

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Hardee County embarked on a community-wide visioning effort to help develop a framework for balanced future growth and development while retaining the County's quality of life assets. The Visioning is aimed at identifying community goals and a means to achieve those goals, both short and long-term. Hardee County is faced with difficult choices in the current economic times. Realizing that growth and development have the ability to either support or hamper the community's desired progress, county officials began to develop a Community Vision that could properly guide future development and identify solutions to challenges.

The Visioning process is intended to utilize a broad range of community comments, issues and opportunities in developing community recommended strategies. The Visioning process is also intended to develop a framework within which to proactively plan, develop milestones and identify potential community champions for the recommendations. With each successive meeting, the community refined the broader comments into more focused, action oriented recommendations that will be used to develop the overall final Vision. The strategies identified are not necessarily government directed and/or supported, and in numerous cases involve local community and civic organizations with specific interest or association with related programs. This method creates broad based community support and responsibility for the implementation of the strategy. It should be noted that during the period of review and comment by the respective focus groups and the Board of County Commissioners adoption, certain strategies and or components of strategies have been implemented by various entities including the Chamber of Commerce (community coordinator/PR) and the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) (greenways master plan).

The County identified five areas of review and analysis that were discussed through a series of "Focus Groups" and community meetings to prepare the Visioning Report and to provide guidance for future projects and decisions. These groups included:

- Economic Development,
- Land Use/ Recreation/ Open Space/ Environment,
- Quality of Life/Housing,
- Education/ Workforce,
- Infrastructure.

The Focus Groups identified both opportunities and constraints that may impact the overall growth and development of Hardee County. These groups provided input as to recommended strategies and desired outcomes, including identifying "Community Champions" that would include representatives from the various community groups, individuals as well as governmental entities. These Champions were identified to further assist in the targeting and implementation for subsequent action steps and overall strategy development.

The Vision or the community's plan has been built using comments received from the steering committee and focus group meetings, formulated into an overall vision and a "road map" of ideas. In general, each Focus Group started with the basic questions of:

- "What challenges do you see to Hardee County growing, economically, culturally, and environmentally?"
- What can be done to overcome those challenges?
- Where would you like to see Hardee County in the next 5-10 years? 20 years?
- What would it take to achieve that? Who needs to be involved to make the vision a reality?
- What unrecognized or underutilized opportunities are present within the community that can assist (or be refocused to assist) in achieving the community's goals?"

Residents, stakeholders and interested persons were invited to attend the community-wide kick-off and the over forty-two Focus Group and Steering Committee meetings held throughout the process to provide their input and comments on the various items identified as being important to the community. These meetings provided the basis for specific projects, programs and opportunities as well as identifying those who should be involved in making the vision a reality. In addition to the public meetings, the County established an on-line method through the County's website and email system to collect responses for those members of the community that could not attend the meetings. Each meeting was recorded and a copy of the audio recording was made available through the County's website, along with a written summary of the meeting's recommendations, strategies and next steps, each summary building on the previous meetings to ensure and assist with a consistent stream of information. The Plan and its recommendations, strategies and community champions was presented to the Hardee County Board of Commissioners (Board) for adoption. Upon adoption, the Board has indicated a series of subsequent public meetings to begin implementing components of the Plan.

The Sustainable Hardee Visioning Plan provides a strategic review and assessment which in whole or in part, can assist to identify actual or perceived needs within the community both from a public and or private sector approach. Key components of the Visioning Plan include:

- Identification of implementation strategies and (targeted) stakeholders
- Identification of new and/or enhanced partnerships necessary for successful implementation of the Plan and respective programs.
- Program assessments and recommended enhancements

In addition, the Visioning Plan seeks to identify and highlight elements that answer the question, "How can Hardee County grow while retaining the qualities that people expect and have come to identify with the community?"

The context of the Vision Plan, although specific policies may be modified over time to meet current needs, are the main ideas and values expressed by the community that will remain constant. These include:

- Maintain Hardee County's rural and small town character and quality of life.
- Create a range of obtainable housing opportunities and choices including much needed workforce housing.
- Support and encourage the core industries within the community including agriculture and agricultural support services.

- Support and encourage a diversification of jobs creating business and industry.
- Balance the need to protect natural resources with the need to provide economic opportunities.
- Provide well designed, functional, and cost effective transportation, utility and public services to workplaces, neighborhoods, communities, and centers of economic activity.
- Promote excellence in educational, medical, employment, and recreational opportunities.

The choice to remain 'rural' and maintain the status-quo is not an entirely viable or sustainable option. Communities that do not effectively grow and or embrace economic development strategies are at risk of declining populations and a diminishing tax base. These communities are also at risk of not being able to adequately address their aging, deteriorating infrastructure further compounding a general decline in the community. However, uncontrolled growth and suburbanization, including moving away from the County's core industries and assets, throughout the County is equally not sustainable. By focusing efforts and directing resources on those locations where the community will allow development (i.e., non-agriculturally based activities), it will also identify and preserve what is intended to remain 'rural'. Furthermore, diversification of the economic base is critical to Hardee County's future and by identifying those targeted industries, including eco-tourism and alternative agriculture enterprises, the community and its leadership can continue to develop its employment and revenue base. By identifying, marketing and building on these assets, Hardee County can attract public support for the various strategies developed throughout the Visioning process.

The Smart Growth Network in association with the International City/County Management Association identified three goals as a framework for future growth in rural communities.

1. Support the rural landscape by creating an economic climate that enhances the viability of working lands and conserves natural lands;
2. Help existing places thrive by take care of assets and investments such as downtowns, main streets, existing infrastructure, and places that the community values; and
3. Create great new places by building vibrant, enduring neighborhoods and communities that people, especially young people, don't want to leave.

Hardee County has the assets and resources necessary (i.e., land, incentives, strong leadership) to pursue such activities based on:

- Political support for economic development, employment diversification and job creation.
- An integrated, connected transportation system with multiple modes of transportation including major highways, rail, and albeit currently limited, air.
- Lands, including developed sites, located within close proximity to the transportation and other related infrastructure (i.e., water, wastewater, rail, electricity) including the availability of incentives and programs through the Economic Development Council (EDC) and Industrial Development Authority (IDA), the City of Wauchula through the Community Redevelopment Agency and Brownfields Assessment Funds, and the Cities of Bowling Green and Zolfo Springs.
- Infrastructure capacity through the County and its municipalities.

Implementation of the Vision and recommended strategies requires regular review by the community to ensure the strategies are reflecting current needs and priorities are responsive to market conditions and trends, and where items have been implemented, are they performing as anticipated. Implementation strategies may involve one or more organizations and can take various forms through the local government process (amendments to the Comprehensive Plan, land development codes, etc.) or through the development, including expansion, of community programs.

Community Image and General Strategies

In addition to the strengths and weaknesses, and recommended strategies, the community comments and stakeholder interviews further identified what image of the community they would like to portray or simply put how residents see the community or would like the community to appear to visitors and businesses, alike. Similar to the overall Vision Plan Strategies, these elements further support the community's need to grow responsibly, diversify its economic opportunities and provide those services necessary to support its population and businesses.

Community's Proposed Image:

- Natural Settings
- Small-Town America, friendly
- Dining & Shopping
- Special Events & Venues

What's Needed?

- Rehabilitation of Historic Buildings; Unsightly Properties. Many developed and vacant properties in the community are outmoded and poorly maintained, deterring private investment and new business.
- Awareness and better communication of the positive aspects of the community
- New development in community centers
- Public policy amendments
 - Design guidelines and/or performance standards
 - Public access to the rivers and creeks; ultimately trails system(s)
 - Cluster development near municipal services
 - Environmental protection and enhancement

- Appropriate scale and mix of development
 - Design for public and private infrastructure improvements
- Update core land development and zoning regulations
 - Strengthen code enforcement process
 - Establish farm-worker housing provisions
- Economic restructuring strategy
 - Marketing, branding and promotion strategy

What else is needed to achieve these strategies?

- Utility Extensions and Municipal Services in targeted development areas
- Education improvements and programs
- Housing diversification and choices including the development of workforce housing opportunities throughout the community
- Parks and Recreation enhancements (i.e., Hardee Lakes Park, Peace River Park)
- Continued support and expansion of community events including Friday Night Live and Pioneer Days; identify, develop and or support events incorporating local landmarks including the Historic Depot, Peace River and Solomon's Castle
- Fees and Assessments Analysis
- Centralized, integrated information on public and community events
- Programs and Incentives
 - Remove barriers to development, identify practices and policies that can be put into place to help achieve common goals
 - Define broad based goals but also flexible options ("carrot" versus "stick")
 - Build in flexibility and the ability to respond and adapt quickly to trends
 - Meeting market demands from a broad spectrum (housing, healthcare, education)

Lessons Learned

During the Community Wide Workshop and the Focus Group meetings, time was set aside to provide additional information, background data as well as best practices observed by the team. This was intended to allow participants to better understand the tasks and the items to be discussed. Within the Visioning process, several key ideas and items emerged that applied both to the Visioning as well as the County's subsequent implementation. These "Lessons Learned" included:

- Take advantage of opportunities to prepare a Plan; projects need to be "shovel ready" as possible especially with regard to outside funding opportunities.
- Invite and encourage public involvement throughout the preparation and implementation of the Plan or a specific activity. Identify opportunities to promote public involvement (*it does not always have to be government led or driven*).
- Use processes that are flexible, allowing for the ability to adapt to changing market conditions and/or changing public priorities.
- Understand that the difference between public and private sector responsibilities.
- Understand the role of the County and its staff is to balance the goals in the plan with the real world issues, funding and opportunities that arise when implementing the Plan or a specific activity.
- Identify key incremental components and thresholds of larger projects from both a funding (resources) and implementation perspective. Smaller projects or components of projects can be easily built upon and allow greater flexibility in budgeting.
- Certain levels of population are needed to create certain opportunities; be realistic in your expectations.
- Lifestyle and public image matters – build on and expand the *"small town America"* approach.
- Create a 'Sense of Place' and a 'Sense of Community' using natural amenities and features (i.e., eco-tourism/Peace River, agriculture/agri-tourism) readily identifiable and available.
 - Embrace and incorporate the natural assets and features of the community.
- Continue to encourage and support Economic and Industrial Development.
 - An ambitious, diversified economy is needed for overall growth and continued community sustainability. This is also a key asset in attracting other targeted businesses and industry.
- Maintain an 'Open For Business' attitude through the local government as well as civic and professional organizations.
- Respect property rights.

OVERVIEW OF THE VISIONING PROCESS

Visioning allows a community to identify its most valuable assets and its future opportunities. Visioning encourages a dialogue between a community's stakeholders (i.e., residents, businesses, civic and community groups, and visitors) about strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and challenges facing the community and can be on a singular or broad based set of issues. The process typically brings individual and groups together and provides an opportunity to identify what is working, what is not working and also ways to approach an opportunity from a different perspective to achieve a desired goal. Strategic actions focus on identified issues and challenges. Through the visioning process, recommended strategies or an "action plan" with a listing of priorities is developed. Subsequent to the identification of the strategies and recommendations, the community must also identify how to best implement the strategy which will provide the "how" to the "what". In addition, the community must prioritize the strategies based on the needs, and in certain projects, the rate of return on the investment, and at the same time, understand if the community has the resources necessary to be successful. The community must identify if there are partnerships in place that will enable the effective implementation of the strategy.

Hardee County's Visioning Process began with a community-wide kick-off to obtain broad based community comments, ideas, concerns and opportunities. Over 165 residents attended this initial kick-off meeting to provide comments, desired projects, and identify issues for further review and analysis. From that initial meeting, the Steering Committee and the individual Focus Groups met over thirty-four separate times over the course of a year to review the data received from the community meeting, existing County/community plans and studies, and also identify opportunities for successful implementation or identify what challenges may be faced. These ideas and community recommendations were then formulated into preliminary visioning and community oriented strategies, identifying whether they were oriented towards a broad based community group(s), Hardee County, or combination. Following this process and further community review of the strategies, including additional public comment opportunities, the Final Visioning Strategies and Implementation Processes were developed and adopted by the Hardee County Board of County Commissioners.

Sustainable Hardee – Visioning is intended and understood to be a living document that should be reviewed on at least an annual basis by the Board and the community to identify those strategies and programs that have been implemented, status of various projects and even a reprioritization of projects as may be necessary due to community comments and/or funding as may be required. While some priorities may be considered short-term and or require little to no funding, other priorities are included that are inherently larger in scale and complexity, and should be undertaken in either smaller "pieces" or over the course of several years.

Through a broad public involvement process, community members identified Issues to be considered when planning for future growth and development of the community as a whole. Key Issues including unplanned growth that is dispersed and low density in character consumes more land, increases impacts on the natural environment, increases fire and emergency response time and costs, provides little opportunity for quality workforce housing, and is overall more expensive to build and maintain. This type of growth can also lead to encroachment into active agricultural and recreational lands potentially limiting their future use and productivity.

This document sets forth specific recommendations and strategies directed at allowing Hardee County to experience a healthy rate of growth in the most sustainable manner, one that will protect those areas of the County that have been identified as an asset to the community including those that are historical, environmental, cultural, and economic in nature.

The Vision Plan was created with the broad based involvement of the community including civic, business and government stakeholders. Input from attendees and the Steering Committee, and individual citizens provided the foundation for the Vision. The Vision Plan is communicated both visually and in the form of key principles and policies that should provide a clear understanding and context for elected and appointed officials, as well as private groups, as they consider future revisions and amendments to community programs, policies, and regulations, including the comprehensive plan and land development code for Hardee County. The Plan can be used as a tool by Hardee County and the entire community to identify needs (current and planned) and possible protection measures, natural resource identification (identification and application of best management practices based on existing resources, habitats and other environmental features), and further coordination efforts between federal, state and local agencies.

Sustainable Hardee is a proactive planning process that was created and approved and accepted by the Hardee County as a means to provide a "road map" to achieve community goals and objectives. The Vision Plan addresses the topics, both positive and negative, that could have an impact on Hardee County. The Vision Plan establishes goals, objectives, community champions and strategies to achieve these recommendations. The overarching principles for the Vision as expressed by the community include:

- Promote economic development;
- Protect property rights;
- Enhance the quality of life for residents and visitors;
- Protect the natural environment;
- Provide housing opportunities and choices;
- Provide an enduring, living document for elected officials, decision-making bodies, and the community to review and assess on a regular basis.

Within the community, there is support for economic development, employment diversification and job creation, as well as the enhancement of recreational and open space amenities available. Based on this support, the Sustainable Hardee – Hardee County Vision Plan is intended to address and achieve the following broad goals:

- Land Use
 - Development and Land Use Patterns
 - Implement a hierarchy of urban and rural places for new development, resulting in separate and complete development areas or "settlements", not suburban sprawl based on the County's adopted future land use designations.
 - Continue to focus redevelopment efforts in downtown Wauchula as the urban, economic and cultural center.
 - Create a balance between natural resources and new development, resulting in thoughtfully planned land uses that respect that natural environment.

