

ECONOMIC ELEMENT



ALACHUA COUNTY COMPREHENSIVE PLAN 2019-2040



GOAL 1

PROMOTE THE ECONOMIC PROSPERITY OF ALL CITIZENS OF ALACHUA COUNTY, ADDRESS ECONOMIC EQUITY, AND EXPAND AND DIVERSIFY THE COUNTY'S TAX BASE.

OBJECTIVE 1.1 - ECONOMIC DIVERSITY AND SUSTAINABILITY

Diversify the County's economy. Achieve a diversified and sustainable economic base in Alachua County to minimize the vulnerability of the local economy and to provide economic opportunity for all segments of the population that shall include strategies to achieve the elimination of disparities identified in the "Understanding Racial Inequity In Alachua County" Report (2018) and attract and retain high-quality employers and employees within the workforce.

- Policy 1.1.1** Alachua County shall promote the recruitment and expansion of targeted industries that are either growing, high-skill, high wage areas of desired growth, or contribute to regional economic diversification. These targeted industries include, but are not limited to: logistics, and distribution; building component design and manufacturing; aviation services and products, bio-fuels and energy; healthcare services and projects business services; communication services; medical and pharmaceuticals, including biotech; technology driven manufacturing; electronics and other electrical equipment; regional or corporate headquarters; information technology; research and development; eco-tourism; multimedia productions.
- Policy 1.1.2** Alachua County shall promote economic development efforts that build on and complement existing commercial, industrial and agricultural assets in the local economic system.
- Policy 1.1.3** Alachua County shall implement the goals of the Alachua County Visitors and Convention Bureau to promote North Central Florida as a tourism destination through events, advertising and accessible recreation sites. The County shall promote tourism, including eco-tourism, agritourism, heritage tourism and tourism-related businesses which complement the County's environmental, social and economic quality.
- Policy 1.1.4** Alachua County shall promote partnerships with local arts/cultural organizations and sports organizations, and promote unique recreational tourism opportunities including agritourism, paddling trails, the African American Heritage Trail and the Old Florida Heritage Highway master plan.
- Policy 1.1.5** Alachua County shall expand its economic base by creating an environment which encourages job skills training, education and entrepreneurship through strong partnerships with CareerSource North Central Florida, the University of Florida, Santa Fe College, the School Board of Alachua County, YouthBuild/Institute for Workforce Innovation, and related organizations that provide education and training to the community.
- Policy 1.1.6** Consistent with [Energy Element](#) Objective 2.2 and [Future Land Use Element](#) Objectives 6.1 and 6.2, Alachua County shall encourage the location and development of energy conservation, alternative energy, reuse/recycling based industry and sustainable food

production and processing businesses and industry clusters in order to achieve a higher level of sustainable economic development.

- (a) Alachua County shall promote a Recycling Market Development Zone (RMDZ)/Resource Recovery industrial park focused on sustainable production of goods or materials that may include recycled content or resources collected by the County curbside recycling program or otherwise removed from the County's waste stream.
- (b) Consistent with [Future Land Use Element](#) Policy 6.1.4, industries and business sectors that create a market for local agricultural products shall be encouraged to locate or expand existing local business in Alachua County.
- (c) Highlight local specialty foods and farmers markets as part of the County's tourism marketing efforts.

Policy 1.1.7 Alachua County shall establish and maintain land uses and zoning regulations that will facilitate telecommuting, home based occupations, mixed-use centers and other components that are helpful to job creation and retention, including the targeted industries listed in Policy 1.1.1.

Policy 1.1.8 Alachua County shall encourage and allow flexibility in the development of "home-based businesses" consistent with public health and safety concerns. Home-based businesses are defined as a business or commercial activity conducted on a residential property which is accessory to the residential use of that property. The land development regulations shall include thresholds to allow for approval of small-scale rural home-based businesses through administrative review and other mechanisms appropriate to the size, intensity, and impacts of such businesses.

Policy 1.1.9 Consistent with [Energy Element](#) Policy 3.1.4, Alachua County shall promote redevelopment and infill within the Urban Cluster. Recognizing that such redevelopment and infill is an efficient use of land, infrastructure, energy resources, and existing public services, redevelopment of existing sites and buildings shall be encouraged. The County will encourage redevelopment by establishing strategies, such as mixed-use and increased densities, in the goals, objectives, and policies of the [Future Land Use Element](#).

Policy 1.1.10 Recognizing constraints such as location, site access, existing utility infrastructure, or other conditions that may constrain redevelopment in compliance with generally applicable standards, the County shall establish criteria for sites where it would be appropriate to facilitate redevelopment of existing properties based on alternative standards.

OBJECTIVE 1.2 - ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

Provide a comprehensive economic development strategy for Alachua County.

Policy 1.2.1 Alachua County shall encourage the allocation of resources for the retention, expansion and development of local business and the recruitment of businesses and industries. Priority shall be given to the retention, expansion and development of local businesses. This strategy shall include support for efforts to provide expanded opportunities for education, including jobs-related skills training, to increase workforce participation and better employment opportunities for populations that are experiencing economic

disparities identified in the “Understanding Racial Inequity In Alachua County” Report (2018).

Policy 1.2.2 Alachua County shall coordinate its economic development activities with its municipalities and the appropriate federal, state, regional and local agencies including Florida Works, the University of Florida, Santa Fe College, the School Board of Alachua County and economic development organizations.

Policy 1.2.3 Alachua County shall pursue an integrated approach to economic development that includes citizen input and addresses the needs of the County. The County shall support and coordinate the activities of the County’s Economic Development Advisory Committee in the development and implementation and periodic update of the strategic plan for county-wide economic development. This integrated approach shall include components that address the disparities identified in the “Understanding Racial Inequity In Alachua County” Report (2018).

Policy 1.2.4 Alachua County may elect to implement all or part of this element through a contractual agreement with another agency or agencies engaged in the business of economic development. Specific responsibilities shall be set forth in such an agreement to ensure compliance with this plan.

Policy 1.2.5 Alachua County shall collaborate with local economic development organizations to develop a program to retain, expand and develop local businesses. This program shall also explore opportunities for attracting appropriate businesses and industries. This program shall encourage the availability of economic opportunities for all segments of the community, monitor and reduce the extent of underemployment in the community and address economic disparities, recruit businesses and industries that will utilize and train the local labor force as their employees, and retain existing talented workforce.

This program shall:

- (a) Provide current informational material to prospective businesses and industries that includes but is not limited to:
 - (1) An inventory of available commercial and industrial land and vacant buildings.
 - (2) Analysis of labor force characteristics and needs.
 - (3) Availability and cost of electricity, water, sewer, natural gas, broadband communications and essential infrastructure, and any programs or incentives to reduce these costs.
 - (4) Analysis of community characteristics (e.g., quality of public schools and cultural amenities).
 - (5) Provide site location and development review assistance.
- (b) Advise the Local Planning Agency and the Board of County Commissioners on economic development issues that affect comprehensive planning and land development regulation activities.
- (c) Participate in the review of grant proposals relating to economic development.

- (d) Provide a review of barriers to employment and economic prosperity (e.g., transportation, child-care, education, employability and health-care) and identify specific ways to overcome those barriers.

Policy 1.2.6 Alachua County shall pursue incentive programs such as Tax Increment Financing (TIF), Community Development Block Grant (CDBG), Qualified Target Industry Tax Refund program, an impact fee financing fund, a revolving capital loan fund, and land acquisition that will allow businesses and employers to invest in retaining and creating high wage job opportunities and value-added businesses. Alachua County shall study economic incentives utilized by various communities and seek to implement those incentives that are appropriate for Alachua County.

- (a) In order to determine whether incentives are provided to a project, the County shall conduct a cost/benefit assessment of any financial incentives proposed to be provided by the County to support the retention, expansion or development of local business or to attract new business. Such an assessment shall factor in the financial costs as well as the social equity, contributions toward the elimination of racial or economic disparities, and environmental impacts of proposed incentives.

Policy 1.2.7 Alachua County shall establish criteria for ranking future economic development proposals/initiatives and requests for funding from economic development organizations based on their contributions to sustainable economic development and to the extent consistent with legally mandated program criteria, contributions towards the elimination of disparities.

Policy 1.2.8 Priority should be given to businesses and industries that would contribute to the flow of income into the local economy through the sale of goods and services outside of the County, or that would produce goods and services that would otherwise be imported into the County and such firms should be encouraged to locate or expand existing local business in Alachua County.

Policy 1.2.9 Alachua County recognizes Research and Technology Parks as valuable economic assets to the community that are particularly appropriate in transit oriented developments and mixed-use activity centers. Development of such parks and other similar ventures through expansion, development and recruitment of appropriate businesses and industries shall be given high priority.

Policy 1.2.10 Alachua County recognizes business incubators as valuable economic assets and supports incubators and similar ventures throughout the community; expansion, development and recruitment of appropriate businesses and industries is encouraged where consistent with the [Future Land Use Element](#). The County shall strive to retain in the community the businesses that are established and grow from the incubators by assuring that an adequate amount of land properly designated for manufacturing and commerce activities related to the incubated enterprises is available.

Policy 1.2.11 Alachua County recognizes the value of industries related to the development of energy conservation, alternative energy, reuse/recycling based products and sustainable food production and processing and encourages the location of these businesses and industry clusters consistent with [Energy Element](#) Objective 2.1. These industries shall be given high priority.

- Policy 1.2.12** Alachua County shall promote industries and businesses that support cultural, nature-based and/or eco-tourism activities.
- Policy 1.2.13** Alachua County shall support the development and expansion of small and minority-owned businesses as a means to address economic prosperity and racial and economic disparities.
- Policy 1.2.14** To further support local, minority-owned, and women-owned business efforts, Alachua County's purchasing procedures shall provide the maximum opportunity for increased participation by local, small, minority-owned, and women-owned businesses. A local business is one that includes employment of the local workforce by the business within Alachua County.
- Policy 1.2.15** Alachua County shall promote methods of financing infrastructure and public services that will minimize costs to current and future taxpayers, such as bond issues when the market is favorable.
- Policy 1.2.16** Alachua County shall initiate efforts and support the efforts of other agencies to obtain grant funding (e.g., Community Development Block Grants, community development financing institutions, etc.) and other sources of funds designed to assist local economic development projects.
- Policy 1.2.17** A comprehensive "State of Alachua County's Economy" report shall be presented to the Board of County Commissioners. This document shall review the economic indicators of the local economy and the impact of economic development efforts on the goals and objectives outlined in this plan. This report shall be developed by the County in coordination with local economic development entities, with input from the appropriate County advisory committees such as the Economic Development Advisory Committee. This report shall include items such as:

A review of the economic development program for Alachua County as it relates to the objectives and policies set forth in this Economic Element, including activities established to address economic opportunity and elimination of disparities as identified in the "Understanding Racial Inequity In Alachua County" Report (2018).

The County shall also monitor:

- (a) Recommendations concerning identified infrastructure needs to support economic development efforts; this information shall be considered as part of the annual update of the Capital Improvement Program.
- (b) A report of existing business expansions and new business starts within the County.
- (c) A report on businesses attracted to the County through the recruitment efforts of Alachua County.
- (d) A report on vocational training opportunities, including identification of needed job skills reported by businesses during the recruitment or expansion process.
- (e) The number of new jobs created.

- (f) A report on the costs and benefits to the County, as well as the effectiveness, of any incentives provided by the County to support the retention or expansion of existing businesses or to develop or attract new business.
- (g) A report on the effectiveness of the economic development program in improving the economic well-being of the unemployed poor, including those not covered by general unemployment statistics such as those measures established to address economic opportunity and elimination of disparities identified in the “Understanding Racial Inequity In Alachua County” Report (2018).

OBJECTIVE 1.3 - ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY AND RESOURCE CONSERVATION

The County shall evaluate and ensure that the types of new or the expansion of existing businesses and industries developing and locating in Alachua County contribute to maintaining a clean environment (air, water, soil) including measures to increase energy conservation, reduce greenhouse gas production, consistent with [Energy Element](#) Objectives 2.1 and 2.2 and Conservation and Open Space Policy 4.1.2, and are located in areas with suitable infrastructure and compatible land uses. Each employer shall be a good neighbor by preventing adverse impacts on the environment with emphasis given to the [Conservation and Open Space Element](#) of the Comprehensive Plan.

Policy 1.3.1 Alachua County shall adopt objective standards for timely decisions on applications for development approval for business and industrial uses that correspond to Alachua County’s Comprehensive Plan and Zoning Ordinances. Such standards and procedures shall be reviewed on an annual basis to determine their effectiveness in facilitating the permitting process and protecting the environment. The County shall develop and maintain, as a mechanism for expediting the development review process, an inventory of suitable potential business locations which would include information on the infrastructure available and the environmental conditions of the site. This inventory may be contained within or accessed from the County’s Geographic Information Systems database and public applications and viewers. The County may coordinate with the municipalities to include their suitable location information within this inventory.

Policy 1.3.2 Alachua County shall encourage the development and expansion of business and industry in appropriate locations that make efficient use of existing public services and infrastructure.

Policy 1.3.3 Industries or businesses generating hazardous wastes shall follow procedures and guidelines for the use, storage, and disposal of such materials as set forth by ordinance and in accordance with the [Solid Waste Element](#) and Objective 5.7 of the Conservation and Open Space Element of this plan.

OBJECTIVE 1.4 - EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Coordinate educational, vocational, and technical training opportunities with the needs of new and existing employers. In collaboration with other institutions, create an environment in which all residents may become as self-sufficient as possible, through educational and employment opportunities with a goal to address economic opportunity and eliminate disparities identified in the “Understanding Racial Inequity In Alachua County” Report (2018).

Policy 1.4.1 Alachua County shall assist in the coordination of educational, professional, technical, and vocational training of the labor force with the needs of businesses and industries.

This assistance shall include, but not be limited to, disseminating information about the vocational and other programs available through Florida Works, Santa Fe College, the School Board of Alachua County, the Chamber of Commerce/CEO and the University of Florida to prospective businesses and industries and disseminating statistical data on population and employment relating to labor markets for use by potential employers and vocational programs.

Policy 1.4.2 Alachua County shall foster collaboration among the workforce development organizations and the educational institutions, the employees and employers to ensure that the skills of the County's labor force closely align with the labor force needs of employers and also to enhance the skills needed to improve the economic well-being and opportunity for all population segments within Alachua County.

Policy 1.4.3 Alachua County shall, as referenced in the County's Strategic Plan for Sustainable Economic Development, collaborate with local workforce development organizations and educational institutions to expand vocational skills training and provide entrepreneurial opportunities for students. This collaboration shall include goals to prepare students for post-secondary employment in such areas as special skills training, targeted industries training and vocational skills training and internships, in collaboration with Florida Works, Santa Fe College, the School Board, the University of Florida, the business community and other agencies. Priority should be given to those locations and populations that have the highest indicators of disparities with respect to economic well-being identified in reports such as the "Understanding Racial Inequity In Alachua County" Report (2018).

Policy 1.4.4 Assist startup companies and encourage business retention through support of incubators consistent with Policy 1.2.10 and workforce education/training initiatives.

OBJECTIVE 1.5 - EXPAND ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES AND REDUCE POVERTY

Provide sustainable economic opportunities for all segments of Alachua County with a goal to eliminate disparities identified in the "Understanding Racial Inequity In Alachua County" Report (2018). Particular emphasis shall be given to activities which increase economic opportunities for persons at or near the poverty level and to activities which redevelop economically distressed and under-utilized areas. Alachua County shall utilize the following indicators:

- a. per capita incomes for Alachua County.
- b. percentage of persons living at or below the poverty level.
- c. unemployment rates.

Policy 1.5.1 Alachua County shall support existing businesses and encourage new business development in economically distressed areas of the County by coordinating with other economic development initiatives at the local, state, or regional level. In particular CareerSource NCF should be engaged as a partner in coordinating job expansion initiatives.

Policy 1.5.2 The County shall make information available to the community on potential incentives such as reduced impact and/or mobility fees, streamlined permitting requirements for redevelopment within the Urban Cluster, and financial incentives available at the state and federal level for redevelopment of brownfield sites.

- Policy 1.5.3** The County shall pursue funding opportunities, including grants and other funding sources, for the extension of essential infrastructure including high-speed internet accessibility to encourage development or redevelopment in specific economically distressed areas identified in the “Understanding Racial Inequity In Alachua County” