

CAPE GIRARDEAU COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP



2026 LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

City of Cape Girardeau • Cape Girardeau County • Southeast Missouri State University
Mineral Area College • Cape Girardeau Public Schools • Cape Girardeau Public Library
Saint Francis Healthcare System • SEMO REDI • Cape Girardeau Area Chamber of Commerce

CAPE GIRARDEAU



THE BUSINESS HUB OF SOUTHEAST MISSOURI

The City of Cape Girardeau serves as a central hub for business, healthcare, and education in the Southeast Missouri region. Its strategic location along the Mississippi River has allowed it to develop a broad range of services and opportunities for a surrounding population of more than 200,000 people.

As a **business center**, Cape Girardeau's economy is characterized by a diverse mix of sectors, including a well-established retail environment, a growing technology and services industry, and a significant manufacturing base. The city's investments in its infrastructure and its advantageous geographical position contribute to its role as a key commercial and industrial location.

The city's standing as a **healthcare center** is supported by Mercy Southeast Hospital and Saint Francis Medical Center. These institutions provide advanced medical facilities and specialized services that are crucial for the region. Their presence offers critical care to patients from a wide area and contributes substantially to regional employment.

In the realm of **education**, Cape Girardeau is anchored by Southeast Missouri State University (SEMO), which attracts students from a broad geographic area. The university's academic offerings, particularly in professional fields such as business and health, are complemented by the Cape Girardeau Public Schools' Career and Technology Center. This center provides high school and post-secondary students with career training for in-demand jobs, helping to meet the regional workforce needs.

This combination of a varied economic base, advanced healthcare services, and a strong educational foundation defines Cape Girardeau's role as the business hub of Southeast Missouri.

CAPE GIRARDEAU COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP PRIORITIES

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

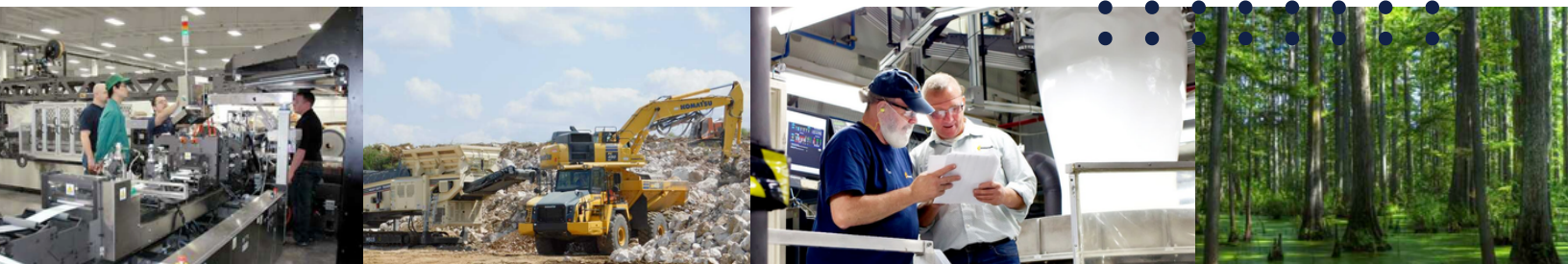
A strong, forward-looking economic development strategy is essential for Missouri's long-term prosperity, and it is a key focus for the Cape Girardeau community. Our growth depends on legislative policies that foster a competitive environment for employers, attract new investment, and sustain local businesses. We advocate for modernized, performance-based incentives that attract and retain quality jobs, ensuring regional fairness and a measurable return on the state's investment. This includes programs that unlock private-sector investment by encouraging capital formation and long-term job retention across all Missouri communities.

Furthermore, we urge strategic investment in infrastructure, including roads, bridges, and broadband—to make our region more competitive in national site selection. Fair access to economic development resources is crucial for communities of every size, ensuring both urban and rural regions can benefit from state tools and funding. We also support preserving effective local tools such as Community Improvement Districts and Tax Increment Financing, which allow communities to tailor solutions to their unique development needs. Expanding east/west highway access through our region will also support decreased transportation costs and improved access for major employers.

Support Entrepreneurial Efforts and the Show-Me Network:

We support initiatives that foster innovation and strengthen Missouri's small business, entrepreneurial, and technology ecosystem. We recognize the impact of the Missouri Technology Corporation and the Show-Me Network in empowering community-based organizations that serve as champions for entrepreneurs and innovators.

As this technology evolves, we also support evidence-based policies on artificial intelligence (AI) that prioritize responsible development, protect employers and employees, and mitigate risk while encouraging innovation.



BUSINESS ENVIRONMENT

The vitality of the Cape Girardeau Metro region is directly linked to a stable, competitive, and predictable business environment. Our focus is on removing obstacles to job creation, ensuring regulatory certainty, and maximizing the economic potential of our core industries. We advocate for legislative action that supports employer flexibility and protects our businesses from undue litigation and mandates.