- Balance existing and future mining efforts with reclamation land plans allowing for adaptive reuse of post-mining lands for agriculture, parks and recreation, and industrial development.
 - Environment
 - Promote multiple uses and sustainable agriculture.
 - Protect water quality and quantity throughout the County.
 - Protect critical wildlife habitats and corridors, including blueways.
 - As part of an overall trails and blueways master plan, identify access points and linkages to the Peace River to promote and expand ecotourism, entertainment and leisure activities. By leveraging these assets and enhancing the bicycle, pedestrian, and blueway opportunities in the community, Hardee County can continue to improve the quality of life for residents by providing more mobility options, providing healthy alternatives, attract visitors and tourists by connecting key features and destinations in the County, and promote economic development for the small and local businesses in the County.
- Economic Development
 - Recognize existing economic development activities, business and industry as a vital component to the long-term viability of the community.
 - Diversify the economy by establishing relationships between universities/local community colleges, regional research institutions, and local businesses.
 - Identify and target Green Industries and Technologies including a wide variety of energy conservation, alternative energy and design/construction services for energy efficient building materials and equipment.
 - Create industrial parks, business/office parks, and research parks within strategic locations with necessary infrastructure and services. Priority should be given to those areas with roadway capacity, rail, municipal water/wastewater, electricity, etc.
 - Sufficient industrial land with developed sites located within close proximity to the transportation and other related infrastructure (i.e., water, wastewater, rail, electricity). Additional lands have been designated but not currently developed at this time that will further augment the County's industrial resources. Included in this are local and state incentives including the use of Enterprise Zones and related funds. Additional incentives are available within the City of Wauchula through the Community Redevelopment Agency and Brownfields Assessment Funds.
- Quality of Life/Housing
 - Provide and support opportunities for adequate workforce housing.
 - Provide for a variety of housing opportunities and ranges.
 - Identify and expand cultural and civic events aimed at highlighting Hardee County's assets (Pioneer Park, Friday Night Live, County Fair, etc.).
- Education/Workforce
 - Create an effective workforce development system with strong linkages and participation from the public schools and the community colleges.
 - Improve the quality of public schools.
 - Develop a set of workforce training incentives.
- Infrastructure (including Transportation)
 - Improve gateways to the community to draw visitors and commerce.
 - Coordination and identification of appropriate public service areas for the efficient provision of utilities.
 - Improve the various infrastructure components including sidewalks, street lighting, stormwater drainage and roadways within the population centers of the community.
 - An integrated, connected transportation system with multiple modes of transportation including major highways, rail, and albeit currently limited, air.
 - Infrastructure capacity through the County and its municipalities including the Cities of Wauchula, Bowling Green and Zolfo Springs. The County should continue to work with the County's Economic Development Council and Industrial Development Authority to further the development of suitable sites. Opportunities to support new manufacturing and establish a better balance of available lands and the efficient use of facilities are necessary.

HARDEE COUNTY

Located in central Florida, Hardee County has a rich history of agriculture, small-town friendly atmosphere and positive business approach. Wauchula, the County Seat, along with Zolfo Springs and Bowling Green, comprise the urbanized core of the community followed by historically small, rural hamlets or communities including Ona, and Ft. Green. The majority of urban type development occurs along the U.S. Highway 17 Corridor, extending south from Polk County to DeSoto County, connecting the three municipalities. US 17 bisects the County; however, the separation is not as pronounced in the rural areas as compared to its impacts within the cities. Additional, major roadway corridors extending east-west through the County include State Road 62 (Bowling Green to Parrish/US 301), 64 (Zolfo Springs to Bradenton/I-75 and Zolfo Springs to Avon Park), and State Road 66 (Zolfo Springs to the Sebring area); County Road 663 extends north-south from Polk County through Ft. Green and Ona.

Hardee County is primarily agricultural in nature with additional agricultural supporting industry, phosphate mining with limited, albeit, growing non-agriculturally oriented industry including manufacturing and power generation sectors. Non-agricultural employment includes education and health care fields, Hardee County School District, Florida Hospital-Wauchula and Florida Institute of Neurological Rehabilitation (FINR), respectively, followed by financial and service related businesses.

Hardee County has experienced modest growth since 2000. According to the U.S. Census, Hardee County's population grew from 26, 938 in 2000 to 27,731 in 2010. Florida's Bureau of Economic and Business Research (BEBR) estimates Hardee County's population (medium projection rate) will continue slight increases to approximately 29,500 (medium projection rate) by 2040. The majority of residents within the community are either located within or close proximity to the respective cities.

Although not directly accessed by an interstate or major airport, the transportation system in place (i.e., combination of State and County roads), central Florida location, and State assistance through the Rural Area of Critical Economic Concern (RACEC) programs, position Hardee County in a favorable competitive environment for economic development opportunities.

Income levels have remained fairly constant within the community with approximately 50 percent of households earning less than \$50,000 per year (U.S. Census). The median household income (2006-2010) was \$37,466; by comparison, the State of Florida's median household income during this same period was \$47,661.

EXISTING CONDITIONS & OPPORTUNITIES

Market Context

The economic vitality of Hardee County and opportunities for new business, industry and residential are driven in large measure on the size, characteristics, and growth of population in the area. Hardee County has a discernible difference between its resident and seasonal population, including seasonal workforce. These populations have the ability to generate economic growth and demand for goods and services in Hardee County. In addition, there is a significant number of daily vehicle trips along U.S. 17 through Hardee County which could be capitalized on. This highly traveled corridor connects two major markets in Polk County and Charlotte County and contains vacant and or underdeveloped properties that are suitable for various types and levels of development.

Housing Market

Continuing unfavorable conditions in the national, regional and county housing market greatly affect development prospects in Hardee County in two ways. First, developer interest in investing in new housing will be limited until commercial lending and demand and pricing for new products return to normal; however, even during the boom of the early to mid-2000's, Hardee County did not see its fair share of increased growth. Second, a weak housing market limits new retail and office development, as demand for goods and services is also restricted. Although prospects are dim for a major rebound in the real estate market in the next few years, long range growth expectations for Hardee County appear relatively positive especially in age-targeted communities. Based on available information, Hardee County has one of the highest average household sizes in the State with 3.12 persons per household; the State average is 2.48 (BEHR, FPS 161 Households)

Development Opportunities

Competitive Strengths and Weaknesses

Hardee County has a number of competitive strengths and weaknesses in relation to locations outside of the larger urbanized areas for attracting new businesses and industry. Strengths are positive attributes that should be marketed effectively to investors, developers, and new businesses. Hardee County is not unique in several of its identified strengths, numerous Florida communities can claim the same or similar strengths and more. Strong segments to expand can include those sectors of the community that are strong or highly visible and can be further enhanced or expanded.

Weaknesses include realities and perceptions that put the community at a disadvantage to business locations outside downtown and require corrective action. Weaknesses can also include competitive weaknesses or disadvantages and liabilities that limit the community's ability to attract and sustain economic growth, business and industry. Underutilized segments include those community assets that may be present and available but are either not readily identifiable, fully funded or perceived as lacking.

Strengths/Strong Segments to Expand:

- Financial institutions
- Health care
- Religious organizations
- Industrial site inventory
- Agriculture/Agricultural Support Services
- Government offices
- Available technology (i.e., broadband)

Weaknesses/Underutilized Segments to Focus On:

- Community identity
- Retail and Dining & entertainment
- Residential
- Offices for small businesses
- Diversified industrial base
- Comparatively high tax rates
- Lack of certain infrastructure in population centers
- Underutilized assets (i.e. Peace River, Wauchula Municipal Airport)
- Transportation including roadways
 - Existing road and infrastructure conditions
 - Lack of sidewalks/poorly lit sidewalks and streets
- Visual concerns including code enforcement along US 17 (not meeting community standards and expectations)
- Higher Education links (South Florida Community College, USF-Polytechnic)

RECOMMENDED STRATEGIES

The following recommendations identify potential implementation and development strategies to build upon the prior successes and establish specific directions for review on a periodic and formal annual review. These strategies reflect the community input and prioritization developed over the course of facilitated discussions to engage residents, business owners, property owners and community leadership on desired local redevelopment priorities. Following the list of Recommended Strategies is a detailed discussion or "break out" of three selected strategies. This discussion includes additional information, proposed "key" next steps and case studies with the intent of providing the County with a format and outline for future application. The three strategies presented are: #3 Eco-tourism Master Plan; #4 Airport Expansion and Feasibility Plan and #23 US Corridor Study.

1. Hardee County along with the municipalities should establish quarterly meetings, including key staff members, to review the Visioning Plan and its recommendations, key projects of regional significance and to increase general dialogue amongst the community. Similar to other, adjacent communities with common issues (i.e., Manatee County), a "Council of Governments" or similar should be established to facilitate the coordination.
 - a. The County along with the municipalities should investigate the feasibility, including the potential components of a Joint Planning Agreement and Interlocal Service Boundary Agreement. These types of agreements generally include determination of the provision of services, process and procedures for annexations, land use reviews, as well as capital improvements.
 - b. In addition to the municipal meetings, Community leaders must foster partnerships between various public sector agencies. The following list of public entities and institutions may have a role in supporting future development in the community:
 - i. Hardee County
 - ii. Cities of Wauchula, Bowling Green and Zolfo Springs
 - iii. Chamber of Commerce
 - iv. Economic Development Authority, Economic Development Council (EDC) and Industrial Development Authority (IDA)
 - v. Hardee County School District
 - vi. South Florida Community College /USF-Polytechnic
 - vii. Ministerial Association
 - viii. Peace River Explorations
 - ix. 3PR (People for the Protection of Peace River)
2. Hardee County should commission a market and logistics study to determine the market feasibility for increased economic and industrial development. This study should further identify targeted industries, potential locational needs including infrastructure improvements as may be necessary, marketing/branding of the community and economic development strategies that may be implemented by the community. Currently (2012), the University of South Florida has been contracted as part of a Phase I analysis to review and provide an overview similar to this strategy and provide baseline recommendations for future phases and "next steps". This strategy is understood to be a multi-part, potentially long-term review and analysis, with implementing recommendations.
 - a. Hardee County and the cities of Wauchula, Bowling Green, and Zolfo Springs should continue to work closely with the Hardee County EDC to complete an Economic Development Strategy/Plan. The Plan also documents economic development incentives available in support of the effort.
3. Consider solicitation of an eco-tourism master plan including components related to Trails/Greenways/Blueways (including Peace River as a catalyst for planning efforts). Funding for a plan has been provided by the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) through their Local Agency Program (LAP). Following the completion of this plan, the community will be in better position to seek additional funding opportunities for identified projects including trails and trail facilities. This type of plan should be considered an integral part of recommended strategy #2 (above) as these plans can serve as a component of a larger economic development strategy, identify community assets, provide plans and guidance on future growth and development of facilities and also identify potential funding sources. These Plans can also promote economic development for the small and local businesses in the County and identify potential opportunities for niche services. The economic impacts of such facilities have been analyzed in numerous state and federal projects in addition to the overall improvements in community health and multi-modal connectivity, especially in areas with higher pedestrian and bicycle needs. Note: FDOT has recently initiated the completion of a greenways master plan which is anticipated to be complete in 2013.
 - a. While the County has access to major thoroughfares, Hardee County also has numerous scenic county roadways that can further support increased bicycle and pedestrian activities.
 - b. This plan should also consider establishing/creating a blueways management plan which could identify land use (current and planned land use along the blueways) and possible protection measures, natural resource identification (identification and application of best management practices based on existing resources, habitats and other environmental features), and blueways coordination between federal, state and local agencies.
 - i. Improve existing public access to facilities
 - ii. Identify and develop new facilities and trail(s) locations
 - c. Based on the FDOT Greenways Plan (underway), identify key projects within the Plan to initiate/implement towards the development of a county-wide greenway system. This may be in the form of multi-modal trails/paths along portions of the Peace River and its tributaries, linking key areas of the community, sidewalks and other pedestrian connections within neighborhoods and linkages between the three cities in Hardee County.
4. Consider solicitation of an airport expansion and feasibility master plan analyzing existing and project air traffic, airport related and support services, establishment of an industrial/office park adjacent to the airport, marketing and branding of the airport, and identification of potential funding sources. The master plan should identify not only aviation uses and areas of development but also aviation supportive uses and industries that can benefit from proximity to an airport and related infrastructure. The master plan and subsequent marketing should consider the airport's location adjacent to the

County's wastewater treatment facility (WWTF), rail and electrical infrastructure in addition to improvements proposed at the airport. Note: the airport/FDOT have identified a pending security enhancement project at the airport to install perimeter fencing, gates, proximity card readers, lighting and other security features.

- a. Create formal joint marketing and business recruitment, expansion and retention efforts with Hardee County, City of Wauchula/Airport Board and the Hardee County Chamber of Commerce.
 - b. Explore opportunities to market and create opportunities between the aviation and aviation support uses including logistics and/or those businesses able to benefit from close proximity to a public airport. Currently, Wauchula Municipal Airport has direct and indirect economic impacts of \$458,000 and \$407,500, respectively (source: FDOT-Aviation Office, March 2010).
 - i. Per a Florida Department of Transportation – Aviation Office Report, general aviation operations are anticipated to increase from 8,200 in 2009 to approximately 9,000 operations by 2019. The Report further notes the airport could support Very Light Jet (VLJ) operations and increases in both recreational and business activity. By comparison, the Arcadia Municipal Airport experienced 19,370 General Aviation Operations in 2008 and estimated to increase to over 20,600 by 2018.
5. Strengthen community branding and partnerships with existing corporate and community-based organizations.
- a. Several regionally successful businesses already exist within Hardee County. Identifying the advantages and looking for complimentary businesses to support growth of these clusters can serve to strengthen the role of the County as a regional economic catalyst.
 - b. Continue to promote and expand the relationship between the community and the School Board, including expanding existing programs similar to those provided through the Chamber of Commerce (i.e., internships) between the schools, students and local businesses.
 - c. Expand existing community events and venues. The community should investigate the feasibility of developing a community event to capitalize on the community's heritage, agricultural assets and environmental prominence.
6. Consider undertaking a Parks Master Plan including specific design and development related specifications for Hardee Lakes Park. Hardee County has numerous parks located throughout the community that all offer something different to visitors and residents alike. The County and the respective municipalities provide a variety of park options and types (i.e., active and passive); however, these resources are not being utilized to their fullest potential. Development of such plans should include analysis as to proposed (recommended) enhancements, funding needs and opportunities, infrastructure needs and programmatic reviews.
7. The County should review their current fee structure including fees for services (i.e., application and inspection fees), and special assessments to better understand fees collected compared to services rendered. Although the County has suspended the collection of impact fees to pay for/offset costs of public improvements (i.e., roadways), the County's review rates and applicable fees may not be adequately covering staff related expenses.
- a. As part of an overall economic development tool, provisions should be identified and/or created to offer reduced fees, expedited permit and plan reviews, or similar for those new or expanding businesses that create additional employment opportunities.
8. Identify and establish a Neighborhood Planning Program including the development of neighborhood and/or community master plans, landscape and buffer improvements, including entryways along primary thoroughfares, pedestrian enhancements and connectivity.
9. Coordinate extension of utilities to provide areas with needed water, wastewater and stormwater management facilities and services.
- a. Coordination of municipal utility and master stormwater management facility planning with priorities within established neighborhoods represents an opportunity to optimize resource commitments through each entity. The County can assist with the collection of funds for a particular improvement such as sidewalks, streetlights, road improvements or maintenance. These funds will be collected from property owners within a designated boundary for an improvement within that boundary. The funds will only be used for the designated improvement and not distributed County wide
 - b. Coordinate extension of utilities to provide areas with needed water, wastewater and stormwater management facilities and services.
 - c. The County should partner with the appropriate city to investigate establishing a Municipal Services Taxing Unit (MSTU) for targeted neighborhoods to provide certain, identified services including street lighting and roadway improvements.
10. Enhancing Community Image
- a. Provide proactive code enforcement. Target and strengthen code enforcement efforts to handle initial "clean-up" of the areas, as needed. Code enforcement can be an effective tool in supporting and enhancing community image and economic development efforts.
 - b. Support and enhance community events including Pioneer Park Days, Friday Night Live and similar events. Additional events and opportunities should involve community assets including the Historic Depot, Historic City Hall, Peace River and other community assets.
11. Elevate Community Services
- a. Expand Health Care and Medical Services.
 - b. Improve bicycle and pedestrian circulation through
 - i. New multi-modal opportunities and enhancements (i.e., during upgrades and improvements along roadways). Although such improvements may not be identified on the capital improvements plan for roadway and/or capacity improvements by FDOT or Hardee County, upgrades along facilities can occur during regular maintenance and repaving projects.
 - ii. Retrofit the existing roadway network to include sidewalks (where identified and applicable),
 - iii. Increase information regarding bicycle/pedestrian routes and opportunities.
 - c. Create a system of strategic, planned improvements of publicly owned lands and right-of-ways to maximize their usefulness for the residents of the County such as entrance features and complete streets design.
 - d. Improve stormwater infrastructure within the urbanized areas.

12. The County and its municipalities should partner with the Hardee County School District to establish a Safe Routes To School (SRTS) Program. This program can assist with infrastructure improvements including the construction of new facilities or improvements to existing facilities including sidewalks, cross-walks, signage, and lighting within a 2.0 mile radius of a school. State and Federal funds are available for the identification and implementation of certain improvements including sidewalks, street lighting, cross-walks, etc.
 - a. There is an existing Safe Routes to School (SRTS) program in Florida that encompasses routes and techniques used to encourage children to walk or cycle to or from school. The SRTS program is a federal reimbursement program to enable and encourage children in grades K-8 to walk and cycle to school; to make walking and cycling to school safer and more appealing; and to facilitate the planning, development and implementation of projects that will improve safety and reduce traffic, fuel consumption, and air pollution in the vicinity of schools. This program would benefit Hardee County due to the fact that there are inadequate sidewalks within the areas around the existing schools to support the pedestrian activities.
13. Continue active monitoring of the Florida Department of Transportation plans for the US 17 improvements to reflect the community's preferred design alternative and recommended infrastructure (i.e., sidewalks, bicycle lanes, etc.). This also includes the identification and development of gateways or similar community entry features.
 - a. The community as whole should provide clear and consistent support for identified design and construction (enhancements) of US 17. This will require an active and progressive effort by the County and Cities together to influence and ensure that a FDOT investment in local infrastructure meets community expectations. Engagement and active partnering with DeSoto County and other near-by communities is essential for success.
14. Provide a single point of contact (or agency) to coordinate the community's economic development and implementation efforts, and programs. Typically, this type of effort is coordinated through the local Chamber of Commerce and/or a sub-committee of the Chamber that includes the appropriate person(s) from key organizations. This includes the combining of certain County and City resources and/or data links across agencies to facilitate the dissemination of information whether for economic development activities, public assets or community events.
 - a. Highlight community and cultural organizations that can attract visitors to the community (Solomon's Castle, Pioneer Village, Center for Great Apes, Peace River Explorations, etc.). Information and or electronic links relating to these organizations should be made readily available.
15. Ensure the protection of private property rights consistent with applicable federal, state and local regulations. Understanding that certain uses, densities and intensities are permitted by the local zoning codes and or through previously approved development applications, the community should focus on updates to the land development code regarding setbacks, buffering and post-development mitigation. This review should include a broad spectrum of community stakeholders and property owners.
 - a. With regard to phosphate mining, this use provides significant direct and indirect economic impacts to the community and can also provide opportunities for adaptive reuse of post mining lands (i.e., Hardee Lakes Park). The County adopted the mining overlay which identifies those areas currently designated for mining and related activities. In addition, the County maintains a series of land development code and development related ordinances addressing these activities as well as mitigation and post mining activities, including monitoring. The County is encouraged to review the current status of these facilities, schedule(s) for build out and reclamation activities, and future mining needs prior to the expansion of the overlay. In addition, the County should review their current regulations in an effort to address regulatory components previously included within the Development of Regional Impact process.
16. Support the efforts of the City of Wauchula Community Redevelopment Agency and its Redevelopment Master Plan through active participation and review of projects and programs available within the CRA.
17. Continue to leverage available funds and in-kind services to obtain alternative grants and funding for identified improvements and programs to enhance the economic and development desirability of the community (i.e., CRA, U.S. EPA Brownfields, LAP Funds, CDBG, FDOT).
18. Evaluate recent state statutory changes to modify code requirements (i.e., elimination of development of regional impact requirements for mining and mining related activities). Monitoring and evaluating changes in state and federal statutes should be part of the annual reporting requirements with recommended actions to aid with achievement of community goals and objectives. This example relates specifically to DRI requirements, but should be considered as a broader responsibility.
19. Continue to promote industrial parks, business/office parks, and research parks within strategic locations with necessary infrastructure and services. Priority should be given to those areas with roadway capacity, rail, municipal water/wastewater, electricity, etc.
20. Additional Strategies Positioning Hardee County for Economic Growth include:
 - a. Expanding Business and Industry in Hardee County including diversification of the economic sector
 - i. Continue to identify desirable business and industry targets
 - ii. Continue to market Hardee County to new business and industry
 - iii. Provide outreach to existing business and industry, business retention and expansion opportunities.
 - iv. Establish an effective interlocal coordination framework between the County, Cities, EDC/IDA and Chamber; other agencies as identified should be involved.
 - b. Improve internal road access and internal circulation.
 - c. Build on communications infrastructure including Hardee County's broadband capacity.
 - d. Continue to promote development of existing industrial properties, including identifying the potential state and local incentives available.
 - e. Identify and plan new (diversified) business and industry locations through the continued use of the Enterprise Zones, as well as identifying areas for infrastructure and improvements and development of minimum standards, including drainage, parking, access, traffic lights, sidewalks, landscaping, and new signage. The community should continue to support and enhance existing industry including the County's agricultural base; however, additional, diversified business and industrial opportunities should be targeted. The County's broadband capabilities and similar technologies are an asset, similar to water, sewer and access to rail, that can attract technology-based business interests. The community should further investigate opportunities to expand, market, and develop this economic attractor.

- f. Leverage grant and funding opportunities, including programs such as the City of Wauchula's Brownfields program, to aide business retention, expansion and relocation.
21. Similar to Hardee County, many communities in similar situations are designating growth areas to better phase or manage their future development and public investments. Based on these ideas, the community sees these areas as an opportunity to create value in private holdings, improve underdeveloped or underutilized properties, create valuable public spaces, where applicable, that are both walkable and sustainable and an overall improvement in civic activity. The success of these areas may take several years to fully develop; however, this will allow for the public, property owners, developers and the County to come together.
 - a. The County should continue to review and amend the land development codes to promote mixed-use developments, streamline development review procedures and provide flexible development standards within the targeted growth and mixed use development areas. Identify and consider incentives for development bonuses to capture market demands, and aggregate parcels along the corridors, particularly if shared public or private infrastructure (i.e., stormwater management, transit, pedestrian connectivity, public access and open space, and landscapes/entry features) are enhanced or included.
 - b. Within the urban style development areas, the respective jurisdiction should focus on the 4 D's (density, diversity, design and destinations), to promote compact, mixed use corridors and areas that have an outward orientation of buildings and uses facing the streets rather than parking areas that create more inviting spaces for residents and visitors.
 - c. Apply architectural and site design guidelines to promote a style or quality of new construction that would maintain the desired theme and scale of development in the community.
22. The County should undertake/commission an "Agricultural-Vacant Lands Study" to better understand and identify existing conditions within the broader (rural) community. Portions of this study should also identify factors and trends impacting these lands especially with regard to encroachment by either urban/suburban uses and/or non-compatible uses that could be detrimental to existing and future agricultural operations. Based on the amount of agricultural activities within the County and their overall economic impact, the protection and preservation of this sector is encouraged. Similar in nature to recommended strategies #2 and #3, these efforts provide the County with valuable information as the current use(s), availability of lands, underlying conditions, and other criteria to provide information on lands that may be eligible (supportive) of additional development activities or other types of future uses beyond current agricultural practices.
23. US 17 Corridor Study. The County should identify and develop corridor planning studies within selected areas (i.e., US 17) to assess and provide recommendations on land use, transportation including pedestrian linkages, redevelopment and economic development opportunities, gateways/visual and aesthetics components (community character). Additional items and analysis should be further identified prior to the initiation of these plans. Corridor Plans typically identify strategies and enhancements that identify the link between transportation and land use, increase the quality of life, incorporate the preference and requirements of the people using the roadway corridors, create safe and attractive streets, reduce the negative effects of motor vehicles on the environment, and reinforce the historical, agricultural, and natural setting.

| Strategy | Key Players/Stakeholders | Required Funding | Funding Source | Reference (Page #) |
|---|--|------------------|----------------------------------|---|
| County-City Joint meetings (“Council of Governments”) | Hardee County, Wauchula, Bowling Green, Zolfo Springs | No | | 12, 15, 19, 51, 52, 71, 72 |
| Economic Feasibility Study/Marketing and Branding Study | Chamber of Commerce/EDC, | Yes | EDC | 4, 12, 19 |
| Eco-Tourism Master Plan/Trails, Greenways, Blueways | Hardee County, Cities, Peace River Explorations | Yes | FDOT | 3, 4, 5, 7, 12, 13, 18, 19, 20, 22, 23, 24, 29, 30, 31, 42, 45, 52, 59, |
| Airport Master Plan and Marketing Plan | City of Wauchula, Hardee County, EDC | Yes | Local/FDOT | 4, 11, 12, 13, 18, 19, 40, 41, 49, 73 |
| Strengthening Community Branding and Partnerships | EDC/IDA/Chamber of Commerce, CRA | Yes | EDC/EDA/Chamber | 4, 12, 13, 18, 19, 22, 23, 32, 44 |
| County-Wide Parks Master Plan including Hardee Lakes Park Plans | Hardee County/City(s) | Yes | County/City(s) | 4, 7, 13, 15, 18, 19, 20, 21, 23, 29, 38, 40, 42, 44, 45, 46, 59, 72, |
| Fee Structure Review and Analysis, including incentives | Hardee County/EDC | No | County/EDC | 4, 13, 39, 45, 50 |
| Establish Neighborhood Planning Program | Hardee County (initially), Wauchula, Bowling Green, Zolfo Springs | Yes | County/City(s) | 3, 14, 18, 19, 38, 40, 41, 52 |
| Utility Service Provision to targeted areas (e.g., MSTU) | Hardee County, neighborhood representatives | Yes | County/City(s)/Utility providers | 4, 8, 14, 39, |
| Enhancing Community Image | Hardee County, Wauchula, Bowling Green, Zolfo Springs, Chamber, CRA, Main Street | Yes* | County/City(s)/CRA/Main Street | 4, 5, 14, 18, 29, 44, 45, 46. 52 |
| Elevate Community Services | Hardee County, Wauchula, Bowling Green, Zolfo Springs | Yes* | | 14, 50 |
| Safe Routes To School (SRTS) Program | Hardee County, School Board, Cities | Yes | FDOT/SRTS | 14, 18, 38, 40, 41, 62 |
| Monitor US 17 Improvements | Hardee County, Cities | No | | 10, 14, 16, 52 |
| Community Coordinator/Community Calendar | Hardee County, Cities, Chamber of Commerce, Wauchula CRA | Yes* | County/City(s)/Chamber | 15, 19, |
| Private Property Rights Protection | | No | | 3, 14, 18, 19, 38, 40, 41, 52 |
| Support the Wauchula CRA and its Redevelopment Efforts | Wauchula CRA, Chamber of Commerce, Main Street Wauchula | No | | 4, 7, 8, 12, 15, 30, 31, 44, 53 |
| Identification and pursuit of alternative funding sources | Hardee County, Wauchula, Bowling Green, Zolfo Springs | No | | 5, 13, 15, 16, 23, 40, 50, 72, 73 |
| Monitor and update local codes and regulations based on State and Federal regulations | Hardee County, Wauchula, Bowling Green, Zolfo Springs, Chamber, EDC | No | | 4, 6, 15, 16, 18, 19, 24, 25, 27, 45, 52, 60, 71 |
| Promotion of industrial, business parks | EDC, IDA, Chamber, Hardee County, Wauchula, Bowling Green, Zolfo Springs | Yes* | EDC/EDA/IDC/County | 4, 5, 7, 8, 10, 11, 12, 13, 15, 16, 26, 28, 30, 53, 60, 71, 73, 74 |
| Continue Supporting Economic Development Strategies | EDC, IDA, Chamber, Wauchula CRA, Hardee County, Wauchula, Bowling Green, Zolfo Springs | Yes* | | 3, 4, 7, 8, 9, 13, 14, 15, 16, 19, 29, 52, 73 |
| • Identification/Development of Potential Public & Private Sites | | | | |
| • Identification/Review of Business Retention and Expansion Programs | | | | |
| Identify future growth areas and modify codes to support | Hardee County, Wauchula, Bowling Green, Zolfo Springs | Yes | County/City(s) | 2, 3, 5, 6, 10, 16, 18, 22, 45, 53, 71 |
| Agricultural-Vacant Lands Study | Hardee County | Yes | County | 4, 10, 16, 24, |
| US 17 Corridor Study | Hardee County, Wauchula, Bowling Green, Zolfo Springs | Yes | County/FDOT | 10, 12, 16, 52, 53 |

SELECTED STRATEGIES

As previously noted, the following list of Recommended Strategies provides the County and other stakeholders with a detailed discussion or “break out” of selected strategies. This discussion includes additional information, proposed “key” next steps and case studies with the intent of providing the County with a format and outline for future application. The three strategies presented are: #3 Eco-tourism Master Plan; #4 Airport Expansion and Feasibility Plan and #23 US Corridor Study.

3. **Consider solicitation of an eco-tourism master plan including components related to Trails/Greenways/Blueways (including Peace River as a catalyst for planning efforts).** Funding for a plan has been provided by the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) through their Local Agency Program (LAP). Following the completion of this plan, the community will be in better position to seek additional funding opportunities for identified projects including trails and trail facilities. This type of plan should be considered an integral part of recommended strategy #2 (above) as these plans can serve as a component of a larger economic development strategy, identify community assets, provide plans and guidance on future growth and development of facilities and also identify potential funding sources. These Plans can also promote economic development for the small and local businesses in the County and identify potential opportunities for niche services. The economic impacts of such facilities have been analyzed in numerous state and federal projects in addition to the overall improvements in community health and multi-modal connectivity, especially in areas with higher pedestrian and bicycle needs.
 - a. While the County has access to major thoroughfares, Hardee County also has numerous scenic county roadways that can further support increased bicycle and pedestrian activities.
 - b. This plan should also consider establishing/creating a blueways management plan which could identify land use (current and planned land use along the blueways) and possible protection measures, natural resource identification (identification and application of best management practices based on existing resources, habitats and other environmental features), and blueways coordination between federal, state and local agencies.
 - i. Improve existing public access to facilities
 - ii. Identify and develop new facilities and trail(s) locations

The purpose of a trails/greenways/blueways master plan is to provide the County with a planning tool that will identify preferred (recommended) corridors for multi-modal connectivity, eco-tourism components including blueways and other similar situated facilities, capital improvement projects and policy recommendations focused on improving the quality of transportation choices within the community. These plans typically coordinate efforts of the entire community including the County, cities, school board and other stakeholder groups with the Florida Department of Environmental Protection’s (FDEP) Office of Greenways and Trails, and FDOT. Generally, the intent is to connect these groups with trails, parks, transportation facilities and water features in the region. One of the outcomes of a plan is to identify local and regional connectivity that can increase the attractiveness of the community to the region and the State, and to promote the community’s attributes to further economic development opportunities. As identified in the Hendry County Comprehensive Pathway Plan, “Due to Hendry County’s rural landscape, pathway corridors and greenways have the capability of serving a dual purpose: 1) to complete a Countywide transportation network of alternative modes of travel and 2) to preserve pathway corridor green spaces that can be integrated and set aside for ecological and recreational purposes.”

Budget: Depending on the requested scope components, number of community and stakeholder meetings, availability of technical information through a geographic information system (GIS), safe-routes-to-school (SRTS) component, requested design(s) for trails, trailheads and similar facilities, a study can range between \$95,000 to \$200,000; other components including marketing, branding, advertising and/or detailed analysis of the airport and its economic impacts would elevate this estimate.

Case Studies:

- Hendry County Comprehensive Pathway Plan
 - DeSoto County Countywide Greenway, Bicycle and Sidewalk System Master Plan
 - City of Dunnellon Bicycle, Pedestrian and Blueway Facilities Master Plan
4. **Consider solicitation of an airport expansion and feasibility master plan analyzing existing and project air traffic, airport related and support services, establishment of an industrial/office park adjacent to the airport, marketing and branding of the airport, and identification of potential funding sources.**
 - c. Create formal joint marketing and business recruitment, expansion and retention efforts with Hardee County, City of Wauchula/Airport Board and the Hardee County Chamber of Commerce.

- d. Explore opportunities to market and create opportunities between the aviation and aviation support uses including logistics and/or those businesses able to benefit from close proximity to a public airport. Currently, Wauchula Municipal Airport has direct and indirect economic impacts of \$458,000 and \$407,500, respectively (source: FDOT-Aviation Office, March 2010).

Per a Florida Department of Transportation – Aviation Office Report, general aviation operations are anticipated to increase from 8,200 in 2009 to approximately 9,000 operations by 2019. The Report further notes the airport could support Very Light Jet (VLJ) operations and increases in both recreational and business activity. By comparison, the Arcadia Municipal Airport experienced 19,370 General Aviation Operations in 2008 and estimated to increase to over 20,600 by 2018.

The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) and Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) require airports receiving development grants to conduct periodic updates of their planning documents. As noted by FDOT, The Florida Legislature annually appropriates a portion of the State Transportation Fund to the State Aviation Program. Each of the programs and funds under the State Aviation Program have specific eligibility and project requirements. These funds include airport improvement programs, discretionary capacity program and strategic intermodal system-aviation component. To qualify, “each project must be consistent with the airport’s role as defined in the Florida Aviation System Panel and capital projects must be part of an FDOT approved master plan or airport layout plan.” In addition, certain FAA certifications are required

The community can commission an airport feasibility and master plan to provide a market and financial feasibility analysis of the potential expansion of the airport and surrounding area. While FDOT funds could be used for on-airport improvements, off-airport improvements including development of a business park/airport support services area would need to be funded by other sources (i.e., City, County, EDC/IDA). The master plan would provide a step-by-step or phased outline for development and expansion of the airport. The plan would provide a capital improvements plan (CIP) or similar mechanism to identify future improvements and schedules. This allows for development in a financially feasible and responsible manner.

Similar studies have been undertaken in two to three phases to consider the critical aspects of the airport’s future development. It is recommended that each phase be reviewed with an advisory committee, airport authority, City of Wauchula and/or Hardee County prior to undertaking subsequent phases. The initial phase could include analysis of the market potential for the airport including review of:

- Local and regional characteristics including socioeconomic data, community plans, physical and environmental characteristics, and weather data as they may relate to airport development potential.
- Review physical and operational characteristics and constraints at other area airports.
- Identify current and projected aviation activity that the airport could reasonably expect.
- Conduct research of other airports and identify possible market niches for the airport.
- Perform a preliminary cost/benefit analysis on the potential expansion of infrastructure at the airport.
- Additional analysis would include financial feasibility of expanding and operating the airport over a certain number of years including identification of funding sources and availability.

Subsequent phases would examine the long term development potential surrounding the airport including available infrastructure (i.e., water, sewer, roadways, electricity, etc.) and future infrastructure needs.

Hernando County provides three industrial parks adjacent to or in close proximity to the airport. In addition, the County includes a specific set of comprehensive plan goals and policies regarding the airport and the creation of an Airport Planned Development District in an effort to further support off-airport development activities.

Budget: Depending on the requested scope components and the level of information requested, preliminary analysis of landside conditions with regard to adjacent land use, security, entryways, preliminary infrastructure analysis, and conceptual land use plan, a study can range between \$15,000 to \$30,000; other components including marketing, branding, advertising and/or detailed analysis of the airport and its economic impacts would elevate this estimate to between \$100,000 to \$150,000.

Case Studies:

- Sebring Regional Airport
- Crystal River Airport
- Hernando County Airport & Business Complex
- Bob Sikes Airport – Okaloosa County

24. **US 17 Corridor Study.** The County should identify and develop corridor planning studies within selected areas (i.e., US 17) to assess and provide recommendations on land use, transportation including pedestrian linkages, redevelopment and economic development opportunities, gateways/visual and aesthetics components (community character). Additional items and analysis should be further identified prior to the initiation of these plans. Corridor Plans typically identify strategies and enhancements that identify the link between transportation and land use, increase the quality of life, incorporate the preference and requirements of the people using the roadway corridors, create safe and attractive streets, reduce the negative effects of motor vehicles on the environment, and reinforce the historical, agricultural, and natural setting.

The process of preparing a corridor study or management plan is an integral part of a community's land use and transportation development pattern. There is a basic process of developing a plan that is typically identified and agreed upon as part of the initial community review process. The study can be led by the community (i.e., Hardee County), the Florida Department of Transportation, or other similar group or combination of groups. Early in the process it is ideal to establish a broad set of goals and objectives that will serve as the guiding point for the corridor study, providing guidance in determining what data to collect and the framework for its analysis. For this reason, goals and objectives must be developed prior to the collection of any data. Some goals and objectives may be stated tentatively and revised as analysis is undertaken. A statement of goals and list of objectives are typically developed that they can be measured, and the measures for each objective must be identified.

Once goals and objectives are defined, maps of the study area provide a foundation for future activities. Each goal may require technical analysis. However, the corridor study area should include the communities within, and immediately surrounding, the corridor's core impacts. In addition, analysis should recognize that existing and/or future projects within the corridor may have other outcomes to communities beyond the initial scope of the study. As a result, the study area may change as more information is collected and alternative strategies are developed or recommended.

The boundaries of a study are often delineated by physical barriers, land-use patterns, municipal or service provision areas of responsibility, demographic characteristics, and community perceptions. The elements that make up the corridor and subsequent study area can include almost anything that can be seen from, or impacted by the roadway and the surrounding corridor. Boundaries of the plan can be determined by mapping the corridor's "viewshed" - the surface area that can be seen from a specific viewpoint along the road. This is an important component because it involves early identification of important corridor features, and provides an appraisal of the visual impact that development may have on roadway area views.

Important elements to consider when developing a corridor master plan:

1. Know the Corridor; collect and review available data.
2. Understand the local and regional context of the corridor.
3. Identify existing land use features, land use and development controls, future land use, other, similar studies, environmental features, opportunities/constraints, supporting transportation network, community assets and facilities, transportation impacts (existing and future) based on trip generation, trip/traffic modes.
4. Develop choices and general suggestions for implementation; be flexible on early concepts.

Budget: Depending on the requested scope components and the length of the corridor, a baseline corridor study can range between \$25,000 to \$50,000; additional study items and/or parameters can range up.

Case Studies:

- Route 50 Corridor Coalition (Virginia)
- Paris Pike (Kentucky)
- US 521/SC 9 Corridor Study (South Carolina)
- Nashville Northeast Corridor Mobility Study (Tennessee)

FOCUS GROUP FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Focus Groups identified various activities that could be involved with the specific element and then ranked each item as to their recommended level of importance and or an item warranting further analysis. Priority issues include economic development, growth management and infrastructure, education, youth issues, government accountability and services, environmental, cultural and recreational opportunities, and family and social services.

The findings from each Focus Group are identified below:

Economic Development

Activity

1. Recruit trades/technical jobs
2. Eco-Tourism
3. Attract corporate offices, management oriented, regional offices
4. Continue/expand agriculture (crops, technology)
5. Target industry(s) with needs for rail, high energy use
6. Agricultural support services
7. More restaurants and entertainment activities (movie, music, cafes)
8. Revitalize main street/historic core
9. Develop a community garden, (indoor) flea market (south of Ace Hardware on US 17)
10. Develop/expand Hardee Lakes Park (w/ cabins and additional facilities)
11. Expand Pioneer Days; add Ranch and Citrus tours
12. Sports/training complex (professional sports), including outdoor activities
13. Trucking and distribution services
14. Expand season residents opportunities

Land Use

Activity

1. Strengthen agricultural land uses and support services
2. No mining/limiting the mining overlay/post-reclamation activities
3. Agricultural/Eco-Tourism including ranching lifestyle/farming and citrus/Peace River tours, connected trails and parks (including a master plan for greenways and blueways)
4. Protection of property rights; prescriptive vs. restrictive development regulations
5. More affordable/workforce housing
6. Privately funded projects
7. Wayfinding/marketing including Hardee County maps, flyers with points of interest
8. Specialty hospital, hospital services
9. More residential (clustered)
10. Cultural festivals
11. More public information on mining
12. Public-private partnerships for development
13. Bike trails/cross county trails
14. Local incentivized businesses (including a farmer's market)

Infrastructure

Activity

1. Airport expansion including marketing and corporate fly-ins
2. More ADA compliant sidewalks within both Neighborhoods/communities and the County
3. Code enforcement; enhanced and increased
4. Enhanced Parks & Recreation infrastructure
5. Expansion of public water and sewer service County-wide
6. Improve/upgrade stormwater infrastructure
7. Replacement of aged watermains for both water service and emergency services (i.e., fire protection)
8. Privatize utilities within the City
9. Bridge and road replacement; improvements in the schedule and prioritization of these projects
10. Utilize prison trustee work program for County projects
11. Arterial travelways enhancements including visual improvement
12. Develop a traffic calming program for neighborhood improvements
13. Develop a Safe-Routes-To-School (SRTS) program

Quality of Life

Activity

1. Community beautification/code enforcement/improve image
2. Opportunities for youth/family recreation
3. Education system improvements
4. Reduce drug and alcohol use/teen pregnancy rates
5. Planning for mining reclamation – including County benefits/uses
6. Street lighting – safe neighborhoods
7. Sidewalks – improved transportation and connectivity
8. High speed internet/continued technology improvements
9. Impacts of/perception of illegal aliens, immigration (i.e., Hardee County viewed as a sanctuary)
10. Enhance/create a vibrant downtown
11. Diversify restaurants/evening entertainment
12. Celebrate/provide faith based activities
13. Hardee Lakes – continued improvement
14. Aviation Business/Services (improved/expanded – general aviation, commercial, international)

Education

Activity

1. Public-Private-Partnerships (help fund gaps in education system) and partnerships with businesses and trusts
2. Provide local flexibility for curriculum and programs
3. Accountability for parents; create successful opportunities
4. Programs to engage kids (educational)
5. Expand technical-vocational programs
6. Ways/opportunities to keep jobs here (not export)
7. Expanding school-family support
8. Expand diversity of educational opportunities (pre-k, public, private) and look at careers and transferability
9. Separate vocational-tech school (i.e., 3 year program)
10. Look at successes across the state and nation, and apply the model(s) here
11. Establish internships with businesses and industries (provide opportunities that can qualify for class credit)

Steering Committee

Comments and Questions

1. Rail access plus available land(s) adjacent to it create a critical advantage for Hardee County
2. Community Events: Pioneer Days is the same time as the Orange Blossom Festival; what can Hardee County do to compete with other communities and their events
 - a. Re-invent Pioneer Park Days – Orange Blossom Festival. Look at re-enactments, new events and re-engage the community; possibly redefine who/what is allowed to participate (i.e., limitations on the numbers and types of vendors to ensure diversity).
3. EDC – currently underway with an initial marketing and branding analysis in association with the University of South Florida
4. Hardee Lakes Park and the development of RV sites is “low hanging fruit”. This should be identified as in progress; however, keep on the list of recommendations.
5. Identify/hire a “Project Manager” for community events – establish a public relations (PR) person in charge of marketing for the community. Could be in partnership with the City, County, Chamber of Commerce, Main Street Wauchula, Community Redevelopment Agency, Wauchula Airport, etc...).
 - a. PR Position could also provide, maintain the “Community Calendar” and be the central source of information.
6. Establish a joint Board of County Commissioners and School Board meeting to discuss issues and opportunities.
7. How does Hardee County compare with other communities, especially with regard to regulations, marketing, information dissemination, etc.?
8. There is a need to clarify and build on networking and relationships between and among the cities and the County.
 - a. Look to establish joint workshops on issues of mutual concern.
9. Update the Land Development Code with regard to processes and uses; the code should be more responsive to “how can we do this?” versus, “you cannot do that”.
10. Identify necessary updates to the various Codes with regard to post-mining uses and reclamation, including working with the applicable state agencies for lakes creation allowances.
11. Support for Eco-Tourism; however, ensure there is broad support for a range of potential activities and not limit to one element or activity.
12. Wauchula Airport: there is the need to quantify its economic impact(s) and how does it compare to similar sized communities.
 - a. Are there opportunities to capitalize on the existing ultra-light/glider/gyro-copter niche market that occasionally uses the facility?

13. Incorporate specific steps in the economic development recommendations including creating a master list of available sites, infrastructure, etc., including both public and private sector opportunities.
14. Identify what types of technical jobs the community wants and what educational requirements are available within Hardee County, including possible partnerships with the School District.
15. Identify existing small business retention programs (local, regional and state) and look to strengthen retention plus expansion programs.
 - a. Balance new business recruitment and expansion with existing business retention programs
 - b. Provide education and support to existing businesses.

FOCUS GROUP AND STEERING COMMITTEE COMMENTS AND STRATEGY RANKINGS

The County identified five areas of review and analysis that were discussed through a series of "Focus Groups" and community meetings to prepare the Visioning Report and to provide guidance for future projects and decisions. These groups included:

- Economic Development,
- Land Use/ Recreation/ Open Space/ Environment,
- Quality of Life/Housing,
- Education/ Workforce,
- Infrastructure.

In addition and as part of the Visioning Process, County staff, interacted with five classes from Hardee County High School totaling over 100 students sharing information about the Visioning process and soliciting their input and feedback. The results from the various Focus Group meetings, including the student discussions is listed below.

Land Use/Recreation/Open Space/Environment

Comments received from the January 25, 2011 Community Wide Kick-Off

- (Re)develop an RV park at Hardee Lakes (utility hook ups/development)
- Provide public hunting and fishing opportunities & expansion (parks and recreation)
- Lakes – develop recreation and RV opportunities
- Baseball – develop a spring training facility (see also Econ Development)
- More urban – less country/rural
- Develop regional sports complex - indoor/outdoor (see also Quality of Life)
 - Baseball
 - Basketball
 - Football
- Develop a recreational facility destination for state/region (see also Econ Development)
- Need for overall code enforcement (see also Economic Development)
- Develop Hardee Lakes – RV Park with utilities
- Diversify Hardee Lakes uses
- Agriculture (see also Economic Development)
 - Loss of way of life with loss of agricultural land
 - Preserve and enhance
 - Backbone and future of community
 - Prevent loss of agriculture to mining
- More recreation for youth
 - Youth centers
 - After school programs
 - Pool
 - Theater
 - Hands-on (playground equipment)
- Peace River
 - Tourism
 - Hiking-camping
 - Fishing
 - Eco-lodge
 - Wayfinding points

- Historical context
- Land use
 - Develop downtown (Arcadia as an example)
 - Save historic context and facades
 - Clean energy – solar farms and infrastructure
- New development in and out of downtown core
 - Need infill of abandoned spaces
 - Not too dense
- Need more 55+ communities
- Need pedestrian connectivity across county
- County-wide trails system
- Develop a Hardee Lakes RV Park with dump stations, water and electricity
- Community garden
- More activities for youth
- Environmental
 - Wetlands protection
 - Habitat
 - Post-mining scenario
- More youth activities
- Phosphate/post phosphate (see also Econ Development)
- Zoning should match comprehensive plan
- “do changes now vs. later” when someone is looking to locate in the community
- Lack of parks (see also Infrastructure)
- Need code enforcement (see also Economic Development)
 - Improve visual appearance of community
- No regional garbage dump
- Need more/better walkable community
- Reduce vehicle miles travelled to services/employment/retail (see also Infrastructure)
- Small town rural character (like)
- County stealing property rights
- County – if code does not allow, you can’t do and too many interpretations (planning/zoning)
- Lack of consistency

Community Comments February 21, 2011

Hardee County's future land use is approximately 95% rural, 5% urban. Is there urban land sufficient to meet the County's growth projections and demands?

- By projection and current absorption rates, yes
- Need to make sure of better planning for facilities

What would you like to see in the County?

- Youth activities involving the Peace River (canoe/kayak/fishing)
- Activities directed to/serving the minority population; increased recreational areas/opportunities (i.e., soccer fields)
- “talk to the youth” and find out what they want
- More Pioneer Park Days (similar activities), Story of Jesus
- More activities and use of the covered arena
- Need more lights at facilities

- Equestrian activities (trail rides, rodeo); tourism
- Rodeo facilities not publicly accessible currently; County owns the land but the Cattlemen's Association built/operates the facility
- Piggyback on Highlands Hammock – horse trails and activities
- Look to expand or do similar use as Reality Ranch in Zolfo Springs
- Keep the open spaces; preserve open spaces
- What attracted you to Hardee County? Orangutan sanctuary (existing) and their educational facilities/opportunities
- Maintain beauty
- Talk to the RV parks, residents and ask why they come to Hardee County
- Keep rural values
- Need access to Peace River (put in/pull out) points
- More space and activities for RV'ers, bicyclists, motorcyclists
- Build on the existing museum and sanctuary(s); look for educational opportunities and links
- Solomon's castle
- Value the community's resources
- Maintain historic preservation
- Look at the population fluctuations due to snow birds, seasonal workers and full time residents
- Bring back retail / commercial to downtown Wauchula
- Create opportunity for Agriculture to come back

What is your vision for Hardee County?

- More lakes (post mining)
- Not increase the mining overlay
- Increased post mining reclamation activities
- Hardee County is the "biggest little county in Florida"
- Co-existing between Agriculture and Phosphate
- Focus on next generation
- Develop around the lakes (reclamation) and create deeper lakes that can be used as an amenity
- Growth in designated areas
- 1 dwelling unit per 2.5 acres (currently 1 dwelling unit per 5 acres); increases affordability and decreases taxes
- Adequate, affordable workforce housing
- Infill in existing residential areas (cities and rural communities)
- More variety in urban and rural development
- Use reclaimed lands for energy production (solar, bio-fuels, algae)
- Preserve the natural lands and resources
- Preserve "this Florida" (old time Florida, natural, historical, wildlife, "cowboy way")
- Peace River – conserve resources and develop launch points
- Conflict: Rivers/Ag and Phosphate (need increased protection for creeks and streams)
 - What is the County going to do to protect the land and water?
 - Limit the role of phosphate?
- Phosphate industry has certain entitlements guaranteed; mining activities are proposed through (existing and proposed DRI's) 2050-2060 (potential)
 - Requires mining master plans including reclamation plans
 - Regulations are in the Comprehensive Plan and the Land Development Code
 - Tree replacement criteria are included (pending soil types)
 - Last Comprehensive Plan update provided other uses (i.e., future land use designation of Industrial, etc.). Currently, no demand for those areas due to existing inventory of industrial, commercial lands

- look for more connectivity of habitat/wildlife with reclamation

Community Comments and Ranking of Priorities March 8, 2011

Following a brief introduction and review of the first Land Use/Environment/Open Space Focus Group community and stakeholder comments, the focus group participants were asked to provide a listing of desired development related activities (short or long term). Each participant was given the opportunity to vote for two activities they would like to see for Hardee County. The activities included:

- Agricultural/Eco-Tourism including ranching lifestyle/farming and citrus/Peace River tours, connected trails and parks (including a master plan for greenways and blueways)^{*1}
- Cultural festivals
- No mining/limiting the mining overlay
- Wayfinding/marketing including Hardee County maps, flyers with points of interest
- More public information on mining
- Protection of property rights; prescriptive vs. restrictive development regulations
- Specialty hospital, hospital services
- More residential (clustered)
- More affordable/workforce housing
- Public-private partnerships for development
- Bike trails/cross county trails
- Strengthen agricultural land uses and support services
- Local incentivized businesses (including a farmer's market)
- Privately funded projects

*1 = Due to the similarities between two items, the focus group combined Agricultural/Eco-Tourism and Connected Environmental Trails into one overall activity.

Participants were given the opportunity to discuss the activities, ask additional questions, discuss possible grouping of certain activities and talk with the other attendees prior to voting. The activities received the following votes:

| Activity | Votes |
|---|-------|
| Strengthen agricultural land uses and support services | 10 |
| No mining/limiting the mining overlay/post-reclamation activities | 9 |
| Agricultural/Eco-Tourism including ranching lifestyle/farming and citrus/Peace River tours, connected trails and parks (including a master plan for greenways and blueways) | 8 |
| Protection of property rights; prescriptive vs. restrictive development regulations | 6 |
| More affordable/workforce housing | 6 |
| Privately funded projects | 4 |
| Wayfinding/marketing including Hardee County maps, flyers with points of interest | 1 |
| Specialty hospital, hospital services | 1 |
| More residential (clustered) | 1 |
| Cultural festivals | 0 |
| More public information on mining | 0 |
| Public-private partnerships for development | 0 |
| Bike trails/cross county trails | 0 |
| Local incentivized businesses (including a farmer's market) | 0 |

June 7, 2011

The Consulting Team began the meeting with a summary of the previous Land Use/Open Space/Environment Focus Group and the Steering Committee's comments. The team reviewed the community's priorities and rankings and then asked the attendees to identify who should be involved in developing the programs and proceeding with initiatives (Community Collaborators), and who should lead the effort (Community Champion).

The results were as follows:

1-1. Strengthen agricultural land uses and support services:

Who in the Community should be involved in this?

- Farm Bureau
- Cattleman Association
- Horticultural Association
- Peace River Valley Citrus Growers Association
- Farm Worker Housing
- Peace River Explorations
- Florida Citrus Mutual
- FFA
- 4-H
- People for Protecting Peace River (3PR)
- Packing Houses
- Farmers
- Banker/Realtors
- Key Land Owners
- Elected Officials – Cities and County
- Regional Planning Council
- Extension Office
- Planning & Zoning Department

Who should lead the effort?

- Planning & Zoning Department

Specific Actions/Strategies:

- Use reclaimed land for agricultural uses; identify lands suitable for various agricultural activities
 - Note: 25% of the County is identified by the Mining Overlay and subject to current and/or future mining activities
- Establish a farmer's market; identify and provide opportunities for local and regional restaurants to use local products. Also target school system
- Increase the exposure of the "7 Baskets"
- Establish a fund/identify funding sources for agricultural activities (i.e., off-set start-up costs, expansion costs, diversification) and support services (i.e., processing facilities)
- Develop migrant worker support services
 - Ensure there is an adequate, available workforce
- Identify ways to reduce or minimize regulatory barriers to agricultural activities (state and local)
 - Monitor regulations and preliminary discussions that may alter practices
 - Also need to look at habitats, water use consumption and water quality
- Identify ways to protect agricultural and water withdrawal; balance agricultural needs/mining needs/growth
- Promote home rule in the County and discourage pre-emption
- Provide permit assistance at both the local and state levels

1-2. Mining/Limitations/Post-Reclamation

Who in the Community should be involved in this?

- Board of County Commissioners
- Planning & Zoning/Mining Department
- 3PR
- Mining Industries
- SWFWMD
- IFAS
- USGS
- DEP
- ACOE
- EPA
- Florida Native Plants Society (FNPS)
- Realtors
- EDC
- Property Owners adjacent to the mines
- Sierra Club
- Manasota 88

Who should lead the effort?

- BoCC
- Planning & Zoning
- 3PR
- Mining Industries

Specific Actions/Strategies:

- Develop more lakes on post mining lands; need to work with the State to allow/permit lakes as part of reclamation plans
- Need to undertake a water use study (mining vs. agricultural needs)
- Protect water sources (balance future needs and verify county/users are not overcommitted for providing water
 - Look at ways to balance the eco-system based on water withdrawals
 - Provide a means for an independent testing mechanism for water levels and quality
- Require/ensure closure and reclamation plans are sufficient and funded. Note: the County requires a per acre fee/bond for reclamation.
- Make information on mining/mining permits more accessible; consider establishing a location on the County's website
- Develop ways to balance the fertilizer and agricultural needs (including a better understanding)
- The community needs to better understand the current regulations and reclamation requirements
- Review the criteria needed for a variance to the regulations
 - Include an informational workshop or materials that explain the new state laws, county regulations and the review processes.

1-3. Agricultural/Eco-Tourism (including ranching lifestyle/farming and citrus/Peace River tours, connected trails and parks (including master plan for greenways and blueways):

Who in the Community should be involved in this?

- Peace River Explorations
- People for Protecting Peace River

- Water Management District
- Parks (County and State)
- Friends of the Parks
- Chamber of Commerce
- Florida's Heartland Redevelopment Initiative (FHREDI)
- EDC
- State Department of Commerce
- Florida Birding Trails
- Board of County Commissioners
- Main Street/CRA

Who should lead the effort?

- County Parks
- EDC
- Planning & Zoning

Specific Actions/Strategies:

- Tie Agricultural activities to educational components (co-ops, classes, mentoring)
- Establish a program to support and build agriculture in the community (i.e., meet quarterly or monthly)
- Establish an "Orange Blossom Festival" or similar; identify a festival(s) based on the growing seasons to draw visitors to the community; look to partner with a local civic or service organization ("start small and build")
- Provide funds/grants for startup, expansion or diversification of products (see also 1-1 Strengthen Agricultural Land Uses and Support Services)
- Identify and remove/streamline regulatory barriers for agricultural activities, festivals and similar, including those "on-site" (i.e., on the farm)
- Identify properties that may be interested in hosting festivals
- Change the mindset in government – have faith in the people and owners to do what's right
- Need to study a local citrus processing plant/facility; work with the co-ops to understand the needs
 - Identify location(s) for a facility
 - Partner with the USDA

1-4. Protection of Property rights; prescriptive vs. restrictive development regulations

Who in the Community should be involved in this?

- Land Owners
- SWFWMD (Technical Support)
- Builders Association
- Farm Bureau
- Realtors
- Planning & Zoning
- BoCC
- Chamber of Commerce
- EDC
- Mining Owners

Who should lead the effort?

- Planning & Zoning

Specific Actions/Strategies:

- See also recommended strategies for item 1-1, specifically with regard to regulatory barriers
- Review the current regulations and identify obstacles/challenges that can be removed or reduced to achieve this goal

Economic Development

Comments received from the January 25, 2011 Community Wide Kick-Off

Economic Development (Agriculture/Industrial/Commercial)

- Build a movie theater/Cineplex (economic development)
- Develop a landfill/incinerator (garbage issue) – economic dollar generator (other communities pay to use the facility) (see also Infrastructure)
- Reduce overall taxes from (by using) mining funds (increase return rate on mining taxes back to Hardee County)
- Develop industrial economic zones
 - Bring in mid-size companies
 - Livable wages/medical benefits
 - “Control” mines – develop good policy/regulations , not have to rely on litigation
- Provide more industry/tax incentives
- Solicit industry/industries – provide development/ incentive packages
- Keep Phosphate mining in Hardee County
- Re-appropriate mining funds back to the community – more severance tax from state for recreation and utilities
- Baseball – develop a spring training facility (see also Land Use/Rec)
- Need more employment opportunities
- Existing business assistance – keep what we have and make it prosper
- Recycling center/separation (see also Infrastructure)
 - Privatize and create jobs
- Keep children in Hardee Co
 - Options for education
 - Options for work
 - Options for employment
 - Sustainable jobs/economy
- More retail opportunities
- (County) Grow with people/jobs/businesses
- Develop a recreational facility destination for state/region (see also Land Use/Rec)
- Hardee County is an agricultural county – keep agriculture nature
- Need clean industry
- Agriculture (see also Land Use)
 - Loss of way of life with loss of ag land
 - Preserve and enhance
 - Backbone and future of community
 - Prevent loss of agriculture to mining
- Protection from mining in the southeast corner of the County
 - Protect for future growth
- Mining lands – what happens to the mines when done digging/mining?
- Higher dollar/square foot in the downtown (rents too high)
- Create industry opportunities related to agricultural land
 - Citrus processing
 - Ethanol – use from citrus and bio-fuel
- Develop a farmer’s market (see also Quality of Life)
 - Community garden
 - In downtown

- Lack of restaurants – need more (see also Quality of Life)
- Spend our money in Hardee
- Need clean industry
- Need phosphate industry
- Growth: jobs, entertainment
- Competition for foreign citrus, ease strain from foreign goods
- Future of agricultural business
- Provide local preference process in government projects for county businesses
- Good jobs
- Light industrial
 - Government help/environment to support jobs
- Better environment for jobs
- Increased tourism
- Agriculture is key
- Phosphate/post phosphate (see also Land Use)
- Need Jobs/clean industry
- Spend Hardee County dollars in Hardee County
- Economic development – jobs creation
 - Salary increases
 - Promote tourism
- Keep and retain farmers
 - Farm worker housing needed
- Don't do a backwards approach now – not build field of dreams in hopes they will come
- Issue: lack of jobs
 - Phosphate will end; agriculture decreasing
- Need for job development and economic development
 - Can create opportunities
- Make room in codes and regulations for various uses and new business opportunities for downtown Wauchula
- More entertainment activities (see also Quality of Life)
- People work here but live elsewhere (spend money in other communities)
- Keep Hardee County citizens in Hardee County
- Lack of government accountability
- Privatize any governmental services
 - Reduce county employees pensions (not person who put life on the line – police/fire)
- Keep children in Hardee Co (see also Economic Development)
 - Options for education
 - Options for work
 - Options for employment
 - Sustainable jobs/economy
- Need for overall code enforcement (see also Land Use)
- Stop wasting taxpayer's money
- Lack of accountability and follow thru (i.e., FEMA Plan)
- Want local control, not outside influence on Board/community
- Top County employees take a pay cut during recession/down times – not firefighters/police (life on the line personnel)
- No retirement funds for Commissioners

- Consistency and fair services
- County spending on some things with less to show for it ("efficiency")
- Keep kids in Hardee County – make dollars from chargers to use, outside companies fee/use dollars
- Need code enforcement (see also Land Use)
 - Improve visual appearance of community

What is your idea of Economic Development?

- Commerce; activities to bring growth to the community
- Save the economic aspects of existing businesses
- Money – reasonable wages and good jobs
- Job growth

Four components of Economic Development

- Retain existing businesses in business – in the County
- Business expansion
 - What are the costs to start/stay in business in the community?
- Relocation of businesses to the community
 - Must be different than what is here
 - What businesses do you travel to outside of the County?
 - Build on tourism components
 - Need to actively enterprise/advertise the available resources (i.e. Land)
 - Have to look at ways to increase your population
 - Must grow your population first, business will follow
 - Build incrementally, it will not all develop at once
 - Put the community on the map (effective advertising, web searches, information distribution)
 - Look at your existing and targeted demographics and then pursue those types of business and industry that fit that model
- Creation of jobs/new business (local incubator)
 - What types of businesses do you want/not want? Is there language in your comprehensive plan and land development regulations to either encourage or prohibit specific uses?

Community Comment/Issue:

- Hardee County is an easy place to come and build
- Current demographics are not attractive to businesses looking here; too many socio-economic issues (low per capita income, teen pregnancy, etc.)
- Population could double and we would never know it

What businesses do you think would be the easiest to attract?

- What the coasts don't have and cannot attract (Peace River/tourism)
- Hunting leases
 - Issue: but don't want them open to the public; keep private
- Off-road vehicles/UTV/motorcycle facilities (primitive areas to ride, not tracks)
 - The State has RTP grants available for the development of a facility.

Business and industry looking to locate here will bring additional, spin-off and supporting businesses (hotels, restaurants, suppliers, etc.)

What is your Vision? What are your ideas of where you want to go in the future, looking forward?

- Diverse mixture of agriculture, phosphate, healthcare, manufacturing, industrial
- Growth but not a loss of historic ties/ties to agriculture
- Crop diversification
- Agriculture, retirees, light industrial, shopping/entertainment
- Maintain and preserve the natural resources
- Build facilities to support better connectivity
- Higher education/co-op/vo-tech opportunities
- Mixture of agriculture, retirees, light industry, corporate offices, tourism/Peace River
- Huge job creator/industry but also enhance what we have; diversify and expand agriculture, expand and enhance healthcare
- Retirees/baby-boomers; they bring dollars to spend and health care needs
- Increase in schools
- Opportunities to improve; need to look at all aspects and not exclude certain opportunities on the front end
- Less commute equals less dollars having to spend on transportation, more money to spend elsewhere
- "Middle of nowhere but close to everywhere"
- Focus and capitalize on what we have (resources, land, transportation, infrastructure)

What are the priorities?

