are organized within this infrastructure ecology. These areas interact dynamically to ensure seamless operation in Coles County, emphasizing collaboration and integration. Public transportation efficiency affects access to community spaces, while effective water management supports health and sustainability. Viewing these components as a connected system helps anticipate challenges and innovate solutions. Adaptability and resilience are crucial as the county plans for growth. By embracing renewable energy, upgrading digital access, and enhancing green spaces, Coles County aims to foster a thriving, sustainable future.

Mobility & Connectivity

Mobility and connectivity play a crucial role in the development of Coles County. The county's transportation infrastructure has evolved significantly since the construction of its first paved road in 1912, which connected Charleston to Mattoon. Today, an extensive network of roadways ensures efficient movement across the county, facilitating economic growth and improving residents' quality of life.

Coles County Cooridors

These networks are built around a small set of regional corridors that serve both local circulation and longer-distance travel. These corridors support commuters, freight, intercity passenger rail, and local transit; they shape access to major employers and regional markets and therefore are fundamental to county connectivity, safety, and economic competitiveness.

Key corridors include:

- Interstate 57 and its IL-16 interchange,
- IL-16 (Mattoon–Charleston),
- U.S. Route 45,
- Illinois routes (IL-121, IL-130, IL-49) that provide intra-county links.
- Rail (CN/Amtrak)
- Coles County Memorial Airport

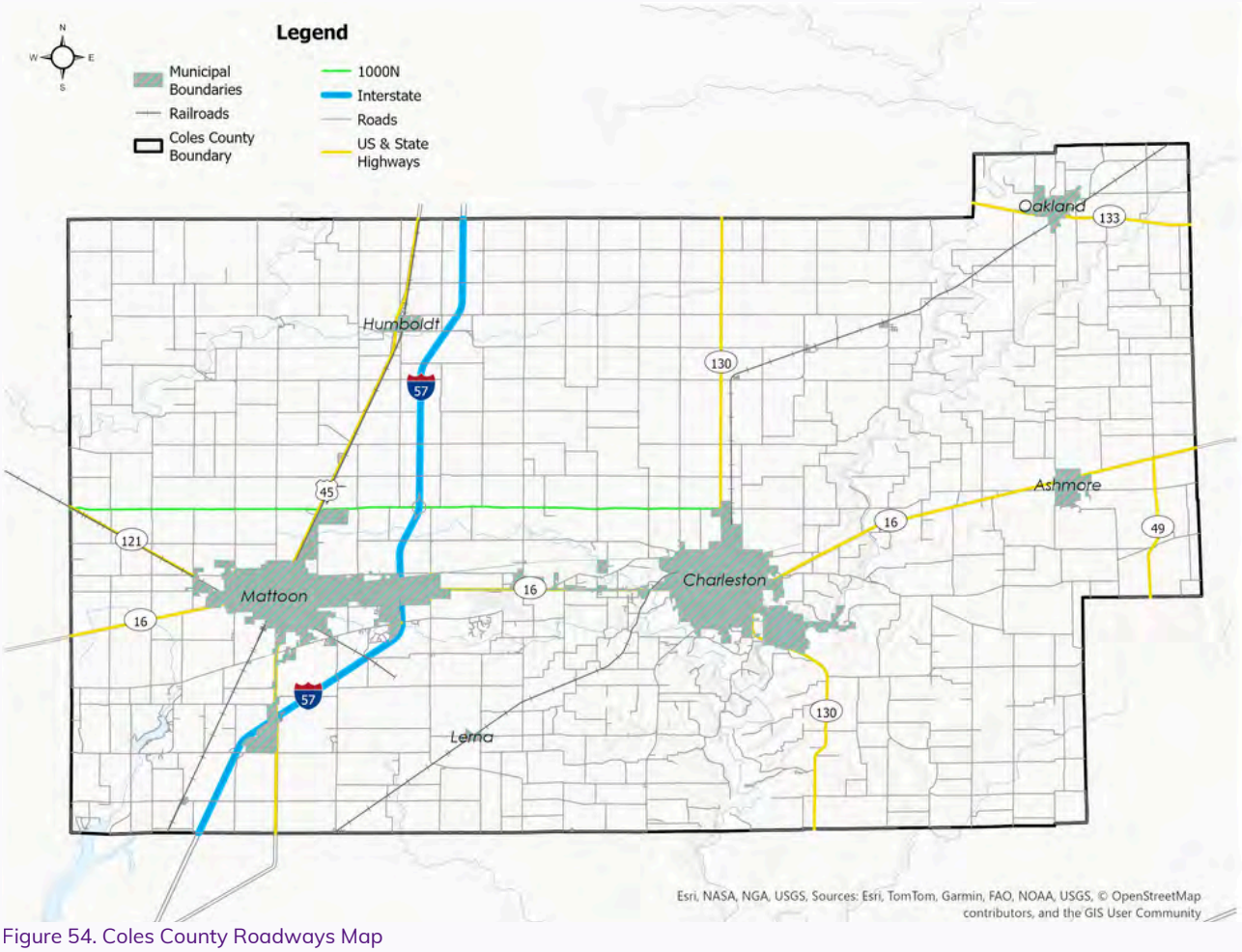


Figure 54. Coles County Roadways Map

NORTH–SOUTH CORRIDORS

Illinois Route 130

- Connects Charleston, Mattoon, and nearby areas, aiding commuters and linking residential, agricultural, and employment zones.
- Key for Charleston-Mattoon connectivity and Coles County commuting.
- Enhancements: rural intersection safety, urban turn lanes, bicycle paths.

Illinois Route 121 (IL-121)

- Runs north–south through the western portion of Coles County, serving as an alternative route parallel to US-45 and IL-130.
- Links rural areas with Mattoon and Charleston, supporting local commuting and agricultural traffic.
- Provides access to smaller communities and regional business nodes, functioning as a relief corridor for US-45 and I-57 during congestion or incidents.
- Enhancements: Pavement rehabilitation, shoulder widening for safety, intersection improvements at key rural junctions, and signage enhancements for commuter and freight movement.

U.S. Route 45

- Main north–south route linking Mattoon to Champaign-Urbana and Effingham.
- Supports heavy traffic, freight, and commuting, serving major employers.
- Enhancements: Mattoon commercial capacity, pedestrian paths, gateway beautification.

Interstate 57

- Primary regional corridor for long-distance travel and freight, vital for county mobility.
- Facilitates workforce movement and industrial growth.
- Enhancements: interchange modernization, safety improvements, EV charging hubs.

EAST–WEST CORRIDORS

Illinois Route 16

- Connects Charleston and Mattoon, serving as the main east–west commuter route.
- Links city centers and university traffic.
- Enhancements: streetscape, flow management, rural-urban safety upgrades.

Commuting Trends

Coles County serves as a central hub for workers from six surrounding counties, with more people commuting into it than to other nearby areas. This influx significantly affects local transportation networks and the county's comprehensive planning efforts. Key employers attract numerous workers to Coles County daily, while many residents commute outward to neighboring counties like Douglas, Moultrie, Cumberland, Clark, Edgar, Effingham, Macon, Champaign, and Shelby. Understanding these commuting patterns is critical for Coles County's comprehensive plan, as it must ensure that development strategies effectively support the mobility needs of both the incoming workforce and those commuting elsewhere. Addressing these patterns will help enhance transportation efficiency and maintain a high quality of life for residents.

Transportation Implications

- Roadway Improvements: Target safety and capacity improvements on high-volume corridors and intersections.
- Multimodal Options: Expand park-and-ride facilities, Dial-A-Ride service, and transit connectivity to key employment centers.
- Active Transportation: Enhance sidewalks, bike lanes, and shared-use paths to support commuting within urban centers, particularly Mattoon and Charleston.
- Regional Coordination: Collaborate with IDOT and surrounding counties to address commuter flows and reduce congestion.

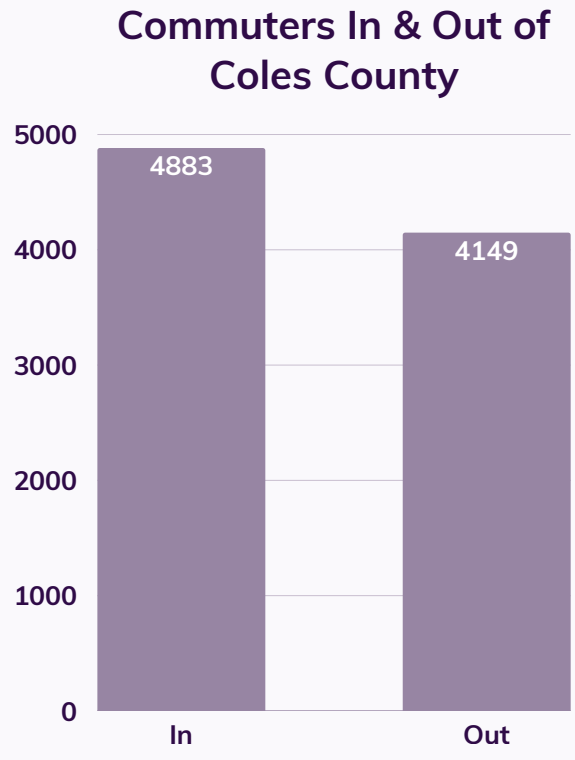


Figure 55. Coles County Commuters

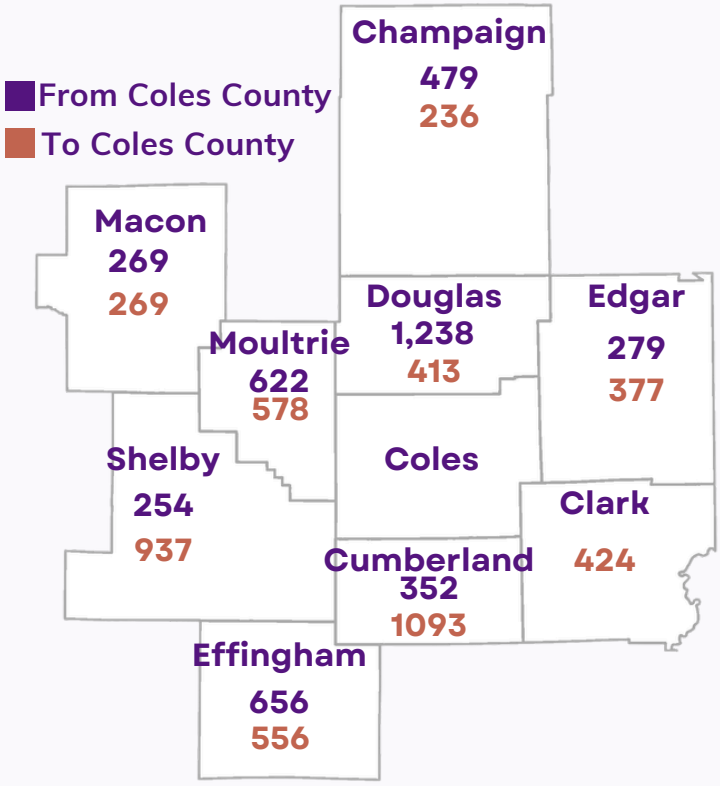


Figure 56. Coles County Commuters Area Map

Transportation Systems

Airport

Coles County Memorial Airport (MTO) serves Mattoon, Charleston, and the surrounding region. Located between the two cities, it supports business, education, emergency response, and community activities. Managed by the Coles County Airport Authority, MTO has two main paved runways (6,501 ft and 5,799 ft) and a small turf runway. It holds FAA Part 139 certification and achieved a perfect score in its 2023 FAA inspection. Classified as a General Aviation airport, it offers various services, including fueling, hangaring, parking, aircraft rental, maintenance, and flight instruction.

The Airport: A Key Regional Business Gateway

The airport serves as a crucial gateway for regional business, enabling efficient travel to and from Coles County. MTO supports air cargo and charter flights, offering logistical flexibility vital for business retention and recruitment. Local industries like manufacturing, education, logistics, and healthcare gain significantly from the airport's proximity to an all-weather airfield with jet-capable runways.

Recent Developments

Recent private investments, such as Rural King's new aviation hangar, underscore the airport's growing role as a business and logistics hub. Future hangar and aviation service expansions could further boost Coles County's appeal to high-skill industries reliant on air access.



Figure 57. Rural King Hanger Design Proposal at Coles County Memorial Airport

This new hangar will enhance aviation operations, increasing flexibility and reducing travel time, allowing associates more field and home time. This investment benefits both Rural King and Coles County by upgrading infrastructure at Coles County Memorial Airport, fostering growth and development.

RAIL ACCESS

The sole Amtrak station in Coles County is situated in Mattoon, on the county's western side. This station is serviced by the City of New Orleans and Illini/Saluki trains, offering connections to popular destinations such as Chicago, New Orleans, and Carbondale. These trains operate daily, providing a comfortable and convenient means of travel throughout the Midwest and beyond. The station itself is a historic treasure, showcasing the region's rich heritage. Constructed in the early 20th century, it has been preserved to retain its original charm while incorporating modern amenities.

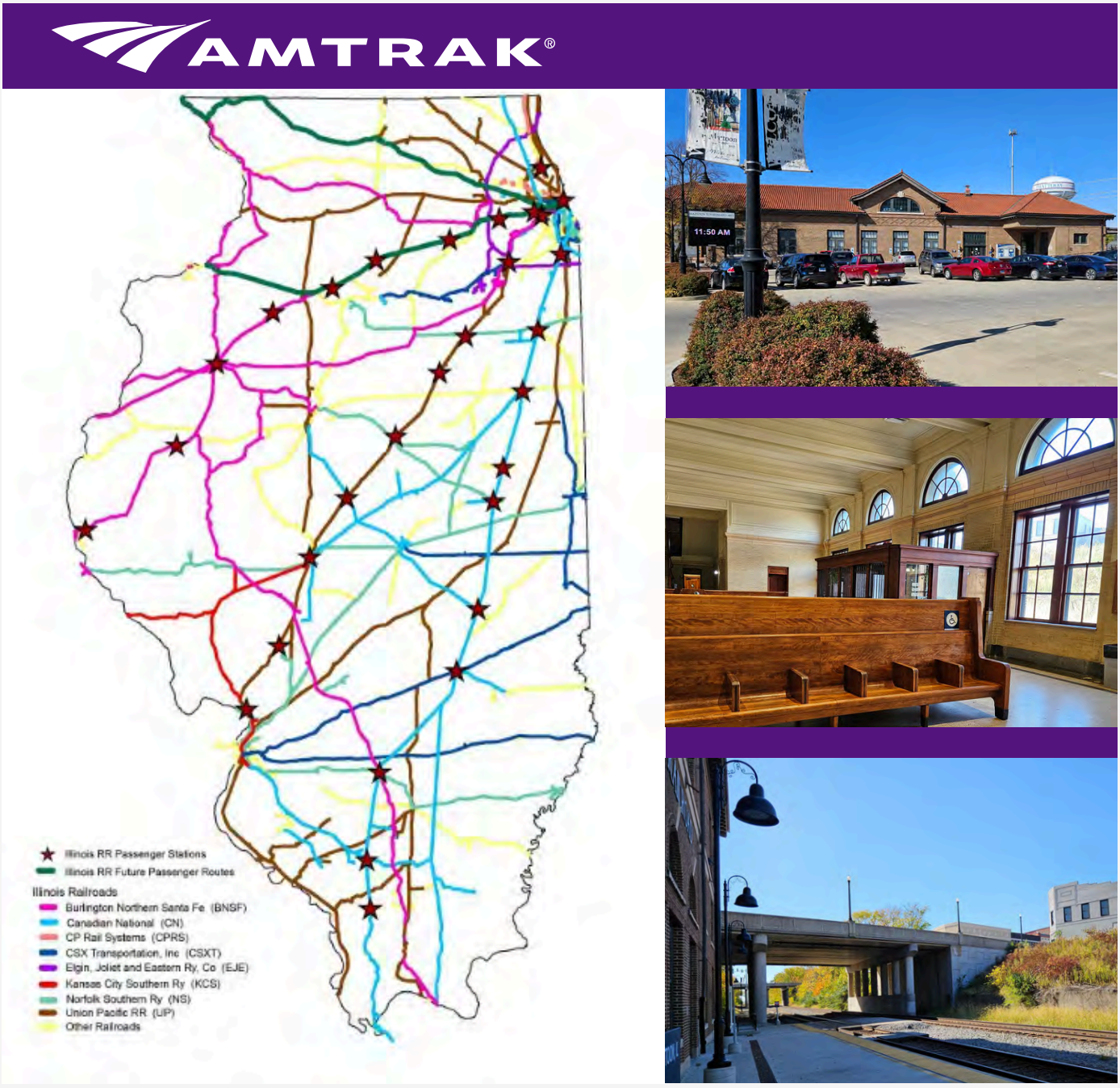


Figure 58. IDOT Rail System Map & the Mattoon Train Station

Amtrak and Canadian National Railroad Operations in the Region

Amtrak operates along the primary Canadian National line in this area, with access provided at the Mattoon Train Depot. The “City of New Orleans” service makes two daily stops at Mattoon: once during its southbound journey to New Orleans and again on its northbound route to Chicago. Additionally, the “Illini Service” runs daily between Chicago and Carbondale. A considerable number of students from Southern Illinois University (SIU), the University of Illinois (Urbana-Champaign), and Eastern Illinois University frequently use this line for trips home and other visits.



Figure 95. CN Rail System

Canadian National Railroad Overview

The Canadian National Railroad, which merged with the former Illinois Central Railroad, operates two main lines in our region. One line begins in Canada and extends all the way to New Orleans, serving as a crucial route for agriculture and industry as it passes through Mattoon. This line is equipped with sidings and spurs that support local businesses and factories.

The second line runs from Peoria/Decatur to Mattoon, where it connects with the main Canadian National line. Known as the Decatur & Eastern Illinois Railroad (DEIR), it travels through Oakland and Charleston, primarily transporting grain, lumber, and plastic. Notable customers of the DEIR include:

- **ADM**
- **Cargill**
- **Chicago Railcar Services**
- **Crop Production Services**
- **Illinois Tool Works**
- **Kirchner Lumber**
- **Lester Building**
- **ODW**
- **TEM**

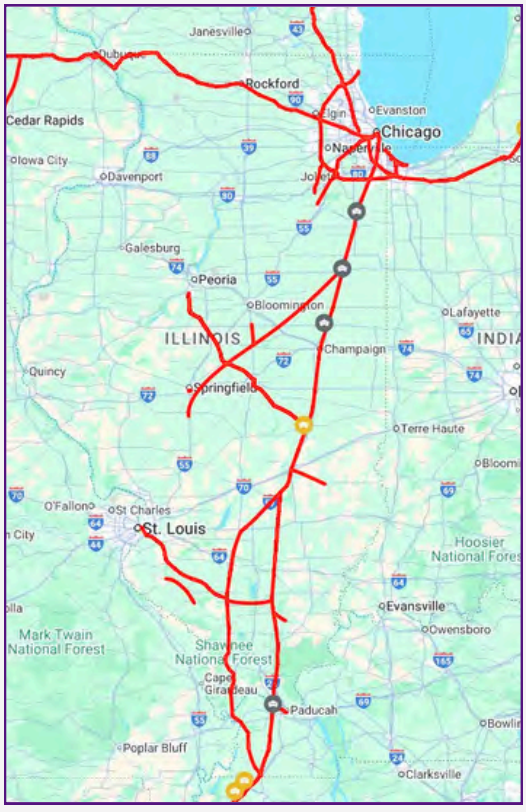


Figure 60. CN Rail Stations & Terminals in Illinois

PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

Coles County benefits from funding through the Downstate Operating Assistance Program from the Illinois Department of Transportation, along with a 5311 grant from the Federal Department of Transportation. Each year, the county selects an operator to deliver services to the community, and since its inception, Dial-A-Ride (DAR) has been the chosen provider, offering accessible public transportation to residents, including those with disabilities.

The program includes accessible buses that cater to on-demand services and features two deviated zipline routes. Services are available from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m., Monday through Friday. The map below highlights DAR's East and West routes.

Additional public transportation options in the area, shown in the "Transportation Supports" section map, include Rides Mass Transit, CIPT, CCARTs, ECPT, and PIATTRAN. For other IDOT-funded transportation providers, rides must either begin or end within the county where they hold a contract.

West Coles County Zipline Route

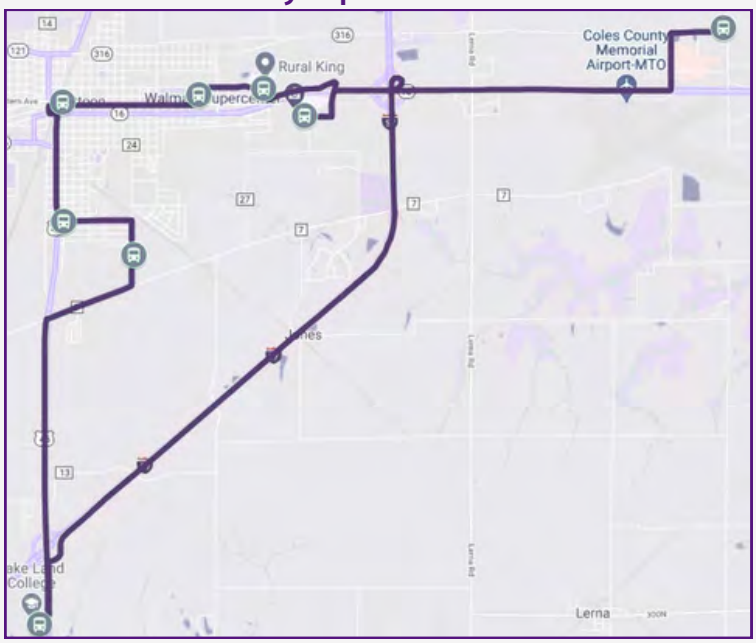


Figure 61. Mattoon, IL DAR Zipline Route



Figure 62. DAR Vehicle at Cross County Mall Stop

East Coles County Zipline Route

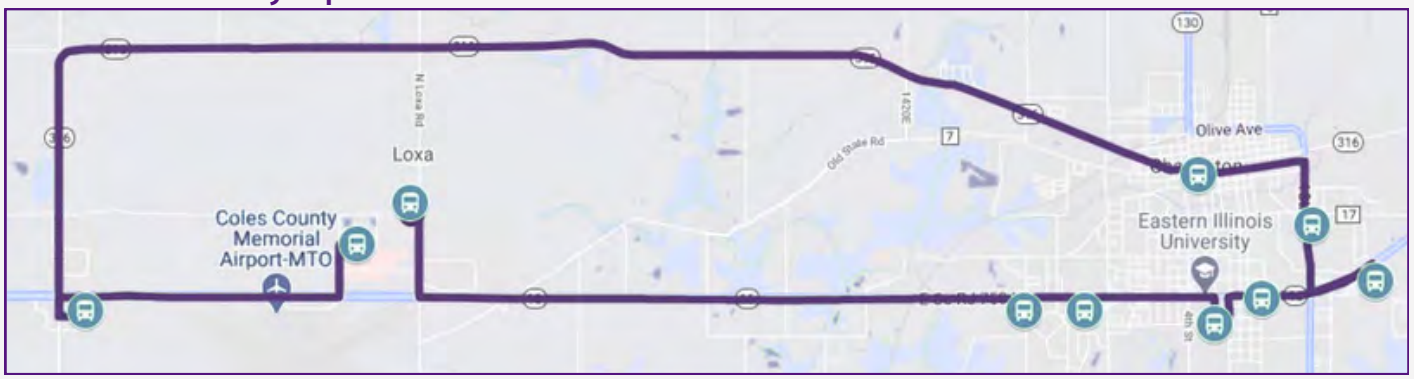


Figure 63. Charleston, IL DAR Zipline Route

EIU'S PANTHER SHUTTLE

Designed for Eastern Illinois University students, operating Monday to Sunday around Charleston. From Monday to Friday, it offers fixed routes from 7:30 AM to 8:50 PM and point-to-point service from 7:40 AM to 2:50 PM. On weekends, fixed routes run from 3 to 9 PM. Special trips to the Mattoon Amtrak station are available at the start and end of holiday and spring breaks, aligning with Amtrak's schedule. Students must register in advance for these trips due to limited capacity. To meet the growing need for direct trips, the Panther Shuttle has begun offering a limited point-to-point service to approved locations that students can reserve. This service is available from 7:40 am - 2:50 pm, Monday through Friday.

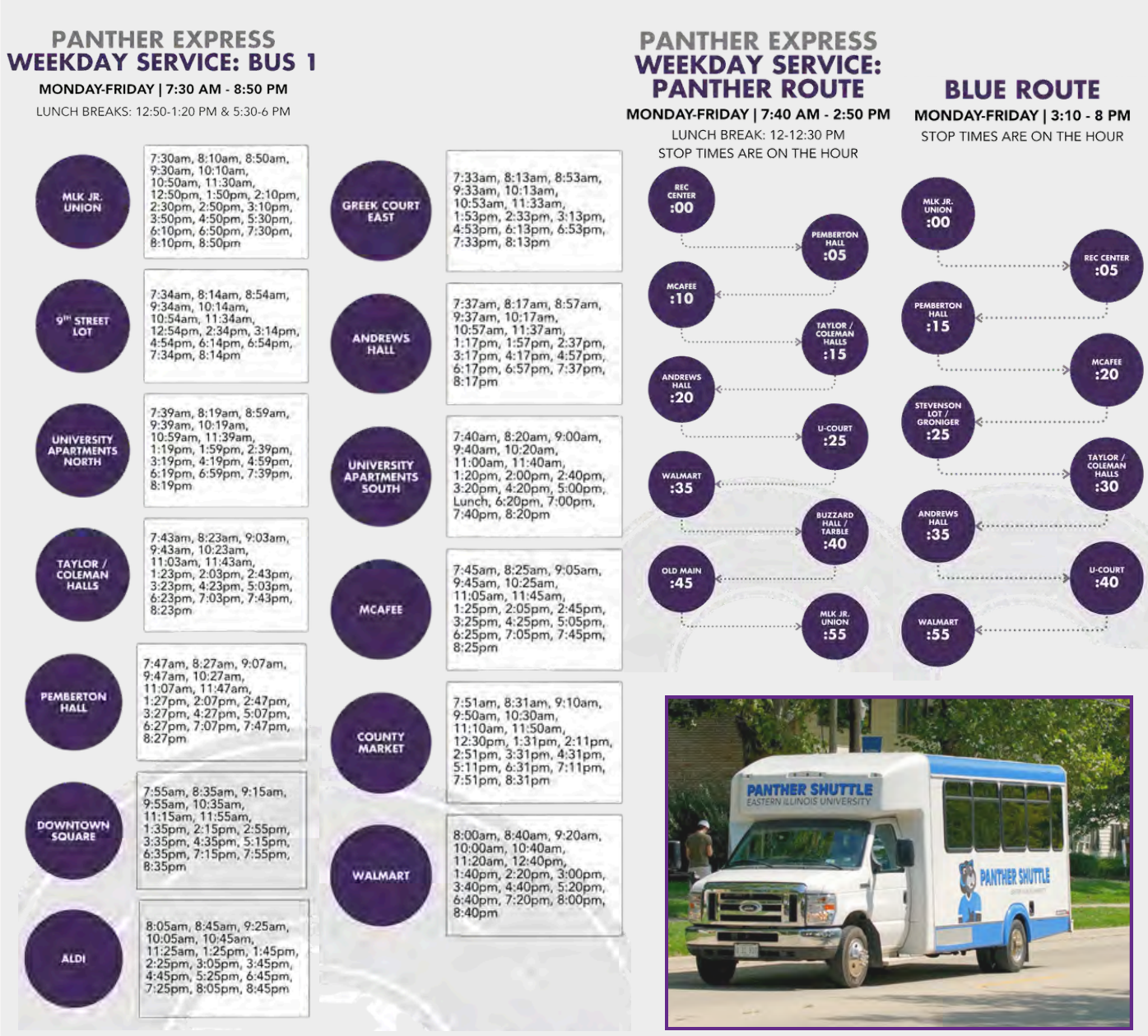


Figure 64. Panther Shuttle Routes, Stops, & Hours

OTHER LOCAL TRANSPORTATION SERVICES

Other services consist of Smart Medical Transport, Lickety Split Ridezz, A Ride Above, and Orange is the New Ride. Each of these services operates independently. Smart Medical Transport exclusively caters to clients through Medicaid, Medicare, or insurance providers, focusing solely on medical-related travel. This includes transporting individuals to metropolitan hospitals and airports.



Figure 65. Other Transportation Services

Public Transportation Supports

The Region 8 Human Service Transportation Plan (HSTP) is a community-based plan designed to provide public and specialized transportation services for individuals with disabilities, older adults, and those with limited incomes. It includes:

- Recognizing transportation needs, gaps, and obstacles
- Detailing tactics to enhance transportation coordination to meet those needs effectively
- Ranking transportation projects based on priority.

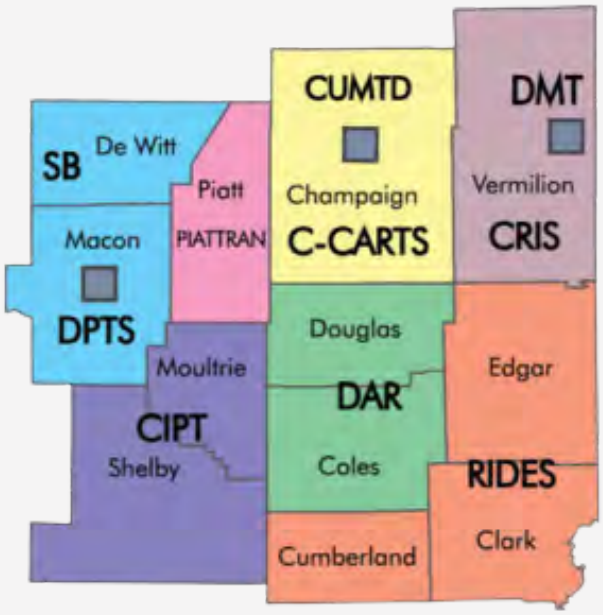


Figure 66. HSTP Region Map



Figure 67. IDOT Provider Map

Digital, Cellular, & Telecommunications

The internet is the digital "mycelial network" of Coles County's modern ecosystem, linking homes, businesses, schools, and institutions across rural and urban landscapes; a hidden but vital web of connections transmitting information and resources between every part of the system. Reliable, high-speed internet and cellular service are no longer optional amenities but critical infrastructure that supports economic growth, education, healthcare, and civic engagement. Telecommunications network includes a blend of fiber-optic lines, fixed wireless systems, cellular towers, and legacy copper-based service areas. These elements together create the digital habitat that sustains modern life.

Reliable internet and cellular service are essential components of modern mobility and connectivity. As reliance on digital tools continues to increase, ensuring equitable broadband and cellular coverage across the county is as important as maintaining the physical transportation network.

Digital infrastructure supports and enhances:

- **Economic mobility, by supporting remote work and business development**
- **Educational access, particularly for students in rural or remote areas**
- **Telehealth and mental health services, reducing transportation barriers**
- **Agricultural innovation, including GPS-guided equipment and real-time crop data**
- **Transportation planning, through data collection and communication tools**

As digital technologies continue to integrate with infrastructure, the county's ability to maintain and stay up-to-date will be critical to long-term mobility.



Figure 68. Connectivity in Rural IL Graphic

AVAILABILITY AND ACCESS

While the majority of residents in Charleston and Mattoon have access to broadband service (defined by the FCC as 100 Mbps download / 20 Mbps upload), digital divides persist in outlying rural areas where infrastructure investment has lagged.

- **Coverage gaps** remain in the western and southeastern parts of the county, where topography, low population density, and distance from fiber backbones limit service options.
- **Fixed wireless** providers have improved rural connectivity, but speeds and reliability can fluctuate due to weather and signal distance.
- **Affordability and digital literacy** continue to affect broadband adoption rates, particularly for low-income and elderly households.

Multiple groups, including Mattoon in Motion, Coles County Regional Planning and Development Commission (CCRPDC), Eastern Illinois University, and other local partners, have explored state and federal programs to expand high-speed internet coverage, including Connect Illinois, BEAD (Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment) grants, and USDA ReConnect funding. These groups have assisted in collecting information about residential and anchor institution broadband access and speed.



Figure 69. Broadband Survey Graphic

CURRENT CONDITIONS

Broadband Availability

Coles County's urban centers—Mattoon and Charleston—have comparatively robust broadband availability with multiple providers offering cable, DSL, and fiber services. However, access is less consistent in rural portions of the county, where broadband speeds may not meet FCC benchmarks for high-speed service, particularly for households located at the edges of municipal boundaries or along low-density roadways.

Rural residents often rely on fixed wireless or satellite connections, which can be affected by weather conditions, terrain, or line-of-sight limitations. This imbalance creates disparities in digital access that influence economic opportunity, telecommuting potential, student learning, and home-based business development.

Cellular Coverage

Cellular coverage across Coles County is generally reliable along major transportation corridors—such as I-57, US-45, IL-16, IL-121, and IL-130—but becomes less consistent in sparsely populated areas. Geographic factors such as terrain and tree canopy, combined with the spacing of cell towers, can result in dropped calls or limited data speeds in rural locations.

Coverage gaps affect:

- Emergency response and 911 call reliability
- Precision agriculture technologies
- Navigation for commuters and freight traffic
- Remote work and mobile business operations

Infrastructure Condition

Infrastructure in Coles County is modernizing rapidly in urban areas, but many rural segments still rely on aging copper lines or limited wireless capacity. Several fiber expansion projects have been completed or are planned along major transportation corridors, including:

- **U.S. Route 45 and Illinois Route 16** corridors between Charleston and Mattoon
- **I-57 fiber trunk lines** connecting Coles County to regional data centers and metropolitan hubs
- **New tower construction** by private carriers and broadband cooperatives to enhance fixed wireless reach

Continued coordination with utility providers, IDOT, and the Illinois Office of Broadband is vital to ensure that new development areas have "dig once" policies and shared conduit infrastructure.

TELECOMMUNICATIONS SERVICES

Wired Broadband

- Fidium/Consolidated Communications: fiber where available/VoIP/DSL.
- Frontier Communications: DSL/VoIP and some fiber where available.
- Mediacom: cable broadband and TV.
- Conxxus: fiber (where available) and other services.

Fixed Wireless & Wireless Broadband

- Rise Broadband: fixed wireless
- WATCH Communications: fixed wireless.
- Nextlink: fixed wireless.
- Earthlink: fixed wireless broadband.
- Community Fiber Solutions: fixed wireless.
- LTD Broadband: fixed wireless.
- T-Mobile Home Internet: LTE/5G home broadband.
- Verizon Fixed Wireless: LTE/5G wireless broadband.
- AT&T Fixed Wireless: wireless broadband.
- Shawnee Communications: limited fixed wireless.

Satellite Broadband

- Starlink: next-gen satellite.
- HughesNet: traditional satellite.
- Viasat: traditional satellite.

Mobile Cell Service

- Verizon: cellular (4G/5G).
- AT&T: cellular (4G/5G).
- T-Mobile: cellular (4G/5G).
- U.S. Cellular: mobile coverage in rural areas.

Service Type	Typical Availability in Coles County
Fiber (Gigabit)	Urban & near-fiber buildouts (Fidium)
Cable Broadband	Urban & suburban (Mediacom)
DSL / Traditional Phone	Some older wired areas (Frontier)
Fixed Wireless Broadband	Countywide pockets (Rise, WATCH, Nextlink, etc.)
Mobile Home Internet (LTE/5G)	Broad (T-Mobile, Verizon, AT&T)
Cellular (Voice/Data)	Very broad (major carriers)
Satellite Internet	Everywhere (Starlink/HughesNet/Viasat)

Table 6. Telecommunication Service Providers

KEY CHALLENGES

- **Rural broadband gaps**: Inadequate speeds or service limitations in portions of rural Coles County.
- **Provider variability:** Coverage differs widely depending on provider footprint and network investment patterns.
- **Affordability:** Some households may have access to broadband but lack affordable service options.
- **Infrastructure limitations:** Aging lines, limited fiber networks in certain areas, and sparse cell tower distribution.
- **Digital literacy and adoption:** Some residents may not have the training or technology needed to take advantage of available digital tools.

OPPORTUNITIES AND STRATEGIES

Expand Rural Broadband Infrastructure

- Partner with service providers to extend fiber and wireless networks.
- Seek state and federal funding, like USDA ReConnect.
- Collaborate with townships and planning agencies to identify underserved areas.

Improve Cellular Service Coverage

- Collaborate with carriers to address coverage gaps and prioritize tower placement in key areas.
- Promote equipment co-location to reduce costs and minimize visual impact.
- Explore small-cell technology for urban areas.

Integrate Digital Access Into Mobility Planning

- Consider broadband and cellular reliability in transportation projects.
- Focus on digital connectivity in major corridors for freight and emergency services.
- Work with transit providers to enhance digital scheduling tools.

Strengthen Community Digital Capacity

- Support digital literacy programs via libraries, schools, and community partners.
- Collaborate with employers and institutions to expand digital resources.
- Back initiatives to improve affordability and access to devices for low-income families.

Monitor Emerging Technologies

- Keep track of connected and autonomous vehicle developments to ensure infrastructure support.
- Assess smart sensors, traffic management tools, and data-sharing platforms.

CONNECTIVITY INITIATIVES & SUPPORTS

Initiative	Focus	Benefits
Region 8 HSTP	Human service transit coordination	Better access for vulnerable populations
Coles County Transportation Plan	Local mobility & infrastructure	Guides county priorities
Rebuild Illinois	Statewide roads/transit investments	Broader infrastructure funding
Next Move Illinois	Statewide public transit planning	Long-term vision for transit systems
EIU Rural School Initiative's Southeast Broadband REACY Project	Multi-county Broadband access support	Connects stakeholders, provides regional support and advocacy
Coles Together advocacy	Local infrastructure support	Energy & connectivity improvements
Enterprise Zone planning	Economic & housing connectivity	Supports economic and residential-oriented development

Table 7. Area Connectivity Initiatives and Support



I like the very clear intent to improve our outdoor recreation options. The new field created in Charleston, the trails around the lake, the trail connecting cities, etc. These are fantastic efforts and have made my life here nicer.

PUBLIC SURVEY PARTICIPANT

Figure 70. Linder Sports Complex, Charleston, IL

Community Spaces

A strong countywide network of community spaces functions much like a balanced environmental system: different environments support different forms of activity and interaction, and the variety of these spaces helps the whole system remain healthy, resilient, and inclusive. Each type of space provides distinct opportunities for connection, learning, recreation, and well-being, much like different habitats in nature support different kinds of life. This section will review the following:

Parks and Open Spaces
These areas offer shared environments for recreation, nature access, play, and quiet retreats, enhancing residents' physical and mental well-being. They are versatile spaces for informal gatherings across all ages.

- **Community Gardens and Small-Scale Green Spaces:** These smaller areas foster hands-on participation, stewardship, and neighborhood interaction, helping residents collaborate, build trust, and strengthen local social networks.
- **Trails, Sidewalk Networks, and Greenways:** These linear spaces link neighborhoods, parks, schools, and commercial areas, promoting active transportation and casual social contact, and enhancing community connectivity.



Figure 71. Charleston Food Forest

Cultural and Arts Spaces
Theaters, studios, exhibition spaces, and community arts venues provide environments for creativity, cultural expression, and shared experiences. These spaces help maintain cultural diversity and give residents opportunities to participate in and shape the county's identity.

Community Centers, Schools, Libraries, and Indoor Facilities
These spaces provide structured, reliable environments for learning, social services, youth activities, recreation, and public meetings. They are essential for community stability and offer year-round options for engagement regardless of weather or season.

Plazas, Town Squares, Main Streets, and Gathering Nodes
These are the central, open points where people naturally cross paths, during events, markets, or day-to-day activities. They serve as important civic environments that help maintain a sense of shared identity and community visibility.

Informal Social Spaces or "Third Spaces"
These are the cafes, diners, barbershops, salons, local restaurants, breweries, bookstores, maker spaces, game shops, and community cafés. They fill an important gap between home and work by offering low-pressure, accessible settings for everyday social interaction.

Parks & Open Spaces

Parks, trails, and open spaces form the backbone of Coles County's green infrastructure, an interconnected system of landscapes that support both community vitality and ecological health. These areas function as habitat corridors, watershed protectors, and natural buffers while offering residents places for recreation, learning, and renewal.

State and municipal parks, conservation lands, and recreational areas work together as a countywide mosaic of prairies, forests, wetlands, and tree-lined neighborhoods. This network sustains biodiversity, supports pollinator movement, protects soil and water resources, and maintains the ecological connections that wildlife depend on across both urban and rural settings.

At the same time, these spaces enhance community well-being by providing accessible recreation, strengthening public health, supporting local tourism, and fostering opportunities for social connection. Integrated with the regional trail and open-space system, they offer meaningful experiences with the natural environment while reinforcing a culture of stewardship throughout the county.

State Parks, Natural & Conservation Areas

Fox Ridge State Park (IDNR)

- Acreage: ~2,000 acres
- Features: Forested ridges, campgrounds, scenic overlooks, multi-use trails, and educational programs

Warbler Ridge Conservation Area & Bluff (Grand Prairie Friends)

- Acreage: ~1,000 acres (and growing through restoration and conservation easements)
- Features: 11+ miles of trails, restored prairie, forest, and savanna habitats, interpretive signage
- Warbler Bend
  - Acreage: ~110 acres

Douglas Hart Nature Center

- Acreage: ~70 acres
- Features: botanical garden and arboretum, walking trails, pollinator gardens, and environmental education center
- The Whiteside Garden
  - Acreage: ~5 acres
  - Features: Native prairie and wetlands, walking trails, pollinator gardens, education center

Lincoln Prairie Grass Trail

- Acreage: ~13.4 acres
- Features: a paved rail-trail connecting Mattoon and Charleston, offering a continuous corridor for biking, walking, jogging, and non-motorized recreation

Municipal Parks, Natural & Conservation Areas

Coles County's parks, recreation facilities, and natural areas form an interconnected system that supports community wellness, outdoor recreation, and long-term environmental stewardship.

Municipal park systems in Charleston and Mattoon provide a range of neighborhood and community spaces, including developed parks, sports complexes, youth athletic fields, and specialty facilities that serve residents of all ages. These amenities are anchored by major water resources, including Lake Charleston, Lake Mattoon, and Lake Paradise, which together offer extensive opportunities for boating, fishing, camping, and shoreline recreation while serving as important ecological assets.

Smaller communities, including Oakland, contribute to this network through locally focused recreation amenities such as community swimming facilities, playgrounds, picnic areas, and accessible open spaces that reinforce rural character and ensure residents have nearby opportunities for outdoor activity and social gathering.

Complementing these developed facilities, municipal conservation lands such as the Woodyard Conservation Area and Lafferty Nature Study Area protect sensitive habitats, native landscapes, and watershed resources while providing opportunities for nature observation and low-impact recreation.

Collectively, this integrated system balances active recreation with habitat preservation, promoting healthy lifestyles, environmental resilience, and a strong sense of place consistent with the County's long-term vision for sustainable community development.

By preserving natural landscapes and coordinating with regional partners, we aim to strengthen shared assets, protect resources, and promote lifelong recreation, environmental awareness, and community resilience.



Figure 72. Lake Charleston



Figure 73. Alex Russel Memorial Pier



Figure 74. Roundhouse Complex, Mattoon Softball Association



Figure 75. Oakland Public Pool



Figure 76. Peterson Park, Mattoon

Trails, Sidewalks, and Greenways

The trail network in Coles County connects habitats, neighborhoods, and destinations. It serves as a vital corridor for both wildlife and people, encouraging outdoor activities and fostering a deeper connection with nature. As the network expands, it not only supports the health and well-being of residents but also enhances the county's appeal as a destination for visitors seeking adventure and tranquility.

Investment in these trails ensures that they remain accessible and enjoyable for all, with thoughtful design and maintenance enhancing their natural beauty and ecological significance. Whether it's a leisurely stroll, a vigorous run, or a peaceful moment of birdwatching, the trails offer something for everyone, weaving together the diverse elements of Coles County into a cohesive and inviting outdoor tapestry.

Trails in Coles County

The **Lincoln Prairie Grass Trail (LPGT)** is an emerging shared-use path that links the two significant population hubs, Mattoon and Charleston. The trail features areas for parking, water, and restrooms.



Figure 80. Loxa LPGT Rest Area

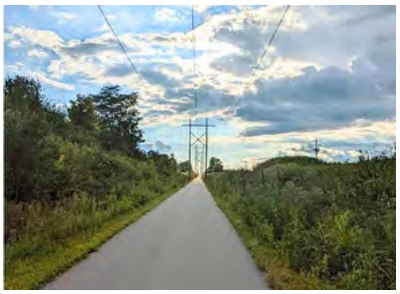


Figure 81. East LPGT



Figure 82. LPGT Map

The **Lake Charleston Trail System** offers picturesque routes that are perfect for walking, running, and observing wildlife. This system is known for its serene lakeside views and well-maintained paths.



Figure 83. Lake Charleston



Figure 84. Lake Charleston Trail System Map

Educational Facilities

Public facilities form the shared habitats where Coles County's communities gather, learn, heal, and serve. These spaces, libraries, schools, municipal buildings, parks, and emergency services, are the core habitats of civic life, supporting both daily routines and long-term resilience. Much like the keystone structures in a natural ecosystem, these facilities provide stability, connectivity, and a foundation for growth.

Coles County's network of public facilities reflects a balance between rural and urban service centers, anchored by the cities of Charleston and Mattoon, and supported by smaller municipalities and unincorporated communities. Together, they form a distributed web of essential services that sustains the county's social and economic vitality.

Educational Facilities

Education serves as a cornerstone of Coles County's community ecosystem, nurturing knowledge and innovation.

- **Eastern Illinois University (EIU)** in Charleston is a comprehensive public University that offers a broad range of curricula leading to bachelor's and master's degrees within its four colleges.
- **Lake Land College,** located between Mattoon and Charleston, provides technical training, workforce development, and continuing education programs for the entire region.
- **Public School Districts –** The county is served by multiple K–12 districts, including Charleston CUSD #1, Mattoon CUSD #2, and Oakland CCSD #5, as well as smaller rural districts. These schools are critical community anchors offering both educational and social services.
- **LIFT: Leaders Innovating for Tomorrow -** This regional innovation center serves 182 high school juniors and seniors from throughout Central Illinois, providing courses in childcare, communications, culinary arts, hospitality, HVAC, green energy, mechatronics, and robotics, information technology, leadership Institute, manufacturing, architecture, & construction, as well as early childhood and birth-3 programs.



Figure 85. Lake Land College, Luther Center, Mattoon



Figure 86. Jefferson Elementary, Charleston



Figure 87. LIFT Building, Mattoon

Libraries & Learning Centers

In the ecology of education, libraries are both connectors and regenerators — sustaining curiosity, providing refuge for discovery, and linking every resident to the shared flow of information and culture.

The Charleston Carnegie Public Library

- Serves the City of Charleston.
- Offers books, digital resources, programs, community meeting space, public computers, Wi-Fi, and local history/genealogy resources, and children's programs.



Figure 88. Charleston Carnegie Public Library

Mattoon Public Library

- Serves the community of Mattoon.
- Provides broad community programming, internet access, library services, and a local history room.

EIU's Booth Library

- Academic library at Eastern Illinois University in Charleston.
- An important research and learning center often used by the broader public for access to extended collections and archives

Oakland Memorial Library

- Local library serving the Village of Oakland in Coles County.
- Provides community access to books and learning resources right within the town of Oakland.



Figure 89. Elevate, Mattoon

Barriers to Access

Educational opportunities, while present throughout the county, are difficult to access for rural residents without transportation. Early education opportunities for children under the age of five are limited but initiatives to explore more options have began in Charleston in Mattoon, partnering with with organizations like EIU, Lake Land College, Rural King, Coles Together, Sarah Bush Lincol Health System.



Figure 90. Booth Library, EIU, Charleston

Public Health, Safety, & Governance

Public health, safety, and effective governance are essential for fostering a robust, resilient community. In Coles County, these systems safeguard the well-being of residents, bolster economic stability, and guarantee that public services are delivered in an efficient, equitable, and transparent manner.

This section provides an overview of local healthcare, social service, and emergency response providers while examining existing capacity and identifying service gaps, emphasizing how enhancing these systems collectively leads to improved outcomes for residents today while building resilience to face future challenges.

Existing Conditions

Public health in Coles County relies on a network of providers, including the Health Department, hospitals, clinics, schools, and community organizations. They focus on disease prevention, environmental and behavioral health, nutrition, and health education.
Key concerns are:

- **Access to healthcare**
- **Behavioral and mental health**
- **Substance use treatment**
- **Environmental health**
- **Chronic disease prevention**
- **Urban-rural health disparities**

Public safety services are provided by county, municipal, township, and regional agencies, including law enforcement, fire protection, EMS, and 911 dispatch.
Key challenges are:

- **Response times in rural areas**
- **Aging infrastructure**
- **Recruitment of first responders**
- **Disaster preparedness**
- **Coordination among agencies**

Coles County's governance includes county government, municipalities, townships, special districts, and regional agencies. Coordination is crucial for efficient service delivery.
Governance challenges include:

- **Fiscal constraints**
- **Regulatory complexity**
- **Need for transparency**
- **Capacity limits in smaller jurisdictions**
- **Public engagement expectations**

Health and Human Services Facilities

Access to healthcare and human services is essential for fostering a healthy community. Providers work together to create a comprehensive network that addresses both physical and mental health, encourages preventive care, and enhances overall well-being. Key providers include:

- **Sarah Bush Lincoln Health Center (SBLHC):** A not-for-profit hospital with 200 beds located between Mattoon and Charleston, offering a range of inpatient, outpatient, and emergency services. It caters to Coles County and neighboring areas, providing home health, hospice, and mobile mammography. Notable facilities include a Cancer Center and Behavioral Health services.
- **Carle Health:** Headquartered in Champaign-Urbana, this organization serves over 1.5 million patients in east-central Illinois. The Mattoon Convenient Care Clinic offers both primary and specialty care, including interventional radiology and vascular surgery.
- **HSHS Medical Group:** Delivering multispecialty outpatient care in Mattoon, this group has multiple facilities throughout Illinois.
- **Public Health Department:** Oversees immunizations, environmental health, and various wellness initiatives.
- **Horizon Health, Oakland Clinic:** This rural health clinic provides an array of services, from wellness exams and immunizations to medication management and treatment for minor illnesses
- **The Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS):** offering vital support services to Illinois residents, including mental health, substance use prevention, developmental disabilities, and basic needs like food and housing, aiming to promote self-sufficiency and improve quality of life.



Figure 91. Sarah Bush Lincoln Health Center



Figure 92. HSHS Medical Group



Figure 93. Carle Health Convenient Care Clinic

Social service organizations provide crucial support for vulnerable populations, including:

- **Life Links:** Offers mental and behavioral health services, including counseling, mental health specialized housing, psychiatric care, crisis intervention, and community support in Coles County. Specialized programs address substance use, trauma, and mental illness.
- **LifeSpan Center**: Protects older adults and those with disabilities from abuse and neglect, offering advocacy and guidance on Medicare and Medicaid as the Coordinated Point of Entry for aging-related services.
- **Land of Lincoln Legal Service:** Provides free civil legal services for low-income individuals, seniors, veterans, and domestic violence survivors, focusing on housing and public benefits.
- **HOPE of East Central Illinois:** Offers shelter, transitional housing, legal advocacy, counseling, and support groups for survivors of domestic violence.
- **The Haven:** Offers shelter and support for those facing homelessness, including emergency shelter and case management.
- **PREVAIL Illinois:** Supports sexual assault survivors and their families with crisis intervention, counseling, medical and legal advocacy.
- **Catholic Charities:** Provides clothing, housewares, furniture, and medication assistance, assistance for new mothers, and loans for individuals or families in need of adaptive equipment.
- **Mattoon Community Food Center**: Providing food to residents facing food insecurity.
- **Habitat for Humanity of Coles County:** Builds affordable housing in partnership with families, supporting homeownership and community revitalization.
- **Matthew 25**: A faith-based organization leasing one-bedroom apartments and allowing guests to stay in these apartments for up to 6 months while they work toward self-sufficiency. The organization also partners guests with families to further support them in stabilizing their lives.
- **Salvation Army:** Offers emergency assistance, food, clothing, and homewares assistance, and disaster response.
- **The Hour House:** Provides transitional housing, prevention education, counseling, and support for substance use disorder recovery.
- **Child Advocacy Center of East Central Illinois:** Supports abused children with forensic interviews and advocacy.
- **Charleston Food Pantry:** Supplies food to residents facing food insecurity.
- **Eastern Illinois Foodbank:** Provides to students and staff facing food insecurity at Eastern Illinois University
- **Standing Stone & Carpenters Table:** Standing Stone Community Center is a nonprofit ministry featuring food, clothing and furniture. Our purpose is to meet unmet needs through a multifaceted, Christ-centered outreach.

Government and Administrative Facilities

Local governance in Coles County is supported by a network of administrative and service buildings that coordinate essential operations:

- **Coles County Courthouse** in Charleston houses county government offices and judicial services.
- **County Highway Department,** located on 18th Street at the Coles County Center for Human Services Building, provides planning and maintenance for vital infrastructure.
- **Coles County Regional Planning and Development Commission (CCRP&DC),** located on the 3rd floor of the Coles County Courthouse, provides planning, grant writing, and low-income home repair assistance to rural local governments.
- **Municipal buildings** in Mattoon, Charleston, Oakland, and smaller towns manage public works, zoning, and community services.
- **Township offices** provide localized governance, maintaining roads, cemeteries, and assistance programs.

These administrative centers function like the nervous system of the county's civic ecology, enabling the flow of information, coordination, and responsive service delivery.

They are instrumental in ensuring that the needs of the community are met efficiently and effectively, fostering a well-organized environment where residents can rely on consistent public services. Each facility plays a crucial role in maintaining the quality of life in Coles County, from the bustling county seat in Charleston to the charming smaller towns scattered throughout the region.



Figure 94. Coles County Courthouse

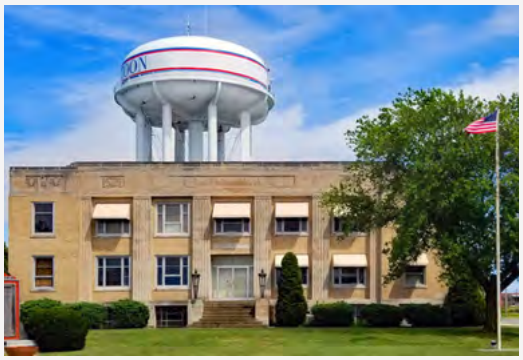


Figure 95. Mattoon City Hall



Figure 96. Coles County Human Services & Highway Department



Figure 97. Charleston City Hall

Public Safety and Emergency Services

Coles County's public safety network safeguards residents and property, responds to emergencies, and ensures stability. Beyond municipal fire services, the county is covered by rural fire protection districts: Cooks Mills, Hutton, Lincoln, Seven Hickory Morgan Township, Wabash, Arthur Rural, and Hindsboro Community. These districts collaborate to provide fire and emergency medical services in their areas.

Law Enforcement:

- **The Coles County Sheriff's Office** provides countywide law enforcement and corrections. The Sheriff's office is also charged with serving civil process papers generated by courts
- **Charleston Police Department:** Provides patrol, investigative, crime scene, and K9 unit services for the city of Charleston. The Charleston Police Department also provides Juvenile and Resource Officers for local schools. They also participate in community partnerships and offer assistance with car seat installation.
- **Mattoon Police Department:** A full-service law enforcement agency, providing patrol within corporate city limits. MPD also participates in community programs and partnerships.
- **Oakland Police Department:** Services residents in the city of Oakland.
- **Lake Land College and Eastern Illinois University** maintain campus police to ensure safety and support for students and staff.
- **Crisis Response Team The Coles County Crisis Response Team (CRT):** Established as a multi-agency tactical team in 1999, members included the Coles County Sheriff's Office, Charleston, Mattoon, Eastern Illinois University, Lake Land College Police Departments, and Mattoon Fire Department. Tactical medics from MFD are inserted with the team to provide emergency medical treatment in the event of injury to a team member, suspect, or other person.

Fire Protection:

Emergency Medical Services (EMS): Hospitals and private providers coordinate medical response, with dispatch handled through the Coles County 911 system.

Emergency Management Agency (EMA): Oversees hazard mitigation, disaster response, and interagency coordination during severe weather or crisis events.

Regular training, equipment upgrades, and interagency collaboration ensure that this protective network remains resilient and adaptive.

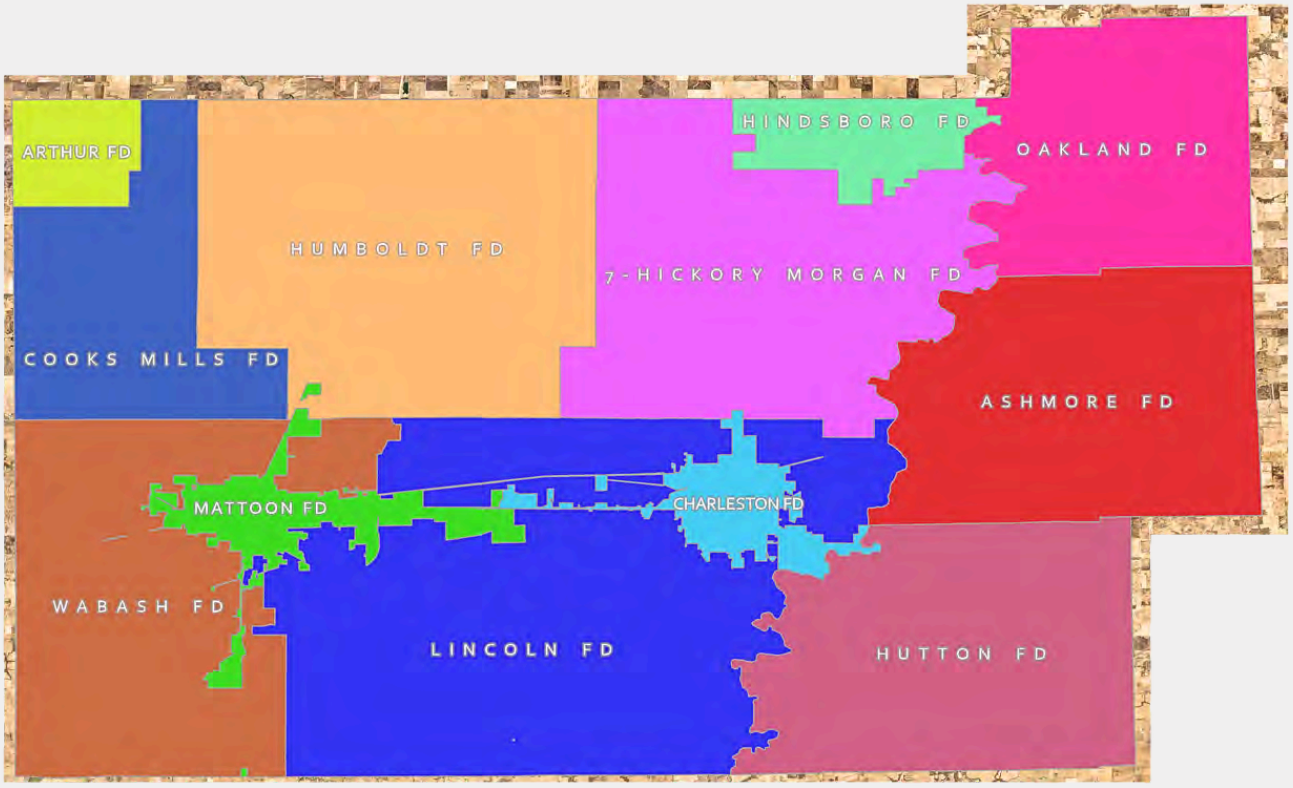


Figure 98. Fire Protection Districts of Coles County

Integration Across Systems

Public health, safety, and governance do not operate in isolation.
Effective outcomes depend on coordination with:

- Land use and transportation planning
- Housing and community development
- Environmental protection and infrastructure investment
- Economic development and workforce initiatives
- Embedding health and safety considerations across all planning efforts helps ensure decisions support long-term community well-being.

Energy Systems

Energy systems are a foundational layer of Coles County's community ecosystem, quietly supporting homes, businesses, institutions, and public services much like the underlying soils and waters that sustain a natural landscape. Reliable, affordable, and resilient energy infrastructure is essential to daily life and long-term county health, shaping how communities grow, adapt, and thrive.

Energy Demand in Coles County

Residential Energy Use

Homes in Coles County consume energy for heating, cooling, lighting, and daily activities. Updating older homes with energy efficiency improvements can reduce system strain and enhance comfort and affordability.

Institutional and Commercial Demand

Large employers, healthcare facilities, educational institutions, and manufacturers are consistent high-demand energy users. They require reliable power and benefit from efficiency measures and renewable energy to stabilize costs.

Agricultural and Rural Energy Needs

Farms and rural businesses need dependable energy for grain handling, livestock, irrigation, and precision agriculture. Reliable rural service supports productivity and safety across the county.

Energy Infrastructure and Resilience

Coles County's grid connects to regional systems, distributing energy like a watershed. Despite general reliability, rural lines and older infrastructure are vulnerable to weather disruptions. Strengthening resilience through maintenance and modern technologies ensures quick recovery, similar to a healthy ecosystem.

Electric Service Providers

Ameren Illinois

Ameren Illinois is the largest electric provider in Coles County, serving about 8,000 customers. The Mattoon Operating Center, on Mattoon's south side, is the division headquarters for their eastern electric region. They supply electric and natural gas energy to over 1,200 communities in downstate Illinois.

Coles-Moultrie

Founded in 1938, the Coles-Moultrie Electric Cooperative (CMEC) serves over 9,500 members in several counties, including more than 4,000 in Coles County. CMEC operates an electrical distribution system covering over 2,000 miles, with members consuming a total of 207,903,617 kilowatt-hours.

Partnership Development for Solutions

To tackle the electrical capacity shortage at the 1000N Industrial Development, Coles Together EDO and the City of Mattoon partnered in writing a grant. This initiative has successfully secured a $3 million DCEO Site Readiness Infrastructure Grant to fund a 26 kV electrical transformer, which is set to go into service on November 15, 2026.

Understanding Coles County's Electric Aggregation Program

Electric aggregation is a program (The Illinois Power Agency Act, 20 ILCS 3855/1-92) that allows a county or municipality to buy electricity in bulk on behalf of residents and small businesses, similar to buying in volume to get a better price. The electricity still flows through the same poles and wires, and Ameren continues to deliver power and handle outages and billing, only the supplier of the electricity changes. State law allows counties to operate this type of program only if voters approve it through a referendum.

What Did Coles County Voters Decide?

In November 2012, Coles County residents voted in favor of allowing the county to run an "opt-out" electric aggregation program. This means:

- Residents were automatically included in the program
- Anyone who preferred not to participate could opt out and stay with Ameren

After the referendum passed, the County adopted a resolution to move forward and began working with energy consultants to purchase electricity at competitive rates.

How Has the Program Performed?

For much of the past decade, the aggregation program was successful:

- Over approximately 13 years, the average household saved about $70 per year on electricity costs
- Savings varied by year and household usage, but overall, the program helped reduce electric bills when market conditions were favorable

Why Is the Program Paused Now?

In recent years, the energy market has become highly volatile, with fluctuating prices and fewer favorable long-term contracts available. In August 2025, Coles County and participating municipalities determined that:

- Available supplier bids were not lower than Ameren's default rates
- Entering a new contract would not provide meaningful savings to residents

As a result, the County chose not to renew the aggregation contract at that time.

What Does This Mean for Residents?

- Residents are automatically returned to Ameren as their electricity supplier
- There is no interruption in service
- Ameren continues to deliver electricity as it always has
- The County may consider restarting the aggregation program in the future if market conditions improve and better rates become available

Why This Still Matters

The aggregation program remains an important tool available to Coles County. Having voter approval in place allows the County to:

- Monitor energy markets
- Act when competitive pricing becomes available
- Help protect residents from high electricity costs when possible

The decision to pause the program reflects a commitment to cost savings and consumer protection, rather than locking residents into unfavorable rates.

Renewable Energy in Coles County

Renewable energy is increasingly prominent in Coles County, with utility-scale solar facilities and proposed wind projects diversifying local energy production. This shift reduces reliance on distant sources and strengthens the county's energy "habitat." Just as ecological diversity boosts resilience, a mix of energy sources, including large-scale renewables, community solar, rooftop installations, and storage technologies, stabilizes supply, cuts emissions, and supports clean energy goals. The solar industry is growing in Illinois and Coles County. On March 11, 2025, Coles County enacted a Commercial Solar Energy Facility Siting Ordinance to regulate large solar projects, providing a framework for review and balancing renewable promotion with community protection. It sets criteria and procedures for developers, ensuring compliance with land-use and environmental standards. The ordinance aims to attract sustainable development while safeguarding residents' interests, requiring developers to engage the community through public meetings and feedback sessions.

Type	Typical Size	Ownership	Location	Primary Benefit
Residential Solar	3–10 kW	Individual homeowner	Rooftop of homes	Lower bills, energy independence
Commercial/Industrial Solar	50 kW–5 MW	Business or Institution	Rooftop of com. buildings or adjacent land	Cost savings, sustainability goals
Community Solar	0.5–5 MW	Shared (co-op/developer)	Off-site, grid-tied	Expands access, shared benefits
Utility-Scale Solar (Solar Farms)	5–500+ MW	Utility or developer	Rural land	Large-scale clean energy generation
Government/ Institutional Solar	50 kW–several MW	Public entity	Public buildings, schools, or facilities	Reduces public-sector costs and demonstrates sustainability leadership

Table 8. Types of Solar Developments

As solar and wind development continues to expand, Coles County faces the challenge of balancing innovation with responsible land use. The newly enacted Commercial Solar Energy Facility Siting Ordinance aims to regulate large-scale installations, prioritizing agricultural preservation, habitat protection, and community benefits. Looking ahead, the county can strengthen its approach by advocating for community solar initiatives, rooftop and institutional solar systems, as well as dual-use practices such as agrivoltaics. Similarly, the Ordinance for Standards of Wind Energy Conservation Systems above 500 kW governs larger wind turbine projects. By planning proactively and engaging residents from the outset, Coles County can steer solar growth in a way that preserves its rural charm, supports local economies, and fosters a sustainable, energy-secure future.

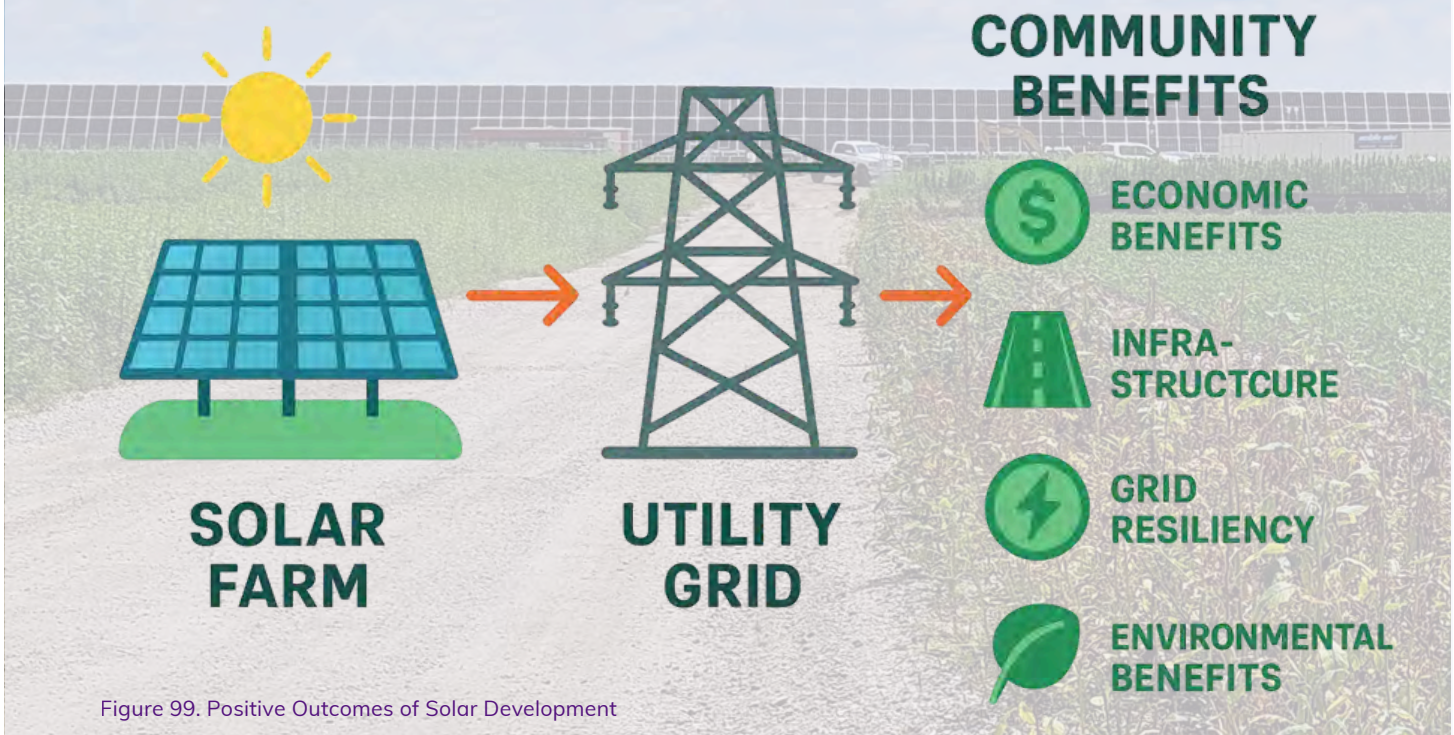


Figure 99. Positive Outcomes of Solar Development

When solar or wind projects supply electricity to the grid, their value extends beyond energy production. They offer local economic benefits, improve infrastructure, and enhance grid reliability. Electricity from these projects provides clean energy to nearby areas, benefiting county residents. Local landowners receive lease payments, and towns and schools benefit from taxes or special agreements, supporting roads, schools, and services. Additional advantages include stronger transmission lines or substations. Even if the power is sold to a larger market, the host community still benefits significantly.

However, large solar farms and wind turbines can alter the local landscape and may disrupt ecosystems if not managed carefully. Noise from wind turbines and the visual impact can concern nearby residents. Challenges also include high initial investment costs and lengthy permitting and construction phases. Although these projects offer long-term savings and benefits, the upfront expenses can be significant, potentially causing financial strain if not planned properly.

Project Name	Status	Capacity	Location	Notes
Prairie Wolf Solar Project	Operational	200 MW	Ashmore Township	Utility-scale, developed by National Grid Renewables, on agricultural land,
Triple S Solar I LLC CSG	Operational	2 MW	Coles County	Small utility-scale, developed by AES Clean Energy; connected to the MISO grid.
Coles Wind Project	Under Construction	311 MW	Seven Hickory-Morgan Township	Large wind energy facility by Coles Wind, LLC (Apex Clean Energy), ~19,500 acres, 51 turbines.
Glacier Moraine Solar	Planned 2026	200 MW	Paradise Twp. & Cumberland Co.	Utility-scale, developed by Earthrise Energy, on agricultural land
NextEra Solar	Planned 2026	200 MW	Northern Mattoon, South of 1000 N.	Utility-scale, developed by NextEra, on agricultural land
Atlantica Wind	Planned 2029	200 MW	Hickory Grove in Hutton Township	Utility-scale, developed by Atlantica, on agricultural land

Table 9. Solar & Wind Projects in Coles County

Water Management

Reliable water supply is crucial for public health, economic stability, and growth in Coles County. The infrastructure for delivering clean water from wells, reservoirs, aquifers, and treatment facilities is essential. As communities expand and infrastructure ages, managing water resources to balance demand, environmental protection, and cost efficiency becomes more important.

Due to regional growth, agricultural needs, and climate variability, proactive coordination is vital. Water planning should integrate with:

- Protecting natural resources and watersheds to safeguard aquifers and sources
- Aligning land-use and economic policies with service areas
- Ensuring public health and emergency management resilience during droughts, floods, or contamination

Existing Water Sources & Capacity

Coles County's drinking water is supplied by a mix of surface water systems, groundwater systems (wells), and rural water cooperatives. These provide public water service to municipalities as well as rural residents, with individual private wells serving others in unincorporated areas.

Key public water systems in Coles County, according to the Illinois EPA database, are:

- **City of Charleston**: Surface water from Lake Charleston and the Embarrass River
- **City of Mattoon**: Surface water, including Lake Mattoon and Lake Paradise
- **Clear Water Service Corporation:** Groundwater from multiple wells
- **Ashmore:** Groundwater from the Embarrass River Alluvial Aquifer
- **Cooks Mills Water Association**: Groundwater for the Cooks Mills area
- **Humboldt:** Limited groundwater, supplemented by purchased surface water
- **Oakland:** Groundwater wells
- **Lerna:** Purchased groundwater

Illinois Groundwater Resources: Coles County

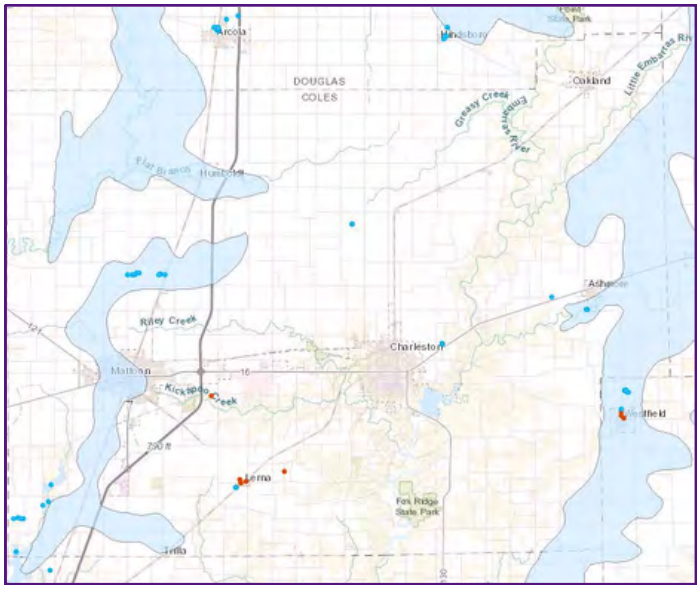


Figure 100. University of Illinois Groundwater Resource Map

Water Treatment

Both the Mattoon and Charleston water treatment systems are considered generally adequate for current demand, but much of their collection infrastructure is aging, with components dating back 50–80 years in some areas. Clay and concrete sewer lines are common in older neighborhoods, and while both cities conduct ongoing repair and lining programs, infiltration and inflow (I/I) remain persistent challenges.

Mattoon Water Treatment Plant:

The City of Mattoon's facility uses coagulation, sedimentation, filtration, and disinfection to provide safe drinking water. It can treat millions of gallons daily, meeting all IEPA and U.S. EPA standards. The plant handles water quality monitoring, raw water pumping, and distribution.

Key plant statistics are:

- Raw Water Pumping Capacity = 4.8 mgd (million gallons per day)
- Rated Plant Capacity = 7 mgd
- Current Average Daily Production = 2.0 mgd
- Current Peak Daily Production = 3.0 mgd



Figure 101. Mattoon Water Treatment Facility

It has a capacity to treat seven million gallons of water each day and provides water to roughly 7,000 residential customers and 1,000 commercial customers. It also serves two raw water customers (Reliant Energy and Clear Water Service Corp) and two wholesale treated water customers (Village of Humboldt and Moultrie County Rural Public Water District).

Charleston Water System

Charleston operates a water treatment plant sourcing from the Embarras River via the Charleston Side Channel Reservoir. It provides drinking water under Illinois EPA and Safe Drinking Water Act standards. Although specific capacity details aren't published, engineering studies confirm the system meets current and future demands, efficiently treating and distributing water. Dual intake structures and ongoing monitoring ensure regulatory compliance and service continuity.



Figure 102. Charleston Water Treatment Systems

Regular reports confirm quality, and Charleston's water meets state requirements. Watershed protection and resource management ensure a reliable supply and quality. Charleston’s treatment plant uses the standard multi-step treatment train designed to turn raw surface water into safe, potable water. The major steps include coagulation, flocculation, sedimentation, filtration, and disinfection.

Small Systems and Private Wells
In communities like Oakland, Ashmore, and Lerna, treatment systems such as aerated lagoons and stabilization ponds are commonly used. While they must meet IEPA standards, these systems often face financial and technical hurdles to stay compliant. Despite needing minimal maintenance, challenges like sediment accumulation and nutrient discharge occur, especially after heavy rain. Limited resources make proactive maintenance difficult, delaying upgrades until compliance issues emerge. Private well owners should conduct annual tests for nitrates and bacteria to ensure safety.

Clear Water Service Corporation
CWCS is located on the western edge of Coles County in Paradise Township and has been providing water to rural Coles County residents since 1978. They also provide service to rural Cumberland and Shelby counties. They have over 300 miles of water pipe servicing over 3,000 members. In 2024, the City of Mattoon voted to dissolve the Lake Mattoon Public Water District, which has received its water from Clear Water since its inception in 1979, so that CWCS could service the residents of Lake Mattoon directly.

Oakland
Oakland Water Works System provides water to residents via purchases from the Embarras Area Water District (EAWD).The Oakland Water Work System, which serves approximately 996 persons, has a storage capacity of 100,000 gallons. The average daily demand is around 74,000 gallons with a peak demand of 105,000 gallons.

Ashmore
Ashmore Water Dept is responsible for treatment and distribution of clean water to village residents. Ashmore maintains 3 wells, pumping water from the Embarras River Alluvial Aquifer under the south end of town. The water treatment plant, located on the south end of S. Iowa St, has the capacity to produce 300,000 gallons per day. The water tower was constructed in 2010 and has a storage capacity of 150,000 gallons. Property owners maintain their own septic systems privately.

Lerna
Lerna Waterworks System was taken over by the Clear Water Service Corporation to serve its residents in 2022.

Embarras Area Water District
EAWD is located on the north side of Charleston and provides water services to residents within the vicinity of the Embarras River, specifically serving parts of Coles, Cumberland, and Douglas Counties. The EAWD obtains water from the Mahomet Aquifer and sells it to local municipalities for distribution (Embarras Area Water District, 2024).

Waste Water & Stormwater Management

Wastewater and stormwater systems are vital to the health, environment, and livability of Coles County. With a mix of urban, rural, and agricultural areas, the county boasts a diverse network of treatment systems and drainage patterns, collectively known as the "water cycle infrastructure." This system ensures public health, supports the economy, and protects natural waterways like the Embarras River and Kickapoo Creek.

Drainage districts are local entities responsible for improving land for agricultural and sanitary purposes by constructing and maintaining drains and levees. They have the authority to utilize private land and levy taxes within their boundaries.

Stormwater infrastructure in Coles County has developed incrementally over decades, leaving many storm sewers, culverts, and ditches potentially obsolete or undersized for current precipitation.

- **Urban areas:** Charleston and Mattoon face street flooding during heavy rain due to undersized inlets and silted basins. Some neighborhoods rely on open channels needing regular maintenance.
- **Rural drainage:** Agricultural tiles and ditches support farming but impact water quality. Many district structures, like levees and culverts, predate modern standards. Deferred maintenance and limited funding worsen erosion and sediment issues.
- **Cross-system pressures**: Increasing rainfall intensity due to climate change raises inflow rates, stressing both sanitary and storm systems and causing overflow events.

System Condition

- Most municipal infrastructure is aging but in good condition (some mains 50–80 years old)
- Replacement and lining projects in Mattoon and Charleston reduce water loss
- Small and rural systems have limited funding and maintenance
- Private wells need annual bacteria and nitrate testing

Challenges

- Agricultural nutrient runoff contributes to algae and sedimentation in reservoirs
- Heavier rainfall increases stormwater contamination
- Septic leaks risk shallow groundwater contamination
- Aging infrastructure causes water loss and service interruptions

Stewardship in Action

- IEPA-funded treatment upgrades in Mattoon and Charleston
- Source Water Protection Zones near Lake Mattoon
- Collaboration & Education Stewardship programs
- Public education on well testing, fertilizer management, and water conservation

Charleston, Illinois EPA (IEPA) NPDES Permit No. IL0021644

The Charleston Wastewater Treatment Plant, an activated sludge facility with tertiary filters, handles an average of 3.3 million gallons per day. It includes 11 remote lift stations and 1 Main Pump Station, serving about 17,000 residents, including Eastern Illinois University. Efforts are underway to separate the combined sewers downtown to reduce overflow risks.

Mattoon, Illinois EPA (IEPA) NPDES Permit No. IL0029831

The Mattoon Wastewater Treatment Plant, designed for 5.3 million gallons per day with a maximum of 14.0 MGD, features a 16.5-million-gallon storage basin and a 12.0 MGD Treated CSO for wet weather. Post-2004 upgrades include a satellite facility for combined sewer overflow. The city uses 12 lift stations and has undertaken sewer rehabilitation projects to reduce infiltration. Despite IEPA-funded enhancements, the plant faces challenges during heavy rain.

Oakland

The Oakland Wastewater Treatment Plant offers a secondary level of treated effluent, currently processing a load of 82,000 gallons per day against a rated capacity of 170,000 gallons per day. This capacity provides the community with a solid buffer for future development and peak load scenarios.

Humboldt

The Humboldt Wastewater Treatment Plant delivers a secondary level of treated effluent via a sand filter/lagoon treatment process. Its average capacity is approximately 23,000 gallons per day, with a peak capacity rated at 90,000 gallons per day.

Smaller Communities

In towns like Oakland, Ashmore, and Lerna, treatment systems such as aerated lagoons and stabilization ponds are common. Although low-maintenance, these systems often face sediment buildup and nutrient discharge issues, especially after heavy rain. Limited resources make it difficult to maintain them proactively, delaying upgrades until compliance problems occur.

Rural and On-Site Systems

In rural areas, many households use outdated septic systems lacking secondary treatment, often in poorly drained soils, leading to gradual failures. While the Coles County Health Department inspects new systems, existing ones depend on homeowner upkeep. Education on proper maintenance could help prevent failures and protect groundwater, especially over the Mahomet Aquifer.

Drainage Districts

Drainage districts are government groups that manage water drainage to prevent flooding and improve soil. They use ditches, levees, and pumps, working under legal rules and funded by property assessments.

In Coles County, districts can be single-township, union (covering multiple areas), or special. They work with local governments and landowners, using engineers and environmental experts to find good solutions. Besides stopping floods, they also help improve soil and support farming, especially where it rains a lot. Public meetings get the community involved.

In short, drainage districts are key for managing water, protecting the environment, and boosting the economy. Below is a map of the districts in Coles County from the Geographical Information System Office.

Coles County Drainage District Map

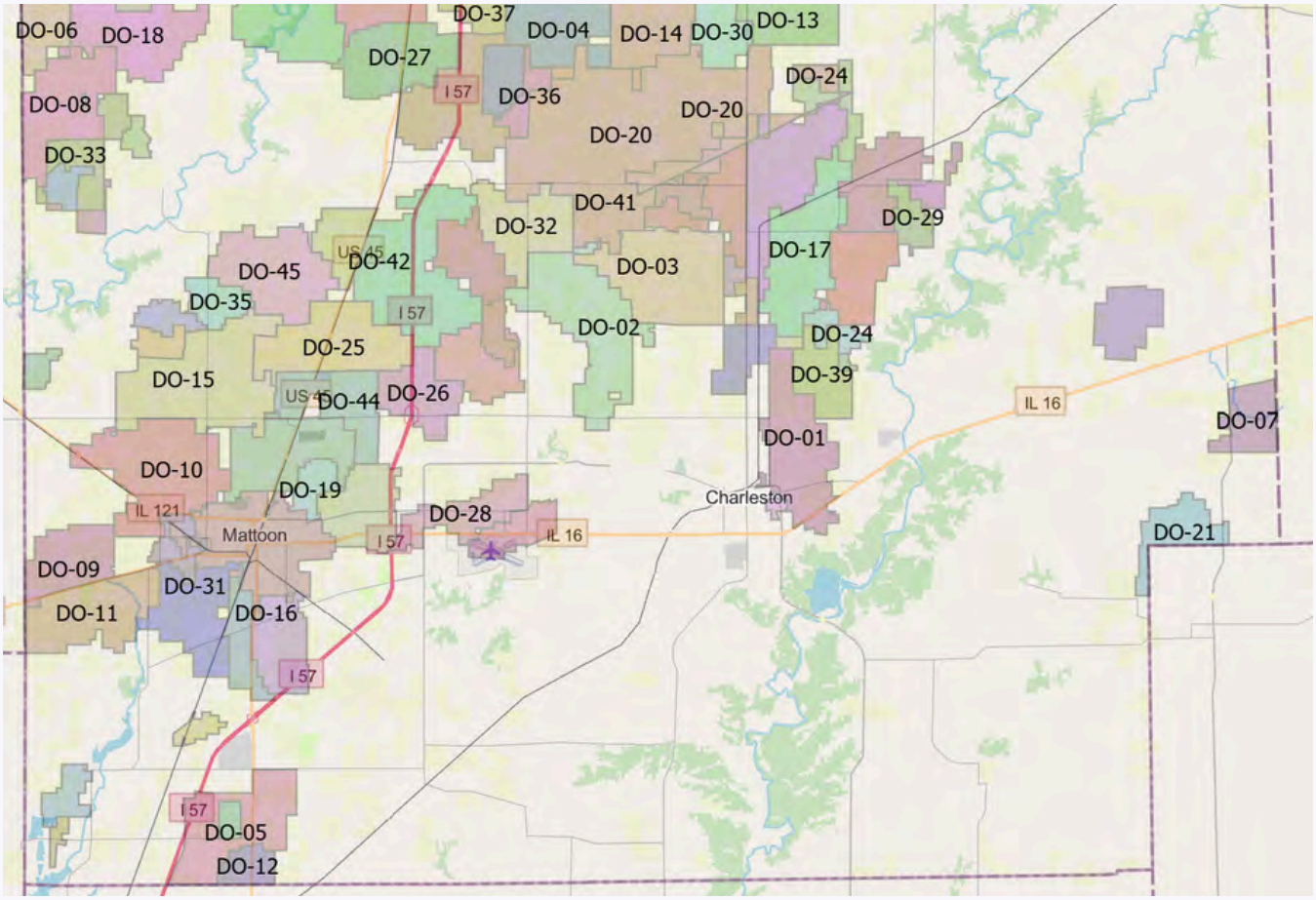


Figure 103. Coles County Drainage District Map



Drainage District	Type	Primary Area / Township
Coles & Moultrie Union Special Drainage District	Multi-county	Coles & Moultrie Counties
Coles–Clark Drainage District	Multi-county	Coles & Clark Counties
Consolidated Drainage District 4-12 North Okaw	Consolidated district	North Okaw watershed area
Charleston–Seven Hickory Township Union Drainage District #1	Union	Charleston & Seven Hickory Townships
Crabapple Creek Union Drainage District #1	Union	Central Coles County
Humboldt & Lafayette Union Drainage District #10	Union	Humboldt & Lafayette Townships
Mattoon & Lafayette Union Drainage District #1	Union	Mattoon & Lafayette Townships
Mattoon–Lafayette Union Drainage District #2	Union	Mattoon & Lafayette Townships
Mattoon–Whitley Union Drainage District #1	Union	Mattoon & Whitley Townships
North Okaw & Humboldt Union Drainage District #2	Union	North Okaw watershed
Seven Hickory & Morgan Union Drainage District #2	Union	Seven Hickory & Morgan Townships
Seven Hickory–Humboldt Union Drainage District #2	Union	Seven Hickory & Humboldt Townships
Seven Hickory–Humboldt Union Drainage District #3	Union	Seven Hickory & Humboldt Townships
Seven Hickory–Morgan Union Drainage District #1	Union	Seven Hickory & Morgan Townships
Seven Hickory–Morgan Union Drainage District #3	Union	Seven Hickory & Morgan Townships
Humboldt Drainage District #3	Local	Humboldt Township
Humboldt Drainage District #4	Local	Humboldt Township
Humboldt Drainage District #5	Local	Humboldt Township
Humboldt Drainage District #12	Local	Humboldt Township
Lafayette Drainage District #1	Local	Lafayette Township
Loxa Drainage District	Local	Loxa Township
Majors Drainage District	Local	Rural Coles County
Mattoon Drainage District #2	Local	Mattoon area
Paradise Township Drainage District #1	Local	Paradise Township
Riley Creek Drainage District	Local	Riley Creek watershed
Seven Hickory Drainage District #1-A	Local	Seven Hickory Township
Seven Hickory Drainage District #2	Local	Seven Hickory Township
Seven Hickory Drainage District #4	Local	Seven Hickory Township
North Okaw Drainage District	Local	North Okaw watershed

Drainage District	Type	Primary Area / Township
North Okaw Drainage District #3	Local	North Okaw watershed
North Okaw Drainage District #8	Local	North Okaw watershed
North Okaw Drainage District #9	Local	North Okaw watershed
Shellhammer Drainage District	Local	Rural Coles County
South Fork Drainage District #2	Local	South Fork watershed
South Fork Township Drainage District #3	Local	South Fork watershed
Union Drainage District #3	Union	Rural Coles County

Table 10. Coles County Drainage Districts List

Several different types of districts exist within the county:

- Local drainage districts serve a single township or watershed area.
- Union drainage districts span two or more townships or counties and allow shared management of larger drainage systems.
- Special or consolidated districts combine multiple districts or address drainage within a larger watershed.

Because many drainage systems cross township and county boundaries, coordination between drainage districts, municipalities, and county government is often necessary. Drainage districts therefore, play an important role in agricultural productivity, flood mitigation, and watershed management across the county.

Drainage Districts and Water Quality

In Coles County, drainage districts significantly impact water quality due to extensive agricultural land use and engineered drainage systems. Established under the Illinois Drainage Code, these districts enhance farmland productivity by managing excess water. However, they also affect nutrient, sediment, and pollutant movement into local waterways.

Common methods like subsurface tile drainage and open ditches quickly channel water into rivers such as the Embarras and Kaskaskia, reducing flooding but posing water quality challenges like:

- Increased nutrient loading (nitrogen and phosphorus) leading to algal blooms
- Sedimentation from erosion and runoff
- Reduced filtration from bypassed wetlands and floodplains

Recognized as key partners in water quality improvement, drainage districts can support efforts by:

- Installing controlled drainage structures
- Implementing constructed wetlands, bioreactors, or saturated buffers
- Adopting erosion-reducing ditch maintenance
- Creating meandering ditches rather than straightaways

Coordinating with state and federal programs like the Illinois EPA and nutrient reduction initiatives

Water Quality: Nonpoint Source Pollution

In Coles County, the soil holds water well but absorbs it slowly when it's wet, especially in areas with silty clay. This slow absorption means that during heavy rain, water tends to pool or run off unless it's managed properly. This issue has worsened due to more frequent heavy rainstorms.

Nonpoint source (NPS) pollution is the main reason for poor water quality in rural and farming areas like Coles County. Unlike pollution from a single, specific place, NPS pollution happens when rain or melting snow moves across the land, picking up pollutants and carrying them into streams, rivers, and groundwater.

In Coles County, NPS pollution is mainly linked to how the land is used, especially for farming, rural homes, and roads. When stormwater flows over fields, roads, and developed areas, it can carry various pollutants, such as:

- **Nutrients like nitrogen and phosphorus from fertilizers and animal waste**
- **Sediment from soil erosion and disturbed land**
- **Pesticides and herbicides used in farming**
- **Oil, grease, and heavy metals from roads and vehicles**
- **Bacteria from livestock and faulty septic systems**

These pollutants often travel through the county's drainage systems, including ditches and underground pipes managed by local drainage districts. While these systems are crucial for farming and controlling floods, they can also speed up the movement of pollutants into waterways like the Embarras River and the Kaskaskia River, as well as smaller streams throughout the county.

The effects of NPS pollution in Coles County might include:

- **Poor water quality in streams and rivers**
- **Higher risk of harmful algal blooms downstream**
- **Loss of aquatic habitats due to sediment build-up**
- **Increased nutrient levels that affect regional water quality, including the Mississippi River Basin**

Addressing nonpoint source pollution requires a landscape-based, collaborative approach. Because it originates from many diffuse sources, effective management depends on voluntary practices and coordination among landowners, farmers, drainage districts, and local agencies.

Approaches to Water Management

Scale	Good Options
Residential yards	Rain barrels, rain gardens, downspout redirection, permeable surfaces
Larger lots/farms	Bioswales, constructed wetlands, detention basins
Urbanized areas	Green roofs, permeable pavement, tree canopy, bioswales

Table 11. Other Approaches to Water Management

Local Resources for Water Management

- Agencies such as the **Illinois Environmental Protection Agency** and the **Illinois Department of Agriculture** support these efforts through technical assistance and funding programs, often aligned with statewide nutrient reduction goals.
- The **Coles County Soil & Water Conservation District** provides technical assistance and sometimes cost-share help for conservation practices.
- **University of Illinois Extension Coles County** offers environmental programming, workshops, and community education on sustainable landscaping, water quality, and local natural resources. It's a great starting point for questions on rain gardens, native plantings, and stormwater practices appropriate for Coles County soils.
    - The Extension office will be hosting Watershed Stewardship programs, starting in 2026, that educate residents about water quality, stormwater, and nutrient runoff practices.

Waste Management

Solid waste management in Coles County functions as the county's "nutrient cycle", the system by which materials are collected, broken down, and returned to useful form or safely stored. A well-balanced solid waste and recycling program ensures the community ecosystem remains clean, efficient, and sustainable. In Coles County, this system depends on collaboration between municipal governments, private haulers, regional landfills, and public recycling programs.

Solid Waste Collection and Disposal

Solid waste services across Coles County are provided through a mix of municipal contracts and private haulers, with service availability differing between urban and rural areas.



Figure 104. Coles County Transfer Station Landfill

- Mattoon: Residential waste is collected by private haulers under municipal regulation. The city offers regular curbside pickup and large-item collection days.
- Charleston: Operates a similar system with private or franchised haulers; the city maintains drop-off sites for specific recyclable materials and coordinates community cleanup events.
- Rural Townships and Unincorporated Areas: Residents typically contract directly with private haulers or self-haul to permitted transfer or disposal sites.

Most of Coles County's municipal solid waste is transported to the Coles County Transfer Station, located near Loxa, between Mattoon and Charleston, which is operated under the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency (IEPA) permit system. The transfer station accepts residential, commercial, and light industrial waste from across the region.

System Condition and Capacity

While the Coles County Landfill has been capped for many years, the transfer station continues to perform adequately. Landfill leachate and gas collection systems are monitored under IEPA standards, and post-closure management plans are in place for inactive disposal sites.

Solid waste collection infrastructure, including trucks, bins, and compactors, is generally modern and well-maintained, though rural service access can be inconsistent due to low population density. Expanding drop-off and recycling access points can improve equity across the county.

Major Waste Collection Providers

- **Premier Disposal**: local waste collection services, and is based in Charleston, IL.
- **Waste Management (WM)**: large national firm operating locally (via the Coles County Transfer Station).
- **Mel's Disposal:** local waste collection and hauler from Oakland, IL.
- **Get It Gone LLC:** dumpster rental and junk removal services out of Charleston, IL.
- **Coles County Sanitation & Recycling:** longstanding local Charleston waste and recycling provider.

Major Waste Processing Facilities

- **WM:** Coles County Transfer Station – Operated by Waste Management; handles municipal solid waste and some non-hazardous materials.
- **Coles County Landfill & Compost Disposal Site –** landfill and compost facility in Charleston.
- Charleston & Mattoon run **seasonal leaf/limb drop-off sites** and manage leaf/yard waste disposal policies

Recycling in Coles County is guided by the Illinois Solid Waste Planning and Recycling Act, focusing on reducing waste and boosting recycling. The 2023 plan aims to expand curbside recycling, reintroduce drop-off stations, and enhance recycling across various sectors.

Recycling options include:

- **Curbside Services:** Provided by private haulers like Coles County Sanitation & Recycling, offering paper, cardboard, and container pickup, though availability varies.
- **Drop-Off & Community Options:** Facilities and trailers collect plastics, glass, and metals, supported by local grants.
- **Special Events:** Community cleanup days and electronic recycling events address items not covered by regular services.

Local facilities include:

- **Coles County Sanitation & Recycling:** Curbside and drop-off services.
- **COM2 Recycling Solutions:** Non-curbside drop-off center.
- **WM-Coles County Transfer Station:** Handles waste and potential recycling shipments.
- **Harris Metals & Recycling:** Accepts scrap metals.
- **Mervis Recycling:** Processes ferrous and non-ferrous materials.

Community options also include the Ashmore recycling trailer and school/nonprofit programs for plastics, paper, and cans.

Recycling Events and Waste Diversion

The Coles County Regional Planning and Development Commission (CCRPDC) organizes recycling events and handles waste planning. They have hosted one-day Household Hazardous Waste (HHW) collection events at the Coles County Airport as well as electronic recycling events at Lake Land College. These events are open to residents and allow safe disposal of materials that pose environmental or safety risks.

The cities of Mattoon and Charleston also offer some recycling options for things like paper, cardboard, aluminum, tin, and certain plastics (#1 and #2).

Materials Markets, End Use, & Limitation

Once sorted, materials are:

- Baled or processed: compacted and prepared for shipment.
- Sold to manufacturers: e.g., recycled plastics going to plastics reclaimers, paper to mills, metals to smelters.
- Used as raw materials in making new products, completing the recycling loop.

Recycling markets and prices for recycled materials influence how much gets processed, an important industry reality that affects all recyclers.

A few key practical realities shape recycling outcomes:

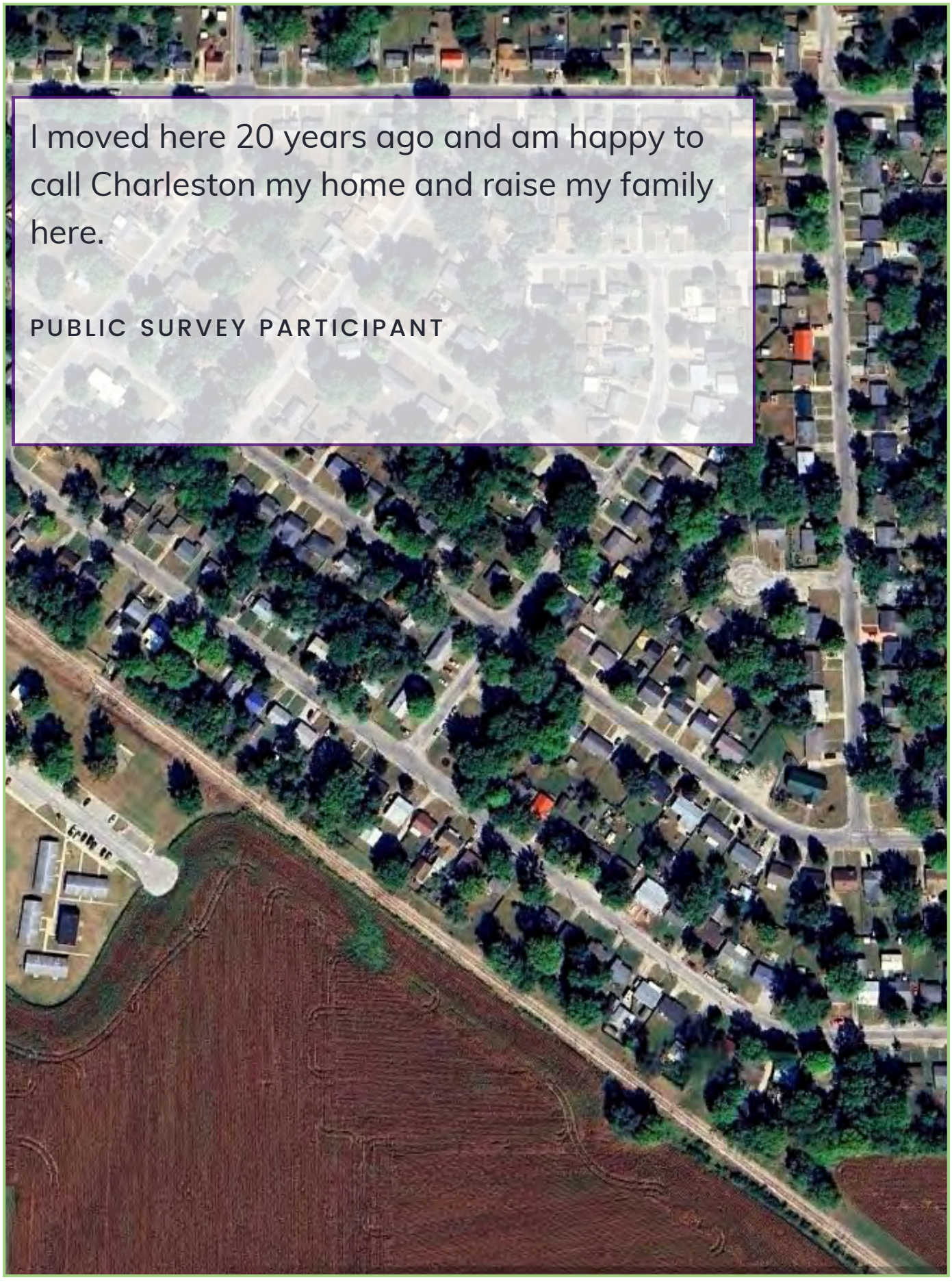
- **Contamination**: Incorrect items in recycling streams often lead to reduced recycling efficiency or even materials being diverted to landfills, not because of a lack of effort, but due to downstream processing constraints.
- **Material markets**: Some recyclables (especially certain plastics) have limited markets and processing capacity, which affects how effectively they can be reused.

Challenges for Local Waste Processing & Recycling

- Rural areas often lack convenient recycling options.
- Fluctuating recyclable material markets affect recycling program economics.
- Contamination with non-recyclables raises processing costs and lowers efficiency.
- Complex consumer packaging complicates recycling.
- High landfill reliance persists despite diversion goals.

Opportunities

- Expand regional recycling partnerships for better economies of scale.
- Develop composting programs for yard waste and organics.
- Promote sustainable procurement policies to reduce waste.
- Use state funding for solid waste infrastructure and education.
- Support circular economy by fostering local reuse and repair businesses.



I moved here 20 years ago and am happy to call Charleston my home and raise my family here.

PUBLIC SURVEY PARTICIPANT

Housing

Stability and stewardship are prerequisites for sustainable growth.

Housing in Coles County is crucial to the community, influencing connections, job access, and the landscape. Like habitats in a healthy ecosystem, housing affects stability, resilience, and adaptability. Availability, affordability, and quality impact household well-being, workforce retention, transportation, and access to services in both urban and rural areas.

Economic pressures like low wages, rising costs, and commuting trends shape housing demand, requiring the County's housing stock to evolve for balanced growth and sustainability. This review of Coles County's housing examines supply, affordability, and age, viewing it as essential social and environmental infrastructure. Stable housing improves community health by reducing stress, promoting healthier lifestyles, and enhancing healthcare access. Aligning housing with economic opportunities, transportation, and land use can help build resilient, inclusive communities within Coles County's ecological and human systems.

Housing is the foundation of a healthy community

Section Overview
In this section, we will review the following areas of housing:

- **Current Stock: Condition, Types, & Diversity**
- **Extraction vs. Stewardship**
- **Housing Availability, Affordability, & Workforce Needs**
- **Senior, Accessible, & Supportive Housing**
- **Future Housing Supply: Development, Redevelopment & Infill Opportunities**
- **Incentives, Financing Tools, & Partnerships**



Figure 105. Housing & Community Health Tree

Current Housing Stock: Condition, Types, & Diversity

Coles County's housing stock is characterized by a large proportion of single-family detached homes, consistent with rural and small-city markets in central Illinois. Multifamily units, particularly apartments and townhomes, are primarily located in Charleston near Eastern Illinois University and in select corridors in Mattoon. These units serve students, workforce households, and seniors who require rental options.

Manufactured homes are an important component of the housing mix in several rural townships, offering naturally occurring affordability for lower-income households.

The Single-Family Housing Market Report (Sept 2025) confirms the continued dominance of single-family properties, with 60 single-family transactions in September 2025, one of the county's best months in 20 years.

As you will see in the next section, condition also affects affordability. For example, while there are older, single-family homes available in the area, many would require rehabilitation or investment in the aging systems that serve the residence, such as aging plumbing, HVAC, and electrical systems.

Stock & Condition

- Coles County has about 22,700 to 22,900 housing units, with many homes built before 1970, increasing maintenance needs.
- A 1.74-month supply of single-family homes indicates a seller's market, with rising prices suggesting strong demand for new and diverse housing.

Type & Diversity

- Single-family detached units dominate (~66–71% of all units).
- Multifamily units in Charleston and Mattoon cater to students, seniors, and working families.
- Manufactured homes provide affordable options in rural areas.
- Limited new subdivisions slow housing diversity.

Age of Housing Stock

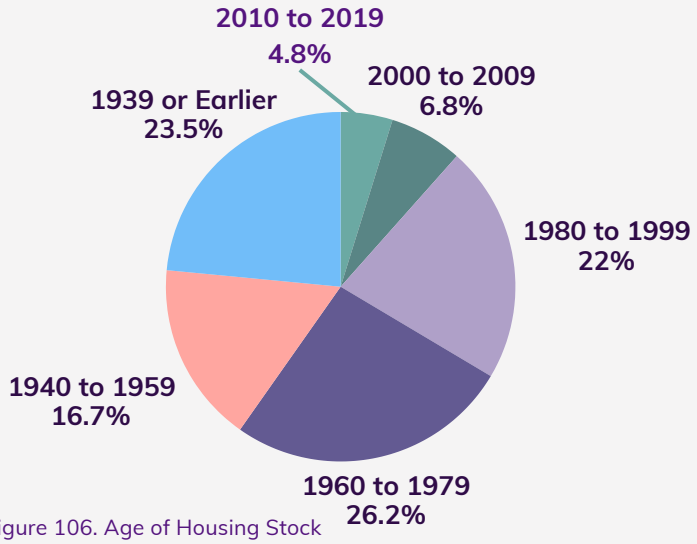


Figure 106. Age of Housing Stock

Total Housing Units

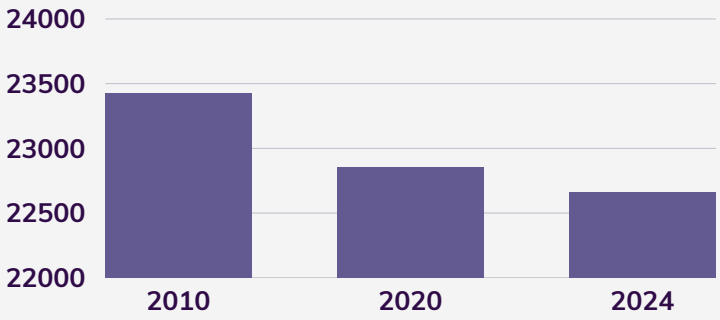


Figure 107. Total Housing Units

Types of Housing in Coles County

A county's housing supply typically includes a range of housing types. A balanced zoning framework supports housing choice by allowing a variety of housing types in appropriate locations while managing compatibility through site design and performance standards. The table below reviews the different housing types in the County, highlighting zoning district categories, density, common locations, and other requirements for the housing type.

Housing Type	Typical Zoning District Category	Typical Density / Intensity	Common Location	Common Zoning Notes & Requirements
Detached Single-Family (SF)	Low-Density Residential (R-1 / RS / SF)	Lowest density (1 unit/lot)	Established neighborhoods; new subdivisions	Minimum lot size + frontage; height limits (often 2–3 stories); setbacks; garage/parking rules; driveway access standards; design compatibility standards may apply
Manufactured Home (on individual lot)	Agricultural (A), Rural Residential (RR), or Residential by permit	Low to moderate	Rural areas, small towns, infill lots where allowed	Often requires permanent foundation or tie-downs; skirting; HUD code compliance; limits on age/condition of unit; may require conditional/special use approval
Manufactured Home Park / Mobile Home Park	Manufactured Home Park District (MH) or Special Use	Moderate density (park-style)	Edge of town, near utilities; away from incompatible heavy industrial	Requires park license/registration; internal road standards; lot spacing; utility hookups; stormwater plan; management plan; screening/buffering from adjacent uses
Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU)	Allowed within SF districts (by-right or conditional)	Adds 1 unit per lot	Neighborhood infill; near jobs, schools, healthcare	Often requires owner-occupancy (sometimes debated); size cap (e.g., max % of primary dwelling); parking requirement (0–1 spaces typical); entrance/appearance standards; limits on short-term rentals
Duplex / Two-Flat	Medium-Density Residential (R-2)	Low–moderate	Transitional areas between SF and multifamily; near corridors	Minimum lot size per unit; parking requirements (commonly 2+ spaces); building width/height limits; buffering when adjacent to SF; sometimes restricted to corner lots or collector streets

Table 12. Types of Housing in Coles County

Housing Type	Typical Zoning District Category	Typical Density / Intensity	Common Location	Common Zoning Notes & Requirements
Triplex / Fourplex / Small Multifamily	Medium-Density Residential (R-2 / R-3)	Moderate	Neighborhood nodes; near downtown; near transit routes	Often requires site plan review; stricter parking and landscaping; trash enclosure requirements; fire access; compatibility standards (stepbacks, façade rules)
Townhomes / Rowhouses	Medium–High Density (R-3 / RM) or PUD	Moderate–high	Growth areas, near schools/parks; walkable corridors	Often developed under PUD for flexibility; private street/utility easements; HOA requirements; common open space; shared stormwater facilities; density bonuses sometimes used
Multifamily Apartments (5+ units)	Multifamily Residential (RM / R-4)	High	Near services, transit, downtown, employment centers	Site plan review almost always required; density limits (units/acre); building height limits; parking ratios; landscaping/buffers; lighting standards; stormwater detention; traffic access standards
Mixed-Use Residential (apartments above commercial)	Downtown (DT), Mixed Use (MU), Corridor districts	Moderate–high	Downtowns and commercial corridors	Ground-floor design requirements; reduced parking options; shared parking allowances; noise/odor mitigation; loading zone standards; compatibility rules for adjacent residential
Senior Housing (Independent Living, age-restricted)	Multifamily or Special Use Residential	Moderate	Near healthcare, shopping, transit, parks	Age restriction rules (55+); accessibility encouraged (universal design); parking ratios may be lower; on-site amenities common; pedestrian connectivity standards
Assisted Living / Supportive Living Facility	Institutional (I) or Special Use in residential/mixed-use	Moderate–high (building-based)	Near hospitals/clinics; along arterials	Licensing and operational requirements (state-level); drop-off/loading areas; emergency access; larger building footprints; buffering from SF areas; sometimes treated as “community facility”

Table 13. Types of Housing in Coles County Continued

Housing Type	Typical Zoning District Category	Typical Density / Intensity	Common Location	Common Zoning Notes & Requirements
Nursing Home / Skilled Care	Institutional (I)	High intensity	Near healthcare corridors	Similar to assisted living with enhanced emergency/ service access; may require planning and public hearing.
Supportive Housing (Permanent Supportive Housing / PSH)	Multifamily (RM) or Special Use (depending on code)	Moderate–high	Near transit and services; walkable areas	Should be regulated like multifamily if functionally apartments; may require service plan; fair housing compliance; avoid excessive spacing requirements that limit feasibility
Group Home (small shared living arrangement)	Residential (often allowed) or Special Use	Low (house-scale)	Neighborhoods, near services	Often limits on residents by code (varies); parking requirements; safety codes; reasonable accommodation considerations
Transitional Housing (time-limited housing + services)	Institutional / Community Facility / Special Use	Moderate	Near service providers and transit	Often requires management/operations plan; security and staffing plan; separation/buffering rules may exist; site plan review; coordination with emergency services
Emergency Shelter / Homeless Shelter	Institutional / Public/Community Facility / Special Use	Moderate	Near services, transit, healthcare; not isolated	Typically requires conditional/special use approval; operational plan (hours, staffing, intake); safety and security measures; ADA accessibility; parking/loading; coordination with police/fire
Student Housing (dorms, off-campus apartments)	Institutional (campus) or Multifamily	Moderate–high	Near campus and transit routes	Occupancy rules often matter (unrelated persons limits); parking/bike parking standards; property management requirements; noise and nuisance enforcement tools; sometimes requires rental registration
Rural Farmstead / Rural Residential	Agricultural (A) / Rural Residential (RR)	Very low	Unincorporated areas	Minimum acreage and frontage; septic/well requirements; access to county roads; limits on splitting farmland; floodplain restrictions; driveway permit requirements

Table 14. Types of Housing in Coles County Continued 2

Rentals in Coles County

Rental housing is essential to Coles County's housing ecosystem, offering options for households that are not yet ready to purchase a home, prefer flexibility, or require accommodations that align with a limited or fixed income. A robust rental market benefits local employers, helps retain residents, and ensures that housing is accessible for a diverse array of households, including young adults, families, seniors, and individuals with disabilities. In Coles County, the demand for rental housing is shaped by the presence of higher education institutions, local employment hubs, and the ongoing need for affordable units that adhere to modern safety and quality standards.

The Role of Rentals in Meeting Local Housing Demand

Rental housing caters to various populations throughout the county, including:

- Workforce households seeking convenient access to jobs and services
- Students and university-affiliated households, particularly in Charleston
- Seniors and fixed-income residents in need of smaller, low-maintenance units
- Residents with disabilities requiring accessible units or supportive services
- Households transitioning out of homelessness or housing instability
- Families and individuals affected by escalating housing costs

A well-rounded rental market should encompass a variety of unit types, such as single-family rentals, duplexes, small multifamily buildings, and larger apartment complexes, along with a diverse range of price points.

The challenges associated with rental housing mirror those found in other types of housing: affordability, availability, quality of options, and aging properties. Additionally, there are unique issues related to the physical locations of rentals and the distinctions between the student and non-student markets.

Concentration of Rentals in Specific Areas

Rental housing is often concentrated in and around Mattoon and Charleston, including areas near major corridors, downtown districts, and educational institutions. Concentration can be appropriate where infrastructure and services exist, but it may also contribute to neighborhood concerns when maintenance, property management, or enforcement resources are limited.

Moreover, there are worries about how accessible these rental housing clusters are for residents. In rural areas like Coles County, essential resources can be far from residents' homes. This, combined with transportation service gaps, can create a disconnect and significant challenges for those without personal vehicles.

Student and Non-Student Rental Market Pressures

In areas with a high demand from students, rental markets can face seasonal turnover and fluctuating occupancy rates. This dynamic can affect neighborhood stability and property maintenance, particularly when homes originally designed for families transition into high-turnover rentals.

Extraction vs. Stewardship in Housing

Housing markets in the U.S. are influenced by two primary approaches: extraction and stewardship. Extraction views housing as a short-term investment focused on investor profits, while stewardship regards housing as essential infrastructure, emphasizing preservation and community well-being. Stewardship aims to maintain safe, affordable housing, enhance neighborhood stability, integrate housing with transport and services, and ensure access for all income levels.

Recent trends, such as more rental listings and rising rents, show sustained demand for rentals. By late 2025, the median rent was about $850 per month, with rental properties growing annually. Conversely, extraction dynamics are evident where investor-owned properties, especially those bought by out-of-area owners, lead to high turnover and speculative behavior, with less focus on maintenance. Research shows institutional investors often neglect community involvement compared to owner-occupants.

In college towns like Charleston, investor interest in student housing near Eastern Illinois University can impact neighborhood stability, aligning with broader research that investor ownership reshapes neighborhoods and affects ownership patterns.

These trends indicate a shift towards viewing housing as an investment rather than a community asset, potentially leading to:

- **Housing Instability & Affordability:**
  - Increased investor purchases focused on short-term gains
  - Local families priced out, leading to higher resident turnover
  - Weakens community sense and civic engagement
- **Property Maintenance & Livability:**
  - Profit prioritized over maintenance
  - Quick property flips without improvements
  - Deterioration of housing stock impacts safety and desirability
- **Community Dynamics:**
  - Short-term rentals replace long-term residents
  - Diminished neighborhood cohesion
  - Strain on local infrastructure
- **Sustainability & Inclusivity:**
  - Challenges to creating sustainable, inclusive communities
  - Difficulty in meeting diverse population needs in Coles County

Counties influence whether their housing systems focus on extraction or stewardship through policy decisions like zoning, land use regulations, property maintenance standards, rental registration, inspection programs, rehabilitation incentives, and local ownership support.

- **Stewardship-oriented policies** treat housing as vital infrastructure, promoting reinvestment, protecting existing properties, and aligning with transportation and economic goals.
- Insufficient regulation can lead to instability, neglect, and neighborhood decline.

By prioritizing stability, quality, and accessibility, counties like Coles County can ensure housing supports vibrant, resilient communities.

Housing Availability, Affordability, & Workforce Needs

Overview of Housing Challenges in the County

Many housing units were built before 1939, with more than half constructed before 1979. The decline in new construction has led to an aging housing stock. The county also faces a tight housing market with limited supply and rapid turnover, affecting both affordability and availability.

Affordability Constraints

Key factors impacting affordability include:

- High absorption rates for homes priced between $75,000 and $200,000 highlight a shortage of starter homes.
- Lower-priced properties are often snapped up by cash or conventional buyers, hindering first-time or credit-restricted buyers.
- Rising sale prices, property taxes, insurance rates, and utility costs.

Additional concerns exacerbating affordability:

- Limited new construction.
- Rising costs to rehabilitate older homes with outdated plumbing, electrical, and HVAC systems.
- Increasing construction and repair expenses.
- Household incomes growing slowly compared to rising housing costs.

Importance of Workforce Housing

Workforce housing is crucial for regional employers like healthcare facilities, manufacturers, logistics providers, and educational institutions. Employer interviews and regional planning studies reveal:

- Employees struggle to find affordable, quality housing near workplaces.
- Many new hires commute from neighboring counties with more affordable housing.
- Rental properties near employment hubs are aging and scarce, especially in Mattoon and Charleston.
- Workforce households compete with investors for affordable homes.

Employers depend on stable housing options. Expanding the supply of attainable units can aid in employee recruitment and retention.

- There's a shortage of move-in-ready homes priced for the county’s workforce, including teachers, healthcare professionals, and manufacturing employees.
- Many households spend over 30% of their income on rent, according to ACS estimates.
- Rapid sales and rising competition restrict opportunities for younger workers and families.

Housing Type & Availability Comparison

The chart below compares major housing types in Coles County, showing their typical usage. While student-oriented rentals or seasonal and short-term lodging experience high vacancy rates at times, they don't meet long-term housing needs. In contrast, housing for low- and moderate-income households, seniors, and those needing supportive services generally sees high occupancy with limited turnover. This suggests that housing challenges in Coles County stem more from the availability and affordability of suitable housing for year-round residents than from the total number of units. The chart is based on planning-level estimates from U.S. Census, American Community Survey data, HUD inventories, IHDA program data, and insights from local housing providers and past planning efforts, aiming to illustrate overall trends rather than precise vacancy counts.

Housing Use Patterns by Type (Occupied vs. Unoccupied)

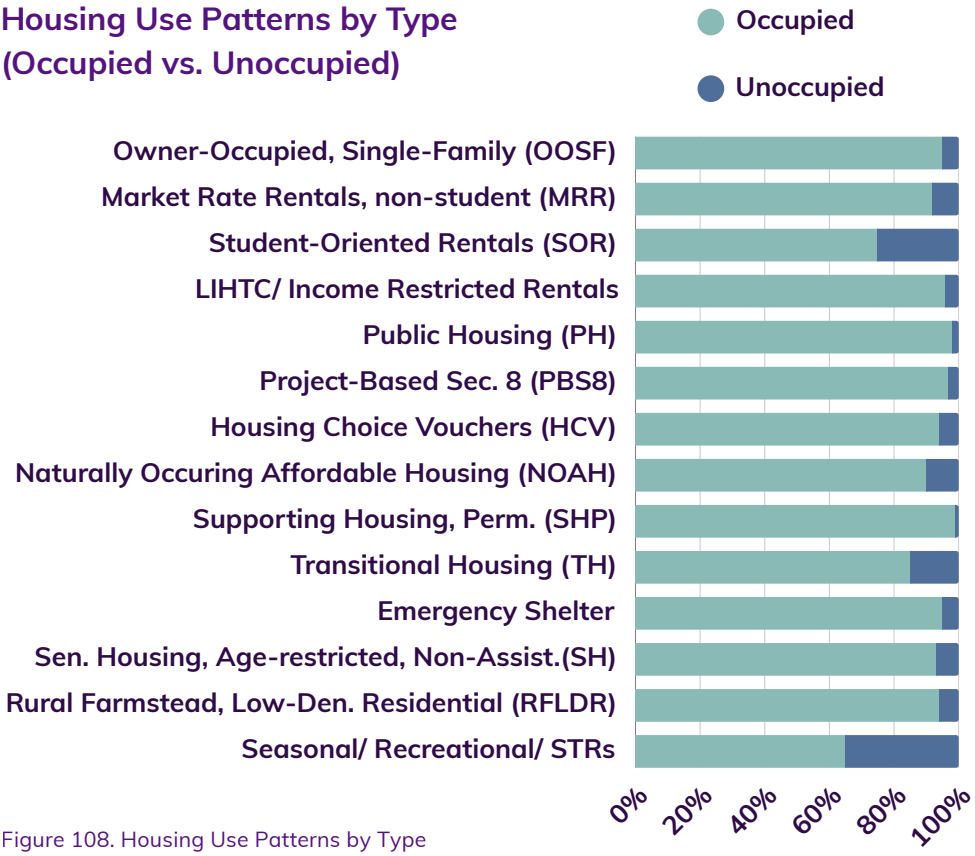


Figure 108. Housing Use Patterns by Type

Housing Occupancy Type

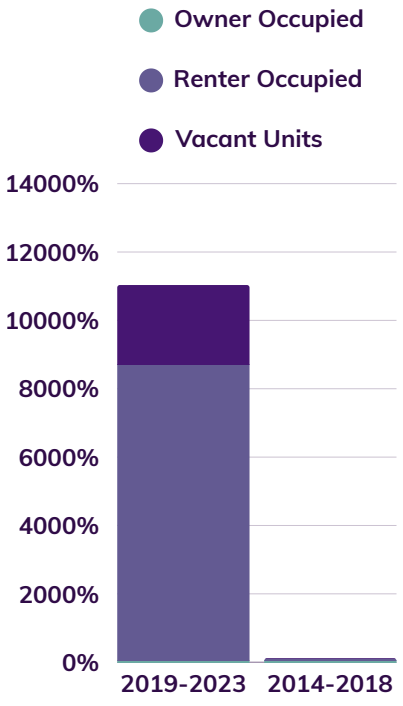


Figure 109. Housing Occupancy: Owned or Rented

Housing Availability Percentage by Type

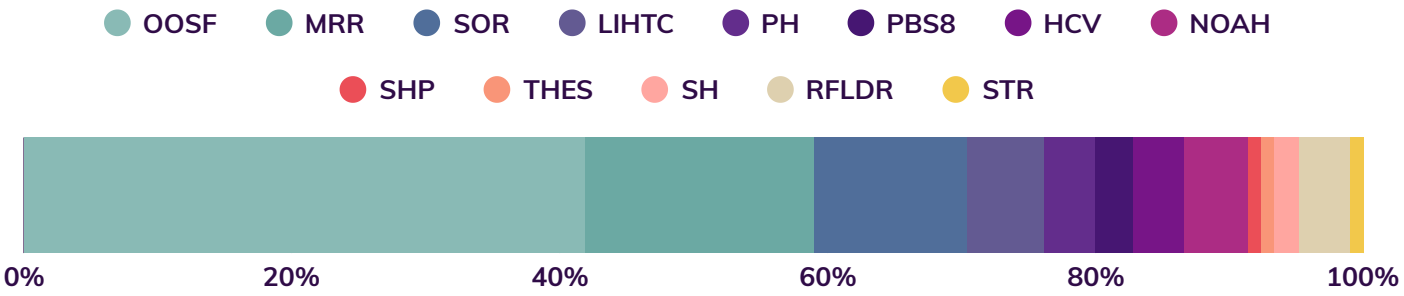


Figure 110. Housing Availability Percentage by Type

Together, the charts displayed on the previous page show that while some housing types represent a large share of the county's inventory, they do not function as available housing for most residents. Housing types that serve low, and moderate-income households represent a much smaller share but operate at or near full capacity.

Affordable Housing

In trying to understand what affordable housing looks like in Coles County, we must first examine the facts and ideas we have about the terminology. The Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) defines affordable housing as housing where monthly expenses, including utilities (excluding telephone), do not surpass 30% of a household's annual median income (AMI). Households that allocate more than 30% of their income toward housing costs are considered cost burdened, while those spending over 50% of their income are classified as severely cost burdened.

The chart below reflects what these figures look like for Coles County.

AMI Level	1-Person Income Limit (Approx)	4-Person Income Limit (Approx)
30% AMI	$18,210	$30,000
50% AMI	$30,350	$43,300
60% AMI	$36,420	$51,960
80% AMI*	$48,560	$69,280

Table 15. Annual Median Income Limits for Housing Assistance

This data highlights the challenges many residents face in securing affordable housing. In Coles County, as in many regions, the income and housing cost gap often results in many being cost-burdened. Addressing these issues requires exploring strategies to make housing more attainable, such as increasing affordable rental units, incentivizing developers to build affordable housing, and providing financial assistance to low-income families.

Additionally, community engagement and collaboration with local governments, non-profit organizations, and the private sector is crucial to developing sustainable solutions. Implementing policies that encourage mixed-income developments and investing in programs that support homeownership education can also contribute to long-term stability.

Types of Affordable Housing

Housing Programs

As mentioned earlier, individuals with an Area Median Income (AMI) of $48,560 or less are eligible for various low-income housing options. Your position in the table from the previous page will determine if you qualify for any of the programs outlined in this section.

In Coles County, affordable housing initiatives such as LIHTC, financed developments, HUD Section 8, public housing, supportive housing, and HOME-supported projects are funded through federal and state programs, along with private investment. These initiatives use external funds to improve housing availability, support households with below-market incomes, and boost local economic growth and stability by providing additional housing options for the local workforce.

The graphic below correctly distinguishes between public housing, Housing Choice Vouchers (Section 8), LIHTC affordable apartments, and USDA rural housing. These are the most common federal housing assistance pathways for lower-income households.

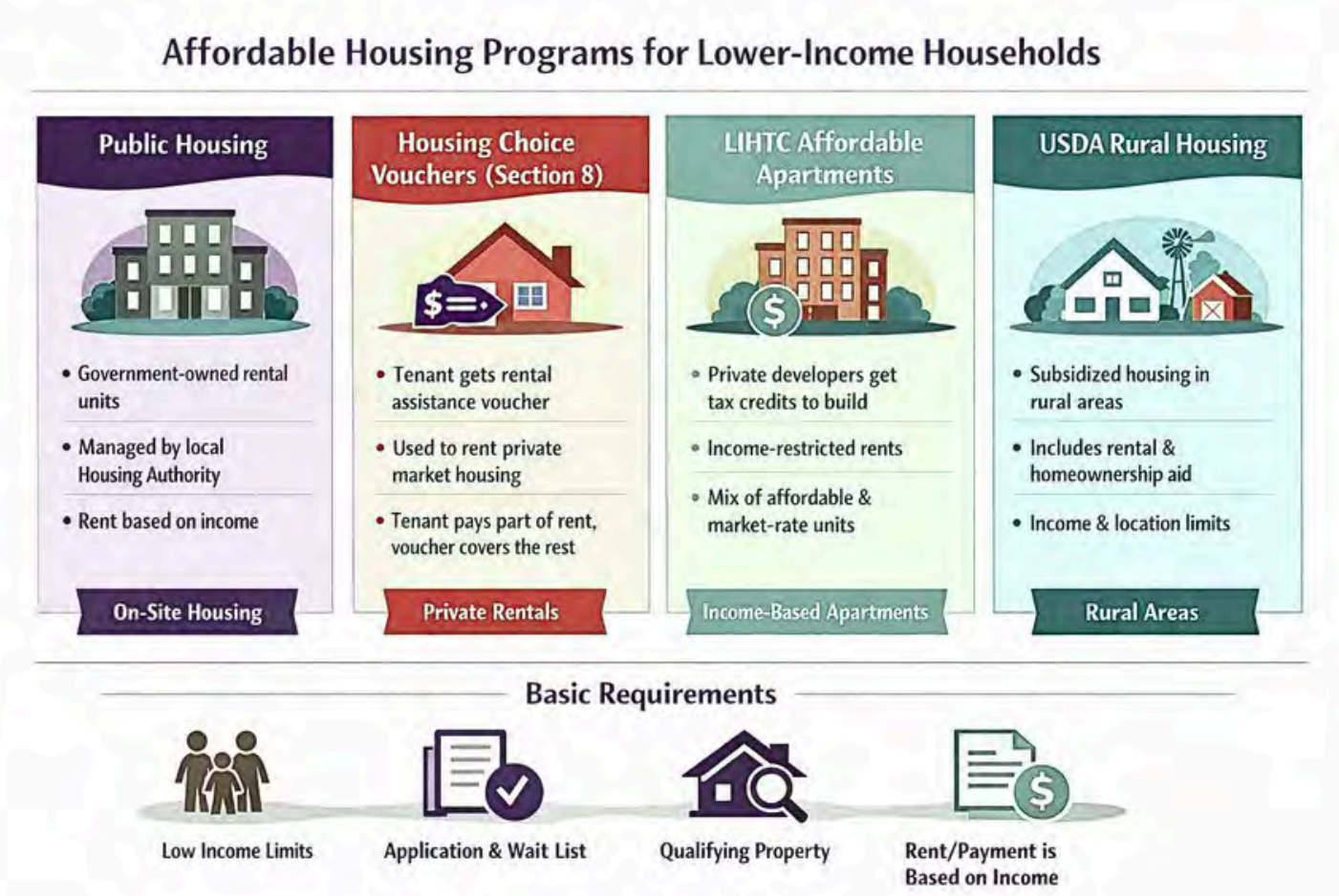


Figure 111. Affordable Housing Programs for Lower-Income Levels Comparison

Income Tier	Most Relevant Programs	Who It Serves
≤30% AMI	Public Housing; Section 8 priority; Supportive housing	Extremely low income individuals/families and vulnerable populations
≤50% AMI	Section 8 PBRA; many LIHTC units	Low income renters needing subsidized or income-restricted housing
≤60% AMI	LIHTC income limits	Moderate low income renters (LIHTC eligibility)
Up to ~80% AMI	LIHTC income averaging; Trust Fund	Wider low-moderate income eligibility, though not all units

Table 16. Affordable Housing Programs for Income Qualifications

Affordable housing programs for low-income households ensure housing stability in Coles County. These programs focus on residents earning below the area median income (AMI), such as seniors on fixed incomes, low-wage families, people with disabilities, and those transitioning from homelessness. Funding is primarily from state, federal, and private sources, making local planning support crucial.

Preservation of Existing Affordable Units

Many affordable units are old and need repair, with rehabilitation programs often underfunded. Priorities include:

- Preserving income-restricted rentals and owner-occupied homes
- Supporting rehabilitation and weatherization programs
- Preventing loss of units due to neglect or redevelopment

Production of New Affordable Housing

New construction is necessary but challenging due to rising costs and funding competition. Key planning actions:

- Identify sites with proper zoning and infrastructure
- Streamline approvals to reduce risk and cost
- Allow multifamily and small-scale developments where infrastructure supports them
- Use Enterprise Zone incentives to cut costs
- Support applications for LIHTC, HOME, and Trust Fund resources
- Encourage a mix of deeply and moderately affordable units
- Align targets with local needs, including extremely low-income households
- Ensure long-term affordability through deed restrictions or compliance periods
- Promote universal design and accessibility in housing
- Coordinate with service providers and transit access
- Disperse affordable housing across neighborhoods
- Locate housing near jobs, education, healthcare, and services
- Address concerns through transparent planning and engagement

Senior, Accessible, & Supportive Housing

Coles County offers various housing and services for older adults, people with disabilities, and those needing extra assistance for safe, independent living.

Senior & Independent Living

Designed for those 55 and older, Coles County features senior apartments and independent living options with accessible units, often income-restricted by housing programs.

Supportive Living & Assisted Housing

These facilities provide personal care for older adults needing help with daily activities, bridging the gap between independent living and full nursing care.

Skilled Nursing & Long-Term Care

Licensed facilities offer 24-hour medical care, rehabilitation, and long-term care for those with significant health needs.

Supportive Housing & Disability Services

Partnerships provide stable housing with mental health services, substance use treatment, and recovery support for those with disabilities and complex needs.

Aging, Caregiver, & Support Services

Agencies offer information, benefits counseling, caregiver support, and care coordination, helping residents remain at home longer and manage care transitions.

Coles County, following state trends, sees a rise in older adults living in homes lacking accessibility features. The demand for senior housing will grow significantly over the next decade, and accessible housing options, such as duplexes, cottage homes, single-story townhomes, and small apartments, will be vital for supporting aging in place. Collaboration among developers, non-profits, and government agencies is crucial to create innovative housing solutions tailored to Coles County's aging population. Prioritizing these developments will ensure seniors live comfortably and with dignity, fostering a vibrant community for all ages.

Challenges include:

- Limited single-story, no-step entry homes
- Insufficient independent senior housing with services
- Lack of accessible rental units (e.g., ADA-compliant bathrooms, elevators)
- Rural isolation for seniors without transportation
- Growing demand for housing linked to chronic health needs
- Concentrated assisted living facilities in Charleston and Mattoon, leaving rural gaps

In Coles County, specialized housing types constitute less than ~10% of the overall housing inventory. While nearly 19% of the population is aged 65 or older, and represents over a quarter of public housing households.

Planning Considerations

- Demand for accessible and age-friendly housing is expected to grow as the population ages.
- Many senior and supportive housing options are income-restricted or have waiting lists.
- Expanding accessible design, supportive housing models, and service coordination will be critical to meeting future needs.

Naturally Occurring Affordable Housing (NOAH)

Naturally Occurring Affordable Housing (NOAH) includes homes and apartments affordable to lower- and moderate-income households without public subsidies or income restrictions. These units are typically older, smaller, or located in areas with lower housing costs, not part of a formal housing assistance program.

Unlike public housing or subsidized apartments, NOAH is part of the private market, with rents and prices set by the market but remaining relatively low compared to newer or high-end housing.

NOAH is vital to Coles County's housing system because it:

- **For many residents, NOAH is the only affordable option.**
- Provides affordable options without public funding
- Offers flexibility for those not meeting strict program requirements
- Supplies much of the county's lower-cost rental housing
- Supports workforce stability by housing essential workers

Challenges include aging properties needing repairs, rising costs leading to rent increases or reduced quality, and market pressures like investor acquisitions raising rents or repurposing properties. Without protection from long-term affordability requirements, Coles County risks losing NOAH units, limiting options for those relying on lower-cost housing.

NOAH includes:

- Older single-family homes used as rentals
- Small multifamily buildings (duplexes, fourplexes, walk-up apartments)
- Modest apartment complexes built before luxury standards
- Housing in established neighborhoods near Charleston, Mattoon, and smaller communities
- Older housing near Eastern Illinois University

These options often serve:

- Working households
- Seniors on fixed incomes
- Students
- First-time renters
- Those unable to access subsidized housing

NOAH presently makes up approximately 4.8% of Coles County's Housing Stock

Housing Development, Redevelopment & Infill Opportunities

Preservation, Rehabilitation, and Blight Reduction

Housing rehabilitation has been a longstanding priority in Coles County. The Coles County Regional Planning and Development Commission has administered state and federal housing rehabilitation programs since the late 1990s, including Community Development Block Grants (CDBG), IHDA HOME and Affordable Housing Trust Fund grants, FHLB, and other assistance programs that support improvements to older homes for low-income households. These programs have helped hundreds of homeowners address health, safety, accessibility, and structural issues, preserving housing stock in Charleston, Mattoon, and surrounding areas.

Local governments have also pursued blight reduction and neighborhood stabilization. Mattoon, Charleston, and Oakland have used demolition funds and community revitalization efforts to remove unsafe or obsolete structures, preparing sites for reuse. The Illinois Housing Development Authority's Strong Communities Program provides grants for rehabilitation or demolition of vacant and abandoned residential properties to return them to productive use, supporting property value stabilization and community revitalization.

Before



After



Figure 112. Mattoon Home Rehabilitation Project Before and After

Charleston: Revitalization & Infill Context

The City of Charleston's 2020 Comprehensive Plan identifies infill development as a key strategy for revitalizing established neighborhoods and making more efficient use of existing infrastructure. The plan emphasizes directing new housing to vacant and underutilized lots within the city, particularly in areas already served by utilities, streets, and public services. Charleston has supported this goal through building permit incentives introduced in the mid-2010s, intended to reduce development costs and encourage residential reinvestment. The Comprehensive Plan notes a long-term decline in residential construction activity compared to previous decades, reinforcing the importance of policies that promote infill housing, adaptive reuse, and neighborhood-scale redevelopment rather than outward expansion.

Mattoon: New Initiatives & Policy Actions

Mattoon has taken a multi-faceted approach to housing development and redevelopment:

- The City received an IHDA housing planning grant in 2023 to assess community housing needs and develop strategies based on public input, positioning the community to prioritize future housing actions aligned with local goals (city housing planning outreach).
- Zoning changes have been adopted to allow tiny homes on vacant lots, enabling small-scale infill and diversification of housing options; several tiny home units have already been completed in Mattoon as a demonstration of this approach (municipal planning context).
- Demolition of abandoned or blighted properties has increased, with more active removal of deteriorated structures to improve neighborhood conditions and ready sites for redevelopment (local council actions).
- Mattoon secured an $8.4 million housing development grant that funded the construction of The Commons of Mattoon, a 25-unit supportive housing development for low-income residents, including adults with disabilities. This project represents a significant new affordable housing production in the community and was completed and fully occupied in 2025, illustrating practical public-private collaboration to expand stable housing options.

Addressing Housing Needs Across All Price Ranges

Despite rehabilitation and revitalization programs, housing demand in Coles County remains strong across all price points. Feedback from residents and local stakeholders indicates that the county needs not only affordable and supportive housing, but also workforce and market-rate housing to retain professionals and support economic growth. Addressing this gap is essential for talent retention, employer recruitment, and long-term economic growth.

Infill and redevelopment opportunities within established communities, combined with new construction incentives and strategic planning, are key components of a balanced housing strategy that responds to current needs while preparing for future growth.

Future Opportunities and Challenges

Despite ongoing rehabilitation and redevelopment efforts, demand for housing assistance continues to exceed available funding. Rising construction costs, labor shortages, and increased competition for state and federal grants limit the pace of rehabilitation and affordable housing production. These conditions underscore the need for a balanced housing strategy that includes:

- Expanded infill and redevelopment in existing neighborhoods
- Increased production of affordable and workforce housing
- New market-rate and higher-end housing to support economic competitiveness
- Continued use of Enterprise Zone incentives to attract private developers

Incentives, Financing Tools, & Partnerships

By aligning local plans, zoning tools, and financial incentives, Coles County and its municipalities are positioned to support diverse housing development that meets present needs while planning for future growth.

Enterprise Zone: New Housing Incentives

The Coles County Enterprise Zone provides state and local incentives to encourage economic development. Beginning in 2026, residential development will become eligible for Enterprise Zone support, allowing qualifying housing projects to benefit from construction materials sales tax exemptions, property tax abatements, and other incentives that reduce costs for new housing construction and rehabilitation. These incentives are intended to support both workforce and market-rate housing investment countywide and have been expanded to promote residential reuse and redevelopment alongside traditional commercial and industrial uses.

Key Enterprise Zone incentives include:

- Sales tax exemptions on building materials for qualifying projects, reducing upfront construction costs.
- Property tax abatements on the increased assessed value attributable to new construction or substantial rehabilitation, enhancing long-term financial returns.
- Local facilitation and streamlined approvals to support coordinated investments.

Several parcels countywide, including infill lots within existing subdivisions, have been added to the expanded zone to encourage both infill and greenfield residential development. More information about Enterprise Zones in Coles County can be found on page 158.

State and Federal Housing Financing Tools

Low Income Housing Tax Credits (LIHTC)

The Low Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) is the primary federal tool for financing affordable rental housing. It provides tax credits to private developers, which can be sold to investors to generate equity for affordable housing projects. LIHTC projects must remain affordable for an extended period (typically 30 years) and are administered in Illinois by the Illinois Housing Development Authority (IHDA).

LIHTC Advantages:

- Attracts private capital to affordable housing projects.
- Encourages long-term affordability and robust compliance.

LIHTC has financed the vast majority of affordable rental housing nationally and is among the most widely used tools to create and preserve affordable units in Illinois.

HOME Investment Partnerships Program

The HOME Program is a federally funded grant program that supports the production, rehabilitation, and preservation of affordable housing. Administered at the state and local level, HOME funds can be used for rental housing development, homeownership assistance, and housing rehabilitation. HOME funds are often combined with other subsidies (such as LIHTC) to fill financing gaps in affordable housing projects.

Community Development Block Grants (CDBG)

The CDBG Program administered by the Illinois DCEO provides competitive grants to local governments for housing rehabilitation and neighborhood stabilization. CDBG housing rehabilitation funds can support major repairs to low- and moderate-income owner-occupied homes, addressing health, safety, and accessibility needs while stabilizing neighborhoods.

Illinois Affordable Housing Trust Fund & Other State Credits

The Illinois Affordable Housing Trust Fund provides grants and loans for acquisition, construction, development, and rehabilitation of affordable housing. The Illinois Affordable Housing Tax Credit encourages private donations for affordable housing by offering donors a state tax credit on qualifying contributions. These tools complement federal resources and expand financing capacity for nonprofit and mission-driven developers.

Partnerships and Development Support

Public-Private and Nonprofit Collaboration

Effective housing development often depends on partnerships among local governments, nonprofit housing providers, developers, and financial institutions. These collaborations can combine public incentives with private capital and nonprofit expertise to produce housing that serves a range of needs, from supportive and affordable units to workforce and market-rate products.

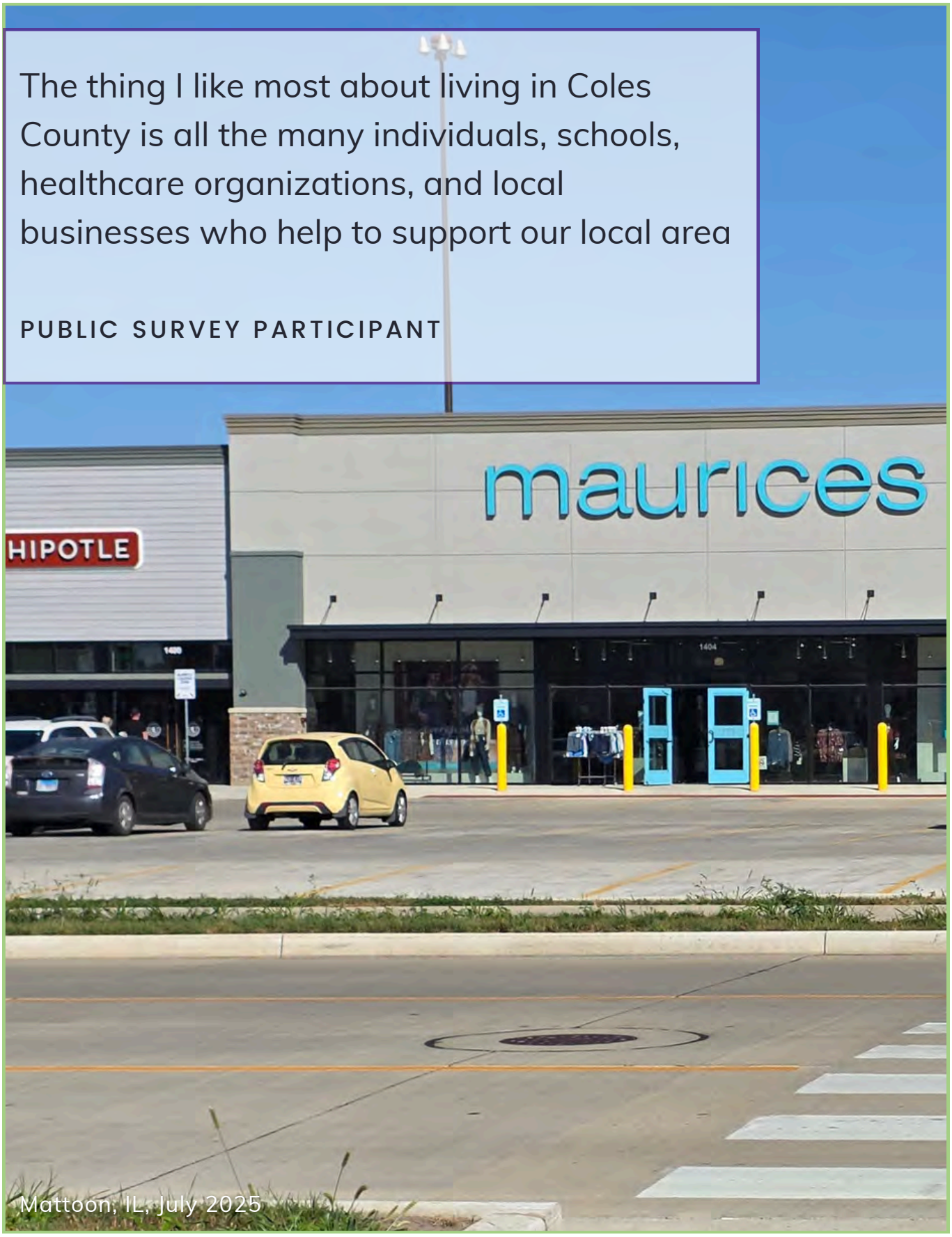
Regional affordable housing providers, such as Habitat for Humanity and community development organizations, partner with local entities and secure grants to build or rehabilitate homes and provide supportive services.

Tax-Exempt Financing and Regional Tools

Statewide economic development tools like Illinois Regional Development Authorities (IL-RDAs) provide tax-exempt bond financing that can lower borrowing costs for qualified projects, including housing and community facilities, when structured appropriately with public sector partners.

The thing I like most about living in Coles County is all the many individuals, schools, healthcare organizations, and local businesses who help to support our local area

PUBLIC SURVEY PARTICIPANT



Mattoon, IL, July 2025

Economy

Coles County functions as a tertiary market with some secondary-market roles, driven by sectors like higher education, healthcare, manufacturing, and agribusiness. Its economy benefits from proximity to metropolitan employment centers, serving both local residents and nearby rural communities. Anchored by diverse institutional employers, industrial activities, agriculture, logistics, small businesses, and entrepreneurial ventures, this balanced economic framework ensures stability and fosters gradual, community-driven growth.

In 2024, Charleston-Mattoon, Illinois, was recognized as a leading Micro Market Nationwide by Site Selection Magazine. This recognition is crucial as it underscores the region's economic potential and growing national significance, attracting investments and opportunities that can further enhance its development.

Looking ahead, Coles County's economic strategy, led by Coles Together, focuses on business retention, workforce alignment, rural and agricultural strength, and quality-of-life investments. By prioritizing infrastructure readiness, talent development, entrepreneurship, and sustainable land use, the county aims to boost economic resilience, wage competitiveness, and adaptability to changing market conditions while maintaining its community character.

Key organizations and institutions such as Rural King in Mattoon, Sarah Bush Lincoln Health Center, Eastern Illinois University, Lake Land College, and other educational establishments support this dynamic economic landscape, playing vital roles in the county's ongoing development and success.

Economic Development Partnerships & Governance

Coles Together Economic Development Organization (EDO) is a 501c6 led by President & CEO Dr. Ronda Sauget. It promotes business investment and community growth by coordinating with public and private sectors for site selection and regional development, aiming to make Coles County a competitive business hub.

Coles Together offers guidance and leadership in: Coles County Enterprise Zone, business recruitment, retention, and expansion, site development, infrastructure coordination, Housing initiatives, & Executive Master Class Series

Coles Together Subcommittees includes:

Housing Subcommittee: This team, led by Kirk Swenson, Joe Dively, and Kayla Aaron, works on the EZ housing component and collaborates with local real estate and industry professionals.

AMI2 Subcommittee: Focused on workforce housing, transportation, childcare, and STEM/vocational training, this group supports recruitment and skill development for employees.

The Charleston, Mattoon, and Oakland Chambers of Commerce offer services such as business referrals, visibility, and promotion opportunities. They support local businesses by providing networking events and representation on community initiative committees. The Chambers emphasize economic development and offer training resources. Members can also use the Chamber's logo, participate in ribbon-cutting ceremonies, and share community events and job openings to enhance their visibility.

Understanding the Local Economy

Coles County's economy mainly revolves around services, with many jobs in education, healthcare, retail, and other service-related fields. This highlights the county's role as a regional hub for services and employment. Trade and transportation are also key, supporting local businesses and regional connections.

Though manufacturing employs fewer workers, it is still an important part of the county's economy. It offers stable jobs and adds diversity to the local economic landscape. Public administration and leisure-related industries also contribute to job opportunities and community stability.

Overall, Coles County enjoys a diverse job market, low unemployment, and stable wages, providing a strong foundation for future workforce development, attracting businesses, and economic resilience.

Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is another important measure of economic output, representing the total annual value of goods and services produced. In 2023, Coles County's GDP was about $3.3 billion, covering sectors like agriculture, manufacturing, healthcare, retail, and education, including Eastern Illinois University. GDP helps compare the county's economic size to others.

Analyzing GDP alongside employment and wages helps identify strong industries and areas needing support. Major contributors include healthcare, education, retail, manufacturing, and agriculture. This information assists residents, business owners, and leaders in planning for growth and community improvement. The pie chart on the right shows the county's GDP by industry.

Employees by Major Industry

Industry Sector	Approx. Jobs
Service Industries	~17,462
Trade & Transportation	~3,701
Manufacturing	~1,623
Leisure & Hospitality	~2,049
Public Administration	~595

Table 17. Employees by Major Industry

Coles County 2023 Gross Domestic Product by Industry Group

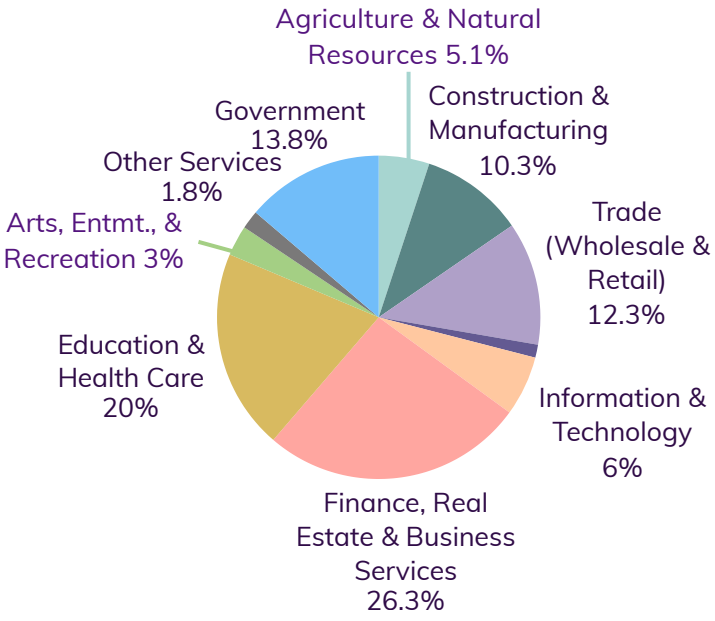


Figure 113. 2023 Gross Domestic Product by Industry Group

Employment Conditions

Employment conditions in Coles County reflect a stable, evolving economy driven by institutions, services, manufacturing, and agriculture. The unemployment rate is usually near or below the Illinois average, indicating steady job availability and economic resilience, supported by major employers in healthcare, education, government, and manufacturing.

Despite low unemployment, labor force participation lags behind the state due to an aging population, population decline, and outmigration of younger workers, limiting workforce availability and economic growth. A skills mismatch also leads to unfilled positions, underemployment, or wage stagnation. Seasonal and structural factors, like agriculture, tourism, and retail, cause employment fluctuations, while automation, remote work, and knowledge-based industry shifts present challenges and opportunities.

Addressing these issues involves boosting economic activity through workforce development, retaining and attracting employers, expanding broadband and transportation access, and aligning education with industry needs to maintain low unemployment and enhance job quality and wages.

People Employed in Coles County Compared to Neighboring Counties 2000-2024

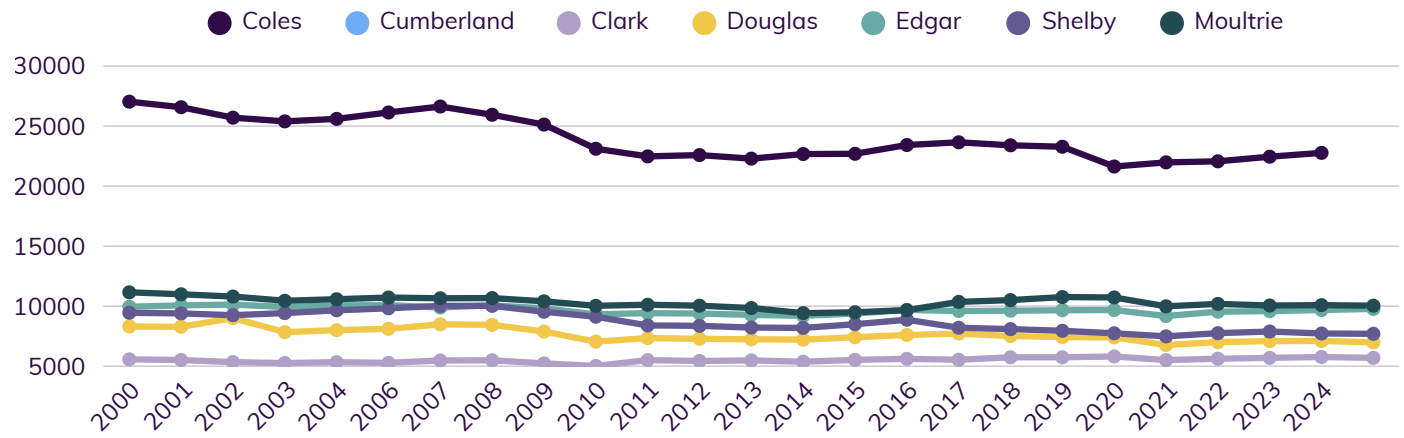


Figure 114. Number of People Employed in Coles County 2000-2024

Number of Employed People in the Counties Bordering Coles County 2000-2024

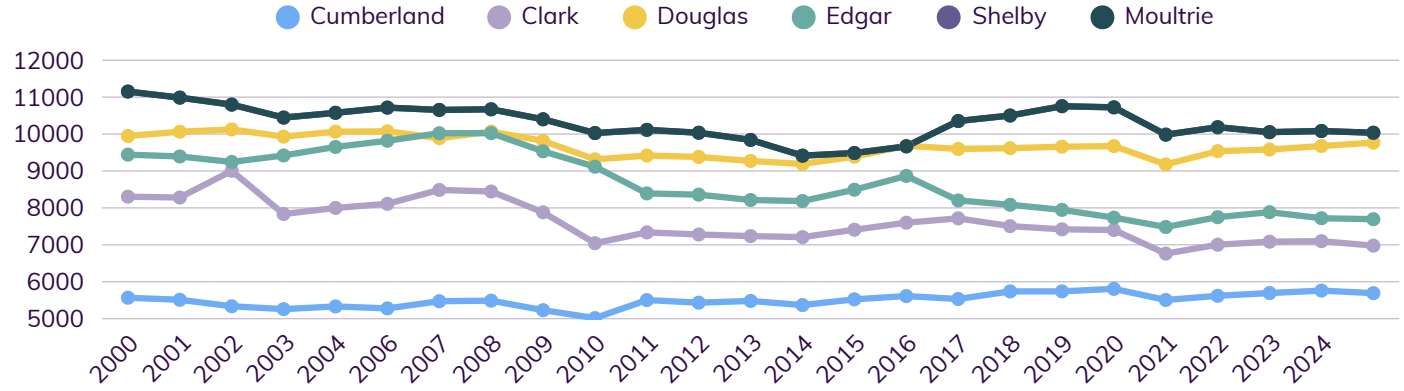


Figure 115. Number of People Employed in County's Bordering Coles County 2000-2024

Employment Trends

The charts on the previous page show how employment in Coles County compares to that of surrounding counties from 2000 to 2024. Coles County consistently has more employed people than its neighbors, reflecting its role as a regional employment hub anchored by healthcare, education, government, and other service-sector institutions. While employment levels fluctuate over time, particularly during economic downturns such as the Great Recession and the COVID-19 pandemic, Coles County has remained relatively stable compared to nearby counties with smaller workforces. This matters because it highlights both the county's economic resilience and its responsibility as a regional job center, while also underscoring the importance of maintaining a strong workforce to support existing employers and future growth.

Why Workforce Trends Matter to Community Health

Employment trends affect more than the economy; they shape how the entire community functions. A stable workforce supports local services, housing demand, infrastructure investment, and tax revenues that fund schools, transportation, and public spaces. When labor force participation declines, fewer workers are available to sustain these systems, increasing pressure on remaining residents and institutions. Strengthening workforce participation helps maintain a balanced, resilient community where economic activity, public services, and quality of life reinforce one another.

Employment Through an Ecological Lens

In Coles County, employment patterns reflect the interconnectedness of people, places, and resources within a community ecosystem. As a regional job center, the county supports housing stability, transportation, and local businesses, though challenges like population aging and workforce outmigration threaten this balance. Much like a healthy ecosystem, employment stability sustains land use, infrastructure, and public investment. Aligning workforce development with housing, education, transportation, and conservation enhances the county's resilience, promoting economic activity that supports long-term community and environmental health.

A robust workforce ecosystem relies on strong local businesses providing essential services, jobs, and community identity. As you will read in the next section, small businesses are crucial in translating regional stability into neighborhood vitality by creating jobs, supporting downtowns, and keeping economic activity local. To boost labor force participation and economic resilience, Coles County should focus on supporting small businesses, reducing commuting pressures, and reinforcing systems that sustain a thriving community.

Small Business & Entrepreneurship

Small businesses are crucial to Coles County's economy. They provide essential services and goods that cater to the unique needs of the community, fostering a sense of identity and pride among residents.

Role of Small Business in Coles County

Small businesses are vital for:

- Job creation and retention
- Building local wealth
- Enhancing downtown vitality
- Innovating during economic changes
- Serving rural and underserved areas

Entrepreneurship is particularly key in rural areas, where small businesses are often primary employers.

Existing Conditions

Coles County's small business landscape features retail, professional services, health care, education, construction, food services, and agriculture. Downtown areas foster entrepreneurship, while rural regions support small-scale manufacturing, trades, and value-added agriculture.

Entrepreneurship benefits from Eastern Illinois University, Lake Land College, workforce training, and regional economic partners. Challenges include access to capital, workforce availability, aging buildings, and limited technical assistance.

Small Business Incentives in Coles County

Coles County provides various incentives and support to help small businesses start, grow, and remain local, aiming to reduce costs, improve capital access, and strengthen the local business ecosystem.

Incentive	What It Does	Best For
Enterprise Zone Incentives	Sales tax exemptions, property tax abatement, potential income tax credits	New construction, expansion, job creation
TIF Districts	Reinvests future tax revenues into improvements	Downtown redevelopment, infrastructure, façade upgrades
SBDC Services	Advising, planning, funding navigation	Startups to established small businesses
Revolving Loan Funds	Low-interest gap financing (if available locally)	Financing when conventional credit isn't enough
State & Federal Programs	Additional tax credits, loans, disaster assistance	Broader business support

Table 18. Small Business Incentives



Figure 116. Small Businesses in Coles County Collage

Workforce Development & Training Programs

Coles County supports a coordinated workforce development system that connects education, training, and employment opportunities for residents and employers. Through collaboration among higher education institutions, workforce agencies, K–12 partners, and employers, the county helps align talent development with current and emerging workforce needs.

Lake Land College serves as a key workforce training provider, offering career and technical education, associate degrees, certificates, adult education, and short-term credentials in high-demand fields such as healthcare, manufacturing, skilled trades, business, and public services. The college also partners with employers to deliver customized training and upskilling opportunities.



Figure 117. Training Program at LIFT, HVAC & Electrical

Eastern Illinois University (EIU) strengthens the regional talent pipeline through undergraduate and graduate programs, internships, applied research, and employer partnerships that support career readiness and talent retention.

Coles County residents and employers also benefit from the state and regional workforce system, including **WIOA-funded services delivered through Illinois workNet®**, which provide job search assistance, career counseling, training support, and connections to employers. Registered apprenticeships, pre-apprenticeships, adult education, and bridge programs further expand access to work-based learning and industry-recognized credentials.



Figure 118. Training Program at LIFT, Vehicles

Regional initiatives such as the **Illinois Workforce & Education Alignment (ILWEA)** framework and **Leaders Innovating for Tomorrow (LIFT)**, a regional Area Career Center serving high school juniors and seniors, strengthen career pathways by coordinating education and workforce efforts. LIFT offers career-focused coursework in areas including childcare, communications, culinary arts and hospitality, HVAC and green energy, information technology, leadership, and manufacturing/architecture/construction. Students gain dual credit, industry credentials, and hands-on learning experiences that support successful transitions into higher education or the workforce.

Future Workforce Priorities

Looking ahead, Coles County will continue strengthening partnerships between education providers, workforce agencies, and employers to ensure training opportunities remain responsive to industry needs. Priorities include expanding access to career pathways, supporting work-based learning, improving connections between rural communities and training resources, and preparing residents for emerging industries. These efforts aim to build a resilient workforce that supports long-term economic growth and opportunity for all residents.

Business Retention & Expansion Efforts

Business Retention and Expansion (BRE) is about actively supporting local businesses to help them stay and grow in the community. In Coles County, which includes small towns, rural businesses, manufacturers, service providers, and regional employers, a good BRE plan helps keep the economy stable, protects local jobs, and lays the groundwork for future investments.

While bringing in new businesses is important, the long-term success of the county's economy relies more on supporting the businesses already in Coles County. These local employers are familiar with the community, hire local workers, and often buy goods and services from nearby sources, creating a positive ripple effect that boosts the entire economy.

Why Business Retention & Expansion Matters

Existing businesses contribute to the county in multiple ways:

- **Sustaining Jobs**: Most new jobs come from expansions of local firms, not from newcomers.
- **Supporting Local Supply Chains:** Local businesses often purchase from other local vendors, boosting the overall economy.
- **Tax Base Stability:** Retention strengthens property and sales tax revenues that support services.
- **Community Identity & Quality of Life:** Locally owned businesses contribute to downtown vitality, culture, and place.

Coles County's business landscape includes manufacturers, agriculture support services, retail shops, hospitality providers, healthcare organizations, professional services, technology firms, and entrepreneurial ventures, all of which benefit from coordinated retention efforts.

Existing Conditions & Challenges

Coles County has considerable strengths that support BRE:

- A diverse mix of industries that helps buffer downturns in any one sector.
- Multi-modal transportation competitive intelligence and positioning advantages with proximity to major transportation corridors (I-57, US 45, US 50) and rail (CN, Watco (EI Railroad in Charleston)
- Anchor institutions such as Eastern Illinois University that support workforce development and innovation.

However, local employers also face challenges:

- Competition for skilled labor, particularly in advanced manufacturing and healthcare.
- Rising operational costs, including insurance, utilities, and infrastructure upkeep.
- Workforce readiness gaps in high-tech and technical trades.
- Limited access to capital for facility upgrades or technology adoption.
- Fragmented business support networks across jurisdictions.
- Capacity issues regarding infrastructure for large scale new builds or expansion.

Coles County Economic Activity

Charleston and Mattoon are emerging as significant business centers, strategically positioned along key roadways, with revitalization initiatives in their downtown areas to attract new enterprises. The cities are accelerating their commercial and industrial sector growth, driven by recent enhancements to the Enterprise Zones and toward infrastructure improvements aimed at accommodating substantial industrial investments.

Mattoon

Retail development focuses on the east side and main roads. The city is revitalizing its downtown and developing east mattoon. **Emerald Acres**, a major sports complex, is expected to draw 580,000 visitors, generate $23.8 million in spending, and result in 59,000 hotel stays annually. Plans include new retail, restaurants, and hotels.



Figure 119. New Eastside Mattoon Businesses Collage

Other new developments include:

- New businesses previously mentioned in the new retail & restaurants include: **Panda Express, Chick-fil-A, Texas Roadhouse, Ross, Michael's, Sierra, 5 Below, Ulta, SIHL, CHS Agra-Business, John Deere 3PL** and other prospective businesses and hotels currently under construction.
- **Mars Petcare** invested $90 million in upgrades, expanding by 65,000 square feet and adding nearly 50 jobs.
- **Blue Cross Blue Shield** opened a facility in 2021, adding 50 jobs.
- **Kingspan Insulated Panels** acquired a former plant to produce K-Roc™ products.
- **Sarah Bush Lincoln Health Center** expanded its campus and opened satellite centers in both cities.
- **Rural King** is building a private hangar at Coles County Memorial Airport for associates.

Charleston

Downtown Charleston

- Retail development and downtown revitalization are bringing significant changes.
- Historic downtown buildings now host businesses such as **Juanito's, Half Moon, Hattie Mae Designs,** and **Easy Co Barber**.

Lincoln Avenue

- **Micro Market – New Leaf Microgreens** opened its first storefront at the southwest corner of 18th and Lincoln Avenue.
- **Huck's** is constructing a 7,500-square-foot store featuring **Godfather's Pizza** and fried chicken
- A long-vacant building on Lincoln Avenue has been transformed into a **Sonic** drive-through.
- A **7 Brew** location is now open on Lincoln Avenue's south side.
- A larger **BP** station with a car wash and **Jersey Mike's** was constructed.
- **Parachute Plasma Center** opened next to Walmart.

Northwest / Northwest Business Park

- Northwest Business Park now houses the county health department as well as the **Embarras River Basin Agency (ERBA).**



Figure 120. Charleston Business Collage

Agribusiness Economy

Agribusiness is a cornerstone of Coles County's economy, identity, and landscape, even if it doesn't employ as many people as other sectors. The county's highly productive soils and rich agricultural heritage support grain handling, food processing, equipment sales, and farm service providers. Its influence extends beyond farming, affecting other industries by providing essential resources like labor and capital, stimulating demand for manufactured goods, and supplying raw materials. This creates a feedback loop of mutual development and industrial growth.

Coles County's agricultural base is primarily driven by corn and soybean production, which shapes land use, business patterns, and the local supply chain. Grain elevators, trucking companies, input suppliers, and financial services rely heavily on the stability of this commodity economy.

Federal farm programs play a crucial role in stabilizing the local farming sector. Crop insurance subsidies and risk-management programs like ARC and PLC help protect farms from market fluctuations and extreme weather, common challenges in Illinois. National discussions about changes in USDA subsidy structures, such as modifications to insurance cost-sharing, updated reference prices, or new conservation-based incentives, could impact farm income, land values, and long-term crop choices in the county. Understanding these policy trends is essential for Coles County to prepare for potential shifts in the agricultural landscape.

Over 90% of Coles County's farmland is used for corn and soybeans. Federal crop insurance subsidies and PLC/ARC payments stabilize income during market downturns. Increased federal support leads to predictable farm income; decreased support results in more volatility.

How Subsidies Affect Corn and Soybean Economics

Subsidies for crop insurance premiums make it cheaper for farmers to manage risks and secure better insurance coverage. These subsidies can influence farmers' planting decisions. When subsidies increase, farmers tend to plant more insured crops like corn and soybeans due to anticipated higher earnings and reduced uncertainty. For instance, a 10% increase in subsidy rates might lead to a 0.43% rise in the land planted with these crops. In essence, crop insurance subsidies guide planting decisions and stabilize farmers' incomes despite market price fluctuations.

Reducing crop insurance subsidies could decrease government spending and reduce incentives for farmers to expand their land due to less risk protection. However, it would also make risk management more costly for corn and soybean farmers. This might lead them to alter their planting choices and insurance options, potentially resulting in a reduced supply. The effects of these changes depend on the extent of subsidy cuts and the prevailing crop prices and farming expenses.

If Subsidies Increase:

Farm Income & Stability
- Predictable income for corn/soy producers
- Better resilience against market downturns
- More reinvestment in equipment and technology

Farmland Values & Cash Rents
- Rising land values from capitalized subsidies
- Higher cash rent prices benefit landowners
- Challenges for new farmers entering the market

Crop Choices & Diversification
- Focus on corn & soybeans
- Limited incentive to diversify
- Slow adoption of specialty or niche crops

Local Agribusiness Supply Chain
- Increased sales for equipment dealers, grain handlers, & ag-retailers
- Stable demand for trucking & custom operators
- Consistent business for seed, fertilizer, & chemical suppliers

Workforce & Rural Labor Market
- Steady seasonal labor demand
- Stable employment in grain, logistics, and ag-services

Rural Fiscal Impacts
- Strong property tax base
- Predictable funding for schools, townships, and road districts

Conservation & Environmental Practices
- More conservation adoption if subsidies link to stewardship
- Increased participation in EQIP, CSP, and similar programs
- Potential for better soil health and productivity

If Subsidies decrease:

Farm Income & Stability
- Greater income volatility for corn and soybean growers
- Lower financial buffer in downturns
- Cautious investment in equipment & tech
- Increased reliance on private risk mgmt.

Farmland Values & Cash Rents
- Slower growth or potential drop in farmland values
- Downward pressure on cash rents
- Improved entry chances for new farmers
- Higher market sensitivity to commodity cycles

Crop Choices & Diversification
- Incentives to diversify income
- Explore specialty crops and livestock
- Focus on profitability and risk

Local Agribusiness Supply Chain
- Variable demand for equipment and services
- Slower investment cycles
- Emphasis on efficiency and cost control
- Potential consolidation in services

Workforce & Rural Labor Market
- Seasonal job fluctuations linked to farm income
- Reduced spending impacts rural service jobs
- Greater emphasis on operational efficiency & productivity

Rural Fiscal Impacts
- Slower property value growth may affect local tax bases
- Fiscal variability linked to agricultural income cycles
- Pressure on rural service funding during downturns

Conservation & Environmental Practices
- Declining incentives may reduce participation in conservation programs
- Delayed adoption of soil health and stewardship investments
- Focus shifts to cost-efficient production
- Emphasis on local conservation partnerships

Understanding federal agricultural support variability is crucial for economic resilience. Reduced subsidies may increase income uncertainty, affect land values, and alter investment. These changes can impact infrastructure, rural services, and economic forecasts, but might also encourage diversification and innovation. Considering these factors in planning helps Coles County anticipate economic cycles, support agribusiness, and maintain fiscal stability. Scenario planning for both high and low federal support can guide decisions on rural infrastructure, workforce development, and environmental stewardship, ensuring long-term community resilience.

Opportunities to Diversify and Add Value

While commodity crops like corn and soybean production will remain the backbone of Coles County's agricultural economy, long-term resilience depends on expanding opportunities that capture more value locally and reduce reliance on commodity price cycles. Coles County is well-positioned to support a broader spectrum of value-added agricultural enterprises that build upon its productive farmland, transportation access, skilled workforce, and existing agribusiness infrastructure.

Potential diversification strategies include:

- Food processing and small-scale manufacturing, such as grain milling, meat processing, specialty packaging, and prepared foods that retain agricultural value within the local economy
- Specialty and niche crop production, including produce, specialty grains, floriculture, and emerging markets that respond to consumer demand and regional supply gaps
- Direct-to-consumer and regional food systems, including farm stands, subscription markets, and institutional purchasing partnerships that strengthen local supply chains
- Farm-based value-added production, such as roasting, fermentation, artisanal products, or branded agricultural goods that enhance farm profitability

Encouraging value-added agriculture supports entrepreneurship, attracts small business investment, and broadens farm income streams while strengthening connections between rural producers and urban consumers. Strategic land-use policies, flexible zoning, and infrastructure planning can help accommodate on-farm processing, small-scale manufacturing, and distribution activities while maintaining compatibility with surrounding land uses.

Diversification also aligns with evolving federal and state policy priorities that increasingly emphasize conservation practices, climate-smart agriculture, soil health, and specialty crop development. By positioning local producers to access emerging incentive programs and technical assistance, Coles County can foster innovation, environmental stewardship, and economic adaptability across its agricultural sector.



Figure 121. Local Produce Collage

Tourism & Visitor Economy

Tourism and the visitor economy play a meaningful and growing role in Coles County's overall economic health. While Coles County is not a traditional large-scale tourism destination, it benefits from a steady flow of visitors drawn by higher education, outdoor recreation, arts and culture, events, and regional travel. These visitors support local businesses, generate tax revenue, create jobs, and help sustain amenities that improve quality of life for residents.

This chapter examines Coles County's visitor economy as a system—one that connects natural assets, cultural institutions, local businesses, infrastructure, and community identity. Strategic investment and coordination can strengthen this system, ensuring tourism supports long-term economic resilience rather than short-term or extractive growth.

Understanding the Visitor Economy

The visitor economy includes more than leisure tourism. In Coles County, it encompasses:

- University-related travel (students, families, conferences, athletics)
- Outdoor recreation and nature-based visitation
- Arts, culture, and heritage tourism
- Sports tournaments and community events
- Business travel and regional pass-through visitors
- Visiting friends and relatives

Together, these forms of visitation support lodging, dining, retail, transportation, entertainment, and service industries throughout the county.

Tourism and visitor activity also provide several benefits to Coles County:

- Job Creation: Hospitality, retail, recreation, and service jobs
- Tax Revenue: Sales taxes, hotel/motel taxes, and other local revenues
- Business Stability: Helps small businesses survive seasonal fluctuations
- Quality of Life: Amenities that attract visitors also serve residents
- Community Revitalization: Supports downtown redevelopment and placemaking

Importantly, visitor spending circulates through the local economy, supporting suppliers, workers, and public services.



Figure 122. Charleston Butterfly Festival at Lake Charleston

Key Tourism Assets in Coles County

Higher Education & Institutional Anchors like Eastern Illinois University (EIU) and Lake Land College are major drivers of visitation. Academic conferences, athletic events, performances, commencement ceremonies, and campus tours bring thousands of visitors to the county each year. These visitors contribute significantly to local hotels, restaurants, and retail establishments, particularly in Charleston and Mattoon.

They also strengthen the county's cultural offerings and workforce pipeline.



Figure 123. EIU's O'Brien Field, Photo Credit to EIU Athletics

Community Sports

Youth sports tournaments, races, festivals, and regional events create significant spikes in visitation. These occasions are particularly beneficial as they help fill hotels during weekends and off-peak seasons, boost spending in restaurants and retail, and welcome new visitors to the communities of Coles County.

Recent developments such as the Emerald Acres Sports Complex in Mattoon and the Linder Sports Complex in Charleston have broadened Coles County's sports tourism potential, providing venues for various tournaments, including basketball, baseball, softball, pickleball, soccer, volleyball, and wrestling.

By strategically recruiting and coordinating events, we can further enhance this segment of the visitor economy.



Figure 124. Emerald Acres Sports Complex

Culture & Heritage

Arts, culture, and heritage are essential to Coles County's identity and visitor economy, capturing the county's rich history and creative spirit. Situated within the National Park Service's Abraham Lincoln National Heritage Area, Coles County benefits from a program dedicated to enhancing the communities and landscapes of central Illinois by recognizing and supporting their significant natural, cultural, and historical legacies. This initiative is particularly relevant given the county's many Lincoln-related sites and lore, making it a program that should be fully leveraged.

From a systems perspective, arts and heritage sites form key cultural infrastructure, boosting tourism, encouraging longer stays, and supporting sectors like dining, lodging, and retail. Preserving and promoting these resources enhances economic vitality and community resilience. Moreover, cultural attractions not only draw visitors but also enhance education, revitalize downtowns, and improve residents' quality of life by supporting local businesses and building community pride.

Lincoln Log Cabin State Historic Site:

An 86-acre living history park preserving the 1840s farm of Thomas and Sarah Bush Lincoln, Abraham Lincoln's father and stepmother. The site includes interpretive exhibits, living history demonstrations, heirloom crops, and historic livestock.

- **Community Impact:**
  - Serves as one of Coles County's most recognizable tourism destinations
  - Supports heritage tourism, school field trips, and educational programming
  - Brings regional and statewide visitors to the county, supporting nearby businesses
- **Why It Should Be Maintained:**
  - The site preserves an authentic connection to Illinois history and Lincoln-era settlement, reinforcing Coles County's role in the state's historical narrative.



Figure 125. Lincoln Log Cabin

How to Maintain It:

- Continued state and local financial support for preservation and interpretation
- Supporting volunteerism
- Utilizing the site in regional school programming
- Improved signage and wayfinding from surrounding communities
- Integration with trail systems and regional tourism marketing

Five Mile House Museum (near Charleston)

The Five Mile House is one of the oldest surviving structures in Coles County, built around 1840. It is preserved as a historic house museum interpreting early rural life and settlement patterns in the county.

- **Community Impact:**
  - Provides hands-on historical education
  - Preserves early settlement architecture and craftsmanship
  - Supports local heritage education and volunteer engagement
- **Why It Should Be Maintained:**
  - The site offers a rare physical link to pre-Civil War rural life and local settlement history.



Figure 126. Five Mile House

How to Maintain It:

- Continued state and local financial support for preservation and interpretation
- Supporting volunteerism
- Utilizing the site in regional school programming
- Improved signage and wayfinding from surrounding communities
- Integration with trail systems and regional tourism marketing

Coles County Courthouse (Charleston)

The Courthouse, constructed between 1898 and 1900, is a Richardsonian Romanesque civic building designed by architect Cornelius W. Rapp. It remains an active courthouse and a central feature of Charleston's public square. Abraham Lincoln argued cases in earlier courthouse buildings on this site, contributing to its historical significance.

- **Community Impact:**
  - Functions as both a working government building and a historic landmark
  - Contributes to local identity and architectural character
- **Why It Should Be Maintained:**
  - The courthouse represents continuity of governance, civic pride, and architectural heritage, while continuing to serve a vital public function.



Figure 127. Coles County Courthouse

How to Maintain It:

- Ongoing preservation of historic architectural elements
- Sensitive modernization to meet accessibility and operational needs
- Streetscape improvements that reinforce the courthouse square as a civic destination

Lincoln- Douglas Debate Museum (Charleston)

The Lincoln- Douglas Debate Museum in Charleston highlights the historic 1858 Lincoln–Douglas Debate in Coles County. It features exhibits on the debates, 19th-century politics, civil discourse, and their national impact. As part of Illinois' Lincoln heritage network, it is both a local heritage site and a tourist destination.

Community Impact:

- Acts as a site of national historical significance
- Draws heritage tourists, school groups, and researchers
- Enhances Charleston's identity as a Lincoln destination
- Boosts downtown activity and educational tourism

Why It Should Be Maintained:

- The museum preserves a nationally important event linked to Coles County, ensuring continued public access to civic history and Illinois' role in shaping national discourse.



Figure 128. Lincoln- Douglas Debate Museum

How to Maintain It:

- Ongoing exhibit maintenance and interpretive updates
- Accessibility improvements and visitor amenities
- Integration with wayfinding, trails, and downtown signage
- Coordination with state and regional Lincoln heritage initiatives
- Coordinate with local educational institutions for utilization

Mattoon Railroad Depot & Heritage Site

The Mattoon Railroad Depot and related structures highlight the crucial role of rail transportation in Mattoon and Coles County's development, establishing the area as a transportation hub in east-central Illinois. This site also hosts a historical exhibit, displaying the rich history of Mattoon

Community Impact:

- Strengthens local identity through transportation and industrial history
- Aids downtown revitalization and heritage tourism
- Offers educational opportunities on economic and transportation history

Importance of Maintenance:

- Preserves a vital part of Coles County's growth and economic history, illustrating community formation and evolution.



Figure 129. Mattoon Railroad Depot & Heritage Site

How to Maintain It:

- Ongoing structural and exterior preservation
- Interpretive signage and exhibits explaining railroad history
- Integration into downtown wayfinding, walking tours, and heritage routes

Other Historical Sites

Additionally, it's crucial to include the following historical sites because they offer invaluable insights into our past, helping us understand the cultural, architectural, and societal developments that have shaped our present. Featuring these sites ensures that we preserve and celebrate our heritage, fostering a deeper appreciation for the diverse histories that contribute to our collective identity.

Old Main & Other Historical Buildings on Campus at Eastern Illinois University, (Charleston)

- A historic academic building that anchors the EIU campus and reinforces Charleston's role as a regional education center.

Burgess–Osborne Memorial Auditorium (Mattoon)

- A landmark civic and performance venue supporting arts, cultural programming, and public gatherings.



Figure 130. EIU Old Main

Historic Infrastructure & Transportation Features

These resources illustrate the development of roads, bridges, and public works that supported community connectivity and growth:

- **Airtight Bridge, Harrison Street Bridge, Blakeman Bridge and Stone Quarry Bridge** (Charleston area)
  - Historic bridges reflecting early engineering practices and transportation networks.
- **Brick Streets (15th Street and Oklahoma Avenue, Mattoon)**
  - Early paved streets that contribute to neighborhood character and historic urban design.

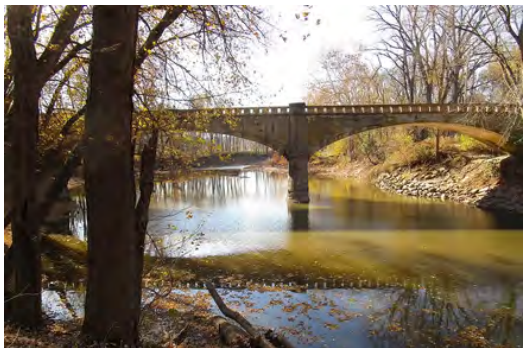


Figure 131. Blakeman Bridge

Historic Neighborhoods, Residential Architecture & Civic Landscapes

These sites reflect patterns of residential growth, architectural design, and civic life:

- **Lumpkin Heights and Elm Ridge Subdivision Historic Districts** (Mattoon)
  - Cohesive residential neighborhoods representing early- to mid-20th-century planning and architecture.
- **McFarland House (Charleston) and Ryptek-Richard House** (Mattoon)
  - Individually significant historic residences that contribute to local architectural heritage.
- **Dr. Hiram Rutherford House and Office** (Oakland)
  - A combined residential and professional site reflecting small-town development and early medical practice.
- **Historic Streetscapes along 6th, 7th, and 10th Streets** (Charleston)
  - Areas that retain historic residential and streetscape character.

Education, Social History & Community Institutions

These resources preserve the history of education, public health, and social development in Coles County:

- Greenwood School Museum (One-Room Schoolhouse)
  - Interprets rural education practices and early community life.
- Health Education Building / McAfee Gymnasium (Charleston)
  - Reflects mid-20th-century investment in public health, recreation, and education facilities.

Commemorative Sites & Cultural Landscapes

- Civilian Conservation Corps Camp Shiloh Encampment Site (Charleston area)
  - Associated with New Deal–era conservation and public works programs.
- Historic Cemeteries (Countywide)
  - Cultural landscapes documenting settlement patterns, genealogy, and military service.
- Public Memorials and Civic Monuments
  - Including commemorative markers that contribute to civic identity and public space character.
- Unity Church (Mattoon)
  - A historic religious structure contributing to community heritage and architectural character.



Figure 132. EIU, Pemberton Hall

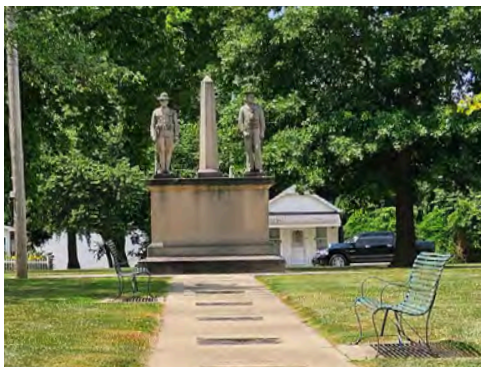


Figure 133. Oakland, WW1 Memorial



Figure 134. Oakland, Rutherford House

Together, these historic and cultural assets strengthen community identity and foster a sense of place. They promote heritage tourism and placemaking, especially in downtown areas and neighborhoods, while providing opportunities for education, preservation, and adaptive reuse. Additionally, they enhance eligibility for state and federal grants aimed at preservation, tourism, and community development. These sites serve as living classrooms, inviting individuals of all ages to explore the rich tapestry of stories and ecosystems that have shaped the county. In doing so, Coles County establishes a benchmark for sustainable development that honors its unique history and environment, all while looking toward a hopeful future.

Natural & Outdoor Recreation Assets

Coles County's natural landscapes are a foundational tourism asset, especially for residents of nearby metropolitan areas seeking outdoor recreation.

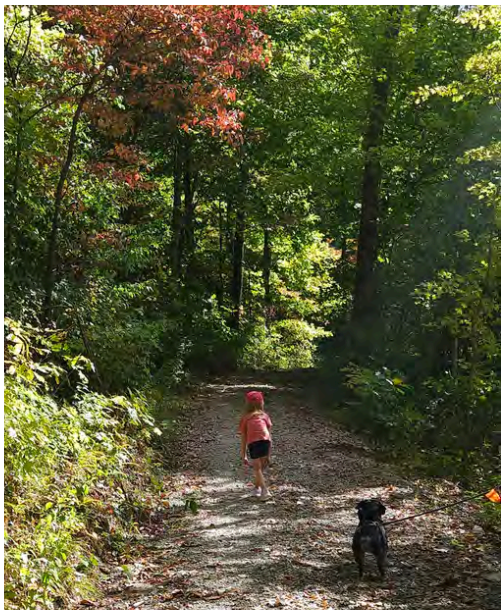
Key assets include:

- State Parks like Fox Ridge
- Embarras River and associated land and water reserves
- Municipal forest preserves, trails, and conservation areas
- Rural landscapes that support agritourism and seasonal events
- Lake Charleston, Paradise,& Mattoon
- Private Conservation Land made available to the public, like Warbler Ridge of Grand Prairie Friends & Douglas Hart Nature Center

Nature-based tourism supports local spending while reinforcing conservation goals. Proper stewardship of these assets ensures they remain viable attractions for future generations.



Figure 135. Fox Ridge State Park


Figure 136. Lake Charleston Trail

The Arts in Coles County, IL

Coles County offers a vibrant arts scene that enriches the cultural landscape and draws visitors from nearby cities. This artistic hub fosters community engagement and cultural tourism with diverse attractions and events.

Key assets include:

- **The Tarble Arts Center** at Eastern Illinois University, featuring contemporary and traditional art
- **Charleston Community Theatre**, showcasing local and touring productions
- Public art installations and murals enhancing urban spaces
- **Doudna Performing Arts Center** and small venues for local and visiting artists.
- **Coles County & Mattoon Arts Councils** which play a pivotal role in supporting and promoting the arts throughout the region. They organize various programs, workshops, and exhibitions to encourage artistic expression and appreciation among residents and visitors alike.

A thriving arts scene not only boosts the economy but also creates 3rd spaces that foster community and cultural appreciation, ensuring a vibrant future for Coles County.

Sports Facilities & Events

Beyond its historic sites, Coles County offers diverse sports events and facilities, such as Eastern Illinois University's Lantz Complex, O'Brien Field, Emerald Acres Sports Complex, and Linder Sports Complex, along with the golf courses at Mattoon and Charleston Country Clubs.

Emerald Acres Sports Complex features state-of-the-art amenities for basketball, volleyball, baseball, and softball, serving as a hub for local and regional tournaments.

Coles County hosts various notable sports events, including:

- Eastern Illinois University's Panther Invitational
- Mattoon YMCA Bagel Run
- Coles County Little League tournaments
- Charleston High School Cross Country Invitational
- Lytle Park Triathlon
- Tour de Charleston Bike Race

Youth sports tournaments and events significantly boost local visitation by filling hotels, increasing restaurant and retail sales, and introducing new visitors. Strategic recruitment and coordination of events can further grow this segment of the visitor economy.



Figure 137. EIU's, O' Brien Field 2



Figure 138.Mattoon Roundhouse Complex



Figure 139.The Compass Guide

Local Tourism and Event Information Resources

Organizations such as the Compass and Explore Local Charleston play a crucial role in boosting the visibility and success of local events. These groups are instrumental in supporting the initiatives of tourism, commerce, and economic development offices. By promoting a wide array of activities and attractions, they help to highlight the unique cultural and historical offerings of the area. Their efforts not only draw visitors from near and far but also stimulate the local economy by encouraging spending at local businesses. In doing so, they contribute to a thriving community where both residents and tourists can enjoy vibrant events and experiences.



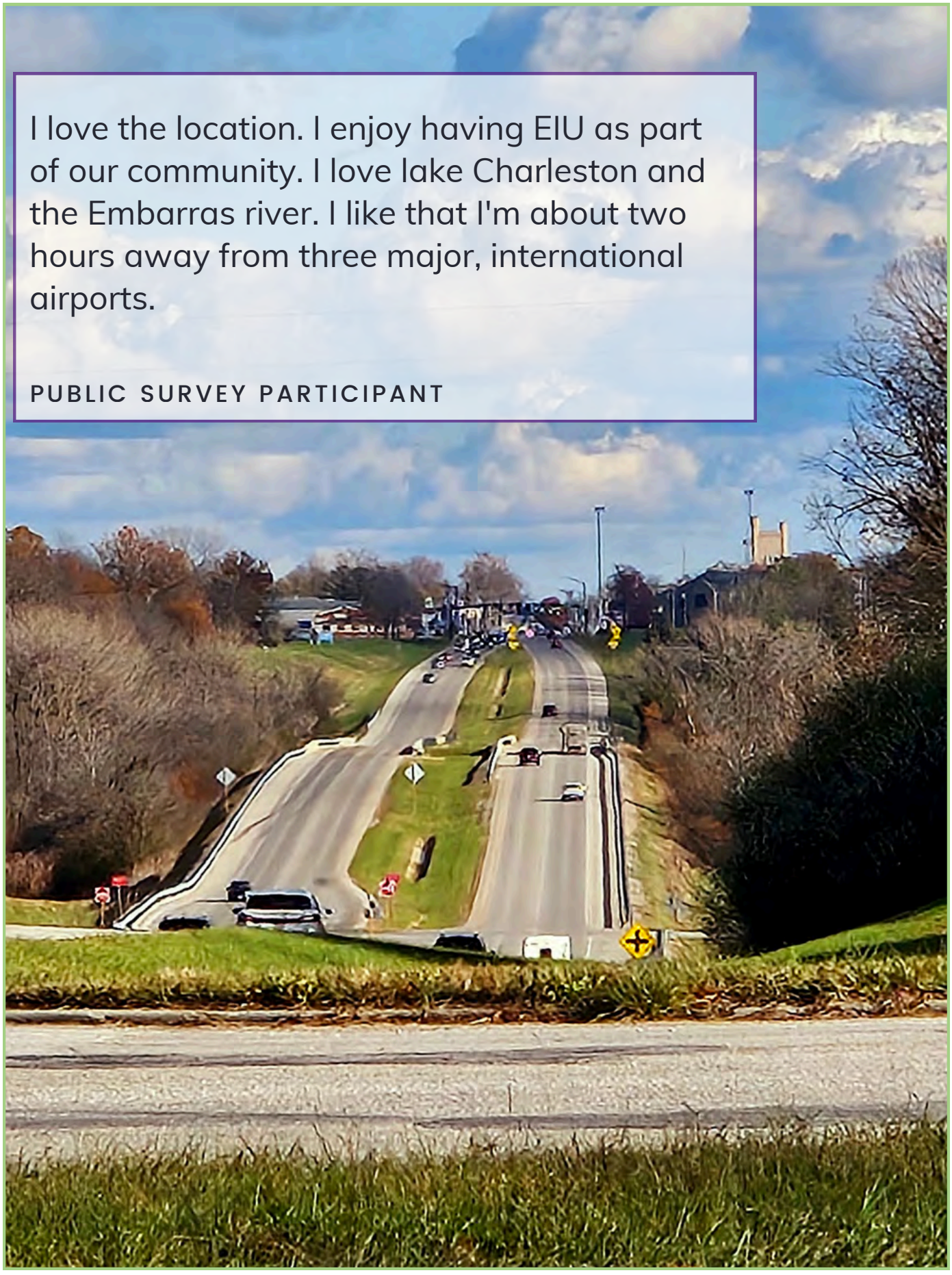
Figure 140. Explore Local Charleston

Coles County Economic Strengths & Weaknesses

In this section, we have showcased how Coles County's economy is built on strong employment foundations, a variety of industries, and an affordable cost of living, creating a landscape rich with opportunities. However, the county faces challenges, including lower income levels, gaps in educational attainment, and limited digital connectivity. The following table outlines the key strengths and weaknesses, offering a concise overview of the county's economic environment and identifying areas for strategic attention.

Category	Strengths	Weaknesses / Challenges	Key Indicators
Employment & Workforce	Low unemployment; steady labor force participation; major employers provide stability	Limited labor pool due to population decline; outmigration of young workers	Unemployment: ~3.7–4.1%; Labor force participation: 62–63%; Population decline 2020–2024: ~1.6%
Economic Diversity & Key Sectors	Health care, education, retail, manufacturing, and agribusiness provide a stable and diverse base	Low educational attainment restricts knowledge-based industry growth	Largest sectors: Health Care & Social Assistance, Educational Services, Retail Trade, Manufacturing; % adults with bachelor's degree+: ~27%
Agriculture & Land Use	Fertile cropland supports corn, soybeans, wheat, and related agribusiness	Reliance on traditional agriculture may limit high-wage sector growth	Acres in cropland: ~400,000+; Key crops: corn, soybeans, wheat
Economic Development & Business Support	Coles Together and Enterprise Zone incentives support business growth	Limited investment in emerging industries; challenges attracting higher-wage firms	Enterprise Zone designation; available industrial sites; recent business expansions
Infrastructure & Connectivity	Highway and airport access supports logistics and markets	Broadband gaps limit remote work, entrepreneurship, and education	Broadband subscription: ~84%; Households underserved: ~13–16%

Table 19. Economic Strengths & Weaknesses



I love the location. I enjoy having EIU as part of our community. I love lake Charleston and the Embarras river. I like that I'm about two hours away from three major, international airports.

PUBLIC SURVEY PARTICIPANT

Fiscal Health & Governance

Strong fiscal health and effective governance are crucial for Coles County to provide services, maintain infrastructure, and achieve its Comprehensive Plan goals. As a rural county with two mid-sized cities and multiple townships, it must balance limited revenue with increasing demands for infrastructure, public safety, and economic development.

Coles County relies on property taxes, intergovernmental revenues, and user fees, with state and federal grants as supplements. Like other Illinois counties, it faces fiscal challenges from aging infrastructure, rising costs, state funding variability, and limited property tax growth.

Despite this, the County benefits from stable population levels, Eastern Illinois University, and a strong agricultural economy that maintains land value. Fiscal sustainability requires aligning spending with realistic revenue and prioritizing investments that cut long-term costs.

Coles County Relative Structure of Revenue

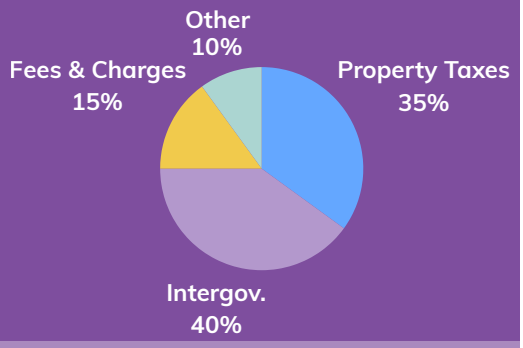


Figure 141. Coles Co., Relative Fiscal Structure of Revenues

Coles County Relative Structure of Expenditures

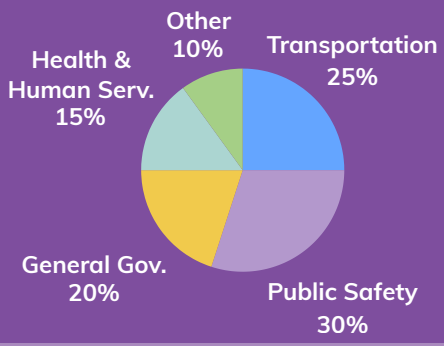


Figure 142. Coles Co., Relative Fiscal Structure of Expenditures

REVENUE PROFILE

Primary Revenue Sources

- **Property Taxes**: Primary local revenue source supporting general operations and public safety
- **Intergovernmental Revenues**: State and federal distributions, reimbursements, and grants
- **User Fees & Charges**: Permits, service fees, and cost recovery
- **Other Revenues:** Interest earnings, fines, and miscellaneous receipts

Key Fiscal Characteristics

- Stable but limited growth in the tax base
- Significant reliance on intergovernmental funding for capital projects and certain program areas
- Rural service area increases per-capita service costs

EXPENDITURE PROFILE

Major Spending Areas

- **Public Safety:** Sheriff, court services, emergency management
- **Health & Human Services:** Public health, social service coordination
- **Transportation & Infrastructure:** Roads, bridges, facilities, and maintenance
- **General Government**: Administration, finance, elections, records
- **Debt Service & Capital Outlay:** Long-term asset investment and obligations

Spending Priorities

The County's spending patterns indicate priorities including:

- Maintenance of essential services
- Infrastructure preservation and system reliability
- Matching funds for state and federal grants

Governance Structure

Coles County operates under a county board–administrator form of government, with elected officials responsible for legislative, executive, and judicial functions. In addition to county government, residents are served by municipalities, townships, school districts, special service districts, and regional agencies. This multi-layered governance environment requires collaboration to avoid duplication of services and maximize public investment.

Key governance partners include:

- Municipal governments (Charleston, Mattoon, and smaller communities)
- Township governments and special districts
- Regional Office of Education #11
- Coles County Regional Planning & Development Commission (CCRPDC)
- State and federal agencies

Coordination Approach

- Intergovernmental agreements
- Shared service delivery
- Regional planning and grant partnerships

Intergovernmental coordination is essential for infrastructure planning, economic development, emergency response, and environmental management.

Financial Management & Accountability

Coles County maintains fiscal accountability through:

- Annual budgeting and financial reporting
- Compliance with state auditing and transparency requirements
- Use of capital improvement planning for major investments
- Grant administration and compliance oversight

Long-range financial planning is critical to avoid deferred maintenance, manage debt responsibly, and ensure that public investments align with community priorities.

FISCAL STRENGTHS

- Established financial controls and audit compliance
- Experience administering state and federal grants
- Active regional coordination and planning capacity

CHALLENGES & OPPORTUNITIES

Challenges

- Limited flexibility in revenue generation
- Increasing costs for public safety, health services, and infrastructure
- Infrastructure maintenance demands in both urban and rural areas
- Dependence on competitive grant funding
- Aging infrastructure and deferred maintenance
- Limited discretionary revenue

Opportunities

- Strategic use of state and federal grants
- Shared services and intergovernmental agreements
- Energy efficiency and sustainability investments that lower long-term costs
- Redevelopment and infill strategies that maximize existing infrastructure

Fiscal Compliance & Grant Readiness

Fiscal Accountability & Controls

Coles County maintains sound fiscal management practices consistent with Illinois statutes and grantor expectations. These include:

- Annual budgeting and financial reporting
- Independent audits and corrective action processes
- Segregation of duties and internal financial controls
- Capital planning to manage long-term asset needs

These practices ensure public funds are used efficiently and transparently.

GATA & SAM Compliance

Coles County is positioned to meet State of Illinois Grant Accountability and Transparency Act (GATA) and System for Award Management (SAM) requirements, including:

- Active SAM registration
- UEI and federal compliance readiness
- Completion of ICQ and Programmatic Risk Assessments as required
- Adherence to Uniform Guidance (2 CFR 200) for federal funds
- Documented procurement, financial management, and recordkeeping policies

These systems reduce administrative risk and improve grant competitiveness.

Grant Readiness & Administrative Capacity

The County is ready to secure grants with a strong system for managing different funding sources. It has a proven track record with agencies like **IDOT, DCEO, IEPA, USDA, and FEMA**, showcasing its skill in meeting various funding requirements.

The County excels in tracking spending, ensuring funds are used correctly. By meeting matching requirements and strict reporting deadlines, it maintains transparency and trust with funding agencies through detailed financial records.

Working with groups like the CCRPDC and municipal partners boosts the County's grant readiness. These partnerships help create strong regional grant applications by pooling resources and expertise, which is crucial for large projects that span multiple areas.

The County integrates grant-funded projects into its capital and operational plans, ensuring they align with its long-term goals. This strategy maximizes the impact of grant funds and supports sustainable development.

In summary, the County's thorough approach to grant readiness and administrative capacity ensures efficient use of grant funds and compliance with all requirements, enhancing its ability to secure funding and successfully complete projects for the community's benefit.

ALIGNMENT WITH STATE AND FEDERAL GRANT PROGRAMS

Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT)

- Aligning capital planning with transportation system preservation
- Expertise in project documentation, right-of-way coordination, and reporting
- Integrating transportation investments with land use and safety goals

Department of Commerce & Economic Opportunity (DCEO)

- Strategically aligning with community development, workforce, and infrastructure priorities
- Demonstrating need and preparedness for implementation
- Providing clear benefits to economic vitality and service delivery

Illinois Environmental Protection Agency (IEPA)

- Ensuring compliance with water quality, wastewater, and environmental standards
- Expertise in implementing NPDES-related projects and infrastructure upgrades
- Coordinating with watershed plans, NARPs, and sustainability goals
- Planning and Implementation Commitment

This Comprehensive Plan forms the backbone of Coles County's fiscal and strategic efforts by:

- Prioritizing public investments
- Demonstrating readiness for grant funding
- Coordinating capital projects across jurisdictions
- Ensuring long-term financial sustainability

The projects outlined in this plan, supported by realistic fiscal strategies and administrative capabilities, position Coles County as a reliable partner for state and federal investment. By encouraging collaboration among local government agencies, private sector partners, and community stakeholders, the plan underscores the value of a unified approach to regional development. This involves:

- Developing a robust pipeline of shovel-ready projects that align with state and federal funding priorities
- Encouraging public-private partnerships to leverage additional resources and expertise
- Promoting transparency and accountability in project implementation to build trust with funding bodies and the community
- Incorporating innovative technologies and practices to enhance efficiency and environmental sustainability
- Engaging the community to ensure projects reflect the needs and aspirations of Coles County residents

This proactive and integrated framework not only boosts the county's eligibility for competitive funding opportunities but also ensures investments deliver maximum community benefits, driving economic growth and enhancing the quality of life for all residents. As Coles County looks ahead, its commitment to strategic planning and collaboration will be vital to realizing its vision of a thriving, resilient, and sustainable community.

Tax Base Composition

Taxes in Coles County fund the essential public services that make our communities livable — from maintaining roads and parks to supporting schools, fire protection, libraries, and local government. Property taxes are collected by a variety of taxing bodies, each responsible for a portion of the total tax rate. A healthy tax structure is essential for maintaining services, supporting growth, and ensuring long-term fiscal sustainability. Understanding how local tax revenues are distributed across taxing bodies helps planners and officials coordinate land use, development, and infrastructure investments.

Understanding How Property Taxes Function

- Every property owner is required to pay taxes that are determined by the assessed value of their property along with the combined tax rates of the various taxing bodies in their area.
- Each taxing body, such as the county, city, township, school district, park district, or fire protection district—establishes its own rate.
- These individual rates are summed up to calculate the total property tax rate for a specific parcel.

Coles County residents are served by various taxing bodies, as seen on the right. Your property's placement determines the taxing bodies that will be reflected in your property tax composition

- **School Districts** (e.g., Mattoon and Charleston School Districts)
- **Fire Protection Districts** (e.g., Ashmore, Humboldt, Lincoln Fire Districts)
- **Township Park and Cemetery Districts**
- **Airport and Conservancy Districts**
- **Tax Increment Financing (TIF) Districts,** which temporarily redirect a portion of property taxes to support infrastructure or redevelopment projects.
- **Smaller Special-purpose Districts** (such as cemeteries, libraries, and airports)

Taxing Bodies in Coles County by Percentage

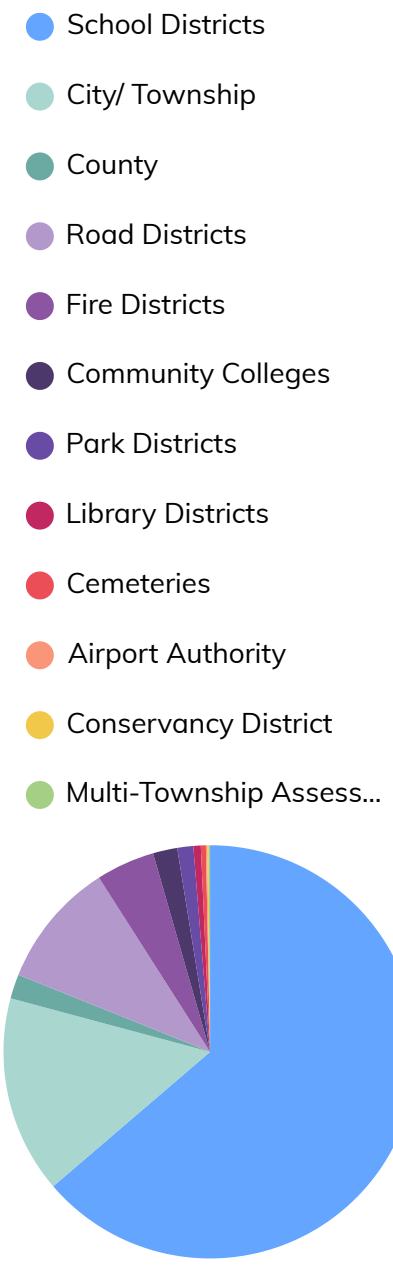


Figure 143. Coles County Taxing Bodies by Overall Percentage

City of Mattoon

Taxing Body	Type	Approx. Rate	Notes
Mattoon CUSD #2	School District	4.09	Largest share; funds local schools, operations, and bonds.
City of Mattoon	Municipality	2.19	General city services (police, roads, parks).
Coles County	County	0.85%	County-wide services and administration.
Mattoon Township	Township	0.15%	Local roads, property assessment, and small public works.
Lake Land College #517	Community College	0.45%	Regional higher-education levy.
Mattoon Park District	Park & Recreation	0.10%	Maintenance of city parks and recreation facilities.
Mattoon Public Library	Library District	0.20%	Library operations and services.
Fire Protection	Special District	0.12%	Fire and emergency protection (may overlap with city).
Cemetery / Airport / Misc.	Special Districts	0.08%	Small overlapping maintenance or facility districts.

Table 20. Mattoon Taxing Bodies

North Okaw Township

Taxing Body	Type	Approx. Rate (%)	Notes
Oakland CUSD #5	School District	3.80%	Primary education provider.
Coles County	County	0.85%	Same base rate as city parcels.
North Okaw Township	Township	0.25%	Road maintenance, assessment, local governance.
Fire Protection District (e.g., Humboldt or North Okaw)	Fire District	0.12%	Volunteer-based rural fire protection.
Cemetery District	Special District	0.05%	Local cemetery maintenance.
North Fork Conservancy District	Conservancy	0.06%	Drainage and environmental management.
Lake Land College #517	Community College	0.45%	Same as Mattoon.
Airport Authority	Regional District	0.05%	Supports Coles County Memorial Airport.

Table 21. North Okaw Township Taxing Bodies

City of Charleston

Taxing Body	Type	Approx. Rate (%)	Notes
Charleston CUSD #1	School District	4.25%	Largest portion; funds public schools and bonds.
City of Charleston	Municipality	1.05%	Police, fire, streets, parks, and general operations.
Coles County	County	0.85%	County-wide services.
Charleston Township	Township	0.15%	Local road and property assessment functions.
Lake Land College #517	Community College	0.45%	Regional community college.
Charleston Park District	Park & Recreation	0.08%	Park and recreation services.
Charleston Public Library	Library District	0.22%	Library maintenance and programs.
Fire Protection (within City)	Fire District	0.10%	May overlap with city fire levy.
Cemetery / Airport / Misc.	Special Districts	0.07%	Small overlapping districts.

Table 22. Charleston Taxing Bodies

Village of Lerna

Taxing Body	Type	Approx. Rate (%)	Notes
Charleston CUSD #1	School District	4.25%	Serves Lerna and nearby rural area.
Village of Lerna	Municipality	0.55%	Small-scale operations and basic services.
Coles County	County	0.85%	County-wide government.
Pleasant Grove Township	Township	0.22%	Road maintenance and local services.
Lake Land College #517	Community College	0.45%	Regional higher-education funding.
Fire Protection District	Fire District	0.12%	Rural volunteer fire service.
Cemetery District	Special District	0.05%	Local cemetery upkeep.
Airport Authority	Special District	0.05%	Coles County Airport Authority.
Cemetery / Airport / Misc.	Special Districts	0.07%	Small overlapping districts.

Table 23. Village of Lerna Taxing Bodies

Village of Ashmore

Taxing Body	Type	Approx. Rate (%)	Notes
Oakland CUSD #5	School District	3.80%	Primary education provider.
Village of Ashmore	Municipality	0.60%	Village government operations.
Coles County	County	0.85%	County-wide services.
Ashmore Township	Township	0.20%	Local road and assessment services.
Lake Land College #517	Community College	0.45%	Regional education.
Ashmore Fire Protection District	Fire District	0.12%	Local fire protection.
Cemetery District	Special District	0.05%	Cemetery maintenance.
Airport Authority	Special District	0.05%	Regional airport.

Table 24. Village of Ashmore Taxing Bodies

Village of Humbolt

Taxing Body	Type	Approx. Rate (%)	Notes
Arcola CUSD #306 or Mattoon CUSD #2 (depending on parcel)	School District	4.10%	Education funding.
Village of Humboldt	Municipality	0.55%	Local government operations.
Coles County	County	0.85%	County-wide services.
Humboldt Township	Township	0.25%	Road and assessment services.
Lake Land College #517	Community College	0.45%	Regional community college.
Humboldt Fire Protection District	Fire District	0.12%	Fire protection and EMS.
Cemetery District	Special District	0.06%	Local cemetery maintenance.
North Fork Conservancy District	Special District	0.06%	Drainage/environmental management.
Airport Authority	Special District	0.05%	Regional airport.

Table 25. Village of Humboldt Taxing Bodies

The County's Tax Ecosystem

Just as an ecosystem relies on balance among its parts, Coles County's fiscal system depends on coordination among many taxing bodies. The county includes:

- County-level services (public safety, administration, courts)
- Municipal governments (Mattoon, Charleston, Oakland, Ashmore, Humboldt, Lerna)
- Townships providing local roads and assessment services
- School districts, the largest single expenditure category
- Special-purpose districts such as park, fire, airport, and cemetery districts
- Tax Increment Financing (TIF) districts that target redevelopment areas

Key Observations from 2024 Data

- There are dozens of active taxing bodies across Coles County, with combined property tax rates typically ranging from 7% to 11%, depending on location.
- Township assessment districts and small maintenance districts have rates between 0.02% and 0.05%, while cemetery and park districts range up to about 0.10%.
- Fire districts (e.g., Ashmore, Humboldt) range near 0.12%, reflecting their essential role in rural public safety.
- School district taxes, as the largest expenditure, can vary significantly, with rates often exceeding 4%, underscoring the community's commitment to education and the future of its children.
- TIF districts, while focused on stimulating economic development, have a nuanced impact on the overall tax ecosystem, as they temporarily divert increased property taxes to fund improvements within the district.
- The interplay between these various entities highlights the complexity of managing public resources effectively, aiming to balance the needs of residents with fiscal responsibility.

Looking Ahead: Fiscal Sustainability & Funding Strategies

As Coles County moves toward its 2026 goals, several strategies are being considered to ensure a sustainable and equitable tax system:

- **Enhanced Coordination:** Encouraging collaboration between taxing bodies to streamline services and reduce redundancy, which can lead to more efficient use of taxpayer dollars.
- **Public Engagement:** Increasing transparency and communication with residents about how their tax dollars are being utilized, fostering trust and understanding within the community.
- **Economic Development Initiatives**: Leveraging TIF districts and other tools to attract new businesses and support local entrepreneurship, thereby expanding the tax base and alleviating the burden on existing taxpayers.
- **Regular Assessment Reviews:** Conducting frequent evaluations of property assessments to ensure they reflect current market values, which helps in maintaining fairness across the board.
- **Innovative Funding Solutions:** Exploring alternative funding mechanisms, such as grants and partnerships, to supplement traditional tax revenue and support critical services without increasing rates.

By focusing on these strategies, Coles County aims to create a robust fiscal environment that supports growth and prosperity while being mindful of the needs and contributions of all its citizens.

Land Use & Development

Regulatory Framework and Land Use Management

Coles County's approach to land use management relies on a limited and targeted regulatory framework rather than a comprehensive countywide zoning or building permit system. This structure reflects local priorities emphasizing property rights, agricultural preservation, and restrained regulation, while still allowing the County to respond to issues that affect public health, safety, and welfare.

Instead of broad zoning controls, the County uses a combination of state-enabled authorities, focused ordinances, and coordination with municipal governments to influence development patterns. These tools are applied selectively to address specific land use concerns, such as the orderly division of land, mitigation of hazards, and regulation of activities with countywide impacts, without imposing uniform restrictions on all unincorporated areas.

Municipal extraterritorial jurisdiction further shapes growth by placing higher-intensity development near incorporated areas where zoning and development review already exist. Together, these mechanisms allow the County to guide land use outcomes, manage risk, and support infrastructure planning while maintaining a generally flexible regulatory environment in rural areas.

Subdivision regulations:

- Adoption in line with the Illinois Plat Act
- Control over land division, including access, drainage, road connectivity, and public infrastructure standards

Targeted county ordinances (non-zoning):

- Nuisance ordinance for unsafe structures, deteriorated properties, junkyards, and conditions affecting public health, safety, and quality of life

Floodplain regulation:

- Participation in the National Flood Insurance Program
- Ordinance requiring permits for development or work in designated floodplain areas

Use-specific land use controls:

- Regulation of utility-scale wind and solar facilities under the Illinois Counties Code
- Establishment of siting, setback, operational, and decommissioning standards

Coordination with municipal extraterritorial jurisdiction:

- Municipal zoning and subdivision regulations apply within 1.5 miles of municipal boundaries, affecting development intensity and location

Indirect land use influence through regulatory framework:

- Reliance on state regulations and selective county actions, shaping development patterns while limiting overall countywide regulation

Existing Land Use Conditions

Coles County's land use pattern is shaped by its rural character, agricultural economy, and towns serving as hubs for people, jobs, and services. Most land outside these towns is dedicated to agriculture, supporting the county's economy and identity. Farms, rural homes, and support buildings are scattered across the countryside, following historic patterns near county roads.

Commercial and industrial areas outside towns are limited and typically located near major roads, infrastructure, or town boundaries, serving regional or agricultural markets with access to highways, railways, or utilities.

Recently, large wind and solar energy facilities have been established in areas with available land, infrastructure, and favorable market conditions.

Public facilities like parks, schools, and government buildings are spread throughout towns and the countryside, enhancing the county's functionality and livability. Natural features such as floodplains and drainage areas influence land use by restricting development and providing environmental benefits.

Coles County used the Land Based Classification System (LBCS) to create their land use map, employing the "Function Dimension" for categorizing land use, seen to the right.



Figure 144. Land Use LBCS Classification Key

Current Land Use Map

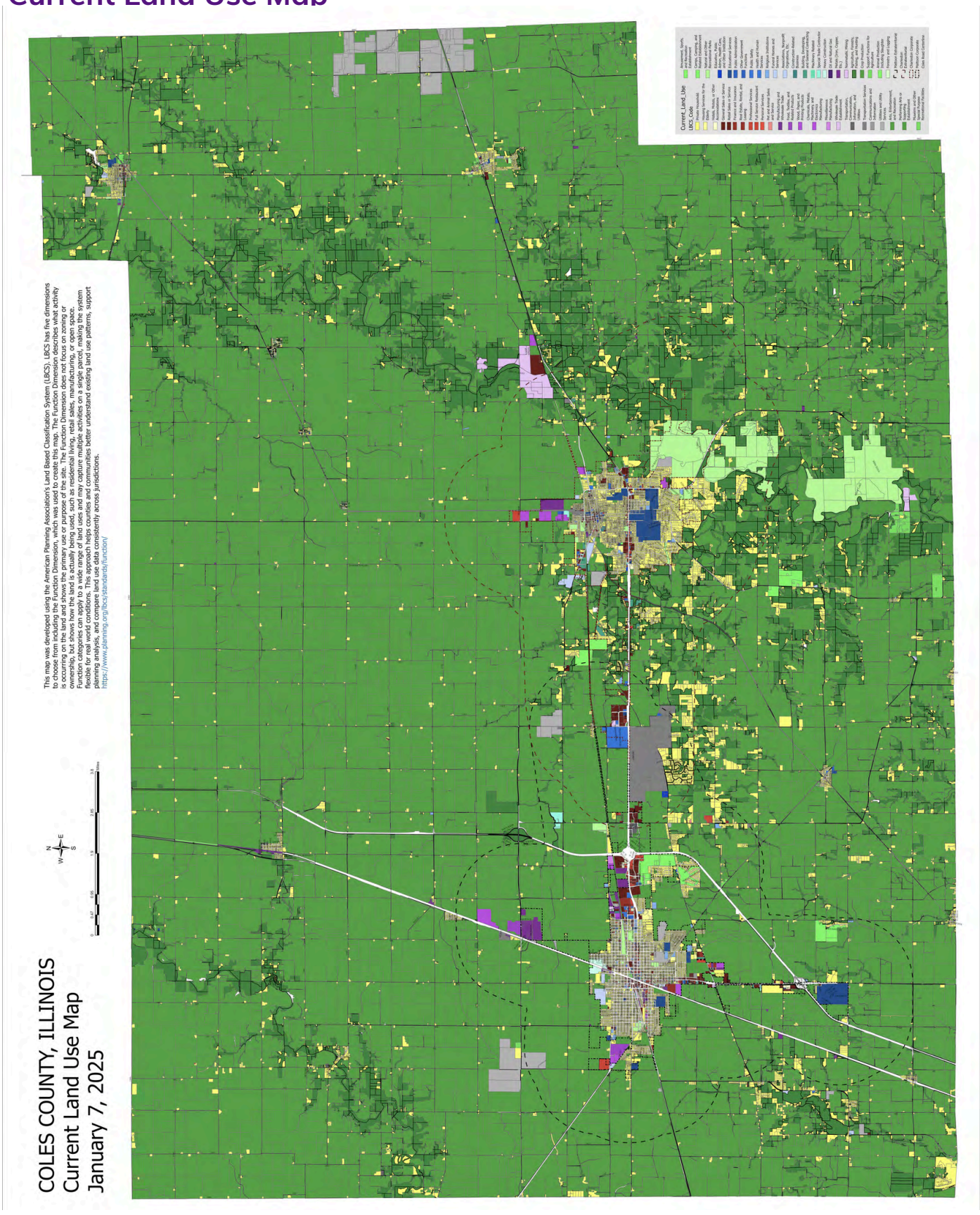


Figure 145. Current Land Use Map

Advantages and Limitations of the Existing Framework

The County's current land use framework offers several advantages. The absence of countywide zoning provides flexibility for landowners, supports agricultural operations, and reduces administrative and regulatory costs. This approach allows development to respond to market conditions and infrastructure availability while maintaining compatibility with the County's predominantly rural landscape. It has also contributed to a regulatory environment that is generally predictable and well understood by residents and landowners.

At the same time, the lack of comprehensive zoning limits the County's ability to proactively guide land use patterns, separate potentially incompatible uses, or reserve land for future economic development or infrastructure needs. Development impacts related to roads, drainage, emergency services, and utilities may be more difficult to anticipate without early review mechanisms such as building permits or site plan approval. As a result, land use conflicts are more likely to be addressed reactively through nuisance enforcement or other remedial measures.

Public Survey Results

Public input was collected through a countywide survey as part of the comprehensive planning effort. Survey results indicate that a modest majority of respondents expressed interest in additional land use regulation tools. Specifically, 56.5 percent of respondents indicated that Coles County should require building permits for new construction, while 27.1 percent responded "maybe." Similarly, 55.5 percent of respondents indicated that the County should adopt a zoning ordinance to establish land use districts, with 32.5 percent responding "maybe." The relatively high percentage of "maybe" responses suggests that a significant portion of residents remain undecided or seek additional information regarding potential regulatory changes.

Does Coles County need a zoning ordinance to establish land use districts that define the types of activities permitted for properties in designated areas?

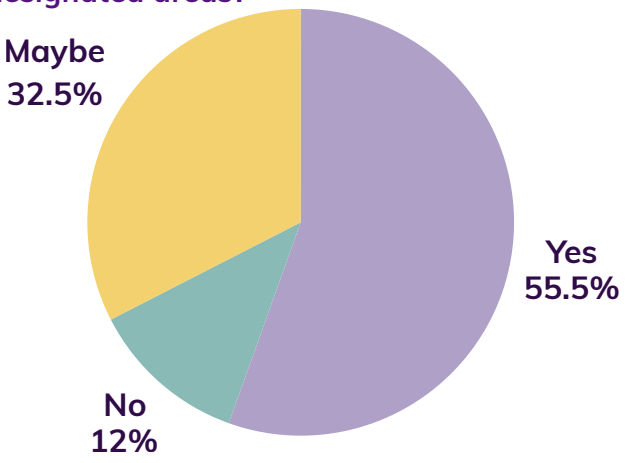


Figure 146. Survey Response Chart for Zoning Ordinance

Should Coles County require building permits for new construction?

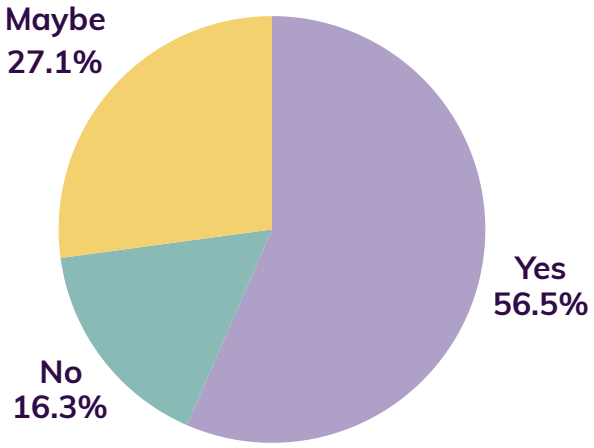


Figure 147. Survey Response Chart for New Construction Building Permit

Future Land Use

Future land planning is vital for organization and sustainability. In Coles County, this involves optimizing land growth, making smart investments, and aligning with long-term goals to reflect community values in sustainable development.

The planning team set goals by analyzing current land use and community feedback, identifying ideal areas for redevelopment or new growth, especially where infrastructure exists. They also prioritized new housing locations.

Coles County is expanding, particularly around Mattoon and Charleston, due to the Emerald Acres sports complex, Sarah Bush Lincoln Health Center, and local industry growth. A key challenge is insufficient housing across various price ranges, underscoring the need for land use plans that support diverse housing options, redevelopment, and new residential areas integrated with existing infrastructure and services.

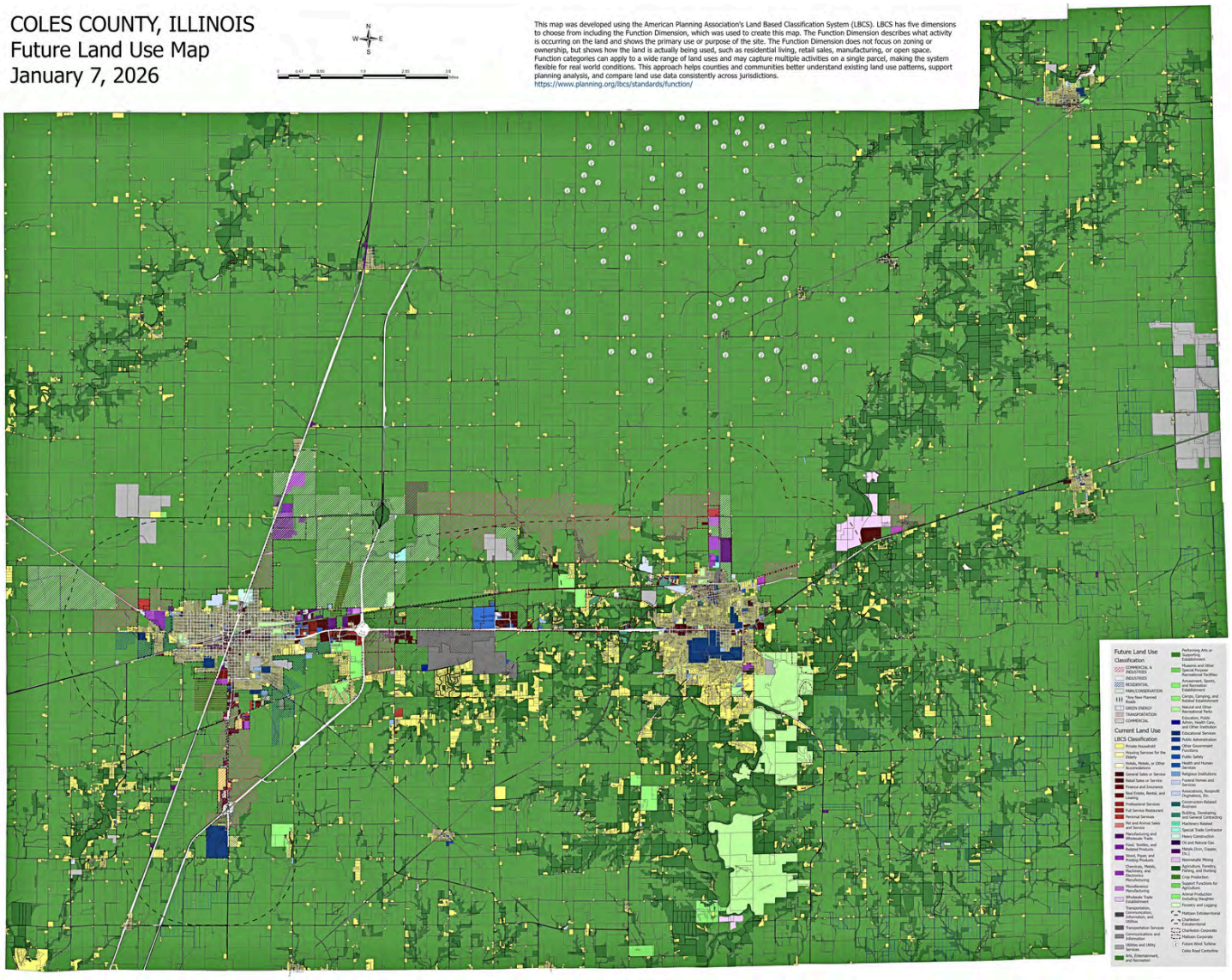


Figure 148. Future Land Use Map

U.S. Route 45/Interstate 57

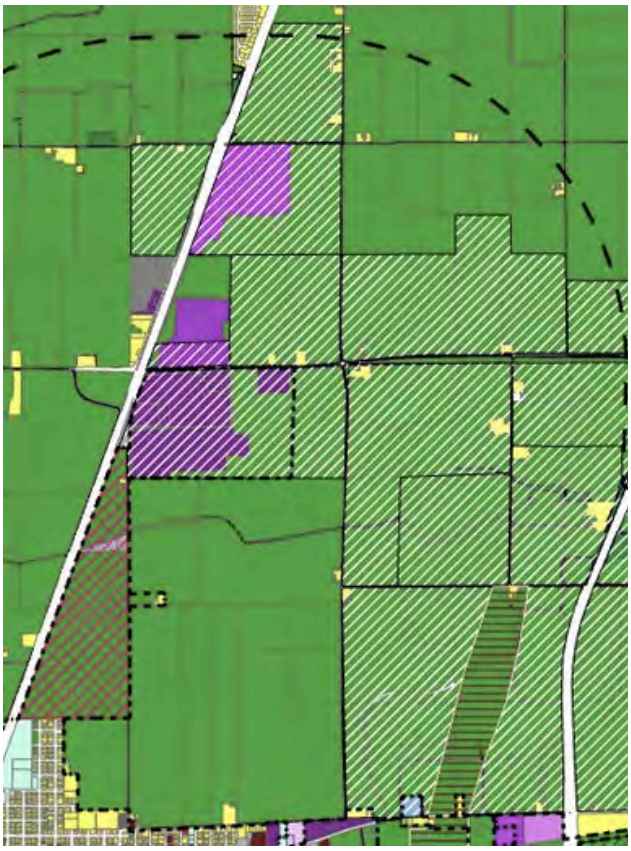


Figure 149.Future Land Use, U.S. Route 45/Interstate 57

The area around U.S. Route 45 North of Mattoon already contains several industrial sites, including Phoenix Logistics, John Deere, Mars Petcare, and Justrite. With recent utility upgrades and access to rail and major highways, this area is prime for future development. Most of the area is in the current Enterprise Zone, with additional parcels being added with the 2026 update. The area is also the site of proposed renewable energy, making the site more enticing for companies wishing to develop here.

There are approximately 3,000 acres available for retail, industrial, manufacturing, and distribution centers between U.S. Route 45 and Interstate 57 on the north side of Mattoon.

Mattoon-Charleston Enterprise Parkway

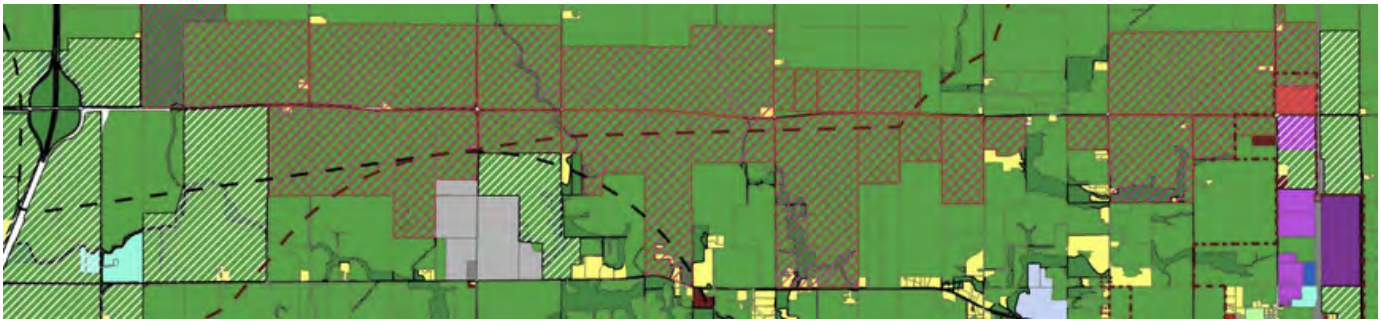


Figure 150.Future Land Use, Mattoon-Charleston Enterprise Parkway

The corridor between Mattoon and Charleston is largely undeveloped. With recent upgrades to utilities, growth in industrial, manufacturing, and distribution centers is expected over the next decade. Several parcels near Interstate 57 and Illinois State Highway 130 are being considered for the 2026 Enterprise Zone expansion, with more parcels queued for future inclusion.

Currently, the area is mainly farmland, offering easy access to Interstate 57, Illinois State Highway 130, and rail on both ends.

Mattoon-Charleston Route 16 Corridor



Figure 151. Future Land Use, Mattoon-Charleston Route 16 Corridor

The Route 16 corridor between Mattoon and Charleston has rapidly grown over the past 30 years. With many undisturbed woodlands and farm fields, significant development is expected in the next decade.

The area west of Sarah Bush Lincoln Hospital is now part of the 2026 Enterprise Zone, poised for residential housing, including subdivisions for the elderly or single families. With major hospital projects and 400 new employees anticipated, this area is ideal for housing or medical facilities. Closer to Interstate 57, the focus will be on housing, medical facilities, and commercial development.

South of Route 16, the Coles County Memorial Airport, covering over 300 largely undeveloped acres, seeks further development. Added to the 2026 Enterprise Zone, the airport aims to attract businesses, especially with the new Rural King hangar. With long runways for large jets, plans for a new terminal to attract commercial flights are underway.

East of the airport and hospital, the mixed-use area of residential and commercial properties is expected to grow over the next 10 years. Several parcels here have been included in the 2026 Enterprise Zone.

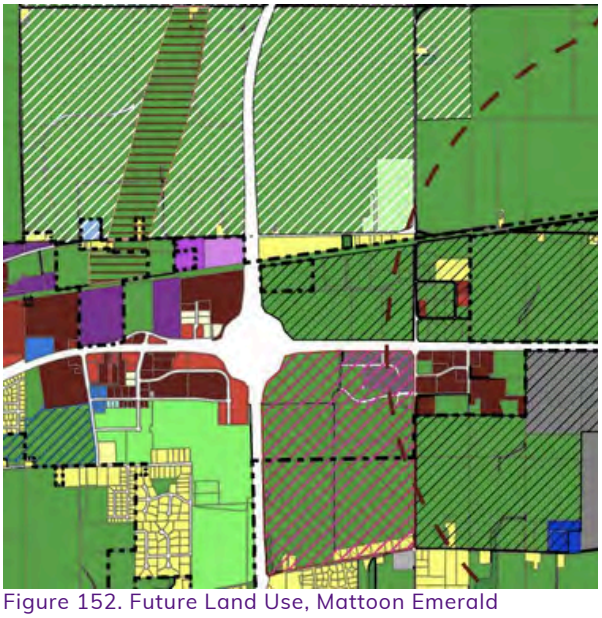


Figure 152. Future Land Use, Mattoon Emerald Acres/Coles Centre

Mattoon Emerald Acres/Coles Centre

The area around the Interstate 57/Illinois Route 16 has exploded over the past 3 years. With the construction of the new sports complex, several new hotels and restaurants are being constructed or have opened their doors, including Chick-fil-A and Texas Roadhouse. New commercial retail stores have also opened their doors, including Ross and Sierra. We expect development to occur on the east side of the interchange in the near future.

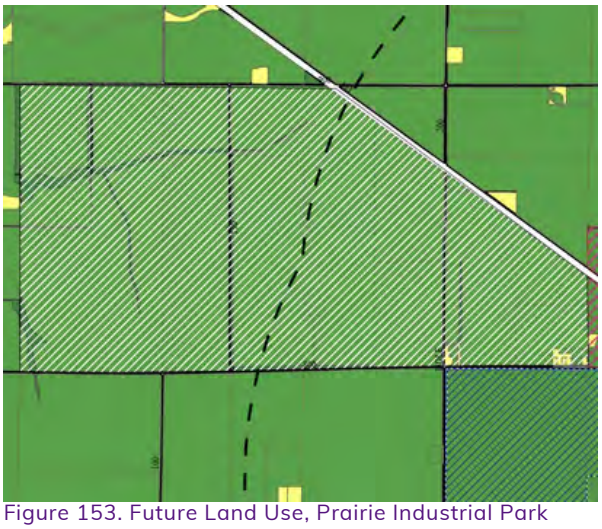


Figure 153. Future Land Use, Prairie Industrial Park

Prairie Industrial Park

The 420 acre (divisible into 20 acre sites) site just south of State Highway 121 west of Mattoon, is a CN certified rail ready site. The site is a great location for heavy industrial and is located within the Enterprise Zone. The site utilities are served by Consolidated Communications Fiber, Ameren Illinois, and the City of Mattoon. The site is flat and suitable for manufacturing and carbon sequestration

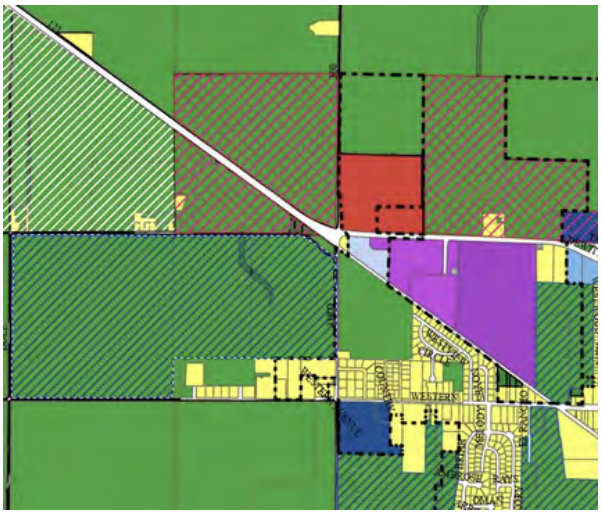


Figure 154. Future Land Use, Dewitt Avenue West

Dewitt Avenue West

Around 280 acres on Mattoon's west side, off north Dewitt Avenue, are available for commercial and industrial development. Existing businesses include Rural King headquarters, American Select Tubing, Justrite Manufacturing, and Bimbo Bakeries, making it an ideal site for further growth. The area is near or within Mattoon, providing easy utility connections. An additional 270 acres south of Dewitt Avenue and north of Western Avenue is suitable for residential development.

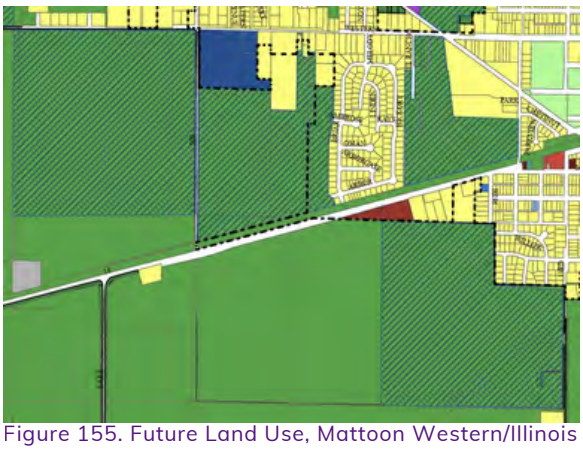


Figure 155. Future Land Use, Mattoon Western/Illinois Route 16 Residential

Mattoon Western/Illinois Route 16 Residential

Several areas south of Western Avenue on the west side of Mattoon have been added to the 2026 Enterprise Zone for residential development. Much of the area is currently open fields and are a prime location for new housing of all varieties.

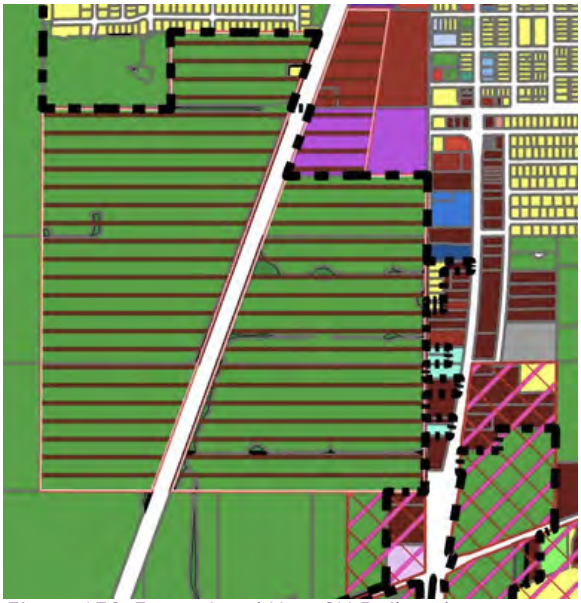


Figure 156. Future Land Use, CN Railroad

CN Railroad

The CN freight yard covers a broad area west of Lake Land College on the south side of Mattoon. This would be an optimal area for lay-down yards and other transportation-related businesses. Canadian National has expressed its willingness to assist in this area as well as other areas of the county.

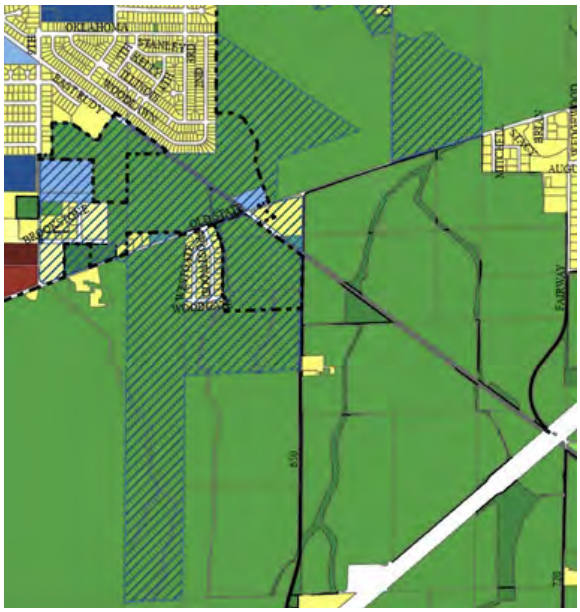


Figure 157. Future Land Use, Mattoon Residential Areas

Mattoon Residential Areas

There are several large parcels that have been added to the 2026 Enterprise Zone for residential development on the southeast side of Mattoon. With existing residential subdivisions surrounding the area, these parcels are prime for any housing development. The parcels are mostly located outside of the City of Mattoon, but adjacent or close to city utilities and services. With a need for housing in Mattoon and the entire county, it is expected that development will occur within the next few years.

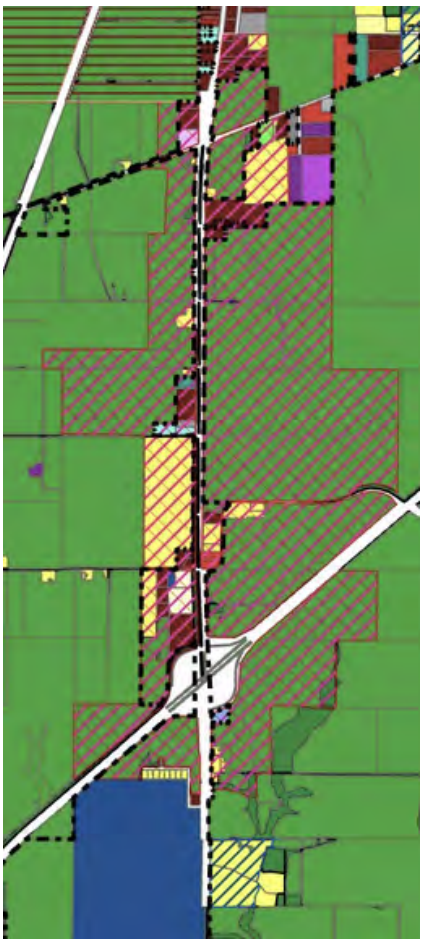


Figure 158. Future Land Use, Mattoon South Route 45/Lake Land Boulevard

Mattoon South Route 45/Lake Land Boulevard

This area has seen improvements that focuses on development and redevelopment. It lies in an enterprise zone and TIF district, offering developers incentives. The area is mainly commercial and agricultural.

North of the Interstate 57 interchange, there are two hotels, R.P. Lumber, a trailer park, and a McDonald's, all in the TIF district. The City of Mattoon supports renovations here to encourage further development.

South of the interchange, significant growth surrounds Lake Land College. The college recently added the Workforce Development Center and expanded the Luther Student Center. Lake Land Living, a large apartment complex, and a successful gas station are nearby. This area is ideal for new educational, residential, and commercial developments.



Figure 159. Future Land Use, State Highway 16 (East of Charleston)

State Highway 16 (East of Charleston)

The area east of the Embarras River a few miles east of Charleston currently hosts a racetrack, concrete business, and Lincoln Springs Resort. With great access to Illinois State Highway 16, this area could be a great fit for other heavy construction businesses and commercial retail. It is out in the county and is an un-zoned location.

North Charleston Industrial Park

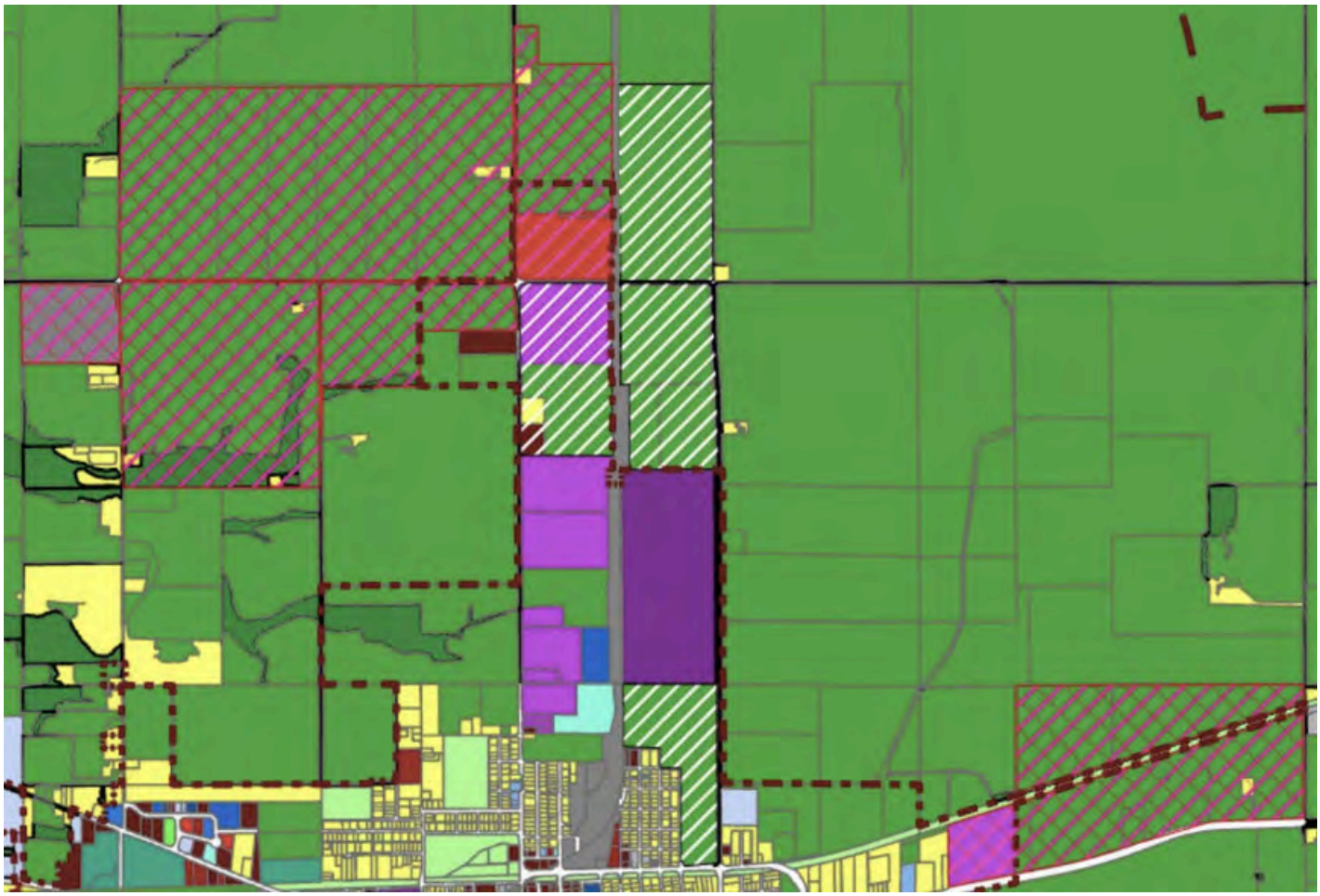


Figure 160. Future Land Use, North Charleston Industrial Park

This location is home to major companies such as Safety Storage, Hi-Cone, Vesuvius, and the Rural King warehouse. With hundreds of acres available, combined with exceptional rail access, utilities, and highway connections, it offers an ideal environment for industrial, manufacturing, and distribution expansion.

The recently acquired Trailmobile site on 14th Street is earmarked for redevelopment and features 350,000 square feet with rail spur access, making it an excellent choice for future industrial or warehousing endeavors.

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Figure 161. Future Land Use, Charleston (South of Westgate Sub.)

Charleston (South of Westgate Sub.)

The area just west of Charleston on the west side of Douglas Drive has been slowly developing over the last 20 years. Housing will be the primary focus in this area. The 2026 Enterprise Zone will include several parcels in this area for development and much of the property is owned by a local residential developer. We anticipate considerable development in this area over the next 5 to 20 years.



Figure 162. Future Land Use, Charleston (South of Madison Avenue)

Charleston (South of Madison Avenue)

The properties highlighted in this area are considered to be a great fit for new residential housing over the next 10 years. The area has been added to the 2026 Enterprise Zone and would be a great fit for single family residential, duplexes, or apartments.

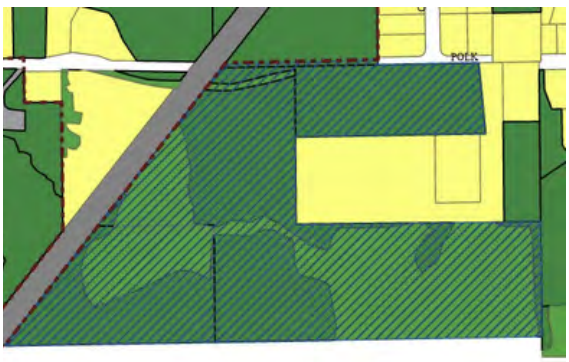


Figure 163. Future Land Use, State Highway 16 (Polk Street)

State Highway 16 (Polk Street)

The property on the west side of Charleston between Polk Street and Illinois State Highway 16 currently has some single family residential and duplexes and would be a great location for additional housing development. This area would be prime land for a subdivision and will become a part of the 2026 Enterprise Zone.



Figure 164. Future Land Use, Charleston Nursery Road)

Charleston Nursery Road

The area just south of Nursery Road on the southeast side of Charleston has seen significant residential growth over the past 30 years. The area has been platted with multiple subdivisions and will be added to the 2026 Enterprise Zone for infill housing. There are currently more than 25 acres available for single family residential housing.



Figure 165. Future Land Use, Charleston Route 16/Route 130

Charleston Route 16/Route 130

The area around Route 16 and Route 130 has seen growth over the past 25 years with Wal-Mart and over 100 housing units in the form of Duplex(ex) and Campus Pointe Apartments. The proposed areas for future development is primarily housing, however, commercial development will most likely occur along the two highways.

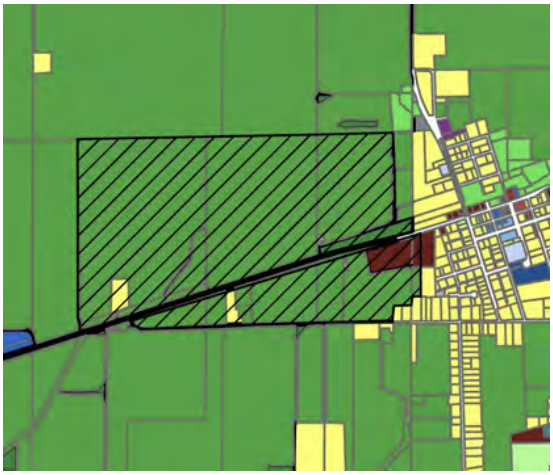


Figure 166. Future Land Use, Ashmore - Route 16 (west of Ashmore

Ashmore - Route 16 (west of Ashmore

There are several properties available for commercial development immediately west of Ashmore. With AHW, LLC, a major John Deere dealership already located here, it could be a prime development area for additional agri-business or other retail establishment. The village has been seeking an option for a small store to purchase groceries and household goods and this area would be a perfect fit.

Ashmore

Immediately south of the Village of Ashmore are a few large parcels that were platted as a subdivision years ago. This would be a great location for new residential housing, something that could help grow the Village. This area, along with other smaller areas in Ashmore, have been proposed for the 2026 Enterprise Zone to expand residential areas.



Figure 167. Future Land Use, Ashmore

Ashmore Downtown/North of Downtown

Downtown Ashmore and its northern areas will join the 2026 Enterprise Zone for potential commercial and industrial development. With TGM already present, agri-business and related ventures would thrive. Downtown hosts businesses like Prospect Bank, Fast Stop, Down the Street, The Place, and Richey's Furniture. The Village aims to expand, including renovating downtown buildings, making Ashmore an ideal spot to start a business.



Figure 168. Future Land Use, Ashmore Downtown/North of Downtown

Oakland North of Route 133

With Miller Brothers LLC and the Township building existing in this area, it would be a great area for future commercial, industry, or construction related businesses to locate. The area to the north and west along the highway are primarily agricultural, leaving plenty of open space for any type of development.



Figure 169. Future Land Use, Oakland North of Route 133

Coles County Enterprise Zone: A Key Catalyst for Business Growth

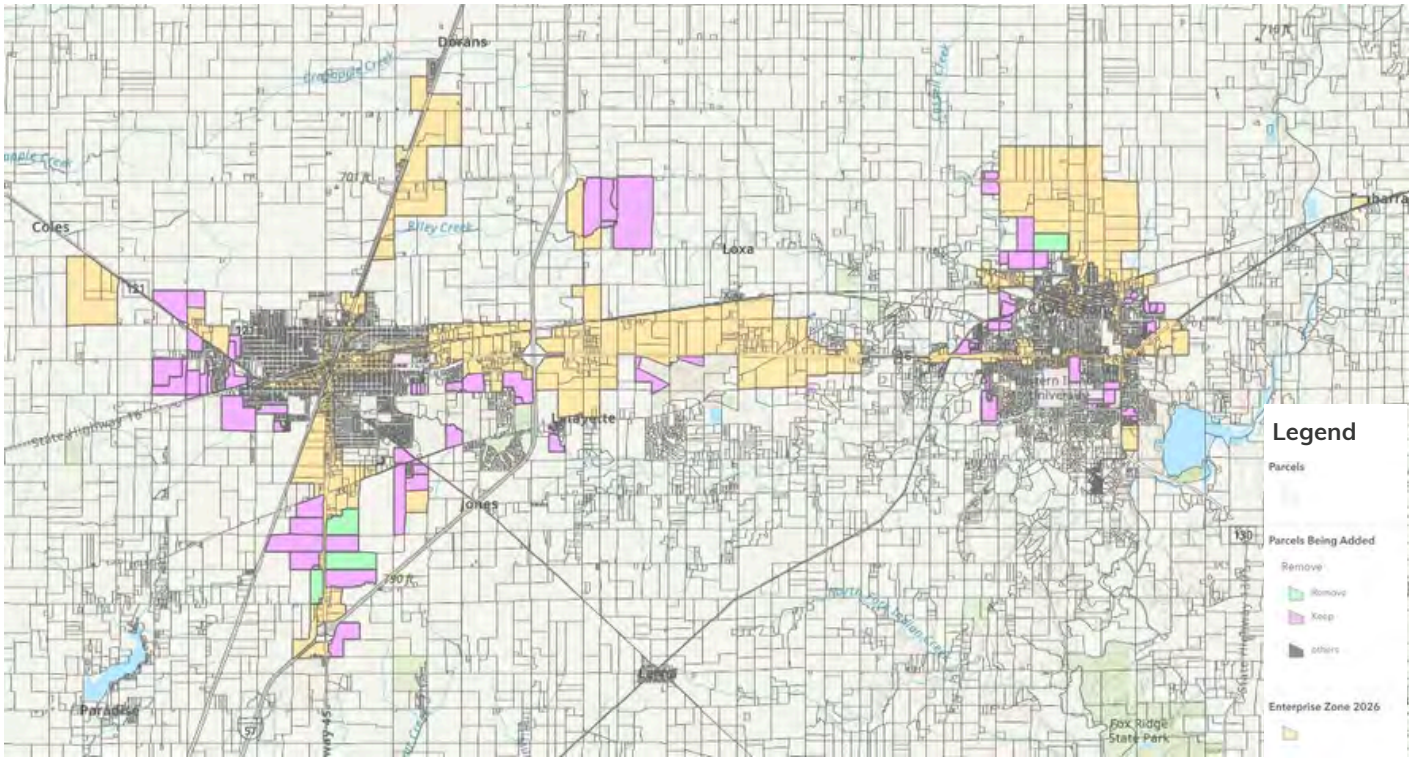


Figure 170. Enterprise Zone Map

The Coles County Enterprise Zone is a crucial state-designated development district that promotes business growth and commercial investment. By offering targeted tax incentives and streamlined development processes, it effectively reduces the costs associated with business expansion. Empowered by the Illinois Enterprise Zone Act (20 ILCS 655/1 et seq.), counties in Illinois can designate enterprise zones to facilitate new development within the state. Established in 2018, Coles County's current zone covers approximately 15 square miles, including parts of Coles County, Mattoon, Charleston, Ashmore, and Oakland. This designation supports various projects, such as industrial and manufacturing initiatives, logistics and distribution centers, and retail service and commercial endeavors.

Businesses that engage in qualified projects can benefit from sales tax exemptions on construction materials, property tax abatements, and other cost-saving measures. These incentives are designed to expedite project timelines and enhance overall returns on investment.

Starting in the first quarter of 2026, the Enterprise Zone will expand to include eligibility for housing development. This extension aims to support workforce and market-rate residential projects that align with business growth and talent acquisition.

Such initiatives enhance Coles County’s ability to provide both industrial and residential solutions, ensuring the simultaneous development of the workforce pipeline and housing inventory. This strategy is crucial for achieving the county's long-term economic development objectives.

Tax Incentives

A range of tax incentives is offered within the current enterprise zone, including:



Figure 171. Enterprise Zone Tax Incentives

Tax abatement means a temporary reduction or elimination of certain taxes. In most cases, including in Coles County, this means you don't pay taxes on the increase in your property value for a set period of time.

For example, a business could build or improve a building, making the property become more valuable. Normally, taxes would go up because of that improvement but with tax abatement they keep paying taxes on the original value and the new, increased value is partially or fully tax-free for a few years.

The Enterprise Zone Board is actively working on a residential component with a **100% tax abatement** and tax-free building materials. Five square miles have been integrated for residential use, including parts of the Village of Ashmore and downtown.

What This Means for the Community

- Encourages new development or expansion
- Reduces upfront costs for businesses or housing projects
- Makes local projects more competitive with other counties or states
- Supports job creation and reinvestment

What tax abatement is NOT

- It is not permanent
- It does not eliminate all taxes
- It usually applies only to the new value, not the entire property

Zoning

Even though Coles County does not currently have countywide zoning in unincorporated areas, it is still important for the Comprehensive Plan to examine zoning as a land use tool.

Zoning is one of several approaches communities use to organize development, define where different types of land uses may occur, and establish expectations for future growth. As Coles County considers long-term issues such as agricultural preservation, infrastructure investment, renewable energy development, and emerging land uses, understanding how zoning functions and how it interacts with Illinois state law provides valuable context for future decision-making. Including a discussion of zoning in the Comprehensive Plan helps document available policy options, clarify tradeoffs, and support informed, transparent conversations about how land use decisions are made over time, regardless of whether zoning is adopted in the future. The table below, continuing onto the next page, is an example of typical Illinois county zoning practice, with notes where state law affects what must be allowed.

Key

- = Permitted by right
- △ = Conditional / Special Use (public hearing required)
- = Not permitted

Use Type	Agricultural (AG)	Residential (R)	Commercial (C)	Industrial (I)	Conservation / Open Space (OS)
Crop & livestock farming					△ (limited / conservation-compatible)
Farm residence					
Single-family homes	△		△		
Multi-family housing		△	△		
Home occupation	△		△		
Agricultural support buildings (barns, grain bins)					
Agritourism (event barns, farm stays)	△				

Use Type	Agricultural (AG)	Residential (R)	Commercial (C)	Industrial (I)	Conservation / Open Space (OS)
Parks & trails	△			△	
Schools / civic buildings	△			△	
Retail & service businesses					
Restaurants					
Offices		△		△	
Warehousing / distribution			△		
Manufacturing (light)			△		
Manufacturing (heavy)				△	
Data centers			△	△	
Public utilities / substations	△	△	△		△
Utility-scale solar energy facilities	△*		△*	△*	
Utility-scale wind energy facilities	△*		△*	△*	
Battery Energy Storage Systems (BESS)	△		△	△	
Junkyards / salvage yards			△	△	
Mining / extraction	△			△	

Table 25. Zoning Type & Use

Zoning Practice Options in Illinois Counties

In Illinois, most counties that adopt zoning use a traditional district-based system that classifies land into agricultural, residential, commercial, and industrial districts. Under the Illinois Counties Code (55 ILCS 5/5-12001 et seq.), counties are authorized to regulate land use in unincorporated areas for the purpose of promoting public health, safety, comfort, morals, and general welfare. Within that statutory framework, counties have discretion to tailor zoning ordinances to reflect local priorities, provided regulations do not conflict with state or federal law.

Options for Enhanced Regulation

- Conditional or Special Use Permits: Counties may require certain land uses to obtain a special or conditional use permit rather than being permitted by right. This process typically includes public notice and a hearing and allows the county board to impose reasonable conditions related to site design and operational impacts, such as:
  - Traffic access
  - Noise
  - Drainage
  - Setbacks
  - Long-term maintenance
- **Regulating Renewable Energy Projects:** Under Public Act 102-1123 and subsequent amendments, counties that adopt zoning may not prohibit commercial wind or solar energy facilities. Such facilities must be allowed in at least one zoning district, and counties must apply state-established siting standards, including uniform setback requirements and review procedures. Counties may regulate project location and design within the limits established by state law, but may not impose standards more restrictive than those authorized by statute.
- **Overlay Districts:** Counties can establish overlay districts that introduce additional standards in specific areas without altering the underlying zoning. For instance, overlays may be utilized to safeguard:
  - Prime farmland
  - Floodplains
  - Groundwater
  - Scenic corridors

- **Performance Standards:** Zoning ordinances may include performance-based standards that regulate measurable impacts such as noise levels, lighting, stormwater runoff, hours of operation, or other operational characteristics, provided such standards are consistent with applicable state and federal regulations.
- **Development Agreements:** For large-scale or infrastructure-intensive projects, counties may enter into development agreements authorized under Illinois law to address site-specific obligations, including road improvements, emergency services coordination, drainage infrastructure, and decommissioning requirements.
- **Clear Definitions and Size Thresholds:** Counties may define land uses with specificity and establish size, capacity, or intensity thresholds to ensure that high-impact projects receive appropriate review under the ordinance.

While counties must operate within the limits established by Illinois statutes, particularly regarding renewable energy siting, they retain meaningful authority to structure zoning procedures, standards, and review processes. Careful ordinance design allows counties to reflect local planning priorities while maintaining compliance with state law.



Figure 172. Jackson Ave. Businesses, Charleston

Local Needs & Initiatives

The following examples illustrate how countywide goals, gap analysis findings, and coordination strategies are beginning to take shape at the local level through ongoing projects and partnerships.

LOCAL INITIATIVE: BROWN SHOE FACTORY ADAPTIVE REUSE PROJECT (CHARLESTON)

Project Overview:
The Brown Shoe Factory in Charleston, built in 1919, is being renovated by local property owners. Documented on the YouTube channel Brick and Sole, this project revives a key part of Charleston's industrial heritage, originally providing significant non-agricultural employment.



Figure 173. Brown Shoe Factory Project

Community & Cultural Significance:
The factory is a cultural landmark that diversified Charleston's economy beyond seasonal agriculture. Its restoration is tied to local identity and historical preservation.

Current Status and Progress:
Renovations continue, with updates shared on Brick and Sole's YouTube channel. Fundraising events, including auctions of factory artifacts, support the renovation and raise project awareness.

Economic and Planning Implications:
Revitalizing the factory supports Coles County's goals of historic preservation and economic development by:

- Enhancing downtown Charleston through adaptive reuse.
- Boosting heritage tourism and cultural activities.
- Showcasing community-driven revitalization that aligns with local growth.

Historical Significance and Impact on the Community:
The Brown Shoe Factory was Charleston's first major non-agricultural factory, creating year-round jobs and diversifying the economy, particularly benefiting women in the workforce.

LINCOLN-DOUGLAS DEBATE MUSEUM UPDATES/ REVITALIZATION

Project Overview:
Revitalize the existing historical, educational structure.


Figure 174. Lincoln-Douglas Debate Museum

Community Significance:
The Lincoln-Douglas Debate Museum

Current Status and Progress:
Currently seeking funding for this project.

Planning Implications:
The successful revitalization of the Lincoln-Douglas Debate Museum will underscore the community's commitment to preserving and celebrating its rich historical legacy, while also aligning with the county's goals for sustainable development and cultural enrichment.

Hutton Township Fire Protection District Building Repairs & Expansion

Project Overview:
The Hutton Fire Protection District is seeking to repair and extend it's current building.

Community Significance:
The Hutton Township Fire Protection District covers 54.6 miles and contains 350 housing units.

Current Status and Progress:
The organization is currently seeking funding for this project.

Planning Implications:
Restoring the firehouse is essential for fire protection and community resilience. Renovations are in the planning stage, with needs for structural repairs and updated equipment storage.



Figure 175. Hutton Township Fire Protection Building

City of Mattoon Projects

Wastewater Treatment Plant Upgrades
By 2035, the plant must meet a .5 mg/l phosphorus limit and relocate from the floodplain. Upgrades include new facilities with biological nutrient reduction (BNR). Improvements involve aeration and BNR systems, biosolids, primary treatment, grit system, and CSO treatment for an estimated cost of $55 million. Funding plans include State Revolving Loan, EDA, and CDBG.

Current Status and Progress:
Preliminary engineering is underway

Water Treatment Plant Upgrades

- To tackle the water quality crisis, Mattoon plans upgrades per Illinois EPA recommendations.
- Recommendations are:
  - Granular Activated Carbon Filtration for organic compound removal and system performance enhancement ($1.1 million).
  - Advanced Ozone Treatment for microcystin neutralization and resilience during algal blooms ($3-4 million).
  - Lime Slaker system installation ($2 million).
- State Revolving Loan funds cover Lime Slaker and GAC filters; appropriations requested for Ozone Treatment.

Westside Drainage Project Phases 1, 2, and 3

The Westside Drainage Project is divided into three phases. Phase I involves installing a 60-inch pipe from IL 16 south to the Little Wabash River and will commence later this year. Phase II plans to place a 36-inch pipe from Western Ave. south to IL 16, but design has not started. Phase III, which is 75% designed, includes a 24-inch pipe along the CN Railroad and three stormwater detention areas. Efforts are underway to secure right-of-way for these areas.

Mattoon: Momentum Park

Project Overview:

Phase I aims to improve local quality of life by transforming an unused railroad area into a vibrant bike park connected to the Lincoln Prairie Grass Trail and nearby neighborhoods. This initiative is the first of three phases, establishing Mattoon as a leader in outdoor recreation.

Phase II will add a mountain bike skills course about a mile east of Site C, behind the Cross County Mall, featuring skills loops and natural trails for riders of all levels. Site B will support skill development for youth and beginners transitioning from Phase I.

Phase III will complete the park with a national-caliber pump track and community park at Site A, also about a mile east of Site C. Designed for regional and national events, it will offer advanced trails and family-friendly amenities, enhancing Mattoon's appeal as a recreational and tourist destination.



Figure 176. Momentum Park Project Area



Figure 177. Momentum Park Plan, Phase I



Figure 178. Momentum Park Plan, Phase II

Community Significance:

The park will provide a safe, inclusive space with ADA-accessible tracks, skill-building features, and shaded seating. It will cater to all ages and abilities, promoting environmental appreciation through native plantings and educational signage developed with local partners.

Current Status and Progress:

City of Mattoon has requested and was awarded $600,000 through OSLAD, while $300,000 has been secured locally through philanthropic contributions from community partners.
They are currently seeking funding for Phase II & III.

Potential Related Regional Project

There is a regional initiative aligning with the Momentum Park Projects that would expand the existing bike trail, Prairie Grass Trail, to Shelbyville, Pana, Springfield, and Taylorville. The aforementioned counties have shown interest in connecting their trails to Coles County's and would like to possibly see the trail extend to Marshall and Terre Haute.

Integration with Municipal & Area Plans

Just as ecological systems are composed of interdependent subsystems, Coles County's planning framework is shaped by multiple, overlapping plans adopted by municipalities, regional partners, and special-purpose agencies. The County Comprehensive Plan functions as a coordinating canopy, providing alignment and support for more localized plans while respecting their distinct roles and scales.

Municipal comprehensive plans, including those adopted by the Cities of Charleston and Mattoon and the Village of Oakland, address community-specific priorities related to land use, infrastructure, housing, economic development, and community character. This Community Resilience chapter provides a shared lens through which these local priorities can be understood as part of a larger countywide system. Together, these local and municipal efforts demonstrate how resilience is strengthened when countywide planning supports, not replaces, community-led priorities.

ALIGNMENT WITH MUNICIPAL COMPREHENSIVE PLANS

City of Charleston

Charleston's comprehensive plan emphasizes downtown vitality, neighborhood stability, institutional partnerships, and infrastructure reinvestment. From a resilience perspective, these priorities contribute to countywide strength by:

- Reinforcing established activity centers that support social cohesion and economic stability
- Supporting reinvestment in existing neighborhoods and infrastructure, reducing exposure to hazard risk associated with outward expansion
- Leveraging educational and institutional assets that enhance workforce development and civic capacity

The County Comprehensive Plan supports these goals by prioritizing infill development, infrastructure resilience, and coordinated planning efforts that strengthen Charleston's role as a regional hub.

City of Mattoon

Mattoon's comprehensive plan focuses on economic development, industrial and logistics activity, transportation access, and housing reinvestment. These priorities align with community resilience by:

- Supporting employment diversity and economic adaptability
- Improving transportation networks for efficient movement of goods and people, enhancing resilience to disruptions
- Promoting housing reinvestment to ensure diverse, affordable living options, reducing residents' vulnerability to economic and environmental changes

The County Comprehensive Plan aligns with Mattoon's goals by advocating sustainable industrial practices, better transportation infrastructure, and collaborative housing strategies to strengthen the city's economic and social fabric.

Village of Oakland

Oakland's comprehensive plan focuses on preserving its rural character, agricultural sustainability, and community engagement, which are crucial for resilience by:

- Protecting vital agricultural lands that ensure local food security and economic sustainability
- Encouraging community involvement to build supportive social networks during crises
- Maintaining the village's rural identity, fostering a sense of belonging and stability

The County Comprehensive Plan supports Oakland's vision by promoting land use policies that protect agricultural resources and encourage community-led initiatives, helping the village retain its unique character while enhancing countywide resilience.

This Comprehensive Plan is intended to serve as a living framework for coordination, stewardship, and shared progress across Coles County. By identifying system-level gaps, highlighting local initiatives, and aligning county priorities with municipal and regional plans, the County can support resilient growth while respecting the unique character and leadership of its communities. Implementation will continue to occur through partnerships, grant opportunities, capital planning, and ongoing public engagement, adapting as conditions and needs evolve. Through this collaborative approach, Coles County is positioned to build on existing strengths, respond to change thoughtfully, and sustain a high quality of life for current and future residents.

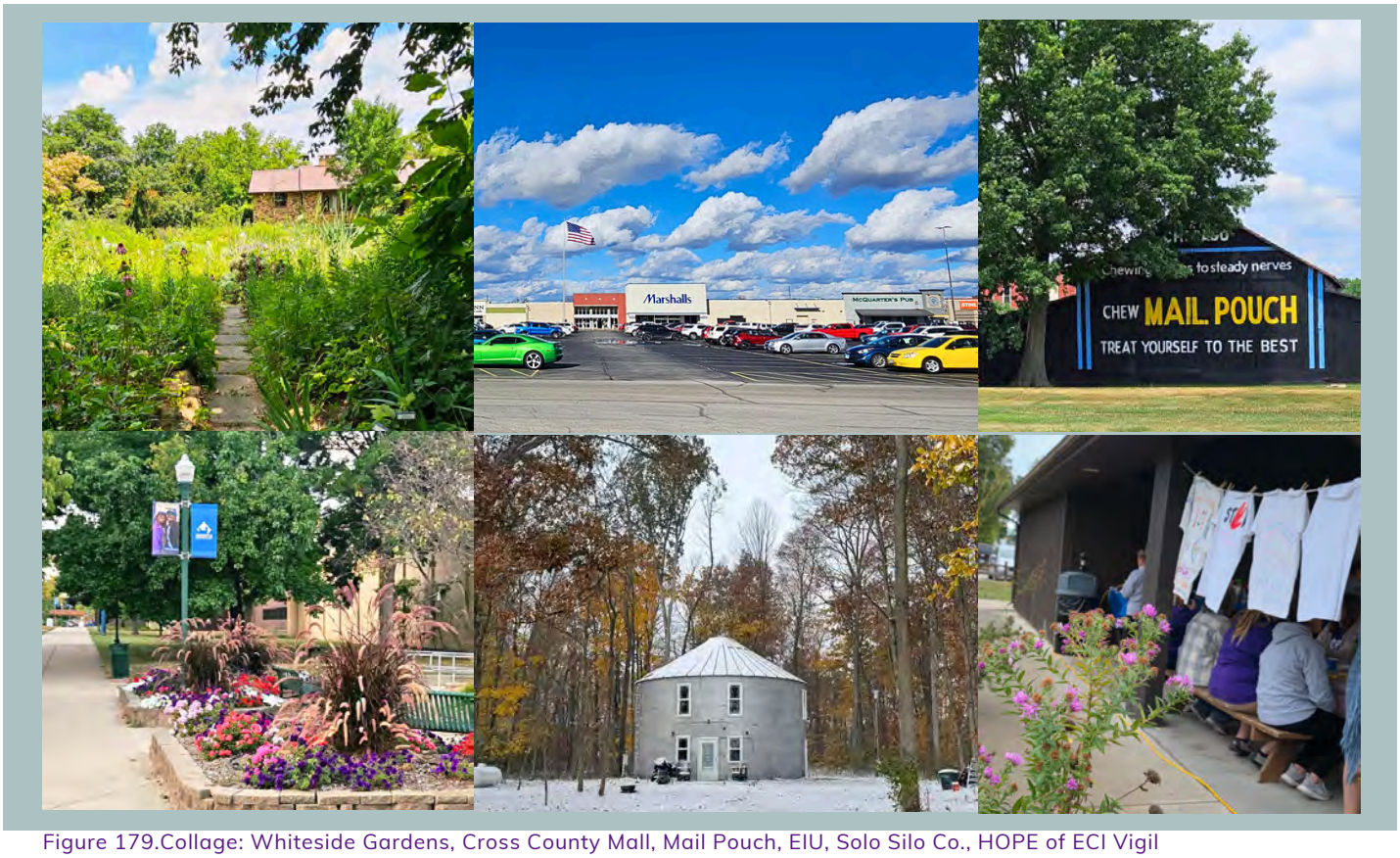


Figure 179.Collage: Whiteside Gardens, Cross County Mall, Mail Pouch, EIU, Solo Silo Co., HOPE of ECI Vigil

Gap Analysis

Methodology

This gap analysis is grounded in the following elements:

- A review of existing countywide conditions as outlined in the 2006 Comprehensive Plan and the 2012 Statistical Update
- Well-established benchmarks for planning and local government services
- Observed trends in rural counties across Illinois
- The intergovernmental framework and service delivery context in Coles County

The analysis focuses on identifying gaps in service, capacity, coordination, and policy, rather than dictating land use policy.

Summary of Countywide Gaps

- Trends indicating an aging and declining population
- Mismatches in housing supply and conditions
- Limited economic diversification and workforce development strategies
- Gaps in transportation access for those without vehicles
- Challenges in infrastructure planning and coordination
- Shortcomings in environmental risk management and resilience planning
- Needs for reinvestment in public facilities
- Limitations in governance and capacity

How This County Gap Analysis Should Be Used

This document is designed to:

- Inform budget planning and capital improvements
- Support grant applications and needs assessments
- Aid in departmental and intergovernmental coordination

Provide foundational input for the current and future updates of the Comprehensive Plan, ensuring that it remains a living document that accurately reflects the evolving needs and priorities of Coles County. By highlighting these gaps, stakeholders can prioritize actions that address the most pressing issues and leverage this analysis as a tool for strategic decision-making.

The insights gained from this gap analysis are intended to foster collaboration among various county departments, community organizations, and regional partners. By working together, they can develop innovative solutions that not only address the identified gaps but also enhance the overall quality of life for residents.

Ultimately, this analysis serves as a catalyst for positive change, driving efforts to create a more sustainable, resilient, and inclusive community. Its findings should be revisited regularly to track progress and adjust strategies as necessary, ensuring that Coles County can effectively meet the challenges and opportunities of the future.

Countywide Gap Analysis

Countywide Gap	Policy Direction for Comp Plan	Example Goal Statement	Implementation Focus
Aging & declining population	Stabilize population and attract/retain working-age households	Support conditions that retain residents & attract new households to Coles County	Housing diversity, workforce alignment, quality-of-life investments
Limited housing options & aging stock	Expand housing choice and reinvestment	Ensure availability of safe, affordable, and diverse housing countywide	Rehabilitation programs, partnerships, housing incentives
Economic dependence on few sectors	Diversify and strengthen local economy	Strengthen economic resilience through diversification and entrepreneurship	Small business support, workforce training, broadband
Workforce availability challenges	Align workforce with employers	Improve workforce readiness and retention	Education partnerships, training pipelines
Transportation access gaps	Improve mobility and access	Enhance access to jobs, services, and healthcare for all residents	Transit coordination, safety improvements
Infrastructure coordination gaps	Align growth with infrastructure capacity	Ensure efficient and sustainable infrastructure investment	Capital planning, service area coordination
Environmental & hazard risks	Increase resilience and resource protection	Reduce risk from natural hazards and protect environmental assets	Hazard mitigation, green infrastructure
Aging facilities & service inefficiencies	Improve service delivery and facilities	Maintain effective, efficient, and accessible public services	Facilities planning, shared services
Governance & capacity constraints	Strengthen coordination and capacity	Improve intergovernmental coordination and implementation capacity	Formal agreements, performance tracking

Table 26. Countywide Gap Analysis

Gap Analysis Funding Identification

Gap Area	Potential Funding & Support Sources
Housing rehabilitation & affordability	USDA Rural Development, IHDA, CDBG, HOME
Workforce development	DCEO, IDES, EDA, Workforce Innovation & Opportunity Act (WIOA)
Economic diversification & small business	EDA, USDA Rural Business Development, DCEO
Broadband & digital access	USDA ReConnect, NTIA Broadband Equity Programs, State broadband grants
Transportation safety & access	IDOT, HSIP, FTA (rural transit), Safe Routes
Infrastructure & utilities	USDA Rural Utilities Service, IEPA SRF, ARPA
Hazard mitigation & resilience	FEMA Hazard Mitigation Grants, IDNR, EPA
Parks, trails & quality of life	IDNR OSLAD, Land and Water Conservation Fund
Government capacity & planning	DCEO planning grants, EDA technical assistance

Table 27. Gap Area I Funding Identification

Taken together, this gap analysis highlights how infrastructure capacity, service coordination, affordability, and system resilience are interconnected across Coles County. Addressing these gaps does not rely on a single solution or entity, but on sustained collaboration among utilities, emergency services, local governments, service providers, and regional partners. By understanding where constraints exist, whether in energy systems, public safety response, or community services, the County can better align planning, grants, and partnerships to support reliable services, protect residents, and strengthen long-term community well-being. This framework reinforces the plan's emphasis on flexibility, preparedness, and stewardship as conditions, technologies, and community needs continue to evolve.

Community Health & Resilience

Coles County's communities function as interconnected living systems, shaped by relationships between people, places, institutions, infrastructure, and the natural environment. Just as healthy ecosystems depend on diversity, redundancy, and adaptability, resilient communities rely on social connections, cultural continuity, functional infrastructure, and environmental integrity.

This chapter synthesizes information from earlier sections of the Comprehensive Plan to evaluate how resilient Coles County's human and natural systems are today, where they are strong, and where they show signs of stress. It serves as a bridge between existing conditions and the Goals & Recommendations chapter by identifying the conditions that enable the county to absorb change, adapt to challenges, and thrive over time.

Community resilience in Coles County is shaped by:

- Natural systems that buffer hazards and support livelihoods
- Built systems that provide safety, mobility, and services
- Social systems that foster trust, participation, and mutual support
- Cultural systems that preserve identity, continuity, and place-based pride

Understanding these interdependencies allows the County to pursue growth and investment strategies that strengthen the whole system rather than addressing challenges in isolation.

Environmental and Hazard Resilience

Environmental and Hazard Resilience

As shown in the Natural Resources & Environment section, Coles County's rivers, floodplains, wetlands, soils, and agricultural landscapes provide essential ecosystem services that reduce risk and support long-term stability. Floodplains and riparian corridors along the Embarras River, Kickapoo Creek, and their tributaries absorb and slow floodwaters, while healthy soils and vegetative cover reduce erosion and runoff.

When these systems are degraded or constrained, hazard impacts intensify. Conversely, protecting and restoring natural systems increases the county's capacity to manage flooding, extreme precipitation, drought, and heat.

Consistent with the Coles County Hazard Mitigation Plan, the primary hazards affecting the county include:

- Flooding and flash flooding
- Severe storms, including high winds, hail, and tornadoes
- Extreme heat and cold events
- Periods of drought and variable precipitation
- Infrastructure and utility disruptions

These hazards interact with land use patterns, infrastructure conditions, and social vulnerability. Areas with older infrastructure, limited redundancy, or constrained access to services may experience disproportionate impacts.

This Comprehensive Plan reinforces hazard mitigation by:

- Encouraging land use patterns that respect floodplains and environmentally sensitive areas
- Supporting watershed-based planning and green infrastructure
- Directing growth toward areas with existing infrastructure and lower hazard exposure
- Recognizing natural systems as long-term risk-reduction assets

Hazard mitigation is addressed as a continuous process embedded in everyday planning and investment decisions, rather than as a stand-alone emergency response function.

Social and Community Resilience

Social Networks as Adaptive Capacity

In ecological systems, resilience is strengthened through diversity and interconnectedness. In communities, this role is played by social networks, civic institutions, and informal gathering spaces that foster relationships and collective problem-solving.

Coles County benefits from a wide range of formal and informal community anchors, including libraries, parks, schools, faith-based organizations, civic groups, trails, and community centers. These “third spaces” support social cohesion, mental health, civic participation, and information sharing, functions that become especially critical during times of stress or disruption.

Accessibility

Resilience depends not only on the presence of community spaces, but on who can access them. Transportation availability, physical accessibility, geographic distribution, and program affordability all influence whether residents can benefit equally from these assets. Ensuring equitable access to social infrastructure strengthens the county’s ability to respond collectively to challenges and reduces disparities in outcomes during emergencies or economic shifts.

Resource Resilience: Rural Connectivity and the Risk of Siloing

Rural resilience research shows that small and rural communities often have strong local ties but can suffer from siloing, where services and planning operate in isolation. The OECD and USDA highlight that limited institutional capacity, geographic distance, and smaller tax bases can hinder coordination and access to resources, weakening adaptability if not addressed. In Coles County, the focus is on strengthening connections between communities, agencies, and plans. Countywide coordination and aligned plans help ensure these areas are integrated into decision-making and support networks. Even modest collaboration improvements can significantly boost the county's adaptive capacity.

Cultural & Historic Resilience

Historic buildings, districts, landscapes, and cultural institutions function as the long-term memory of the community. They anchor identity, reinforce continuity across generations, and contribute to economic vitality through tourism, education, and local pride.

From an ecological perspective, these assets act as stabilizing elements within the community system. When well maintained and actively used, they support resilience by reinforcing shared identity and fostering stewardship.

Risks and Stewardship Challenges

Cultural and historic resources face risks from:

- Deferred maintenance and limited funding
- Environmental exposure, including flooding and severe weather
- Changing demographics and use patterns
- Loss of institutional capacity for stewardship

Monitoring the condition and use of these assets provides insight into broader community health. Declining investment in historic and cultural resources may signal weakening social or economic systems, while renewed interest and care often reflect broader revitalization trends.

Health and Well-Being as System Indicators

Public health outcomes reflect the cumulative effects of environmental quality, housing conditions, mobility options, access to services, and social connection. In this way, health indicators function as system-level signals of resilience or vulnerability.

Key factors influencing health and well-being in Coles County include:

- Access to healthcare and emergency services
- Availability of safe places for physical activity
- Food access and agricultural systems
- Housing quality and affordability
- Environmental conditions, including air and water quality

Rather than focusing on individual outcomes, this plan considers health trends as indicators of how well community systems are functioning together.

Early Warning Signs of Stress or Decline

Conversely, certain patterns may indicate emerging stress within the community system:

- Deferred maintenance of public spaces, historic sites, or infrastructure
- Loss or underuse of third spaces and community anchors
- Rising housing vacancy or deterioration
- Reduced civic participation or volunteer capacity
- Increasing service disruptions or emergency response demands

Tracking these signals over time allows the County to identify challenges early and respond proactively.

Goals & Recommendations

Overview of Goals

Together, the vision, ecosystem framework, and community feedback provide a complete understanding of Coles County's current situation and future dreams. The following goals and recommendations turn these ideas into actions, policies, programs, and investments. Each goal is made to improve connected systems, fix identified problems, and help different areas and partners work together. These goals show what the community wants, the current conditions, and the County's promise to take care of the land for the long term instead of just using it up quickly. These objectives create a plan for making decisions that balance a strong economy, a healthy environment, responsible spending, and a good quality of life.

Goal 1: Strengthen Coles County: Resilient Community Ecosystem
Foster a balanced system of people, land, infrastructure, and institutions adaptable to change, emphasizing coordination to ensure growth decisions support long-term stability.

Goal 2: Expand Housing Choice While Preserving Community Character
Enhance access to diverse housing options while reinvesting in neighborhoods and infrastructure to address limited variety, aging stock, and affordability issues.

Goal 3: Promote Sustainable Economic Development and Workforce Opportunity
Cultivate an economy supporting living wages and local investment, focusing on quality job creation and aligning land use with growth sectors.

Goal 4: Improve Transportation and Infrastructure Connectivity
Safeguard essential assets like farmland and water resources to ensure economic health and environmental resilience, prioritizing conservation and sustainable development.

Goal 5: Protect and Steward Natural Resources and Working Lands
Ensure reliable access to essential services, with infrastructure investments aimed at improving connectivity and closing service gaps.

Goal 6: Support Educational Assets and Lifelong Learning
Strengthen coordination between educational institutions and workforce programs to support economic mobility and retain young residents.

Goal 7: Promote Fiscal Responsibility and Collaborative Governance
Align planning and service delivery with fiscal sustainability, emphasizing prioritization and regional partnerships for long-term value.

Goal 8: Advance Accessibility and Quality of Life
Reduce barriers to opportunity, ensuring all residents have access to housing, transportation, and employment by considering the impact on vulnerable populations, especially the elderly.

Goal 9: Use Planning as an Ongoing Stewardship Tool
Ensure the comprehensive plan guides decisions and investments, with regular updates to respond to changing conditions.

Together, these goals provide a framework for stewarding resources, strengthening communities, and guiding growth decisions for Coles County's current and future residents.

Goal Implementation Timetable

Goal 1: Strengthen Coles County as a Resilient Community Ecosystem				
Action	**Description**	**Lead**	**Partners**	**Timeframe**
Integrate stewardship framework	Use framework to evaluate major County investments, policies, and partnerships	County Board, Planning & Development	U of I Extension	Review 2028, Completion 2031
Align capital planning	Coordinate capital improvement planning with comprehensive plan priorities	County Board	County Dept. Heads	Review 2028, Completion 2031

Goal 2: Expand Housing Choice While Preserving Community Character				
Action	**Description**	**Lead**	**Partners**	**Timeframe**
Support housing rehabilitation	Promote & coordinate rehabilitation programs to reinvest in aging housing stock	County, Municipalities	IHDA, Regional Developers	Ongoing; Review 2028, Completion 2031
Encourage housing diversity	Support zoning & policy changes that allow a wider range of housing types	Municipalities, County	IL DCEO, IHDA, IL Dir. of Housing Soultions	Short-term groundwork; Mid-term implementation; Review 2028
Promote infill & reuse	Prioritize redevelopment & infill in existing communities over greenfield development	Municipalities	IL DCEO, IHDA, Coles Hist. Soc., Business Owners	Ongoing, with Mid-term pilot implementation

Goal 3: Promote Sustainable Economic Development & Workforce Opportunity				
Action	**Description**	**Lead**	**Partners**	**Timeframe**
Align economic development with workforce needs	Coordinate employers, education providers, childcare, & workforce agencies	Coles Together, Municipalities	Lake Land College, EIU, ILWEA	Short- to Mid-term
Support quality job growth	Focus incentives on industries that provide living wages & long-term stability	Coles Together, Municipalities	Regional Employers, ILWEA, Chambers of Commerce	Ongoing
Coordinate land use & infrastructure	Ensure employment areas are supported by housing & transportation	County, Municipalities	CCRP&D	Ongoing

Goal 4: Improve Transportation and Infrastructure Connectivity				
Action	**Description**	**Lead**	**Partners**	**Timeframe**
Address Transportation Gaps	Support coordination with regional transit providers, & funding diversification for Coles County's operator.	Coles Co. Planning & Development Committee,	Municipalities, DAR	Short- to Mid-term
Continue Walkability & Bicyclist Initiatives	Integrate complete streets principles to boost walkability and safety. Continue Safe Routes for All initiatives, ensuring cities complete Safety Action Plans.	County, Municipalities	-	Ongoing
Maintain Existing Infrastructure	Prioritize maintaining critical rural roads for agriculture and commuters over expansion.	County Departments	-	Ongoing

Goal 5: Protect and Steward Natural Resources and Working Lands				
Action	**Description**	**Lead**	**Partners**	**Timeframe**
Preserve Farmland & Open Space	Encourage land use practices that limit unnecessary conversion	County, Municipalities	Landowners	Ongoing
Protect Water Resources	Support watershed planning and stormwater best practices	County, Regional Partners	U of I Ext., Soil & Water Dep.	Ongoing
Guide Development around Sensitive Areas	Use data to inform land use and infrastructure decisions	County, Municipalities	IEPA, U of I Extention, Soil & Water Dep.	Short- to Mid-term

Goal 6: Support Educational Assets and Lifelong Learning				
Action	**Description**	**Lead**	**Partners**	**Timeframe**
Strengthen school-employer connections	Support internships, apprenticeships, career pathways	Schools, Employers	ILWEA, Coles Together	Short-to Mid-term
Retain students & graduates	Promote quality-of-life and housing strategies for young adults	County, Municipalities	EIU, LLC, Local Employers, Housing Providers	Mid-to Long-term
Integrate community resources with local educational strategies	Coordinate educational institution curriculum with local historical, arts, & cultural sites	Superintendents	Historical Societies, Arts Councils	Mid-term

Goal 7: Promote Fiscal Responsibility and Collaborative Governance				
Action	**Description**	**Lead**	**Partners**	**Timeframe**
Prioritize investments	Use plan goals to guide budgeting and grant applications	County Board	-	Ongoing
Expand shared services	Explore opportunities for intergovernmental service & cost sharing	County, Municipalities	-	Mid-term
Track fiscal impacts	Evaluate long-term costs and benefits of major decisions	County	-	Ongoing

Goal 8: Advance Accessibility and Quality of Life				
Action	**Description**	**Lead**	**Partners**	**Timeframe**
Improve access to services	Address transportation, housing, and digital barriers	Coles County Planning & Dev. Committee	DAR, EIU Dig. Lit. Program, Local Social Service Orgs.	Short-term
Evaluate population/ community vulnerabilities	Evaluate community resource barriers and policy impacts for vulnerable populations	CCRP&DC	Municipalities, Social Serv. Orgs	Short-term/ Ongoing
Support aging & disabled populations	Coordinate services for seniors and residents with disabilities	County	Coles County Council on Aging	Mid-term/ Ongoing

Goal 9: Use Planning as an Ongoing Stewardship Tool				
Action Category	**Action Item**	**Lead Entity**	**Supporting Partners**	**Timeline**
Plan Monitoring	Prepare & publish an annual Comprehensive Plan progress report	Coles County	Municipalities, Coles Together	Annual
Plan Evaluation	Conduct a formal review of progress toward goals & metrics	Coles County	Regional partners	Every 3–5 years
Data Tracking	Establish & maintain a centralized system for tracking key metrics	Coles County	Municipal staff, EDO	Ongoing
Public Engagement	Host public meetings or outreach events to share progress & gather input	Coles County	Community organizations	Annual
Plan Integration	Incorporate Comprehensive Plan goals into capital planning, budgeting, & policy decisions	Coles County	Municipalities	Ongoing
Intergovernmental Coordination	Strengthen coordination between county, municipalities, & regional partners	Coles County	Municipal governments, EDO	Ongoing
Plan Updates	Update the Comprehensive Plan to reflect changing conditions & priorities	Coles County	Planning partners	Every 5–10 years
Transparency & Communication	Maintain a publicly accessible version of the plan & progress updates (website/dashboard)	Coles County	EDO, community partners	Ongoing

Table 28. Goal 1-9

Performance Metrics: A Key to Effective Evaluation

The importance of performance metrics and the evaluation data collected from monitoring goals cannot be overstated, as they provide a clear and objective measure of progress toward strategic objectives. By analyzing this information, decision-makers can:

- Identify areas of success
- Pinpoint aspects that need improvement

This analysis enables informed adjustments to strategies and resource allocations. Additionally, strong performance metrics promote accountability and transparency, ensuring that all stakeholders are aligned with the organization's goals. This ongoing feedback loop not only boosts operational efficiency but also aids in long-term planning by revealing trends and patterns that may impact future initiatives.

Goal 1: Strengthen Coles County as a Resilient Community Ecosystem				
Action Item	**Metric**	**Priority**	**Data Source**	**Frequency**
Align capital projects with plan	% of CIP projects aligned with plan	MVT	County CIP	Annual
Improve interdepartmental coordination	# of coordination meetings	MVT	Staff logs	Annual
Integrate planning across sectors	# of projects using multi-sector approach	Secondary	Project reviews	Annual

Goal 2: Expand Housing Choice While Preserving Community Character				
Action Item	**Metric**	**Priority**	**Data Source**	**Frequency**
Expand housing supply	# of new housing units by type	MVT	Building permits	Annual
Promote reinvestment	# of rehab permits issued	MVT	Local permits	Annual
Encourage infill development	% infill vs. greenfield development	Secondary	GIS / permits	Annual
Improve affordability	Median home price-to-income ratio	MVT	ACS data	Annual

Goal 3: Promote Sustainable Economic Development and Workforce Opportunity				
Action Item	**Metric**	**Priority**	**Data Source**	**Frequency**
Support job growth	# of jobs created/retained	MVT	EDO reports	Annual
Increase workforce participation	Labor force participation rate	MVT	State labor data	Annual
Support business growth	# of new businesses/expansions	MVT	EDO/local data	Annual
Improve workforce training	Workforce program enrollment	Secondary	Colleges	Annual
Improve site readiness	Acres of shovel-ready land	Secondary	EDO	Annual

Goal 4: Improve Transportation and Infrastructure Connectivity				
Action Item	**Metric**	**Priority**	**Data Source**	**Frequency**
Maintain infrastructure	Miles of road improved	MVT	County highway	Annual
Expand broadband access	% households with broadband	MVT	FCC maps	Annual
Improve mobility	Transit ridership	Secondary	Transit providers	Annual
Increase infrastructure investment	$ invested per year	MVT	County budget	Annual

Goal 5: Protect and Steward Natural Resources and Working Lands				
Action Item	**Metric**	**Priority**	**Data Source**	**Frequency**
Preserve farmland	Acres preserved annually	MVT	USDA/local	Annual
Reduce land conversion	Acres converted to development	Secondary	GIS	Annual
Improve water quality	Key water quality indicators	Secondary	Watershed data	Annual
Support conservation	# or growth of conservation projects	MVT	Local agencies	Annual

Goal 6: Support Educational Assets and Lifelong Learning				
Action Item	**Metric**	**Priority**	**Data Source**	**Frequency**
Strengthen workforce pipeline	Enrollment trends (local institutions)	MVT	Colleges	Annual
Improve talent retention	% graduates staying local	Secondary	Surveys	Annual
Expand training programs	# of workforce programs offered	Secondary	Colleges	Annual

Goal 7: Promote Fiscal Responsibility and Collaborative Governance				
Action Item	**Metric**	**Priority**	**Data Source**	**Frequency**
Increase external funding	$ grant funding secured	MVT	County/EDO	Annual
Improve efficiency	Budget vs. actual spending	MVT	Financial reports	Annual
Strengthen partnerships	# of intergovernmental agreements	Secondary	County records	Annual

Goal 8: Advance Accessibility and Quality of Life				
Action Item	**Metric**	**Priority**	**Data Source**	**Frequency**
Improve service access	% population near key services	Secondary	GIS-based proximity	Annual
Reduce poverty	Poverty rate	MVT	ACS	Annual
Improve housing stability	% cost-burdened households	MVT	ACS	Annual
Expand childcare access	# of childcare slots	Secondary	Local providers	Annual

Goal 9: Use Planning as an Ongoing Stewardship Tool				
Action Item	**Metric**	**Priority**	**Data Source**	**Frequency**
Track implementation	Annual progress report completed	MVT	County staff	Annual
Measure progress	% goals showing progress	MVT	Internal tracking	Annual
Maintain engagement	# of public engagement activities	Secondary	Staff logs	Annual

Table 29. Goal 1-9 Action Items

Interpretation of Performance Metrics

Performance metrics in this Comprehensive Plan are intended to track trends, activity levels, and system conditions that inform decision-making and support coordination among partners. Many indicators reflect outcomes influenced by multiple public, private, and nonprofit actors, as well as broader economic and demographic forces, and should not be interpreted as sole measures of County performance. Metrics are used to understand direction of change, identify gaps, and guide adjustments to policies, partnerships, and investments over time.

Defining Progress

For purposes of annual reporting, a goal is considered to be “showing progress” when one or more of the following has occurred:

(1) an action has been initiated,

(2) a policy or ordinance has been adopted or amended,

(3) funding or partnerships have been secured, or

(4) measurable implementation steps or pilot activities have begun.

Progress does not require full completion of an outcome within a single reporting period.

Progress can take various forms and isn't always linear. Celebrating small achievements keeps stakeholders motivated and fosters collaboration. Progress evaluation involves qualitative and quantitative assessments. Metrics are essential, but should include narratives from those involved, revealing challenges, innovations, and lessons. Regular stakeholder feedback enhances transparency and allows for continuous improvement, ensuring the Comprehensive Plan stays responsive and guides Coles County toward its vision.

Plan Maintenance & Update Cycles

The Importance of Maintenance and Updates in Planning

Maintenance and updates are essential elements of all plans, especially within the framework of comprehensive planning. Several key stages ensure that plans remain relevant and effective.

Year-End Review Process

The first stage involves the year-end review process, where the current plan is assessed to pinpoint areas needing updates or improvements based on new data or changes in goals. This review typically takes place at the end of each year and continues until a comprehensive update is considered necessary. During this period, a report on goal progress is submitted to the Coles County Planning & Development Committee and made available on the Coles County website for public access.

Five-Year Review

The next review occurs at the five-year mark, during which necessary revisions to the plan are implemented. This may involve integrating new information, adjusting goals and strategies, and ensuring compliance with any updated regulations or standards. Often, this process includes collecting feedback from stakeholders and evaluating new data or changes in circumstances since the plan's initial development.

Clear Communication of Changes

Once updates are finalized, it is crucial to communicate these changes effectively to all stakeholders. This communication ensures that everyone involved is aware of the new direction and understands the implications for their roles and responsibilities.

Maintaining Engagement

By maintaining a regular cycle of updates and maintenance, the plan remains flexible and responsive to future changes, keeping both responsible parties and the public engaged. This proactive approach not only enhances the plan's effectiveness but also supports the long-term sustainability of the project or initiative.

The following pages contain the Coles County Comprehensive Plan Maintenance & Investment Strategy Table sheet for your quick reference. It provides an overview of the county's significant historical features and resources, which are crucial for comprehending its geological landscape.

Maintenance & Investment Strategy Table

This Maintenance & Investment Strategy Table focuses on historic and cultural assets where long-term stewardship, partnership coordination, and phased reinvestment are particularly critical. Other infrastructure and service investments are addressed through applicable capital planning and departmental processes.

Site / Asset	Primary Maintenance Needs	Recommended Investments	Lead / Partners	Timeframe
Lincoln Log Cabin State Historic Site	Ongoing preservation of structures, grounds maintenance, interpretive upkeep	Wayfinding signage, trail and corridor connections, visitor amenities, interpretive updates	Lincoln Log Cabin Foundation; County; Tourism partners	Ongoing / Mid-term
Coles County Courthouse (Charleston)	Preservation of exterior masonry and interior historic elements; accessibility	ADA upgrades, energy-efficient systems, streetscape and square enhancements	County; City of Charleston; Preservation agencies	Short–Mid
Will Rogers Theatre & Commercial Block	Façade stabilization; interior rehabilitation	Adaptive reuse planning, code compliance upgrades, cultural programming support	City of Charleston; Private owners; Preservation groups	Mid-term
Five Mile House Museum	Structural preservation; artifact conservation	Preservation grants, interpretive signage, educational programming support	Nonprofit operators; County; Schools	Ongoing
Alexander Briggs House	Exterior stonework preservation; weatherproofing	Incentives for rehabilitation; historic designation support	Private owner; City of Charleston; Preservation orgs	As needed
Blakeman Bridge	Structural monitoring; surface preservation	Preservation-based rehabilitation; interpretive signage; trail integration	County Highway Dept.; IDOT; Preservation agencies	Mid–Long
Coles County Historical Society Museum	Collections management; facility maintenance	Climate control, exhibit upgrades, accessibility improvements	Historical Society; City of Mattoon; County	Ongoing
Historic Downtowns & Districts	Building maintenance; public realm upkeep	Façade grants, wayfinding, streetscape improvements, placemaking	Municipalities; Chambers; Property owners	Ongoing

Maintenance & Investment Strategy Table-Continued

Site / Asset	Primary Maintenance Needs	Recommended Investments	Lead / Partners	Timeframe
Mattoon Railroad Depot / Railroad Heritage Sites	Structural upkeep; exterior preservation; artifact care	Interpretive signage, exhibit updates, integration with downtown wayfinding and tourism routes	City of Mattoon; Historical Society; Tourism partners	Ongoing / Mid-term
Douglas–Lincoln Debate Museum	Exhibit upkeep; facility maintenance	Interpretive updates, ADA improvements, wayfinding, educational programming	City of Charleston; Museum operators; Tourism partners	Ongoing / Mid-term
Greenwood School Museum (One-Room Schoolhouse)	Building preservation; weatherproofing; artifact conservation	Preservation grants, educational materials, accessibility improvements	Nonprofit stewards; Schools; County	Ongoing
Historic Community Resources – Oakland	Maintenance of historic structures; documentation	Historic surveys, signage, small-scale façade or stabilization grants	Village of Oakland; Preservation groups; County	Mid-term
Historic Cemeteries (Countywide)	Grounds maintenance; monument repair	Preservation planning, interpretive signage, digital mapping	Municipalities; Cemetery boards; Veteran groups	Ongoing

Table 30. Maintenance & Investment Strategy Table

Embracing Coles County's Heritage and Future

Together, these locations embody Coles County's collective history, identity, and sense of belonging. This table illustrates how the Comprehensive Plan links long-term goals to tangible, recognizable assets through careful maintenance, collaboration, and sustained investment over time. It serves to facilitate discussions, aid in grant applications, and assist the County and its partners in making informed decisions as new opportunities arise, rather than acting as a fixed project list or funding commitment. As community needs, partnerships, and resources evolve, these priorities may be adjusted through regular updates to the plan and ongoing public involvement.

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ROAD USE AGREEMENT

This Road Use Agreement this "**Agreement**" is made this 14th day of April 2026, by and between Serenity Solar, LLC, a Illinois limited liability company "**Developer**" with offices at Peachtree Rd NW, Ste 350, Atlanta, GA. 30305, and Coles County Highway Department the "**County**" with address at 825 18th St. Charleston, IL 61920.

RECITALS

A. Developer is currently developing a solar energy project located in the County of Coles the "**Project.**"

B. In connection with the development, construction, and operation of the Project, Developer and its contractors, agents, and representatives collectively "affiliates" will use East County Road 1000 N and N County Road 400 E /Road Description: bituminous surface roadway within the County, as shown on **Exhibit A** attached hereto the "Roadways".

C. The County has expressed a concern regarding responsibility for damage to the Roadways caused by Developer during the construction of the Project.

D. The County has asked Developer to enter into this Agreement in connection with permission to use the Roadways.

AGREEMENT

In consideration of the foregoing, the mutual covenants herein contained and other good and valuable consideration (the receipt, adequacy, and sufficiency of which are acknowledged by the parties by their execution), the parties agree as follows:

1. Use of Roadways. The County hereby grants permission to Developer, its affiliates, and their contractors and subcontractors the right to use the Roadways in connection with the development, construction, and operation of the Project. The County execution of this Agreement constitutes its authorization of such use to the extent permitted by applicable law, but the County makes no separate representation or warranty regarding its authority to grant such permission. Developer acknowledges that it is responsible for confirming all necessary permits, rights, or approvals required for its use of the Roadways.

2. Operations. Developer agrees to keep traffic open along the Roadways, except as necessary to make temporary or emergency repairs, and to keep traffic flowing in the same manner as customary on the Roadways.

3. Agreement to Repair Damage. Developer agrees at its sole expense that it shall document via digital recording the condition of the Roadways prior to the start of Project construction and again upon completion of construction activities. In the event damage to the Roadways is caused by Developer (or its contractors, agents, and

representatives), upon completion of construction of the Project, the Developer agrees to repair, at its sole cost and expense, such damage. The digital recording and a pre-construction inventory with representatives from the County and Developer will define existing distresses and road conditions. The digital recording and a post-construction survey with representatives from the County and Developer will define post-construction road distress, if any. The Developer will not be required to pay cost, fees or charges for damages that are not attributable to use of the Roadways for construction of the Project. Repairs shall be made to the Roadways within thirty (30) days following completion of the construction of the Project or upon notice by the County. If road damage occurs from solar activities during the life of the solar project, Developer will repair. Solar activity includes maintenance, repairs, or replacements and for which maintenance vehicles, heavy equipment or the like are utilized in repairs and upkeep of the solar project.

4. Insurance. Developer agrees, at its own expense, to carry and maintain insurance in commercially reasonable amounts that will cover its operations in connection with the Project including general liability, automobile liability, workers' compensation, and excess liability.

5. Performance Bond. Prior to commencement of construction, Developer agrees, at its own expense, to obtain a bond in the amount of $150,000 (the "**Security**") securing Developer's obligations to repair the Roadways pursuant to this Agreement. Developer will furnish to the County appropriate evidence of the Security and agrees to not commence construction of the Project until such evidence of the Security has been provided to the County. The County may draw on the bond for actual, reasonable, and documented expenses if Developer does not make repairs as required in Section 3 and County makes the repairs. For the avoidance of doubt, once the Developer makes the Roadways repairs to the County's reasonable satisfaction and upon written release by the County, the Developer may terminate the bond.

6. Notices. All notices, requests, consents, and other communications hereunder shall be in writing and be mailed or sent by electronic mail to the receiving party at the address or email set forth below. The date and time of a notice shall be the date and time the electronic mail is sent.

If to Developer:	If to County:
Serenity Solar, LLC Attn: Nick Williamson 2320 Marinship Way, Sausalito, CA, 94965 Email: nwilliamson@38degreesn.com	Coles County Highway Department Attn: Richard Johnson 825 18th St., Charleston, IL 61920 Email: rjohnson@co.coles.il.us

7. Captions. Captions contained in this Agreement have been inserted herein only as a matter of convenience and in no way define, limit, extend or describe the scope of this Agreement or the intent of any provision.

8. Successors and Assigns. All provisions of this Agreement are binding upon, inure to the benefit of and are enforceable by or against the parties and their respective heirs, executors, administrators or other legal representative and successors and assigns. Developer shall have the right to assign this Agreement, in whole or in part, in connection with any financing relating to the Project and/or to any purchaser of the Project's assets.

9. Governing Law. This Agreement and the rights and obligations of the parties hereunder are to be governed by and construed and interpreted in accordance with the laws of the State of Illinois without regard to choice or conflict of laws rules or rule of that state or any other jurisdiction that would cause the application of the laws of any jurisdiction other than the State of Illinois.

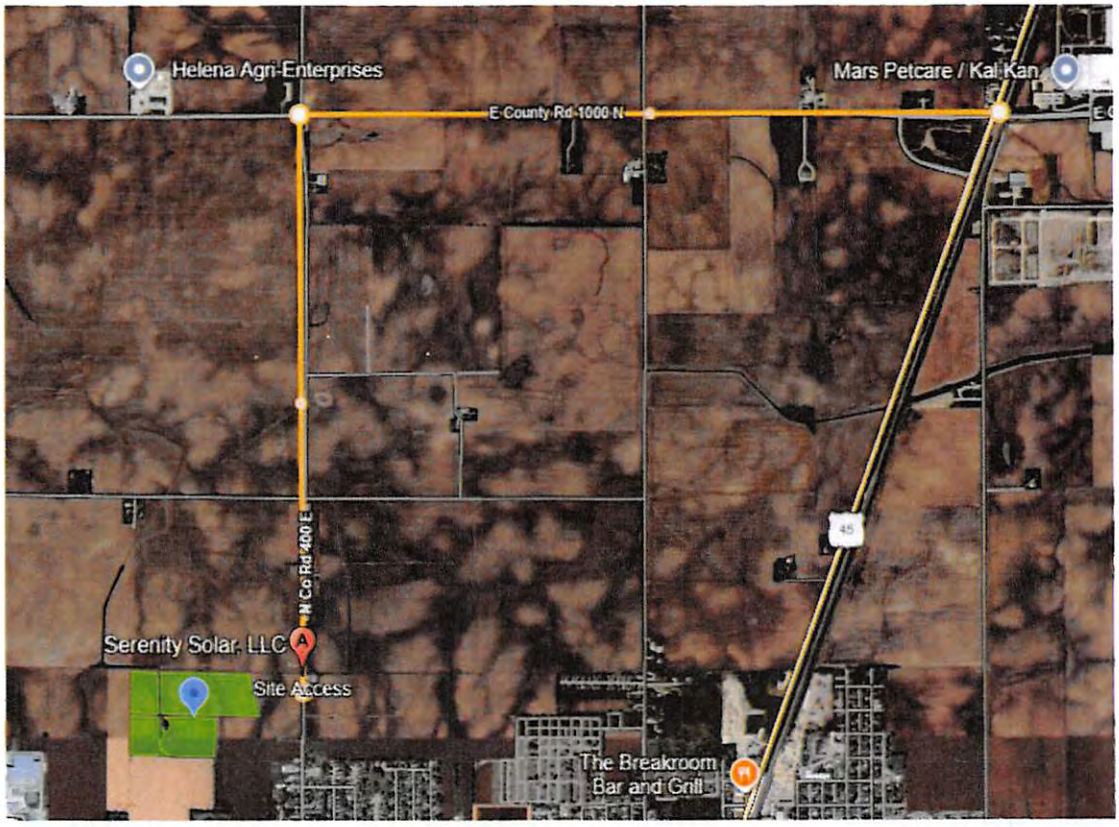
[Signatures Below]

Serenity Solar, LLC	**Coles County**
By: _____	By: _____
Name: _____	Name: _____
Title: _____	Title: _____

EXHIBIT A

SUBJECT ROADWAYS

Exit West onto E County Rd 1000 N and turn South onto N Co Rd 400 E



RESOLUTION TO AWARD

Section 25-00205-00-RS

WHEREAS a letting was held at the Coles County Highway Department on March 26, 2026, at the hour of 10:00 A.M. for a proposed bituminous resurfacing project on County Highway 35 (Trilla Road), and

WHEREAS, said section was advertised in the Charleston Times Courier and the Mattoon Journal Gazette on March 12, 2026, and March 19, 2026, and the State's "Notice to Contractors Bulletin" on March 12, 2026, and March 19, 2026, and

WHEREAS, bids were received from 2 qualified contractors, and

WHEREAS Howell Paving, 1020 N. 13th Street, PO Box 1009, Mattoon IL 61938, submitted the low bid in the amount of $ 398,916.09, and

WHEREAS the engineer's estimate for said section was $ 443,726.90.

NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, that the County Board of Coles County award a contract for said section to Howell Paving, 1020 N. 13th Street, PO Box 1009, Mattoon IL 61938,

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STATE OF ILLINOIS
COUNTY OF COLES

I, being properly authorized, do hereby certify that the foregoing is a true and correct copy of a Resolution adopted by the County Board of Coles County on this 14th day of April 2026.

_____ (SEAL)
Julie Coe, County Clerk

Approved By:_____
Darrell Cox, County Board Chair

Illinois Department of Transportation

Resolution for Improvement Under the Illinois Highway Code

Is this project a bondable capital improvement?
☐ Yes ☐ No

Resolution Type	Resolution Number	Section Number
Original		25-00205-00-RS

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Board (Governing Body Type) of the County (Local Public Agency Type)

of Coles (Name of Local Public Agency) Illinois that the following described street(s)/road(s)/structure be improved under the Illinois Highway Code. Work shall be done by Contract (Contract or Day Labor).

For Roadway/Street Improvements:

Name of Street(s)/Road(s)	Length (miles)	Route	From	To
County Highway 35 (Trilla Road)	1.47	CH-35	IL-121	TR-68

For Structures:

Name of Street(s)/Road(s)	Existing Structure No.	Route	Location	Feature Crossed

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED,

1. That the proposed improvement shall consist of

Hot mix asphalt surface removal, hot-mix asphalt surface, aggregate wedge shoulders, as well as pavement markings and other work described in the plans.

2. That there is hereby appropriated the sum of Two Hundred Thousand and 00/100 Dollars ($200,000.00) for the improvement of said section from the Local Public Agency's allotment of Motor Fuel Tax funds.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Clerk is hereby directed to transmit four (4) certified originals of this resolution to the district office of the Department of Transportation.

I, Julie Coe (Name of Clerk) County (Local Public Agency Type) Clerk in and for said County (Local Public Agency Type)

of Coles (Name of Local Public Agency) in the State aforesaid, and keeper of the records and files thereof, as provided by statute, do hereby certify the foregoing to be a true, perfect and complete original of a resolution adopted by

Board (Governing Body Type) of Coles (Name of Local Public Agency) at a meeting held on April 14, 2026 (Date).

IN TESTIMONY WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand and seal this 14th (Day) day of April, 2026 (Month, Year).

(SEAL, if required by the LPA)

Clerk Signature & Date

Approved

Regional Engineer Signature & Date
Department of Transportation

RESOLUTION TO AWARD

Section 25-00206-00-RS

WHEREAS a letting was held at the Coles County Highway Department on March 26, 2026, at the hour of 10:00 A.M. for a proposed bituminous resurfacing project on County Highway 28 (Loxa Road), and

WHEREAS, said section was advertised in the Charleston Times Courier and the Mattoon Journal Gazette on March 12, 2026, and March 19, 2026, and the State's "Notice to Contractors Bulletin" on March 12, 2026, and March 19, 2026, and

WHEREAS, bids were received from 2 qualified contractors, and

WHEREAS Ne-Co Asphalt Company Inc., PO Box 25, Charleston, IL 61920, submitted the low bid in the amount of $ 283,093.21, and

WHEREAS the engineer's estimate for said section was $ 368,202.50.

NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, that the County Board of Coles County award a contract for said section to Ne-Co Asphalt Company Inc., PO Box 25, Charleston, IL 61920,

---

STATE OF ILLINOIS
COUNTY OF COLES

I, being properly authorized, do hereby certify that the foregoing is a true and correct copy of a Resolution adopted by the County Board of Coles County on this 14th day of April 2026.

_____ (SEAL)
Julie Coe, County Clerk

Approved By:_____
Darrell Cox, County Board Chair

Illinois Department of Transportation

Resolution for Improvement Under the Illinois Highway Code

Is this project a bondable capital improvement?
☐ Yes ☐ No

Resolution Type	Resolution Number	Section Number
Original		25-00206-00-RS

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Board (Governing Body Type) of the County (Local Public Agency Type)

of Coles (Name of Local Public Agency) Illinois that the following described street(s)/road(s)/structure be improved under the Illinois Highway Code. Work shall be done by Contract (Contract or Day Labor).

For Roadway/Street Improvements:

Name of Street(s)/Road(s)	Length (miles)	Route	From	To
County Highway 28 (Loxa Road)	1.47	FAS 1673	IL-316 (FAS 1669)	North of CH-18 (FAS 642)

For Structures:

Name of Street(s)/Road(s)	Existing Structure No.	Route	Location	Feature Crossed

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED,

1. That the proposed improvement shall consist of

Hot mix asphalt surface removal, hot-mix asphalt surface, aggregate wedge shoulders, as well as pavement markings and other work described in the plans.

2. That there is hereby appropriated the sum of One Hundred Fifty Thousand and 00/100 Dollars ($150,000.00) for the improvement of said section from the Local Public Agency's allotment of Motor Fuel Tax funds.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Clerk is hereby directed to transmit four (4) certified originals of this resolution to the district office of the Department of Transportation.

I, Julie Coe (Name of Clerk) County (Local Public Agency Type) Clerk in and for said County (Local Public Agency Type)

of Coles (Name of Local Public Agency) in the State aforesaid, and keeper of the records and files thereof, as provided by statute, do hereby certify the foregoing to be a true, perfect and complete original of a resolution adopted by

Board (Governing Body Type) of Coles (Name of Local Public Agency) at a meeting held on April 14, 2026 (Date).

IN TESTIMONY WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand and seal this 14th (Day) day of April, 2026 (Month, Year).

(SEAL, if required by the LPA)

Clerk Signature & Date

Approved

Regional Engineer Signature & Date
Department of Transportation

Illinois Department of Transportation

Bond Number 108462659

Contract Bond

Local Public Agency	County	Street Name/Road Name	Section Number
Coles County	Coles	Various	26-XX000-00-GM

Bond information to be returned to Local Public Agency at 825 18th Street Charleston, Illinois 61920
Complete Address

We, Earl Walker Co., Inc. 915 W. McGill PO Box 77 Sullivan, Illinois 61951
Contractor's Name and Address

a/an Corporation organized under the laws of the State of Illinois as PRINCIPAL, and
State

Travelers Casualty and Surety Company of America 1 Tower Square Hartford, Connecticut 06183
Surety Name and Address

as SURETY, are held and firmly bound unto the above Local Public Agency (thereafter referred to as "LPA") in the penal sum of
One Million Eight Hundred Thirty Seven Thousand Four Hundred Sixty Eight dollars and 25 cents

Dollars ($1,837,468.25) lawful money of the United States, to be paid to said LPA, the payment of which we bind ourselves, successors and assigns jointly to pay to the LPA this sum under the conditions of this instrument.

WHEREAS, THE CONDITION OF THE FOREGOING OBLIGATION IS SUCH that the said Principal has entered into a written contract with the LPA acting through its awarding authority for the construction of work on the above sections, which contract is hereby referred to and made a part hereof, as if written herein at length, and whereby the said Principal has promised and agreed to perform said work in accordance with the terms of said contract, and has promised to pay all sums of money due for any labor, materials, apparatus, fixtures or machinery furnished to such Principal for the purpose of performing such work and has further agreed to pay all direct and indirect damages to any person, firm, company or corporation to whom any money may be due from the Principal, subcontractor or otherwise for any such labor, materials, apparatus, fixtures or machinery so furnished and that suit may be maintained on such bond by any such person, firm, company or corporation for the recovery of any such money.

NOW, THEREFORE, if the said Principal shall perform said work in accordance with the terms of said contract, and shall pay all sums of money due or to become due for any labor, materials, apparatus, fixtures or machinery furnished to it for the purpose of constructing such work, and shall commence and complete the work within the time prescribed in said contract, and shall pay and discharge all damages, direct and indirect, that may be suffered or sustained on account of such work during the time of the performance thereof and until the said work shall have been accepted, and shall hold the LPA and its awarding authority harmless on account of any such damages and shall in all respects fully and faithfully comply with all the provisions, conditions and requirements of said contract, then this obligation shall be void; otherwise it shall remain in full force and effect.

IN TESTIMONY WHEREOF, the said PRINCIPAL and the said SURETY have caused this instrument to be signed by their respective agents this 30th (Day) day of March 2026 (Month and Year).

PRINCIPAL

Company Name	Company Name
Earl Walker Co., Inc.	
By	By
Signature & Date: 3-30-26	Signature & Date
Attest	Attest
Signature & Date	Signature & Date

(If PRINCIPAL is a joint venture of two or more contractors, the company names and authorized signature of each contractor must be affixed.)

STATE OF IL

COUNTY OF MOULTRIE

I, Tammie S. Wheeler , a Notary Public in and for said county, do hereby certify that
Notary Name

Bradford O. Wheeler
Insert name of Individuals signing on behalf of PRINCIPAL

who is/are each personally known to me to be the same person(s) whose name(s) is/are subscribed to the foregoing instrument on behalf of PRINCIPAL, appeared before me this day in person and acknowledged respectively, that he/she/they signed and delivered said instrument freely and voluntarily for the uses and purposes therein set forth.

Given under my hand and notarial seal this 30th day of March, 2026
Day Month, Year

Notary Public Signature & Date

Tammie S. Wheeler 3/30/26

(SEAL)

OFFICIAL SEAL
TAMMIE S. WHEELER
Commission No. 854345
NOTARY PUBLIC, STATE OF ILLINOIS
My Commission Expires 4/19/2029

Date commission expires 04/19/29

SURETY

Name of Surety

Travelers Casualty and Surety Co of America

Title

By: Gordon R. Wood Jr.

STATE OF IL

COUNTY OF MOULTRIE

I, Tammie S. Wheeler , a Notary Public in and for said county, do hereby certify that
Notary Name

Gordon R. Wood, Jr.
Insert name of Individuals signing on behalf of SURETY

who is/are each personally known to me to be the same person(s) whose name(s) is/are subscribed to the foregoing instrument on behalf of SURETY, appeared before me this day in person and acknowledged respectively, that he/she/they signed and delivered said instrument freely and voluntarily for the uses and purposes therein set forth.

Given under my hand and notarial seal this 30th day of March, 2026
Day Month, Year

TRAVELERS CASUALTY AND SURETY COMPANY OF AMERICA
SEAL

OFFICIAL SEAL
TAMMIE S. WHEELER
Commission No. 854345
NOTARY PUBLIC, STATE OF ILLINOIS
My Commission Expires 4/19/2029

Notary Public Signature & Date

Tammie S. Wheeler 3/30/26

Date commission expires 04/19/29

Approved this _____ day of
Day Month, Year

Attest:

Local Public Agency Clerk Signature & Date

Clerk
Local Public Agency Type

Awarding Authority

Awarding Authority Signature & Date

TRAVELERS

Travelers Casualty and Surety Company of America
Travelers Casualty and Surety Company
St. Paul Fire and Marine Insurance Company

POWER OF ATTORNEY

Travelers Casualty and Surety Company of America, Travelers Casualty and Surety Company, and St. Paul Fire and Marine Insurance Company are corporations duly organized under the laws of the State of Connecticut (herein collectively called the "Companies"), and the Companies do hereby make, constitute and appoint **GORDON R WOOD JR** of **SULLIVAN**, **Illinois**, their true and lawful Attorney(s)-in-Fact to sign, execute, seal and acknowledge any and all bonds, recognizances, conditional undertakings and other writings obligatory in the nature thereof on behalf of the Companies in their business of guaranteeing the fidelity of persons, guaranteeing the performance of contracts and executing or guaranteeing bonds and undertakings required or permitted in any actions or proceedings allowed by law.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, the Companies have caused this instrument to be signed, and their corporate seals to be hereto affixed, this **16th** day of **February, 2024**.

SEAL SEAL SEAL

State of Connecticut

By: _____
Bryce Grissom, Senior Vice President

City of Hartford ss.

On this the **16th** day of **February, 2024**, before me personally appeared **Bryce Grissom**, who acknowledged himself to be the Senior Vice President of each of the Companies, and that he, as such, being authorized so to do, executed the foregoing instrument for the purposes therein contained by signing on behalf of said Companies by himself as a duly authorized officer.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I hereunto set my hand and official seal.

My Commission expires the **30th** day of **June, 2026**

ANNA P NOWIK NOTARY PUBLIC CONNECTICUT

_____
Anna P. Nowik, Notary Public

This Power of Attorney is granted under and by the authority of the following resolutions adopted by the Boards of Directors of each of the Companies, which resolutions are now in full force and effect, reading as follows:

RESOLVED, that the Chairman, the President, any Vice Chairman, any Executive Vice President, any Senior Vice President, any Vice President, any Second Vice President, the Treasurer, any Assistant Treasurer, the Corporate Secretary or any Assistant Secretary may appoint Attorneys-in-Fact and Agents to act for and on behalf of the Company and may give such appointee such authority as his or her certificate of authority may prescribe to sign with the Company's name and seal with the Company's seal bonds, recognizances, contracts of indemnity, and other writings obligatory in the nature of a bond, recognizance, or conditional undertaking, and any of said officers or the Board of Directors at any time may remove any such appointee and revoke the power given him or her; and it is

FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Chairman, the President, any Vice Chairman, any Executive Vice President, any Senior Vice President or any Vice President may delegate all or any part of the foregoing authority to one or more officers or employees of this Company, provided that each such delegation is in writing and a copy thereof is filed in the office of the Secretary; and it is

FURTHER RESOLVED, that any bond, recognizance, contract of indemnity, or writing obligatory in the nature of a bond, recognizance, or conditional undertaking shall be valid and binding upon the Company when (a) signed by the President, any Vice Chairman, any Executive Vice President, any Senior Vice President or any Vice President, any Second Vice President, the Treasurer, any Assistant Treasurer, the Corporate Secretary or any Assistant Secretary and duly attested and sealed with the Company's seal by a Secretary or Assistant Secretary; or (b) duly executed (under seal, if required) by one or more Attorneys-in-Fact and Agents pursuant to the power prescribed in his or her certificate or their certificates of authority or by one or more Company officers pursuant to a written delegation of authority; and it is

FURTHER RESOLVED, that the signature of each of the following officers: President, any Executive Vice President, any Senior Vice President, any Vice President, any Assistant Vice President, any Secretary, any Assistant Secretary, and the seal of the Company may be affixed by facsimile to any Power of Attorney or to any certificate relating thereto appointing Resident Vice Presidents, Resident Assistant Secretaries or Attorneys-in-Fact for purposes only of executing and attesting bonds and undertakings and other writings obligatory in the nature thereof, and any such Power of Attorney or certificate bearing such facsimile signature or facsimile seal shall be valid and binding upon the Company and any such power so executed and certified by such facsimile signature and facsimile seal shall be valid and binding on the Company in the future with respect to any bond or understanding to which it is attached.

I, **Kevin E. Hughes**, the undersigned, Assistant Secretary of each of the Companies, do hereby certify that the above and foregoing is a true and correct copy of the Power of Attorney executed by said Companies, which remains in full force and effect.

Dated this **30th** day of **March**, **2026**.

SEAL SEAL SEAL

_____
Kevin E. Hughes, Assistant Secretary

To verify the authenticity of this Power of Attorney, please call us at 1-800-421-3880.
Please refer to the above-named Attorney(s)-in-Fact and the details of the bond to which this Power of Attorney is attached.

Bond Number 108462660

Illinois Department of Transportation

Contract Bond

Local Public Agency	County	Street Name/Road Name	Section Number
Coles County	Coles	Coles County	26-00000-00-GM

Bond information to be returned to Local Public Agency at 825 18th Street Charleston, Illinois 61920
Complete Address

We, Earl Walker Co., Inc. 915 W. McGill PO Box 77 Sullivan, Illinois 61951
Contractor's Name and Address

a/an Corporation organized under the laws of the State of Illinois as PRINCIPAL, and
State

Travelers Casualty and Surety Company of America 1 Tower Square Hartford, Connecticut 06183
Surety Name and Address

as SURETY, are held and firmly bound unto the above Local Public Agency (thereafter referred to as "LPA") in the penal sum of
Three Hundred Forty Seven Thousand Seven Hundred Thirty Dollars and no cents

Dollars ($347,730.00) lawful money of the United States, to be paid to said LPA, the payment of which we bind ourselves, successors and assigns jointly to pay to the LPA this sum under the conditions of this instrument.

WHEREAS, THE CONDITION OF THE FOREGOING OBLIGATION IS SUCH that the said Principal has entered into a written contract with the LPA acting through its awarding authority for the construction of work on the above sections, which contract is hereby referred to and made a part hereof, as if written herein at length, and whereby the said Principal has promised and agreed to perform said work in accordance with the terms of said contract, and has promised to pay all sums of money due for any labor, materials, apparatus, fixtures or machinery furnished to such Principal for the purpose of performing such work and has further agreed to pay all direct and indirect damages to any person, firm, company or corporation to whom any money may be due from the Principal, subcontractor or otherwise for any such labor, materials, apparatus, fixtures or machinery so furnished and that suit may be maintained on such bond by any such person, firm, company or corporation for the recovery of any such money.

NOW, THEREFORE, if the said Principal shall perform said work in accordance with the terms of said contract, and shall pay all sums of money due or to become due for any labor, materials, apparatus, fixtures or machinery furnished to it for the purpose of constructing such work, and shall commence and complete the work within the time prescribed in said contract, and shall pay and discharge all damages, direct and indirect, that may be suffered or sustained on account of such work during the time of the performance thereof and until the said work shall have been accepted, and shall hold the LPA and its awarding authority harmless on account of any such damages and shall in all respects fully and faithfully comply with all the provisions, conditions and requirements of said contract, then this obligation shall be void; otherwise it shall remain in full force and effect.

IN TESTIMONY WHEREOF, the said PRINCIPAL and the said SURETY have caused this instrument to be signed by their respective agents this 30th (Day) day of March 2026 (Month and Year).

PRINCIPAL

Company Name	Company Name
Earl Walker Co., Inc.	
By	By
Signature & Date: 3-30-26	Signature & Date
Attest	Attest
Signature & Date	Signature & Date

(If PRINCIPAL is a joint venture of two or more contractors, the company names and authorized signature of each contractor must be affixed.)

STATE OF IL

COUNTY OF MOULTRIE

I, Tammie S. Wheeler, a Notary Public in and for said county, do hereby certify that

Notary Name

Bradford O. Wheeler

Insert name of Individuals signing on behalf of PRINCIPAL

who is/are each personally known to me to be the same person(s) whose name(s) is/are subscribed to the foregoing instrument on behalf of PRINCIPAL, appeared before me this day in person and acknowledged respectively, that he/she/they signed and delivered said instrument freely and voluntarily for the uses and purposes therein set forth.

Given under my hand and notarial seal this 30th day of March, 2026

Day Month, Year

Notary Public Signature & Date

Tammie S. Wheeler 3-30-26

(SEAL)

OFFICIAL SEAL
TAMMIE S. WHEELER
Commission No. 854345
NOTARY PUBLIC, STATE OF ILLINOIS
My Commission Expires 4/19/2029

Date commission expires 04/19/29

SURETY

Name of Surety

Travelers Casualty and Surety Co of America

Title

By: Gordon R. Wood Jr

STATE OF IL

COUNTY OF MOULTRIE

I, Tammie S. Wheeler, a Notary Public in and for said county, do hereby certify that

Notary Name

Gordon R. Wood, Jr.

Insert name of Individuals signing on behalf of SURETY

who is/are each personally known to me to be the same person(s) whose name(s) is/are subscribed to the foregoing instrument on behalf of SURETY, appeared before me this day in person and acknowledged respectively, that he/she/they signed and delivered said instrument freely and voluntarily for the uses and purposes therein set forth.

Given under my hand and notarial seal this 30th day of March, 2026

Day Month, Year

TRAVELERS CASUALTY AND SURETY COMPANY OF AMERICA
SEAL

OFFICIAL SEAL
TAMMIE S. WHEELER
Commission No. 854345
NOTARY PUBLIC, STATE OF ILLINOIS
My Commission Expires 4/19/2029

Notary Public Signature & Date

Tammie S. Wheeler 3-30-26

Date commission expires 04/19/29

Approved this _____ day of

Day Month, Year

Attest:

Local Public Agency Clerk Signature & Date

Clerk

Local Public Agency Type

Awarding Authority

Awarding Authority Signature & Date

TRAVELERS

Travelers Casualty and Surety Company of America
Travelers Casualty and Surety Company
St. Paul Fire and Marine Insurance Company

POWER OF ATTORNEY

Travelers Casualty and Surety Company of America, Travelers Casualty and Surety Company, and St. Paul Fire and Marine Insurance Company are corporations duly organized under the laws of the State of Connecticut (herein collectively called the "Companies"), and the Companies do hereby make, constitute and appoint **GORDON R WOOD JR** of **SULLIVAN** , **Illinois** , their true and lawful Attorney(s)-in-Fact to sign, execute, seal and acknowledge any and all bonds, recognizances, conditional undertakings and other writings obligatory in the nature thereof on behalf of the Companies in their business of guaranteeing the fidelity of persons, guaranteeing the performance of contracts and executing or guaranteeing bonds and undertakings required or permitted in any actions or proceedings allowed by law.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, the Companies have caused this instrument to be signed, and their corporate seals to be hereto affixed, this **16th** day of **February, 2024**.

SEAL SEAL SEAL

State of Connecticut

By: _____
Bryce Grissom, Senior Vice President

City of Hartford ss.

On this the **16th** day of **February, 2024**, before me personally appeared **Bryce Grissom**, who acknowledged himself to be the Senior Vice President of each of the Companies, and that he, as such, being authorized so to do, executed the foregoing instrument for the purposes therein contained by signing on behalf of said Companies by himself as a duly authorized officer.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I hereunto set my hand and official seal.

My Commission expires the **30th** day of **June, 2026**

NOTARY PUBLIC CONNECTICUT

_____
Anna P. Nowik, Notary Public

This Power of Attorney is granted under and by the authority of the following resolutions adopted by the Boards of Directors of each of the Companies, which resolutions are now in full force and effect, reading as follows:

RESOLVED, that the Chairman, the President, any Vice Chairman, any Executive Vice President, any Senior Vice President, any Vice President, any Second Vice President, the Treasurer, any Assistant Treasurer, the Corporate Secretary or any Assistant Secretary may appoint Attorneys-in-Fact and Agents to act for and on behalf of the Company and may give such appointee such authority as his or her certificate of authority may prescribe to sign with the Company's name and seal with the Company's seal bonds, recognizances, contracts of indemnity, and other writings obligatory in the nature of a bond, recognizance, or conditional undertaking, and any of said officers or the Board of Directors at any time may remove any such appointee and revoke the power given him or her; and it is

FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Chairman, the President, any Vice Chairman, any Executive Vice President, any Senior Vice President or any Vice President may delegate all or any part of the foregoing authority to one or more officers or employees of this Company, provided that each such delegation is in writing and a copy thereof is filed in the office of the Secretary; and it is

FURTHER RESOLVED, that any bond, recognizance, contract of indemnity, or writing obligatory in the nature of a bond, recognizance, or conditional undertaking shall be valid and binding upon the Company when (a) signed by the President, any Vice Chairman, any Executive Vice President, any Senior Vice President or any Vice President, any Second Vice President, the Treasurer, any Assistant Treasurer, the Corporate Secretary or any Assistant Secretary and duly attested and sealed with the Company's seal by a Secretary or Assistant Secretary; or (b) duly executed (under seal, if required) by one or more Attorneys-in-Fact and Agents pursuant to the power prescribed in his or her certificate or their certificates of authority or by one or more Company officers pursuant to a written delegation of authority; and it is

FURTHER RESOLVED, that the signature of each of the following officers: President, any Executive Vice President, any Senior Vice President, any Vice President, any Assistant Vice President, any Secretary, any Assistant Secretary, and the seal of the Company may be affixed by facsimile to any Power of Attorney or to any certificate relating thereto appointing Resident Vice Presidents, Resident Assistant Secretaries or Attorneys-in-Fact for purposes only of executing and attesting bonds and undertakings and other writings obligatory in the nature thereof, and any such Power of Attorney or certificate bearing such facsimile signature or facsimile seal shall be valid and binding upon the Company and any such power so executed and certified by such facsimile signature and facsimile seal shall be valid and binding on the Company in the future with respect to any bond or understanding to which it is attached.

I, **Kevin E. Hughes**, the undersigned, Assistant Secretary of each of the Companies, do hereby certify that the above and foregoing is a true and correct copy of the Power of Attorney executed by said Companies, which remains in full force and effect.

Dated this **30th** day of **March** , **2026**

SEAL SEAL SEAL

_____
Kevin E. Hughes, Assistant Secretary

To verify the authenticity of this Power of Attorney, please call us at 1-800-421-3880.
Please refer to the above-named Attorney(s)-in-Fact and the details of the bond to which this Power of Attorney is attached.

Bond No. 54-271542

Illinois Department of Transportation

Contract Bond

Local Public Agency	County	Street Name/Road Name	Section Number
Coles County	Coles	Various County Highways	26-00000-00-GM

Bond Information to be returned to Local Public Agency at 825 18th Street, Charleston Illinois 61920
Complete Address

We, Ne-Co Asphalt Co, Inc 812 Adkins Drive PO Box 25 Charleston Illinois 61920
Contractor's Name and Address

a/an Corporation organized under the laws of the State of Illinois as PRINCIPAL, and
State

United Fire & Casualty Company PO Box 73909 Cedar Rapids IA 52407
Surety Name and Address

as SURETY, are held and firmly bound unto the above Local Public Agency (thereafter referred to as "LPA") in the penal sum of

one hundred thirty two thousand

Dollars ($132,000.00) lawful money of the United States, to be paid to said LPA, the payment of which we bind ourselves, successors and assigns jointly to pay to the LPA this sum under the conditions of this instrument.

WHEREAS, THE CONDITION OF THE FOREGOING OBLIGATION IS SUCH that the said Principal has entered into a written contract with the LPA acting through its awarding authority for the construction of work on the above sections, which contract is hereby referred to and made a part hereof, as if written herein at length, and whereby the said Principal has promised and agreed to perform said work in accordance with the terms of said contract, and has promised to pay all sums of money due for any labor, materials, apparatus, fixtures or machinery furnished to such Principal for the purpose of performing such work and has further agreed to pay all direct and indirect damages to any person, firm, company or corporation to whom any money may be due from the Principal, subcontractor or otherwise for any such labor, materials, apparatus, fixtures or machinery so furnished and that suit may be maintained on such bond by any such person, firm, company or corporation for the recovery of any such money.

NOW, THEREFORE, if the said Principal shall perform said work in accordance with the terms of said contract, and shall pay all sums of money due or to become due for any labor, materials, apparatus, fixtures or machinery furnished to it for the purpose of constructing such work, and shall commence and complete the work within the time prescribed in said contract, and shall pay and discharge all damages, direct and indirect, that may be suffered or sustained on account of such work during the time of the performance thereof and until the said work shall have been accepted, and shall hold the LPA and its awarding authority harmless on account of any such damages and shall in all respects fully and faithfully comply with all the provisions, conditions and requirements of said contract, then this obligation shall be void; otherwise it shall remain in full force and effect.

IN TESTIMONY WHEREOF, the said PRINCIPAL and the said SURETY have caused this instrument to be signed by their respective agents this 14th day of April 2026
Day Month and Year

PRINCIPAL

Company Name
Ne-Co Asphalt Co., Inc.

By
Signature & Date
4/14/2026

Attest
Signature & Date
4/14/2026

Company Name

By
Signature & Date

Attest
Signature & Date

(If PRINCIPAL is a joint venture of two or more contractors, the company names and authorized signature of each contractor must be affixed.)

STATE OF IL

COUNTY OF Macon

I, Catherine L. Ater, a Notary Public in and for said county, do hereby certify that
Notary Name

John Robinson and Brent Cole
Insert name of Individuals signing on behalf of PRINCIPAL

who is/are each personally known to me to be the same person(s) whose name(s) is/are subscribed to the foregoing instrument on behalf of PRINCIPAL, appeared before me this day in person and acknowledged respectively, that he/she/they signed and delivered said instrument freely and voluntarily for the uses and purposes therein set forth.

Given under my hand and notarial seal this 14th day of April 2026
Day Month, Year

Notary Public Signature & Date

Catherine L Ater 4/14/2026

(SEAL)

CATHERINE L ATER
NOTARY PUBLIC, NOTARY SEAL
STATE OF ILLINOIS, MACON COUNTY
COMMISSION # 894369
MY COMMISSION EXPIRES: MAY 07, 2027

Date commission expires 05/07/2027

SURETY

Name of Surety: United Fire & Casualty Company

Title

By: Attorny-in-Fact

STATE OF IL

COUNTY OF Macon

I, Catherine L. Ater, a Notary Public in and for said county, do hereby certify that
Notary Name

James D. Morgason
Insert name of Individuals signing on behalf of SURETY

who is/are each personally known to me to be the same person(s) whose name(s) is/are subscribed to the foregoing instrument on behalf of SURETY, appeared before me this day in person and acknowledged respectively, that he/she/they signed and delivered said instrument freely and voluntarily for the uses and purposes therein set forth.

Given under my hand and notarial seal this 14th day of April 2026
Day Month, Year

Notary Public Signature & Date

Catherine L Ater 4/14/2026

(SEAL)

CATHERINE L ATER
NOTARY PUBLIC, NOTARY SEAL
STATE OF ILLINOIS, MACON COUNTY
COMMISSION # 894369
MY COMMISSION EXPIRES: MAY 07, 2027

Date commission expires 05/07/2027

Approved this _____ day of _____
Day Month, Year

Attest:

Local Public Agency Clerk Signature & Date

Clerk
Local Public Agency Type

Awarding Authority

Awarding Authority Signature & Date

UNITED FIRE & CASUALTY COMPANY, CEDAR RAPIDS, IA
UNITED FIRE & INDEMNITY COMPANY, WEBSTER, TX
FINANCIAL PACIFIC INSURANCE COMPANY, LOS ANGELES, CA
CERTIFIED COPY OF POWER OF ATTORNEY
(original on file at Home Office of Company – See Certification)

Inquiries: Surety Department
118 Second Ave SE
Cedar Rapids, IA 52401

KNOW ALL PERSONS BY THESE PRESENTS, That United Fire & Casualty Company, a corporation duly organized and existing under the laws of the State of Iowa; United Fire & Indemnity Company, a corporation duly organized and existing under the laws of the State of Texas; and Financial Pacific Insurance Company, a corporation duly organized and existing under the laws of the State of California (herein collectively called the Companies), and having their corporate headquarters in Cedar Rapids, State of Iowa, does make, constitute and appoint

MICHAEL K. BREHENY, JAMES D. MORGASON, DANIEL A. MARTINI, ASHLYN B. TUCKER, MATTHEW D. BENNETT, WESLEY SHADE, HOLLI SCHOREY, JOSEPH MARTINI, EACH INDIVIDUALLY

their true and lawful Attorney(s)-in-Fact with power and authority hereby conferred to sign, seal and execute in its behalf all lawful bonds, undertakings and other obligatory instruments of similar nature provided that no single obligation shall exceed $40,000,000.00 and to bind the Companies thereby as fully and to the same extent as if such instruments were signed by the duly authorized officers of the Companies and all of the acts of said Attorney, pursuant to the authority hereby given and hereby ratified and confirmed.

The Authority hereby granted is continuous and shall remain in full force and effect until revoked by United Fire & Casualty Company, United Fire & Indemnity Company, and Financial Pacific Insurance Company.

This Power of Attorney is made and executed pursuant to and by authority of the following bylaw duly adopted by the Boards of Directors of United Fire & Casualty Company, United Fire & Indemnity Company, and Financial Pacific Insurance Company.

"Article VI – Surety Bonds and Undertakings"

Section 2, Appointment of Attorney-in-Fact. "The President or any Vice President, or any other officer of the Companies may, from time to time, appoint by written certificates attorneys-in-fact to act in behalf of the Companies in the execution of policies of insurance, bonds, undertakings and other obligatory instruments of like nature. The signature of any officer authorized hereby, and the Corporate seal, may be affixed by facsimile to any power of attorney or special power of attorney or certification of either authorized hereby; such signature and seal, when so used, being adopted by the Companies as the original signature of such officer and the original seal of the Companies, to be valid and binding upon the Companies with the same force and effect as though manually affixed. Such attorneys-in-fact, subject to the limitations set of forth in their respective certificates of authority shall have full power to bind the Companies by their signature and execution of any such instruments and to attach the seal the Companies thereto. The President or any Vice President, the Board of Directors or any other officer of the Companies may at any time revoke all power and authority previously given to any attorney-in-fact.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, the COMPANIES have each caused these presents to be signed by its vice president and its corporate seal to be hereto affixed this 15th day of November, 2017

UNITED FIRE & CASUALTY COMPANY
UNITED FIRE & INDEMNITY COMPANY
FINANCIAL PACIFIC INSURANCE COMPANY

By: Kyanna M Saylor
Vice President

State of Iowa, County of Linn, ss:

On 15th day of November, 2017, before me personally came Kyanna M. Saylor to me known, who being by me duly sworn, did depose and say; that she resides in Cedar Rapids, State of Iowa; that she is a Vice President of United Fire & Casualty Company, a Vice President of United Fire & Indemnity Company, and a Vice President of Financial Pacific Insurance Company the corporations described in and which executed the above instrument; that she knows the seal of said corporations; that the seal affixed to the said instrument is such corporate seal; that it was so affixed pursuant to authority given by the Board of Directors of said corporations and that she signed her name thereto pursuant to like authority, and acknowledges same to be the act and deed of said corporations.

Judith A. Jones
Iowa Notarial Seal
Commission number 173041
My Commission Expires 04/23/2027

Judith A Jones
Notary Public
My commission expires: 04/23/2027

I, Mary A. Bertsch, Assistant Secretary of United Fire & Casualty Company and Assistant Secretary of United Fire & Indemnity Company, and Assistant Secretary of Financial Pacific Insurance Company, do hereby certify that I have compared the foregoing copy of the Power of Attorney and affidavit, and the copy of the Section of the bylaws and resolutions of said Corporations as set forth in said Power of Attorney, with the ORIGINALS ON FILE IN THE HOME OFFICE OF SAID CORPORATIONS, and that the same are correct transcripts thereof, and of the whole of the said originals, and that the said Power of Attorney has not been revoked and is now in full force and effect.

In testimony whereof I have hereunto subscribed my name and affixed the corporate seal of the said Corporations this 14th day of April, 2026.

By: Mary A Bertsch
Assistant Secretary
UF&C & UF&I & FPIC

BPOA0049 1217

RESOLUTION TO SUBMIT AN ADVISORY REFERENDUM TO THE VOTERS OF COLES COUNTY REGARDING THE POSSIBILITY OF SEPARATING FROM COOK COUNTY TO FORM A NEW STATE

WHEREAS, the County of Coles, Illinois is a duly organized and existing county created and operating under the provisions of the Illinois Counties Code and the laws of the State of Illinois; and,

WHEREAS, the Illinois Election Code provides that any public question authorized by statute shall be initiated in accordance with 10 ILCS 5/28-1 and 5/28-5; and,

WHEREAS, the Coles County Board recognizes that the influence of a legislature dominated by Cook County does not align with many of our local values; and,

WHEREAS, a number of Coles County citizens feel that the political and economic conditions that currently exist throughout the entire State of Illinois have become over burdensome and counter to a significant amount of the Illinois populace; and,

WHEREAS, the Board has become aware of an effort to begin discussions regarding the possibility of separating from Cook County; and,

WHEREAS, the Board seeks direction from Coles County citizens on whether to participate in these discussions, which will include research regarding the financial implications of separation; and,

WHEREAS, an advisory referendum would not make the split happen, but would be an important first step, by assessing the will of the people and informing local, state, and federal officials;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED by the County Board of Coles County that the Coles County Clerk is hereby authorized and directed to place on the November 3, 2026 General Election Ballot in Coles County the following non-binding, advisory public question in accordance with applicable law:

Non-Binding Advisory Public Policy
STATE SPLIT
(Illinois Separation Referendum)

Shall the board of Coles County correspond with the boards of the other counties of Illinois outside of Cook County about the possibility of separating from Cook County to form a new state, and to seek admission to the Union as such, subject to the approval of the people?

YES _____

NO _____

APPROVED this _____ day of _____, **20** by the County Board of Coles County, Illinois.

Chairman of the Board

ATTEST:

Coles County Clerk

(SEAL)