Regulatory Certainty and Opposition to Employer Mandates

The Partnership strongly advocates for policies that reduce regulatory burdens and protect the autonomy of private employers to manage their operations efficiently. We must safeguard the ability of our businesses to structure compensation and benefit packages competitively, tailored to their specific workforce needs. We therefore continue our firm **opposition to legislation, such as Proposition A passed in Missouri in 2024, that would impose new, mandatory benefit programs, paid leave requirements, or other benefit mandates** on private-sector employers. Such mandates unnecessarily increase operational costs, diminish job creation, and undermine the flexibility critical for businesses—especially small businesses—to thrive in a dynamic market. Our priority is a regulatory environment that supports growth, not one that dictates management structure.

Curbing Abusive Digital Access Litigation

In an increasingly digital economy, the state must act to shield local businesses from abusive litigation that drains resources and threatens digital investment. We urge lawmakers to enact **legislation mirroring the Act Against Abusive Website Access Litigation, passed in Kansas in 2023**, to establish a formal notice and cure period. This crucial reform would require plaintiffs to notify businesses of alleged digital accessibility violations before filing a lawsuit. This measure ensures businesses have a reasonable opportunity to correct deficiencies, fostering genuine accessibility while **curtailing the practice of serial, high-volume litigation designed primarily to extract settlements**. Protecting businesses from predatory lawsuits is essential for encouraging digital commerce, innovation, and modernization.

Investment in Tourism as an Economic Catalyst

Recognizing tourism as a vital and immediate driver of economic activity, job creation, and tax revenue across our region, the Partnership calls for sustained state investment in the sector. We support **robust funding for the Division of Tourism and cooperative marketing programs** that promote Southeast Missouri as a premier destination for leisure, business, and cultural travel. Furthermore, we advocate for strategic capital investments in **regional tourism infrastructure, including improvements to cultural sites, recreational facilities, and visitor centers**. Enhancing our visitor experience is a proven strategy for diversifying our local economy, attracting outside capital, and generating growth that benefits the entire community.



TRANSPORTATION

The Cape Girardeau Community Partners recognizes a robust transportation network as the cornerstone of our regional economy and quality of life. To prepare for future growth, we are prioritizing investment in three key areas: highway infrastructure, regional airport modernization, and public transportation.

Strategic highway investment is vital for efficient movement of people and goods. The City of Cape Girardeau strongly advocates the modernization and expansion of a vital east-west corridor. This project, identified as the Ozark Parkway, is a top priority for enhancing safety and improving traffic flow. Securing state and federal funding for this critical project will reduce congestion and improve accessibility for residents and businesses.

The Cape Girardeau Regional Airport (CGI) is a critical economic asset for our region. The city has made significant strides in maintaining and improving the airport, but due to the high cost of essential upgrades, state and federal partnership is required. Our top legislative priority is leveraging state resources to support regional partnerships in developing infrastructure improvements and education program enhancements that will magnify the regional impact of CGI.



Finally, public transportation is a cornerstone of an equitable and accessible community. We support sustained investment in our public transit system, operated by the Cape Girardeau County Transit Authority (CGCTA). This investment is vital for ensuring all residents have access to employment, education, and essential services. This commitment is essential for providing a sustainable and affordable mobility option for all members of our community, particularly those in high-poverty areas and individuals with disabilities.

K-12 EDUCATION



The Cape Girardeau Metro Partnership recognizes that a strong education system is the backbone of our community and a prerequisite for a thriving economy. Our legislative priorities for the upcoming year are rooted in this belief, focusing on initiatives that will cultivate a skilled workforce and ensure the long-term vitality of our region. The following are principal priorities for our region:

Early Childhood Education Is Foundational to Academic Success:

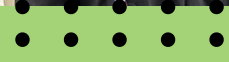
We urge lawmakers to invest in full-day Pre-K and early childhood programs. This is not simply an educational matter; it is a critical workforce development issue. By providing foundational learning for our youngest citizens, we ensure a higher rate of school readiness and a stronger talent pipeline for the future.

Expanded Investments in Career and Technical Education (CTE) are Critical:

Continued and expanded funding for the Career & Technology Center is crucial. This facility directly serves the needs of our business community by preparing students in high-demand fields like healthcare, advanced manufacturing, and skilled trades. These programs provide our local employers with a ready workforce and offer students a path to a debt-free, career-ready future.

Avoid Policies That Fragment Local Education:

We oppose any legislation—such as open enrollment or local property tax restrictions—that diverts state or local funding away from our public schools. Such measures weaken vital programs, including our highly successful Career and Technical Education (CTE) initiatives, which are essential to sustaining the regional workforce pipeline and maintaining community stability. Protecting the financial integrity of local schools safeguards the educational, economic, and social infrastructure upon which our communities depend for long-term growth and prosperity.



HIGHER EDUCATION

The region's higher education ecosystem is the engine of our future workforce and a key driver of economic prosperity. The Cape Girardeau Community Partnership prioritizes strategic state investment in Southeast Missouri State University (SEMO) and Mineral Area College (MAC) to ensure they are responsive to industry needs, remain affordable for students, and have the flexibility to innovate.

Strengthening Regional Workforce Development Pathways

We advocate for **continued and enhanced funding specifically targeted at workforce training, technical education, and career development programs** through SEMO and MAC. These institutions are vital partners in bridging the skills gap across Southeast Missouri. We support initiatives that:

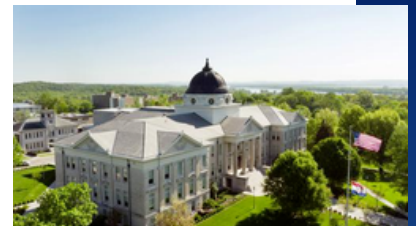
- Expand specialized certification and non-credit programs in high-demand fields like healthcare, advanced manufacturing, and technology.
- Foster stronger collaboration between university and college faculty and industry leaders to ensure curriculum is immediately relevant to employer needs.

Enhanced Operating Support to Limit Student Debt

To maintain a competitive and accessible talent pool, higher education must remain affordable. The Partnership requests **enhanced state investment in core operating support for regional public universities and community colleges**. Direct state funding is the most effective mechanism to offset rising institutional costs—including facility maintenance, technology upgrades, and competitive faculty salaries—without forcing the financial burden onto students. Increased state support is critical to combat and limit rising tuition costs and reduce the unsustainable growth of student debt, thereby ensuring that our graduates are financially ready to invest in and contribute to the local economy upon graduation.

Program Development Flexibility for Critical Needs

We call for increased administrative and fiscal freedom for regional universities, such as SEMO, to rapidly develop and implement high-priority academic and workforce programs identified by the business community. This includes the establishment of **dedicated, flexible grant funding** for new program development and expansion. Similar to action taken for Missouri State University in 2025 to develop key statewide programs, our regional institutions must be empowered to quickly stand up degrees and certificates in areas facing acute workforce shortages. This flexibility is essential to ensure that our universities can immediately respond to evolving economic demands and provide the specialized talent required for future regional growth.



HEALTHCARE

Healthcare is a cornerstone of regional stability and a reflection of our values in Southeast Missouri. A place where hard work, self-reliance, and care for our neighbors is part of who we are. Healthcare sustains thousands of private-sector jobs, fuels local innovation, and ensures our workforce stays healthy and productive. Strengthening healthcare strengthens the entire regional economy.



Building the Healthcare Workforce for Tomorrow

Challenge: Critical shortages of nurses, allied health professionals, and support staff are limiting access to care and straining hospitals.

- Align workforce funding to support local training programs.
- Streamline licensure reciprocity to attract qualified professionals from other states.
- Expand career pathways, apprenticeships, and tuition partnerships that connect schools, colleges, and employers.

Outcome: Home-grown talent, stable employment, and care that stays close to home.

Protecting Healthcare as an Economic Engine

Challenge: Hospitals face rising costs, workforce inflation, and reimbursement pressures that limit investment and innovation.

- Protect and strengthen the 340B Drug Pricing Program to stretch scarce resources without new government spending.
- Expand broadband and telehealth infrastructure to unlock access in rural and underserved agricultural areas.

Outcome: Efficient operations, job creation, and a stronger regional economy.

Improving Transportation and Access

Challenge: Limited infrastructure and unreliable transport impede both emergency and routine care.

- Invest in road and bridge networks that ensure timely care.
- Support medical transport programs for both emergent and non-emergent transportation.

Outcome: Faster, safer, and more reliable access to care for every community.

Healthcare thrives when government is a partner. By empowering local control, investing in our people, and modernizing critical infrastructure, Missouri can help secure a healthier, more prosperous future for every family, business, and community in our state.



LIBRARY AND ARTS

The Partnership recognizes and supports the vital role that libraries, museums, the arts, and other cultural institutions play in the City of Cape Girardeau. These organizations not only enrich the lives of residents but also contribute significantly to the economic health of the community by attracting investment, generating jobs, and fostering a dynamic, vibrant city.

We advocate for continued funding of the Missouri Arts Council, Missouri Humanities Council, Missouri State Library, Missouri Public Television Broadcasting Corporation, and the Missouri Historic Preservation Revolving Fund through the Non-Resident Professional Athletes and Entertainers Tax. We further support the full, statutorily required distribution of those funds.

Additionally, the Partnership opposes any legislation that would reduce or eliminate real or personal property tax revenues in Cape Girardeau without identifying a reliable alternative funding source for the taxing districts that depend on those revenues.

LOCAL GOVERNANCE

Local governance, particularly in the realm of tax policy, is essential for a community's fiscal health and autonomy. When state governments impose strict tax limits and restrictions, they can inadvertently weaken local decision-making and hinder the ability of municipalities to fund vital public services. Such limitations, while sometimes intended to protect taxpayers, may lead to overreliance on regressive revenue sources or the deferral of critical infrastructure projects. Therefore, empowering local governments with appropriate fiscal flexibility is crucial for fostering responsive, equitable, and resilient communities that can adapt to changing needs and ensure a high quality of life for all residents.

CAPE GIRARDEAU METRO PARTNERSHIP

2026 STRATEGIC OPPORTUNITIES

These three priorities represent critical investment opportunities that will immediately strengthen Southeast Missouri's economy, improve safety, and empower local decision-making for long-term regional stability.

Investing in Comprehensive Air Transportation Enhancements & Programs

Request: Allocate \$16.65 Million in the FY'2027 Transportation Budget to support three critical infrastructure and program enhancements to support regional growth through the Cape Girardeau Regional Airport (CGI).

Southeast Missouri State University – Air Traffic Controller Degree Program

Funding Request: \$3.8 million

Purpose: Establish Missouri's first FAA-approved Air Traffic Collegiate Training Initiative program, addressing the regional ATC workforce shortage across Missouri and surrounding states.

Outcome: Creates the only ATC training pipeline for Missouri, Iowa, Arkansas, Kentucky, and Tennessee.

Cape Girardeau Public Schools – Fire Science & ARFF Training Center

Funding Request: \$3.35 million

Purpose: Build a Midwest regional Aircraft Rescue & Firefighting Training Center to expand aviation safety and emergency response readiness.

Outcome: Establishes hands-on ARFF and fire science training for students, first responders, and regional agencies.

City of Cape Girardeau – Airport Safety & Infrastructure Expansion

Funding Request: \$9.5 million (ATC Tower + Fuel Farm)

Purpose: Replace outdated, mission-critical airport infrastructure essential to passenger, cargo, and the local industries.

Outcome: Increases airport safety, improves flight capacity, and supports expanding aviation programs.

Regional Impact

- Expands airport safety and aligns with FAA standards.
- Builds Southeast Missouri's aviation workforce pipeline from high school to university.
- Strengthens economic development through shared facilities and training capacity.
- Creates a unified regional hub for aviation, emergency response, and workforce training

Enhancing Regional Commerce: Funding the Ozark Parkway Linkages Study

Request: Provide \$5 Million in dedicated financial support for the essential linkages and economic impact study for the proposed Ozark Parkway project.

Rationale: Southeast Missouri's economic future requires optimized logistics. Our current infrastructure heavily favors north-south corridors, creating a critical gap for businesses needing efficient east-west movement.

Unlocking Business Growth: An east-west artery would significantly reduce transportation costs and time for manufacturing, distribution, and agriculture, making the Cape Girardeau Metro region substantially more attractive for industrial and commercial site location.

Defining the Corridor: Funding this study is the crucial first step to officially define the optimal route ("linkages") and accurately quantify the economic benefits across the entire region.

Strategic Future Mobility: This study is an investment in a cohesive, modern state transportation network, ensuring the long-term viability and prosperity of the region by enabling more efficient movement of goods and people.

Impact: A fully funded study accelerates the development of a modern logistics artery that will propel regional commerce and competitiveness into the next decade.

Protecting Local Financial Stability: Preserving Local Tax Authority

Request: The state of Missouri should maintain and protect the existing local tax authority of municipal governments and special districts, refraining from enacting new restrictions, caps, or forced reductions on local property tax levies.

Rationale: Property taxes are the most vital and stable funding source for essential, voter-supported local services, including public safety, K-12 education, and critical infrastructure.

Empowering Local Control: Local officials are best positioned to respond to community needs. The state's existing Hancock Amendment already provides a critical check by rolling back tax rates when property values outpaced inflation. New, superimposed limitations undermine local democracy and accountability.

Ensuring Fiscal Health: Undermining this revenue source creates significant financial uncertainty, compromises the ability to manage rising operational costs (e.g., competitive salaries), and complicates securing voter-approved bonds for capital projects.

Preventing Service Decline: Restricting this funding will inevitably lead to cuts in essential services—such as reduced police/fire coverage, larger class sizes, and deferred maintenance—which directly harms the quality of life and the region's attractiveness for business investment.

Impact: Protecting local fiscal autonomy ensures stable, well-managed communities capable of meeting their unique needs without becoming reliant on uncertain state aid.

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