- Agriculture
- Diversification/opportunities
- Mining and post mining (need to address what happens to land after activities)
- Light industry
- Tourism
- More business friendly
- Also:
 - Sports complex/youth sport
 - Healthcare
 - Technology
 - Energy production
 - Community visual appearance and aesthetics
 - Capitalize on Churches
- Develop a uniform brand and image to provide a consistent message to those looking to come to Hardee County

Community Comments and Ranking of Priorities March 1, 2011

Following a brief introduction and review of the first Economic Development Focus Group community and stakeholder comments, the consulting team asked the focus group participants to provide a listing of desired economic development activities (short or long term). Each participant was given the opportunity to vote for two activities they would like to see for Hardee County. The activities included:

- Attract corporate offices, management oriented, regional offices
- Revitalize main street/historic core
- Develop a community garden, (indoor) flea market (south of Ace Hardware on US 17)
- Develop/expand Hardee Lakes Park (w/ cabins and additional facilities)
- Expand Pioneer Days; add Ranch and Citrus tours
- More restaurants and entertainment activities (movie, music, cafes)
- Recruit trades/technical jobs
- Eco-Tourism

- Target industry(s) with needs for rail, high energy use
- Sports/training complex (professional sports), including outdoor activities
- Continue/expand agriculture (crops, technology)
- Expand season residents opportunities
- Agricultural support services
- Trucking and distribution services

Participants were given the opportunity to discuss the activities, ask additional questions and talk with the other attendees prior to voting. The consulting team tallied the votes, ranking the activities as follows:

| Activity | Votes |
|---|-------|
| Recruit trades/technical jobs | 7 |
| Eco-Tourism | 7 |
| Attract corporate offices, management oriented, regional offices | 6 |
| Continue/expand agriculture (crops, technology) | 6 |
| Target industry(s) with needs for rail, high energy use | 5 |
| Agricultural support services | 5 |
| More restaurants and entertainment activities (movie, music, cafes) | 4 |
| Revitalize main street/historic core | 2 |
| Develop a community garden, (indoor) flea market (south of Ace Hardware on US 17) | 2 |
| Develop/expand Hardee Lakes Park (w/ cabins and additional facilities) | 2 |
| Expand Pioneer Days; add Ranch and Citrus tours | 2 |
| Sports/training complex (professional sports), including outdoor activities | 2 |
| Trucking and distribution services | 1 |
| Expand season residents opportunities | 0 |

Following the voting and ranking of activities, the participants were given the opportunity to expand on their votes and why they voted for certain activities. Participants were also given the opportunity to provide comments on what activities and actions were currently ongoing in the community that could be further supported and enhanced by these ideas.

May 24, 2011

The Consulting Team began the meeting with a summary of the previous Economic Development Focus Group and the Steering Committee's comments. The team reviewed the community's priorities and rankings and then asked the attendees to identify who should be involved in developing the programs and proceeding with initiatives (Community Collaborators), and who should lead the effort (Community Champion).

The results were as follows:

1-1. Recruit Trades & Technical Jobs:

Who in the Community should be involved in this?

- Economic Development Director/EDC
- Board of County Commissioners
- Colleges
- School Board
- Chamber of Commerce
- Jim Kelly
- Media
- Technical Experts/Headhunters
- Banks (local and outside)
- Real Estate Offices/Realtors

- Farm Bureau
- Healthcare/FINR
- Cities (“what’s good for the County is good for the Cities”)
- Power providers
- Main Street/CRA

Who should lead the effort?

- Economic Development Director/EDC

Specific Actions/Strategies:

- Identify existing opportunities beyond the existing commerce park
- Update/create a master downtown/county-wide list of available properties
- Pre-identify workforce and skills (and update on a regular basis)
- Expand and identify collaboration with school system and colleges
- Focus on expanding trade/technical jobs and businesses
- Identify “green” jobs and business opportunities

1-2. Eco-Tourism:

Who in the Community should be involved in this?

- Peace River Explorations
- People for Protecting Peace River
- Water Management District
- Parks (County and State)
- Friends of the Parks
- Chamber of Commerce
- Florida’s Heartland Redevelopment Initiative (FHREDI)
- EDC
- State Department of Commerce
- Visit Florida
- Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FFWCC)
- Florida Birding Trails
- Audubon Society
- Center for Great Apes
- Charlotte Harbour Estuary Program
- FDOT (including Blueways & Greenways)
- Pioneer Village
- Board of County Commissioners
- Solomon’s Castle
- Passion Play
- Main Street/CRA

Who should lead the effort?

- Peace River Explorations
 - Chamber of Commerce
 - FHREDI
 - Main Street/CRA

Specific Actions/Strategies:

- Identify property owners along the Peace River (willing to participate); also provide public education on use conflicts
- Confirm central location for public access sites/local eco-tourism sites and activities (i.e., clearinghouse of information)
- Develop a master blueways/greenways plan, including marketing approach
- Educate users on available activities
- Identify liability issues (see also public education on use conflicts)

2-1. Attract corporate offices, management oriented, regional offices

Who in the Community should be involved in this?

- Economic Development Director/EDC
- Board of County Commissioners
- Colleges
- School Board
- Chamber of Commerce
- Jim Kelly
- Media
- Technical Experts/Headhunters
- Banks (local and outside)
- Real Estate Offices/Realtors
- Farm Bureau
- Healthcare/FINR
- Cities ("what's good for the County is good for the Cities")
- Power providers
- Main Street/CRA

Who should lead the effort?

- Economic Development Director/EDC

Specific Actions/Strategies:

- Build on hometown values and feelings ("Hardee way of life")
- Invest and expand health care and medical services
- Discuss with Florida Hospital and FINR roles for generating additional interest
- Create and or update a list of amenities and community-wide activities for potential employers/employees

2-2. Continue/expand agriculture (crops, technology)

Who in the Community should be involved in this?

- Peace River Citrus
- Farm Bureau
- Cattlemen's/women's Association
- IFAS
- EDC/IDA
- USF-Polytechnic
- Water Management District
- Florida Nurserymen's Association
- Florida Foreign Trade

- USDA
- Bankers/Farm Credit
- SBA
- SBDC
- Board of County Commissioners
- Mining Industry
- Dairyman's Association

Who should lead the effort?

- EDC/IDA

Specific Actions/Strategies:

- Identify/inventory all existing agricultural products produced/grown in Hardee County – look for opportunities to expand and or re-establish, including opportunities for diversification
- Supply locally grown produce to local/regional restaurants
- Provide incentives for risk/change
- Establish a mentoring program between agricultural community and schools/those interested in agriculture; knowledge sharing
- Establish a community identity/branding
 - Provide and promote awareness through internet and other media sources
- Identify and fill gaps in existing services
- Analyze transportation and infrastructure availability

3-1. Target industry(s) with needs for rail, high energy use

Who in the Community should be involved in this?

- Mining Industry
- Energy Production Industry (Natural Gas, Peoples TECO Gulfstream, Florida Gas Transmission)
- Chamber of Commerce
- Economic Development Director/EDC
- Board of County Commissioners
- Colleges
- School Board
- Jim Kelly
- Media
- Technical Experts/Headhunters
- Banks (local and outside)
- Real Estate Offices/Realtors
- Farm Bureau
- Healthcare/FINR
- Cities (“what’s good for the County is good for the Cities”)
- Power providers
- Main Street/CRA

Who should lead the effort?

- EDC/IDA

Note: Hardee County has an electrical surplus and also has alternative energy projects (although not overall cost-effective at this time).

3-2. Agricultural support services

Who in the Community should be involved in this?

- Peace River Citrus
- Farm Bureau
- Cattlemen's/women's Association
- IFAS
- EDC/IDA
- USF-Polytechnic
- Water Management District
- Florida Nurserymen's Association
- Florida Foreign Trade
- USDA
- Bankers/Farm Credit
- SBA
- SBDC
- Board of County Commissioners
- Mining Industry
- Dairyman's Association
- Large farm/land holdings
- Farmers/livestock market
- Fertilizer Association
- "unnamed suitors"

Who should lead the effort?

- EDC/IDA

Note: there is also a need for more sophisticated agriculture/farms/production; need to involve the brokers also

Education

Comments received from the January 25, 2011 Community Wide Kick-Off

- Education needs to be better – “Quality Education”
- Improve funding for schools
 - Supplies/sources
 - County wide improvements
- Supplemental education opportunities
 - High school (vo-tech), college
 - Programs (sylvan)
 - Government/community funds to support
- Education
 - Ease teacher meetings/business day-to-day (too much besides just teaching)
 - Allow teachers focus on students more
 - Individual family contributions (tax dollars) are not paying for/ not meeting the demands placed on school system
 - Develop a charter school
 - Develop a Vo-Tech High School
- Jobs, skills training
 - Night school for adults
- Improve education system
- Education facilities are fine
- Keep/improve agricultural education
- Vo-Tech opportunities
 - Not just computers/more skills
- Improve education
- Skills training/Vo-Tech
- Education improvements
 - Trade School/ Vo-Tech
 - Both higher and lower education
- Need higher education center
- More education choices (i.e., charter school)
- Issue: healthcare and school needs (see also Economic Development)
- Need safe placed for kids (other than the YMCA)

Community Comments February 22, 2011

What are your general thoughts and comments regarding the education opportunities in the community?

- Well structured
- Good teachers/administration
- Good community involvement but could be more
- The administrative load on teachers exceeds the teaching load; too much paperwork and too many meetings
- There is an importance of schools and the education system for new residents and potential jobs
- Have to look at the continuum of education – pre-k, k-12 to post-secondary/community colleges
- Multi-lingual school age population in the community
- There is a need for job/employment opportunities to retain youth/families in Hardee County
- More technical and computer skills needed in the schools and in the workforce
- Tie education to workforce

- State of Florida's disconnect (% college vs. available jobs and curriculum)
- High School has a career tech program
 - Adding animal biotechnology to HS curriculum this year
 - Current programs offer industry certifications
 - Florid Farm Bureau certification
 - First responder program?
- Society of Mining Engineers sponsors a science fair
- Vocational/career tech funding is a challenge
- Significant impacts on the school system with state budget cuts
- By the time a child is 5 yrs. old, 90% of learning has occurred
- Bring back the "little red schoolhouse" or similar program (pre-k)
- Lack of available pre-k due to public/state funding
- Two post-secondary institutions
 - SFCC (South Florida Community College – Hardee Campus)
 - USF-Polytechnic
 - 2 programs: administrative/student assistance; blue sky (entrepreneurial programs)
- SFCC
 - Bachelor's program to be available 2012 - business management
- Communities proximity to these and other institutions is a plus
- How much of the taxes paid in Hardee County stay in Hardee County?
- Need to create an expectation of achievement by students (at home and in the community)
- Need to create opportunities for parent/family/home support for children
- Can expand the role of the Churches in education/support for families and children
- Look at neighborhood schooling
- Parents (and the community) need to set a good example for the children
- Look at Florida Virtual School (but family support and discipline needed)
- Youth mentors are present; look to mirror and expand
 - Big Brothers/Big Sisters programs are available in the schools
 - "Take Stock In Children" program
 - "College Reach Out Program" CROP

What is your Vision for Education in Hardee County? What are the opportunities?

- More parent involvement and accountability
- Mentoring program for parents
- Involvement from state and national groups
- Improvements in health/healthy habits
- Increased communication (can't legislate)
- Need family support/network
- Need Christian School
- Expand existing student mentoring programs

Community Comments and Ranking of Priorities March 10, 2011

Following a brief introduction and review of the first Education/Workforce Focus Group community and stakeholder comments, the focus group participants were asked to provide a listing of desired development related activities (short or long term). Each participant was given the opportunity to vote for two activities they would like to see for Hardee County. The activities included:

- Ways/opportunities to keep jobs here (not export)

- Programs to engage kids (educational)
- Expand technical-vocational programs
- Separate vo-tech school (i.e., 3 yr program)
- Expanding school-family support
- Expand diversity of educational opportunities (pre-k, public, private) and look at careers and transferability
- Accountability for parents; create successful opportunities
- Public-Private-Partnerships (help fund gaps in education system) and partnerships with businesses and trusts
- Establish internships with businesses and industries (can quality for class credit)
- Look at successes across the state and nation, and apply the model(s) here
- Provide local flexibility for curriculum and programs

Participants were given the opportunity to discuss the activities, ask additional questions, discuss possible grouping of certain activities and talk with the other attendees prior to voting. The activities received the following votes:

| Activity | Votes |
|--|-------|
| Public-Private-Partnerships (help fund gaps in education system) and partnerships with businesses and trusts | 13 |
| Provide local flexibility for curriculum and programs | 12 |
| Accountability for parents; create successful opportunities | 8 |
| Programs to engage kids (educational) | 7 |
| Expand technical-vocational programs | 7 |
| Ways/opportunities to keep jobs here (not export) | 4 |
| Expanding school-family support | 3 |
| Expand diversity of educational opportunities (pre-k, public, private) and look at careers and transferability | 2 |
| Separate vo-tech school (i.e., 3 yr program) | 1 |
| Look at successes across the state and nation, and apply the model(s) here | 1 |
| Establish internships with businesses and industries (can quality for class credit) | 0 |

July 19, 2011

The Consulting Team began the meeting with a summary of the previous Education/Work Force Focus Group and the Steering Committee's comments. The team reviewed the community's priorities and rankings and then asked the attendees to identify who should be involved in developing the programs and proceeding with initiatives (Community Collaborators), and who should lead the effort (Community Champion).

The results were as follows:

1-1. Public-Private-Partnerships (help fund gaps in education system) and partnerships with businesses and trusts:

Who in the Community should be involved in this?

- Businesses (Publix, Banks, EDC, Chamber)
- Farm Bureau
- Cattleman's Association
- Workforce Development
- Churches
- State Agencies
- Civic Organizations/Service Clubs/Interest Clubs (Garden Club, Music, Art)
- Extension Agents
- Hospital
- Industry (Industrial Certifications) (Mosaic, CF)
- SFCC/USF-Polytechnic

- Utility Companies
- Senior Citizens (SCORE)
- Education Foundation

Who should lead the effort?

- Chamber Representative
- School Board
- Ministerial Representative
- Business Leader (CORE)
- SFCC

* Discussion Items:

- Need to balance certifications, graduates with business needs
- Teach work ethic
- Create community trust for "student businesses" (own and work grooves and properties)
- Involve State Legislators with interest to change educational requirements

1-3. Accountability for parents; create successful opportunities:

Who in the Community should be involved in this?

- Churches
- Migrant Outreach
- Businesses Support for employees – school related activities with their children
- Rotary (mentoring program with the schools) and other Civic Groups
- Teachers
- Pre-School Providers
- Hospitals/Pre-Natal
- School Assistance

Who should lead the effort?

- Planning & Zoning Department

1-4. Programs to engage kids (educational) and Expand technical-vocational programs:

Who in the Community should be involved in this?

- USF/SFCC
- EDC/IDA
- Parents-Parent Organizations
- Farm Bureau
- Regional – CFRPC, County Legislative/School Board
- Heartland Educational Consortium (Lake Placid)
- Federal & State Legislators
- Businesses (Internships)
- DCT
- Junior ROTC
- Regional Vo-Tech (Look at Travis in Polk County)

Who should lead the effort?

- Florida Workforce Development
- Heartland Educational Consortium

1-2. Provide local flexibility for curriculum and programs:

Who in the Community should be involved in this?

- See also 1-1 and the asterisk (*) noted items in 1-1
- This priority becomes an "Action Item" vs. a stand-alone item
- Look at cross-reference of this topic and Focus Group and other Focus Groups

Infrastructure

Comments received from the January 25, 2011 Community Wide Kick-Off

- Develop community transit – for the elderly and less mobile (these groups lack transportation)
- Develop a landfill/incinerator (garbage issue) – economic dollar generator (other communities pay to use the facility) (see also Econ Development)
- Revitalize infrastructure/improvements (i.e., roads)
- Recycling center/separation (see also Economic Development)
 - Privatize and create jobs
- Better road maintenance – pave dirt roads
- Lack of parks (see also Land Use)
- Increase fire hydrants/fire protection throughout county (better insurance rates)
- Improved lighting and sidewalks (Safe Routes To School)
- Improved lighting will lead to less crime
- Need recycling program
- Recycling program (county/regional)
- Reduce vehicle miles travelled to services/employment/retail (see also Land Use)
- Future development/services
 - Services not segregated
 - Segments of community ignored

Community Comments February 28, 2011

Hardee County has approximately 310 miles of paved roads and approximately 202 miles of unpaved roads. What are your thoughts on this?

- Keep unpaved roads (want more)
- County gets request to stabilize unpaved roads to minimize dust, repair ruts and improve conditions
- More paved roads equals more maintenance costs
- Hardee County receives gas tax funds that can be used for roads/maintenance
- Unpaved roads equal increased long-term costs but less up front capital costs (as compared to paved roads)
- Also have to look at paved road conditions and maintenance
- The County's road maintenance program can be used as an economic development tool if they use local contractors to repair and improve roads; local contractor provides local jobs and revenues back to the County

Other infrastructure thoughts and needs?

- Need for (increased) lighting in selected areas throughout the County; look at roads and parks
 - Can look to a lighting district for a smaller area versus county-wide
- Need more sidewalks and lighting especially for the kids (in and around schools and for the bus stops)
 - There are unsafe conditions for kids walking to the school bus stop
- Need more animal control
- Look at providing a rate incentive if someone provides a private security light in these areas
- Need to look at lighting in targeted areas
- There is a lack of lighting in the MLK neighborhood
 - IF the area was annexed, the City of Wauchula could provide that service
- Ask the State/FDOT to reallocate lighting funds from 17 and other main roads to other roads in the County
- Emergency Services; currently Hardee County has an ISO rating of 4
- Disagree; outside of 10 miles from a fire station, the insurance rate is higher

- If the County had paid professionals (i.e., paid volunteers) with necessary equipment and apparatus, the ISO and other rates could go down
- In the rural areas, fire assessments can be several thousand dollars
- EMS/Fire Calls last year = 2000/265 respectively.
 - Are you funding the right mix of services?
- Fire/EMS have dual certifications
 - Are EMS calls up due to "emergency/insurance" needs (i.e., no insurance)?
 - Concern: calls in the outer portions of the County require back up responder service from Polk County/ Arcadia if there are additional calls (closer in to town)
 - Concern with 911 system: with a different phone prefix, operators have difficulty in finding their location
 - Dual service (i.e., rolling fire truck and ambulance) is not cost effective
 - If the County looked at 3 services versus the current 2, could save money and equipment overall, and have specific response needs/calls
 - Need to look at/study the types of calls and costs
 - Emergency services have good, professional staff
 - Need to look at a fire MSTU instead of the current MSBU; current MSBU does not fully fund itself and requires additional general funds
 - Current fire tax is too high; deters economic development
 - Need additional dollars for staffing and also look at ways to be more efficient in service delivery
 - Current fire service fees are based on the 2004 Fire Study
 - Question: what can you afford and how can you best serve the community?
 - Need to look at fees (bills) to insurance company and at-fault persons if County has to provide services
 - Concern: Fire Assessments versus insurance rates and fees
 - Want qualified, trained professional staff; equipped to provide those services
- Need an alternative to the hospital/ER for minor items (i.e., urgent care facility)
- Landfill – how much time is left in the current permit?
 - 5-6 years of permitted life left/2 years
- County needs a recycling program; also helps by extending the life of the landfill by reducing the total wastes going into it
 - Start-up costs are high; costs to separate are also high
 - If the recycling market was better, could offset costs
- Need to study a landfill incinerator
 - Incinerator can generate electricity at the facility and potentially other areas
- Look at burning manure as a waste-to-energy stream
- What is the availability of water and sewer?
- Most of the County is on well/septic; central (public) water and sewer available close in to cities and in cities
 - State regulates well and septic systems
- Need to look at the condition of the existing lines and facilities
- There are private systems in the County; concern is the level of nitrates in the water
- State and federal systems funds for utility assumption
- Private systems cost dollars too, "no free ride for service"

What is your vision or need for Hardee County in the future?

- Lights in Magnolia Manor
- Stormwater treatment/flood mitigation (Wauchula and dense areas)
- Additional lots for Habitat for Humanity
- Road improvements – County Line Road specifically

- Central water to all population centers
- More welcoming roadways and entrances into the community and cities
- Increased code enforcement
- More business friendly
 - Services
 - Facilities
 - Cost of getting/staying in business
 - Taxes/fees as impediment to new business
 - Incentives for staying/coming to Hardee County for business
 - Availability of public infrastructure
- (improve) Quality of water
- Better water and sewer rates
- Streamline regulatory process
 - Provide an advocate for new business permitting process
 - More efficient/timely responses
- Improvements to the transportation system including maintenance
- Look at additional revenue streams and opportunities for new funding sources
- Question: how do we pay for all of the services, needs in the Community? Only have limited resources
- Improve business environment; its difficult for small businesses to get into business

Community Comments and Ranking of Priorities March 15, 2011

The focus group was provided with a brief introduction and review of what is included in infrastructure and an overview of existing County infrastructure including water, sewer, roadways, bridges, parks and recreation facilities, emergency services and the Wauchula Airport. The meeting attendees were then provided a summary of the first Infrastructure Focus Group community and stakeholder comments.

The focus group participants were asked to provide a listing of desired development related activities (short or long term) with regard to community infrastructure. Each participant was given the opportunity to discuss the activities and vote for two activities they would like to see for Hardee County.

The activities included:

- More ADA compliant sidewalks within both neighborhoods/communities and the County
- Replacement of aged watermains for both water service and emergency services (i.e., fire protection)
- Bridge and road replacement; improvements in the schedule and prioritization of these projects
- Privatize utilities within the City
- Improve/upgrade stormwater infrastructure
- Expansion of public water and sewer service County-wide
- Develop a Safe-Routes-To-School (SRTS) program
- Utilize prison trustee work program for County projects
- Enhanced Parks & Recreation infrastructure
- Code enforcement; enhanced and increased
- Arterial travelways enhancements including visual improvement
- Develop a traffic calming program for neighborhood improvements
- Airport expansion including marketing and corporate fly-ins

Participants were given the opportunity to discuss the activities, ask additional questions, discuss possible grouping of certain activities and talk with the other attendees prior to voting. The participants also discussed ongoing County activities and master plans currently in place to address some of these items. The activities received the following votes:

| Activity | Votes |
|--|-------|
| Airport expansion including marketing and corporate fly-ins | 12 |
| More ADA compliant sidewalks within both Neighborhoods/communities and the County | 7 |
| Code enforcement; enhanced and increased | 7 |
| Enhanced Parks & Recreation infrastructure | 6 |
| Expansion of public water and sewer service County-wide | 5 |
| Improve/upgrade stormwater infrastructure | 4 |
| Replacement of aged watermains for both water service and emergency services (i.e., fire protection) | 3 |
| Privatize utilities within the City | 2 |
| Bridge and road replacement; improvements in the schedule and prioritization of these projects | 1 |
| Utilize prison trustee work program for County projects | 1 |
| Arterial travelways enhancements including visual improvement | 1 |
| Develop a traffic calming program for neighborhood improvements | 1 |
| Develop a Safe-Routes-To-School (SRTS) program | 0 |

June 28, 2011

The Consulting Team began the meeting with a summary of the previous Infrastructure Focus Group and the Steering Committee's comments. The team reviewed the community's priorities and rankings and then asked the attendees to identify who should be involved in developing the programs and proceeding with initiatives (Community Collaborators), and who should lead the effort (Community Champion).

The results were as follows:

1-1. Airport expansion including marketing and corporate fly-ins:

Who in the Community should be involved in this?

- Board of County Commissioners
- Law Enforcement
- Airport Board
- City of Wauchula
- FAA
- Mosaic/Corporate Industry/CF
- Military
- Benson Ultra-light
- EDC
- Chamber of Commerce

Specific Actions/Strategies:

- Analyze and expand the range of uses: aviation and non-aviation at/close proximity to the airport
- Build and or expand:
 - Recreational activities and opportunities
 - Aviation uses
 - Aviation support uses
 - Non-aviation uses
 - Support agriculture uses/other eco-development activities
- Need expertise from the aviation users

Who should lead the effort?

- Airport Board

- City of Wauchula

1-2. More ADA compliant sidewalks within both Neighborhoods/ communities and the County:

Who in the Community should be involved in this?

- County Departments (Multiple – Planning, Engineering, Utilities, Community Development, etc.)
- Cities
- School Board
- Neighborhood Organizations
- FDOT
- Law Enforcement
- CRA

Who should lead the effort?

- Planning & Zoning Department

Specific Actions/Strategies:

- Continue grant programs to add sidewalks in neighborhoods/around schools
- Prioritize where demand is evident and right-of-way is available.
 - Review and identify historical pedestrian routes and where roads are used (i.e., where there is a lack of sidewalks)
- Evaluation sidewalk needs and conditions (where sidewalks are present) beyond internal development areas
- Weigh/identify long-term maintenance costs
- When designing/installing sidewalks and pedestrian connections, separate users, where feasible, and reduce opportunities for conflicts

1-3. Code enforcement; enhanced and increased:

The Focus Group recommended this item moved to and be more a part of Quality of Life and Land Use due to:

- Community responsibility
- Community pride
- Community involvement
- Help each other/love & caring
- Outreach
- Community clean up(s)
- Board vs. Court System (look to set up/establish a County Code Enforcement Board to review complaints before it goes to the Courts)

Specific Actions/Strategies:

- Prefer complaint driven code enforcement strategies (reactive vs. proactive)
 - Calls should only be made (by property owners) when situation becomes a problem.
- Establish community values and appearance guidelines but also provide opportunities to “self-regulate”
- Establish “Keep Hardee Beautiful” but make it community-based and provide community assistance.

1-4. Enhanced Parks & Recreation infrastructure:

Who in the Community should be involved in this?

- Planning & Zoning
- School Board

- County Community Development
- Neighborhood Groups
- County Parks & Recreation
- City Representatives
- Water Management District (grants)
- DEP (grants)
- FRDAP (grants)
- Service & Civic Groups

Who should lead the effort?

- Planning & Zoning
- County Parks & Recreation

Specific Actions/Strategies:

- Hardee Lakes – provide more campsites, horse/equestrian areas, trails, etc.
- Better develop/support existing facilities
- Keep up Pioneer Park
- Consider overall maintenance costs
- Look for additional water access
- Augment/increase festivals and special events
 - Create “Orange Blossom Festival”
- Identify and develop bike trails/courses
- Identify/establish birding opportunities and butterfly gardens
- Analyze need/location for additional soccer fields and facilities
- Prepare and provide a map identifying uses, parks and similar facilities

Quality of Life (Includes Housing, Recreation, Healthcare)

Comments received from the January 25, 2011 Community Wide Kick-Off

- Use foreclosed homes to provide migrant workers with opportunities for housing
- More housing
- Foreclosures are high
- Help with banks (cut-red tape)
- Extend to farm help including farm workers
- Housing:
 - Foreclosures
 - Affordable
 - Diverse
- Lack of quality, affordable housing
- Grants for residential rehab county-wide (more money for Habitat)
- Need safe places for kids (other than the YMCA)
- "Pretty lady in an ugly dress"
- Keep children in Hardee Co (see also Economic Development)
 - Options for education
 - Options for work
 - Options for employment
 - Sustainable jobs/economy
- Issue: healthcare and school needs (see also Economic Development)
- Better access to health care
 - Needs community support
 - Specialty health care needed
 - Veteran's and retiree health care needed
- Build a movie theater/Cineplex (see also Economic Development)
- Develop regional sports complex - indoor/outdoor (see also Land Use/Recreation)
 - Baseball
 - Basketball
 - Football
- More entertainment activities (see also Economic Development)
- Develop a farmer's market (see also Quality of Life)
 - Community garden
 - In downtown
- Lack of restaurants – need more (see also Quality of Life)
- More recreation for youth
 - Youth centers
 - After school programs
 - Pool
 - Theater
 - Hands-on (playground equipment)
- Peace River
 - Tourism
 - Hiking-camping

- Fishing
- Eco-lodge
- Wayfinding points
- Historical context
- Great place to grow up
- Get Washington DC's ear
 - Education
 - Crime
 - Teen issues
- Like:
 - Youth deaths/crime is down
 - Family here
 - Community values
 - Geographic location
 - Friendly – “never eat alone”
 - Culture
 - Local sense, know who you are dealing with
 - Churches and family environment
 - Small town atmosphere
- Lack of activities (after work hours)
- Improve public welfare/Hardee County (opportunities for assistance/needs)
- Opportunities to keep families in Hardee

Community Comments February 15, 2011

What is your idea of Quality of Life?

- The Constitution, Bill of Rights and Freedoms we have
- Clean water/air/soil
- Quality of environment
- Secure /safe environment
- High standard of living /education
- Sense of community/jobs/livable wage/salary
- Small town feel/Church/accountable
- Small town feel
- Everyone knows you
- Family – roots are here and a place for the future
- Population could double and we would not know it
- Marketing - what image do you want to show for Hardee County
 - Image – Family Based?

Components of Quality of Life

- Livability
 - Affected by: safety, education, health/healthy living/healthcare, cultural and community activities, environment, recreation, transportation and political environment
 - Political Environment affects everyone, from State and Federal to County and Cities Business expansion
 - Positive: Florida Avenue/Main Street paving, CRA,
- Education – what type of schools do you have and how are they rated?

- Safety/Security – low crime
- Health Care – need for good quality health care across the board (specialty care, emergency care, active adults)
- Infrastructure – Positive – Cell Phone Service/Broadband
- Housing – quality and quantity, availability
 - Comments ranging from “there is no issue with housing” to “we need more options and flexibility” in housing.
 - Need to look at existing housing stock and its condition
 - Companies and individuals look for schools, health care and housing.
- Environment -

How does Hardee County rate/rank in these areas? What information is available to companies and individuals coming to the community (i.e., bank ratings, school ratings, etc...)?

What Quality of Life component would you like to have in the community?

- Consistency in architecture (in the downtown area)
- Hardee Lakes/Pioneer Park (more)
 - RV/hook ups, horse/trails opportunities
- Opportunities for children/children's activities
- Spend more (personal) dollars in Hardee County and build it up
- Preserve Peace River/Eco-Tourism opportunities
 - Enhance waterways
 - River front activities/businesses (hotels, restaurants, retreats)
- More festivals (orange blossom festival)
- More parks/recreational assets/camping/canoeing
- Public and/or private incentives to (re)locate to the County
- ATV Park using state funds?

What components would you not like to have in the community?

- Phosphate mines (leaves a ghost town)
- Adult entertainment
- Casino
- Destruction of the natural environment
- Empty buildings downtown
- What are the costs to start/stay in business in the community? Process and fees are too high including fire fees

What is your Vision? What are your ideas of where you want to go in the future, looking forward?

- Stable growth with opportunities to grow
- Maintain the inviting small town feel
- Secure, family oriented community
- More opportunities for residents to spend their money in the community
- Opportunities/job growth
- Controlled growth
- Vibrant downtown with more activities (build on Friday Night Live and similar events)
- Protection of agricultural resources and opportunities
- Market the County's beauty
- Develop an image to provide a consistent message to those looking to come to Hardee County with information on the community

- Review the regulations to encourage growth (less red tape, more hospitable to business and people going through the system)
- Lessen the cost of doing business
- Cycle of prosperity – “housing/schools” brings people which creates the need for more businesses/services (jobs) which brings more people to the community

Community Comment (received prior to the Focus Group Meeting)

- Need additional funding for primary care network – primary care for uninsured indigent patients to avoid unnecessary ER visits
- Also need transportation to/from for this population
- Previously funded by a grant but no longer available
- Need for additional physicians/medical services

Community Comments and Ranking of Priorities March 7, 2011

Following a brief introduction and review of the first Quality of Life Focus Group community and stakeholder comments, the consulting team asked the focus group participants to provide a listing of desired quality of life activities (short or long term). Each of the 21 participants was given the opportunity to vote for two activities they would like to see for Hardee County. The activities included:

- Sidewalks – improved transportation and connectivity
- High speed internet/continued technology improvements
- Impacts of/perception of illegal aliens, immigration (i.e., Hardee County viewed as a sanctuary)
- Enhance/create a vibrant downtown
- Planning for mining reclamation – including County benefits/uses
- Community beautification/code enforcement/improve image
- Opportunities for youth/family recreation
- Diversify restaurants/evening entertainment
- Celebrate/provide faith based activities
- Hardee Lakes – continued improvement
- Aviation Business/Services (improved/expanded – general aviation, commercial, international)
- Street lighting – safe neighborhoods
- Education system improvements
- Reduce drug and alcohol use/teen pregnancy rates

Participants were given the opportunity to discuss the activities, ask additional questions and talk with the other attendees prior to voting. The consulting team tallied the votes, ranking the activities as follows:

| Activity | Votes |
|--|-------|
| Community beautification/code enforcement/improve image | 7 |
| Opportunities for youth/family recreation | 6 |
| Education system improvements | 4 |
| Reduce drug and alcohol use/teen pregnancy rates | 4 |
| Planning for mining reclamation – including County benefits/uses | 3 |
| Street lighting – safe neighborhoods | 2 |
| Sidewalks – improved transportation and connectivity | 1 |
| High speed internet/continued technology improvements | 1 |
| Impacts of/perception of illegal aliens, immigration (i.e., Hardee County viewed as a sanctuary) | 1 |
| Enhance/create a vibrant downtown | 1 |

| | |
|--|---|
| Diversify restaurants/evening entertainment | 1 |
| Celebrate/provide faith based activities | 1 |
| Hardee Lakes – continued improvement | 1 |
| Aviation Business/Services (improved/expanded – general aviation, commercial, international) | 1 |

Following the ranking, the participants discussed the impact of existing County (or other community) plans and services in place for improvements (i.e., Hardee Lakes Park Master Plan) on the votes. The participants also began to discuss opportunities to combine and further refine the activities.

August 2, 2011 Focus Group Meeting

The Consulting Team began the meeting with a summary of the previous Quality of Life Focus Group and the Steering Committee's comments. The team reviewed the community's priorities and rankings and then asked the attendees to identify who should be involved in developing the programs and proceeding with initiatives (Community Collaborators), and who should lead the effort (Community Champion).

The results were as follows:

1-1. Community beautification/code enforcement/improve image:

Who in the Community should be involved in this?

- Garden Club
- BoCC
- Cities
- Main Street Board
- CRA
- Peace River Explorations
- Builders Association
- Realtors Association
- "Citizens"
- Neighborhood Association
- Farm Bureau
- County Extension office
- Law Enforcement
- Churches
- Cattlemen's Association

Who should lead the effort?

- Group to decide based on the specific topic and focus

Specific Actions/Strategies:

- Develop/implement a "help thy neighbor" attitude and strategy; involve the local ministerial association and habitat for humanity, civic groups to identify and assist individual properties and or neighborhoods.
 - Develop a citizen/community outreach program
- Develop community education programs about programs and services including establishing "community pride"
- Modify the process of code enforcement including following state statutes. Allow code enforcement officers to visit and inspect sites on adjacent properties when called out to a site

1-2. Opportunities for youth/family recreation:

Who in the Community should be involved in this?

- Newspaper & High School

- School Oriented Service Groups
- FFA/4-H
- Churches/Youth Services
- FFCC
- USF-PolyTech
- YMCA

Who should lead the effort?

- Group to decide based on the specific topic and focus

Other Discussion Items:

- Need to take Pride In the Community
- Be More Positive
- Be Family Oriented
- This is a "Place to Raise Family"
- Need to get the word out to others

Specific Actions/Strategies:

- Establish a mentoring program and process for kids; also develop a mentoring program for parents
- Identify and list a "menu" of good choices and activities available in the community.
 - "get the word out" on FFA, 4H Summer Camps, religious based youth groups, etc.
- Develop a community education component targeting parental involvement in children's lives; establish positive role models and activities.

1-3. Education system improvements/ Reduce drug and alcohol use/teen pregnancy rates:

The Focus Group recommended this item moved to and be more a part of Quality of Life specific goals and/or action items.

Who in the Community should be involved in this?

- Families
- Need to make the right choices
- Library (need to look to extend hours and services)
- Use Senior Citizens as Mentors

Hardee County High School Student Review

Similar to the Focus Groups, the students were asked a series of questions ranging from their current likes/dislikes to future needs and opportunities. The following ideas and thoughts were provided by the students during the half-day session.

CONCEPTS, IDEAS AND COMMENTS

What do you like about Hardee County?

- Small town feel; everyone knows everyone
- Farming
- Quiet
- Nothing
- Oranges
- Wal-Mart ("it's the only fun thing to do around here")
- Small place – know everyone
- Family businesses
- Nice people
- Between the big cities; like the country
- Nothing really
- Traffic is not bad
- Nice parks
- Convenient, don't have to drive far
- Agriculture is a great thing

What would you like to see changed? What are the issues?

- Not enough jobs
 - Need more jobs, including part-time jobs
 - Need more diversity of jobs
 - All of the old people have the jobs
 - Need high paying jobs – medical, engineering
 - Issue: our age group is stereotyped and cannot get jobs, economy is bad and older people are taking jobs
- Can't get to work (lack of transportation)
- No place to go, no entertainment
- Gang problems
- Mall
- Restaurants (more chains)
- Everyone is related
- Keep agriculture, preserve farms
- Want more ranches
- Better schools. Want:
 - Teachers to care more
 - Teachers to teach real world (not for the FCAT)
 - Improved teaching skills
 - Increased students
 - Change in dress code
 - Increased electives
 - Better organized teachers

- Don't think we are getting a good education
- Better clubs with student directed activities
- Better technology
- More dollars for academic/business clubs
- More hunting
- Improved schools
- Movie theaters (lack of), lack of entertainment
- Need upscale stores; more variety of stores
- Need a gym
- Too many older people
- Dunkin Donuts (built it, opened and then closed)
- Need an amusement center, place to buy CD's
- Need an arcade and a place to hang out
- Rebuild the roller skating rink
- Need a concert arena
- Want a bigger airport
- Like to see the dark skies
- Need air conditioned place for graduation; need an arena civic area
- Police (need better)
- Like to see more money for tourism
- Need more money for the community ("How do you make Hardee County better with money?")
- Need more people
- More, better restaurants
- Better schools with computers, books and facilities
- Amusement park/water park
- Not remove orange trees
- Shooting range
- ATV Park/motorcycle racing
- Need a go-kart track
- Need to preserve Peace River
- Better hospital and health care including dentists
- Issue: teen pregnancy
- Issue: high school drop-out rate
- Issue: drugs/drug use in school and the community
- Community is too small, need more people
- Too many dollars are spent on "stupid" things
- "This part of the state will take forever to change"
- Mining is out there in the country; its not a problem
- Need to make sure to replant/reclaim mined lands
- Issue: seasonal population and full time population
- Like to see public art/art studios
- Need more community based organizations
- Don't need motor cross (most local people who ride, ride on own property)

What would you like to see in Hardee County, what would be your legacy project?

- Fashion shows
- New park with camping and other activities
- Better club(s), facilities and equipment
- More, better restaurants
- Homeless shelter
- Better transportation, cars for people who can't afford

Why would you decide to leave Hardee County?

- Want to see other places, enjoy life
- Try better food
- Boring here, nothing else to do
- Too far from activities and bigger cities
- More opportunities and jobs
- College
- Nothing to do, no places to eat, no places to shop
- Not good opportunities for jobs
- Too small
- Everyone knows everyone's business
- See the world
- Family in other locations
- Its ordinary
- If all of these things were here, we would stay.
- Go to different places, better transportation, friendlier people, more accepting of us
- Future is not positive enough for the family I want to have

STEERING COMMITTEE REVIEW& COMMUNITY COMMENTS

- Funding for recommended projects, where will that come from?
 - Development of short, mid, long term goals
 - Identify potential funding sources (grants, public, public-private partnerships, etc.)
 - County Commission review on at least an annual basis and review priorities based on available funding, community needs and recommendations
- Should the Steering Committee review these items from a public perspective, private perspective or what?
- Is the Steering Committee reviewing this just for the County or County plus cities?
- Will the Steering Committee look at government operations and areas of overlap between departments and the County/cities?
- Steering Committee comments and questions directed to whom?
- Consultant's role is to facilitate discussions, provide information and synthesize available data for the focus group discussions; help identify opportunities and constraints; assist the Steering Committee to prioritize projects
- Focus groups should also look at quality of life issues
- Need to increase exposure, attendance and involvement for the focus groups and subsequent meetings (recommendation to announce schedule at civic, social and community groups members are involved in; newspaper articles and column, flyers, web/email blasts)
- How will information from this meeting and focus group meetings get out? Per staff, summaries will be provided upon request, County staff will post the information on the County's website including presentations and audio recording(s) from each meeting typically within two- to three-working days.
- Comments:
 - Garbage/landfill – residents previously opposed locating one in the County

- Education – need to look at the Library and ways to help
- Agricultural Representation on the Steering Committee? Need more
- Funding – use of user fees, membership fees and “pay to play” options to support; don’t raise taxes to support services and facilities
- Need to look at prioritizing needs and programs; look at available resources
- Need to add quality of life items to the reviews
- Make sure this is a living document and reviewed by the County on a regular basis
- Need to reach out to the Ag business/industry and Farm Bureau
- Focus Groups generate ideas and comments; Steering Committee reviews the Focus Group recommendations and refines; Focus Groups review and analyze, and then further refine goals and priorities; Steering Committee finalizes recommendations for BOCC consideration
- Need public-private partnerships for funding of some projects

Steering Committee Comments March 14, 2011

Following a summary of the Focus Group #1 comments, the Steering Committee received an update on the Focus Group #2 meetings including a review of community recommended activities and projects, and rankings.

Following discussion by the Steering Committee of the Focus Group #1 and #2 comments, the Committee provided the following comments and recommendations for Staff and the Consulting Team’s consideration:

- Provide a program for the use of local products and foods in the schools and community services,
- Utilize local preference for county acquired services and goods
- Review and investigate public-private partnerships; look at opportunities for cross-issue strategies.
- Examine best practices from similar communities but keep unique characteristics of Hardee County in mind and apply those, as appropriate, accordingly
- Health care facilities and services – land use vs. quality of life issue? Economic development?
- As we continue to progress, need to consider the feasibility of priorities
- Need to look at a broader representation of community including prioritization of projects
- Need to identify specific actions to reach out for broader community/stakeholder opportunities
- Need to identify champions in the community for specific projects and programs
- “revival of/for Hardee County”
- Need to look at/create momentum for short term success(es)
- Need to look at improved communication and improve perception within the community
- Identify implementation programs and action items

Potential (targeted) groups for stakeholder discussions (i.e., Alternatives for Community Engagement):

- Kiwanis, Rotary, Lions
- Employee groups, County employees
- Builders Association
- Local Businesses
- Chamber of Commerce
- Neighborhood groups
- High School/leadership
- Secret shopper approach/anonymous comments
- Cities within Hardee County; possible joint meeting
- Farm Bureau
- Young professionals
- Community college
- Realtors
- Cattleman’s Association

- Head Start
- Ministerial Association
- Newspaper
 - Look for more coverage, updates and articles
 - Provide comment form and drop box
- Teachers union/School Board employees
- Telephone polling/internet polling
- Shopper/drop box (Wal-Mart, Post Office, restaurants)
- Prison employees
- Electric Co-Op

DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES

Land Use Context

Land uses in the community tend to transition abruptly between urban and rural uses. While minimal to some extent, there is an uneven mix between the County and the Cities with regard to land use. Although there are numerous large parcels within the County, most of these are either in active agriculture (i.e., citrus or cattle), in various stages of mining and/or reclamation, or have limited municipal services, which greatly limits opportunities for well-planned larger projects. These conditions greatly affect the attitudes and behavior of investors, developers, businesses, and residents. A land use and design strategy, guidelines, and standards for future development are needed to ensure that individual actions and projects fit within and reinforce a compatible and consistent land use and design framework for development in the County.

Regulatory Framework

Hardee County has adopted codes and plans governing development throughout the community in accordance with the applicable Florida Statutes. Currently, the County is in the process of preparing a series of updates to the land development code (LDC). Specifically, the County is currently amending the Code to amend:

- Land development review process providing two levels of review to expedite projects already 'permitted by right'.
- Building and development requirements to reflect change in the Florida Building Code.
- Flood zone management regulations to conform to the new Florida Building Code.
- (Consistency with) Comprehensive Plan – Evaluation and Appraisal Report (EAR) based amendments.
- Complete review and rewrite of the LDC eliminating inconsistencies and errors, and providing for a general update to the requirements.

Hardee County Planning and Development is responsible for the development, maintenance and interpretation of adopted and applicable codes and ordinances, including the LDC. The Department is also responsible for the update and implementation of the Comprehensive Plan. The County has completed the EAR-Based Amendments which were adopted by the County in 2010 in accordance with Florida Statutes. These documents provide the foundation for development and redevelopment efforts, along with recreational and conservation policies throughout Hardee County, each municipality maintains its own Comprehensive Plan and Land Development Code respectively.

The Hardee County Comprehensive Plan contains a considerable number of policies that further support the Vision Plan and the recommendations of the various Focus Groups. For reference, a portion of the Goals, Objectives and Policies contained within the 2010 Comprehensive Plan are located in the Appendix. While this is not a complete listing of the existing policies, it provides a broad range of policies addressing economic development, land use, environmental stewardship and protections, parks and open spaces, and ecotourism.

The following sections discuss existing zoning and development patterns, including the Land Development Code (LDC) and the Comprehensive Plan.

Design Elements and Character

No single factor contributes more to the appearance or image of community than its streetscape. Along the gateways and major thoroughfares, an improved streetscape can help define the corridor and introduce the community to visitors and potential businesses. Improvements within the corridor whether it be through the streetscape or the development and implementation of design standards or combination can help implement the community's vision for Hardee County's gateways. Typically, what has been experienced are gateways that have fragmented and visually complicated corridors, or allowed to deteriorate. The impression of strength and stability, which the private sector investor looks for, and which adds to the livability of the area, is missing.

U.S. 17 and the major county thoroughfares are currently designed as automobile oriented areas primarily catering to the needs of vehicles with less emphasis on pedestrian features, design standards and an overall inviting, extension of the community's assets.

- Provide residential and non-residential solutions that ensure future needs and preferences for various opportunities are addressed in the community.
- Maintain or enhance the quantity and quality of parks, recreation facilities, and cultural facilities in the corridor.
- Promote development patterns and intensities that balance the tax base and facilitate fiscal sustainability.

Enhancing the design standards and re-evaluating code enforcement as recommended by the community will represent the biggest departure from the business as usual conditions. This will require discussions and coordination between the County and Cities code enforcement programs to ensure consistency in their application.

Generally, land use patterns and development densities and intensities have a significant impact on the quality of life, community and neighborhood cohesiveness, economic vitality and an overall efficient use of public facilities and services. Like these areas, Hardee County has a renewed interest in the relationships between land use and community design including the ties to environmental/eco-tourism opportunities and creating unique places.

With a focus on the 4 D's (density, diversity, design and destinations), the gateways can develop into a compact, mixed use urban corridor that has an outward orientation of buildings and uses facing the streets rather than parking areas that create more inviting spaces for residents and visitors. The success of these areas may take several years to fully develop; however, this will allow for the public, property owners, developers and the County to come together.

Many cities and counties in similar situations are designating growth areas to better phase or manage their future development and public investments. Based on these ideas, the community sees these areas as an opportunity create value in private holdings, improve blighted properties, create valuable public spaces that are both walkable and sustainable and an overall improvement in civic activity.

Types of land uses and conditions of many properties adjacent to and near the main downtown intersection – US 17 and Main Street – greatly detract from the desired ambiance and character of downtown Wauchula. Redevelopment and improvement of properties would go a long way toward making the county-seat a more attractive location for private investment and business and an appealing destination for shoppers.

The rural communities of Ona, Vandolah and Ft. Green have not witnessed the level of development similar to other areas within the community. While these areas have limited to basic services, they are located at important county crossroads of CR 64 and CR 663 and CR 62 and CR 663, respectively. CR 62 and CR 64 are the primary east-west corridors within the community providing access to Hillsborough, Manatee and Sarasota Counties while CR 663 provides a significant north-south link from Hardee County to Polk County. The Wauchula Municipal Airport is adjacent to and east of the Vandolah community. These areas are also served by an existing rail line which runs parallel to CR 663.

The 2010 Hardee County Comprehensive Plan provided significant opportunities for economic and industrial development within these areas through the creation and application of the Industrial, Commerce Park, Rural Center and Rural Village land use designations. In addition, portions of this corridor are also identified as an Enterprise Zone by the State of Florida. Based on the availability of core infrastructure and multiple modes of transportation, make these areas potentially attractive and relatively easy to develop.

Expectations for what Hardee County is like are influenced by the type, appearance, and condition of development in this gateway area. Much of the existing development in this area generally does not provide an attractive introduction to the County. Streets lack well defined edges, adjacent properties are not well defined or buffered with landscaping, and many developed properties are showing their age and inadequate maintenance.