



Rural Leaders for  
Economic Mobility

Mobility Action Plan

# Holmes County, Miss

RURAL LEADERS FOR ECONOMIC MOBILITY  
**HOLMES COUNTY**  
MISSISSIPPI  
*Mobility Action Plan*

<b>County</b>	Holmes County, Miss.
<b>County Seat</b>	Lexington, Miss.
<b>Key City</b>	Durant, Miss. (Exit 156, I-55)
<b>County Population</b>	~17,000
<b>Poverty Rate</b>	40.2 percent (2020)
<b>RLEM Subgrant</b>	\$50,000
<b>Primary Contact</b>	Debra Mabry, Holmes County supervisor
<b>Contact Info</b>	dmabry@holmescountymiss.org   (662) 834-0911

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

# BUILDING HOLMES COUNTY'S INDUSTRIAL FUTURE

*A 330-acre publicly owned asset. A professional master plan. A community ready to compete.*

Holmes County, Miss., is one of the most economically distressed communities in the United States and one of the most determined to change that. The county's population has declined from nearly 40,000 in 1940 to approximately 17,000 today, driven by limited job opportunities, out-migration and an economy that has never fully recovered from the structural shifts of the 20th century. The poverty rate stands at 40.2 percent more than double Mississippi's statewide average. Only 44 percent of working-age residents participate in the labor force, and the majority of those who are employed commute outside the county for work. For a family in Durant or Tchula, economic mobility has meant leaving.

Holmes County is building a different answer. At Exit 156 along Interstate 55 the same corridor that connects Jackson to Memphis the county owns a 330-acre industrial site that, with targeted investment, can become the foundation for a new economy. Through the Rural Leaders for Economic Mobility (RLEM) program, Holmes County used its \$50,000 subgrant to commission a full industrial park master plan, feasibility study and market assessment from Waggoner Engineering, Inc. That document is now in hand. The next phase is execution.

Holmes County is implementing four connected strategies to bring that industrial park to life and connect its benefits directly to the residents who need them most:

Strategy	Focus	Lead Partners	Timeline
<b>1. Industrial Park Development &amp; Site Readiness</b>	Advance the site to full shovel-ready certification and attract manufacturing tenants	Holmes County, NCPDD, Mississippi Development Authority (MDA), Waggoner Engineering	2025–2028
<b>2. Infrastructure Modernization &amp; Connectivity</b>	Upgrade roads, water, wastewater and broadband to support industrial development and countywide access	Holmes County, NCPDD, MDOT, USDA Rural Development, City of Durant	2025–2034
<b>3. Workforce Access &amp; Economic Participation</b>	Align training with target industries and create pathways to employment for Holmes County residents	Holmes County, Holmes Community College, workforce boards, state workforce agencies	2026–2030
<b>4. Community Assets &amp; Quality of Life</b>	Invest in parks, recreation and community infrastructure to support workforce retention and livability	Holmes County Parks & Recreation, local governments, community organizations	2026–2035

### Support Requested from Capstone Partners

Holmes County is requesting support from capstone partners in three areas:

- Connections to Delta Regional Authority (DRA), Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) and USDA Rural Development program officers familiar with industrial site certification and infrastructure funding
- Introductions to manufacturing site selectors and economic development networks that can connect Holmes County to prospective industrial tenants

- Technical assistance on Entergy Qualified Sites certification, workforce-industrial partnership design and grant application strategy

**SECTION 1**  
**ECONOMIC MOBILITY VISION**  
*A county that has seen its people leave — and is building the conditions for them to stay*

**Vision Statement**

*To position Holmes County as a competitive destination for industry and employment by developing a future-ready industrial park grounded in infrastructure, equity and workforce access, so that Holmes County residents can build good careers and good lives without leaving home.*

**Holmes County’s Story**

Holmes County has watched its population decline for 80 years. In 1940, the county was home to nearly 40,000 people. By 2020, that number had fallen to approximately 17,000, a 57 percent reduction across three generations. Behind that number are families who left for jobs in Jackson, Memphis and beyond; schools that closed as enrollment fell; businesses that followed their customer base out the door; and a county that has been, by nearly every economic measure, left behind.

The reasons are structural. Holmes County has few large employers, and the jobs that exist are often low-wage, part-time or located outside the county. More than half of Holmes County residents who are employed commute out of the county for work a daily cost in time, fuel and family stability that compounds the economic disadvantage of those already living on narrow margins. Young adults who grow up here face a clear-eyed choice: stay and accept limited opportunity, or leave. Most leave.

The Holmes County Industrial Park changes that calculus. A publicly owned 330-acre site at one of Mississippi’s busiest interstate interchanges, with rail access, utility connections and a professional master plan already in hand, is not a plan for the future it is a real, investable asset available today. Holmes County’s Mobility Action Plan is the roadmap for converting that asset into jobs, tax revenue and a reason for the next generation to stay.

**What Full Success Looks Like in 10 Years**

In 10 years, Holmes County’s vision is an industrial park with multiple active tenants, employing hundreds of county residents in manufacturing and logistics jobs that pay living wages without requiring a long commute. It is a county where the labor force participation rate is rising, the poverty rate is declining and young adults can point to a career pathway that keeps them at home. It is a county that has reversed its population decline not because people are forced to stay, but because the opportunity to build a life here is finally real.

ASSETS & STRENGTHS	OBSTACLES & CHALLENGES
✓ 330-acre publicly owned industrial site at I-55 Exit 156	X 40.2 percent poverty rate — more than double the Mississippi state average
✓ Completed master plan, feasibility study and market assessment from Waggoner Engineering	X Population declined 57 percent since 1940; ongoing out-migration
✓ Interstate 55 access: Jackson 62 miles south, Memphis 145 miles north	X Only 44 percent labor force participation among working-age residents
✓ Canadian National (CN) rail service east of the Durant site	X Majority of employed residents commute outside the county for work
✓ Holmes Community College as a local workforce training partner	X Limited broadband and digital infrastructure countywide

✓ North Central Planning & Development District (NCPDD) as a regional planning partner	X Water and wastewater infrastructure requires upgrades before industrial tenants can locate
✓ Mississippi Development Authority engagement and Entergy Qualified Sites Program pathway	X Median household income of \$29,179; real decline in purchasing power since 2000

## SECTION 2

**LOCAL CONDITIONS***The data, history and community voices that shaped this plan***A County Shaped by Departure**

Holmes County's economic conditions are the product of decades of structural change. The county sits in Mississippi's Delta region, an area defined historically by agricultural production that underwent a fundamental transformation in the mid-20th century as mechanization eliminated the farm labor jobs that had anchored rural Black communities for generations. The population exodus that followed was not a failure of individual ambition it was a rational response to an economy that was eliminating the livelihoods of working families.

What emerged in the decades that followed was a county with a significantly reduced population, a workforce that is employed but largely elsewhere, and an economic base anchored by low-wage manufacturing and public-sector employment. The 40.2 percent poverty rate the product of these structural conditions, not individual choices represents more than a data point. It means families making hard decisions every month between rent and food, between car repairs and prescriptions, between staying in Holmes County and leaving for somewhere with more jobs.

**What Community Engagement Revealed**

Through community input gathered during the RLEM process the county held a stakeholder meeting and one individual stated Holmes County has the location and potential, but without ready infrastructure, stronger workforce pipelines, and better connectivity, we're missing opportunities we should be capturing." Stakeholders emphasized job creation, industry recruitment, and infrastructure readiness.

**Infrastructure as a Barrier to Growth**

Holmes County's industrial growth potential is directly constrained by infrastructure gaps. The Durant publicly owned treatment works (POTW) requires upgrades before it can support industrial-scale wastewater loads. Road access to the industrial park site requires improvements to support freight movement. Broadband access is limited across the county, restricting workforce participation in remote and digital training opportunities. These are not abstract challenges — they are the specific conditions that industrial site selectors identify when they evaluate locations like Exit 156. Until they are addressed, the county's competitive position is limited regardless of how well the master plan is executed.

SECTION 3

# MOBILITY PATHWAY

*How industrial investment connects to lasting economic mobility for Holmes County residents*

Holmes County’s Theory of Change is grounded in a straightforward logic: invest in the infrastructure that makes quality jobs possible, attract employers who create those jobs, and build the workforce pathways that connect county residents to them. Each step depends on the one before it. Without a shovel-ready site, manufacturers will not locate here. Without manufacturers, there are no jobs. Without jobs that are accessible to county residents, economic mobility remains out of reach regardless of workforce programs. The four strategies in this plan address each link in that chain.

	Inputs	Key Activities	Outputs (Short-Term)	Outcomes (1–5 Yrs)	Long-Term Impact
<b>Strategy 1 Industrial Park Development</b>	RLEM-funded master plan (Waggoner Engineering); Holmes County land ownership; NCPDD partnership; MDA engagement; Energy Qualified Sites Program pathway	Energy Qualified Site certification; infrastructure buildout (roads, utilities, broadband); site marketing to industrial prospects and site selectors through MDA and state/national forums	Energy certification achieved; site listed with MDA and national site selectors; first industrial prospect inquiries	First manufacturing tenant secured; construction and job creation underway; county tax base expanding	Multiple active industrial tenants; hundreds of manufacturing and logistics jobs at Exit 156; Holmes County positioned as a competitive industrial destination in central Miss.
<b>Strategy 2 Infrastructure Modernization</b>	USDA Rural Development Water & Waste Disposal Program; EPA Clean Water State Revolving Fund (CWSRF); Mississippi Legislature appropriations; ARC/DRA grants; City of Durant partnership	Durant POTW upgrade (stacked USDA/EPA financing); road access improvements to industrial site; broadband expansion countywide	Durant POTW capacity increased; road access to industrial site improved; broadband infrastructure expanded	Industrial site fully infrastructure-ready for manufacturing tenants; countywide connectivity improved for workforce training and business	Modern infrastructure base supporting sustained industrial growth and improved quality of life for all county residents
<b>Strategy 3 Workforce Access</b>	Holmes Community College; Mississippi Department of Employment Security; workforce development boards; state workforce	Industry-aligned training programs at Holmes Community College; employer partnerships with incoming manufacturers;	Training programs aligned to target industries; employer partnership agreements signed; county residents	County residents placed in industrial park jobs; labor force participation rate increasing; wages rising	Holmes County becomes a net in-commuter county; poverty rate declining; population stabilizing as employment opportunities grow

	agencies; future industrial park employers	career pathway development for county residents; job placement support	enrolled in pre-employment training	for employed residents	
<b>Strategy 4 Community Assets</b>	Holmes County Parks & Recreation; local governments; regional partners; community organizations; potential philanthropic investment	Parks and recreation investment; community infrastructure improvements; quality-of-life programming for workforce retention	Improved community facilities; workforce retention supported through livability investments	Holmes County more attractive to employers recruiting workforce; residents choosing to stay	Population decline reversed; Holmes County a place where workers and families choose to build their lives

SECTION 4

# STRATEGIC ACTIONS & IMPLEMENTATION

*The roadmap from master plan to manufacturing jobs*

Holmes County’s Mobility Action Plan is moving from planning to execution. The \$50,000 RLEM subgrant was deployed to commission the Waggoner Engineering master plan, feasibility study and market assessment for the Holmes County Industrial Park a foundational investment that gives the county a credible, professional document to present to investors, site selectors and grant agencies. The next phase begins now.

## Strategy 1: Industrial Park Development & Site Readiness

The Holmes County Industrial Park represents the county’s most significant publicly controlled economic development asset. Located at Exit 156 along Interstate 55 in Durant, Miss., the site offers 330 acres of county-owned land with direct interstate access, proximity to Canadian National (CN) rail service and a location equidistant between Jackson (62 miles south) and Memphis (145 miles north). The Waggoner Engineering master plan establishes a development framework that positions the site for certification through Mississippi’s Entergy Qualified Sites Program the state’s primary industrial site certification program and aligns it with regional Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) priorities.

Achieving Entergy Qualified Site status is the single most critical near-term milestone. Certification signals to industrial site selectors that Holmes County’s site is ready to receive investment quickly a decisive competitive advantage in a market where manufacturing companies often choose sites based on speed-to-production timelines. Holmes County is working with MDA, NCPDD and Entergy Mississippi to advance the certification process.

<b>Lead</b>	Holmes County Board of Supervisors; Holmes County administrator
<b>Key Partners</b>	North Central Planning & Development District (NCPDD), Mississippi Development Authority (MDA), Entergy Mississippi, Waggoner Engineering, congressional delegation
<b>Key Milestones</b>	2025: Submit Entergy Qualified Site application; begin site marketing through MDA → 2026: Achieve certification; site listed with national site selectors → 2027–2028: First industrial tenant recruited and announced → 2030+: Multiple tenants operating
<b>Measurable Outcomes</b>	Entergy Qualified Site certification achieved; minimum two industrial tenant inquiries within 24 months of certification; first tenant lease signed within 36 months; 100 Holmes County residents employed at industrial park by 2030
<b>Accountability</b>	Holmes County administrator monitors milestone progress; reports quarterly to Board of Supervisors; annual progress shared with RLEM and NACo Foundation
<b>Budget</b>	\$50,000 RLEM subgrant (master plan, completed); \$1 million appropriation funds from the Mississippi Legislators. (infrastructure improvements beginning in Phase I.

## Strategy 2: Infrastructure Modernization & Connectivity

The Holmes County Industrial Park cannot attract industrial tenants without infrastructure capable of supporting manufacturing operations. Three infrastructure priorities are critical: the Durant publicly owned treatment works (POTW) requires upgrades to handle industrial-scale wastewater loads; road access to the industrial site requires improvements to support freight movement; and countywide broadband expansion is needed to support workforce training, remote work and business connectivity.

Holmes County is pursuing a stacked financing approach for the Durant POTW upgrade, combining USDA Rural Development Water and Waste Disposal Program funding with EPA Clean Water State Revolving Fund (CWSRF)

resources an approach that reduces the county’s direct cost while meeting federal lending requirements. The city of Durant is a co-applicant, creating a joint application platform and a model of city-county collaboration that strengthens grant competitiveness.

<b>Lead</b>	Holmes County Engineering & Utilities; City of Durant
<b>Key Partners</b>	NCPDD, Mississippi Department of Transportation (MDOT), USDA Rural Development, EPA, Mississippi Legislature, congressional delegation
<b>Key Milestones</b>	2025–2026: Submit joint USDA/EPA application for Durant POTW upgrade; begin road access improvements to industrial site → 2027–2028: POTW upgrades complete; industrial site fully infrastructure-ready → 2028–2034: Broadband expansion countywide
<b>Measurable Outcomes</b>	Durant POTW upgraded to industrial-capacity within 36 months; road access to industrial site improved by 2027; broadband coverage expanded by 2030
<b>Accountability</b>	Holmes County engineer monitors infrastructure project timelines; reports to Board of Supervisors quarterly

### Strategy 3: Workforce Access & Economic Participation

Industrial park development creates job opportunities. Workforce development converts those opportunities into employment for Holmes County residents. Without deliberate investment in workforce alignment, a new manufacturing tenant at Exit 156 may hire from outside the county or recruit workers who commute in rather than employing the local residents who need those jobs most.

Holmes County will work with Holmes Community College, workforce development boards and the Mississippi Department of Employment Security to design training programs aligned with the specific skill requirements of target industries identified in the Waggoner market assessment. As industrial tenants are recruited, employer partnership agreements will be developed that create direct pathways from training completion to hiring. Special attention will be given to residents who have been outside the labor force, ensuring that the industrial park’s jobs reach the households with 40.2 percent poverty rates, not just those who are already working.

<b>Lead</b>	Holmes County; Holmes Community College
<b>Key Partners</b>	Workforce Development Boards, Mississippi Department of Employment Security, Mississippi Department of Workforce Training, incoming industrial park employers
<b>Key Milestones</b>	2026: Establish employer partnership with first industrial tenant → 2027: Launch first aligned training cohort at Holmes Community College → 2028: Place first Holmes County residents in industrial park jobs → 2030: 150 county residents employed at industrial park
<b>Measurable Outcomes</b>	At least one employer partnership agreement per industrial tenant; 50 percent of industrial park jobs filled by Holmes County residents; labor force participation rate increases by 5 percentage points by 2030
<b>Accountability</b>	Holmes County economic development lead monitors job placement outcomes; quarterly reports to Board of Supervisors; annual reporting to MDA and workforce funders

### Strategy 4: Community Assets & Quality of Life

Manufacturing employers evaluate more than infrastructure when selecting a site. They evaluate quality of life for their workforce. Parks, recreation facilities, community events and livable neighborhoods are part of what determines whether a manufacturing employee especially one who has relocated stays in a community long-term. Holmes County’s investment in community assets is not a secondary priority; it is a direct component of the county’s competitiveness as a manufacturing location.

Investments in parks and recreation also improve quality of life for existing residents — the Holmes County families who have stayed through decades of economic decline and who deserve to see their community invest in itself alongside the industrial development at Exit 156.

<b>Lead</b>	Holmes County Parks & Recreation; Holmes County Board of Supervisors
<b>Key Partners</b>	City of Durant, Lexington city government, regional partners, community organizations, philanthropic funders
<b>Key Milestones</b>	2026: Identify priority community investment projects through community input → 2027–2028: Begin priority projects → 2030–2035: Sustained investment in community assets tied to industrial park growth
<b>Measurable Outcomes</b>	Baseball park, recreation facility, and job training site.
<b>Accountability</b>	Holmes County Parks & Recreation department monitors project delivery; reports to Board of Supervisors

**Use of RLEM Subgrant Funds**

Holmes County used the \$50,000 RLEM subgrant to contract Waggoner Engineering, Inc. to complete the Holmes County Industrial Park Master Plan, feasibility study, market study and economic analysis. This investment produced a professional, publicly credible planning document that Holmes County can present to investors, site selectors, grant agencies and state and federal partners as evidence that the industrial park is analysis-ready and development-ready. Without this foundational document, Holmes County could not credibly pursue Entergy Qualified Site certification, MDA marketing support or the federal infrastructure financing that Strategy 2 depends on. The RLEM subgrant, in this case, unlocked a path to orders-of-magnitude larger investments.

SECTION 5

# GOVERNANCE & PARTNERSHIPS

*Who leads, how decisions are made and who is at the table*

Holmes County’s Board of Supervisors leads and authorizes all major decisions under the Mobility Action Plan. Day-to-day implementation is managed by the county administrator in coordination with the Holmes County Economic Development Department and the North Central Planning & Development District (NCPDD), which provides regional planning, grant application and technical assistance support. Progress is monitored through quarterly reports to the Board of Supervisors. External partners MDA, Entergy Mississippi, Holmes Community College and workforce agencies are coordinated through regular project meetings and formal partnership agreements as strategies advance.

**Debra Mabry** — *Holmes County Supervisor — MAP Lead*

Board of Supervisors is the governing body of the county, establishing goals and objectives to direct the county's growth and development, and carries out other responsibilities as set forth by Mississippi statutes. The Board oversees county operations and enacts ordinances and resolutions to promote the health, safety, and welfare of citizens and businesses in the county, and approves the annual budget and millage rate which funds the operations of the offices and departments under the Board's jurisdiction. Debra Mabry is the Supervisor of District 3 and has served for 12 years as Holmes County Supervisor.

**Tiffany Williams** — *Holmes County Administrator — Implementation Lead*

The county administrator is responsible and role is to ensure funding is properly administered for the industrial park. Also, I am responsible for work projection, budget planning, accounting, purchasing, cost control, personnel management, and road construction procedures. The administrator, under the policies determined by the board of supervisors and subject to the board’s general supervision and control, administers county affairs falling under the control of the board and carries out the general policies of the board. Tiffany has served for 4 years as Holmes County Administrator.

## Key Partners

Partner	Role in the Plan
<b>North Central Planning &amp; Development District (NCPDD)</b>	Regional planning, grant application support and technical assistance across all strategies
<b>Mississippi Development Authority (MDA)</b>	State economic development agency; industrial park marketing, site selector outreach and Entergy Qualified Sites program coordination
<b>Entergy Mississippi</b>	Qualified Sites Program certification process; industrial prospect referrals
<b>Waggoner Engineering, Inc.</b>	Completed master plan, feasibility study and market assessment; ongoing technical consulting
<b>City of Durant</b>	Co-applicant for POTW infrastructure financing; joint city-county collaboration model

<b>Holmes Community College</b>	Workforce training programs aligned with industrial park target industries
<b>Delta Regional Authority (DRA)</b>	Infrastructure, site development and workforce funding through annual grant rounds
<b>Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC)</b>	Infrastructure and economic development grant funding (Holmes County is in ARC service area)
<b>USDA Rural Development</b>	Water and waste disposal financing for Durant POTW upgrade
<b>Congressional delegation</b>	Federal advocacy, community project funding and agency introductions
<b>Peer rural counties</b>	Best practices on Qualified Site certification and MDA/EDA grant sequencing

SECTION 6

# SUSTAINABILITY & FUNDING STRATEGY

*How Holmes County finances the industrial park from planning through full operation*

Holmes County’s long-term sustainability strategy is anchored in a simple premise: a functioning industrial park generates its own sustainability. Manufacturing tenants pay property taxes, create jobs that generate income tax revenue, attract secondary businesses and increase the county’s economic base in ways that compound over time. The goal of the funding strategy is to deploy targeted public investment from federal, state and local sources to reach the point where private industrial investment takes over as the primary driver of economic growth.

Infrastructure improvements totals approximately \$20 million for roadways and utility work from the industrial park. Therefore, funding sources will be detrimental in ensuring we make prominent improvement to the park.

Funding Source	Target Use	Timeline
<b>RLEM / NACo Foundation (\$50,000 — deployed)</b>	Master plan, feasibility study and market assessment (complete)	2024–2025
<b>Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC)</b>	Infrastructure, site development and workforce improvements	Annual/semi-annual rounds
<b>Delta Regional Authority (DRA)</b>	Infrastructure, site development and workforce improvements	Annual/semi-annual rounds
<b>Mississippi Legislature Appropriations</b>	Targeted line items or bond authorizations for industrial park infrastructure	Legislative session cycles
<b>Congressional Community Project Funding</b>	Site preparation, road improvements and broadband expansion	Annual appropriations
<b>USDA Rural Development — Water &amp; Waste Disposal</b>	Durant POTW upgrade (stacked with EPA CWSRF)	As ready; 18–24 month application timeline
<b>EPA Clean Water State Revolving Fund (CWSRF)</b>	Durant POTW upgrade (stacked with USDA)	As ready; coordinated with USDA application
<b>Mississippi Development Authority (MDA)</b>	Industrial park marketing, site selector support and Entergy certification	Ongoing state program support
<b>Industrial park lease and tax revenue</b>	Sustaining county operations and future infrastructure investment once tenants are operating	Year 3+ (first tenant)

SECTION 7

**FOR MORE INFORMATION**

*Contacts for funding partnerships, site development and implementation*

Contact	Title	Organization	Contact Info
<b>Debra Mabry</b>	Holmes County Supervisor	Holmes County Board of Supervisors	dmabry@holmescountymys.org (662) 834-0911
<b>Tiffany Williams</b>	Holmes County Administrator	Holmes County	twilliams@holmescountymys.org (662) 834-0911
<b>Reggie Ross</b>	Regional planner / project lead	North Central Planning & Development District (NCPDD)	<a href="mailto:rross@ncpdd.org">rross@ncpdd.org</a> (662)-283-2675
<b>Eric Jefferson</b>	Project contact	Waggoner Engineering, Inc.	<a href="mailto:eric.jefferson@waggonereng.com">eric.jefferson@waggonereng.com</a> (601)-355-9526

## ABOUT RURAL LEADERS FOR ECONOMIC MOBILITY (RLEM)

Rural Leaders for Economic Mobility (RLEM) was a 22-month peer-learning initiative that supported rural county leaders in advancing equitable economic mobility. The initiative brought together leaders from 10 rural counties to strengthen local systems that expand opportunity for residents, particularly in communities facing persistent workforce, education and infrastructure challenges. NACo continues to share RLEM experiences with rural counties across the United States.

### **Mobility Action Plans**

The central outcome of the RLEM initiative is the development of a Mobility Action Plan (MAP) in each participating county. These locally informed roadmaps help counties move from learning to action by identifying priority economic mobility challenges, target populations and practical short- and long-term implementation strategies.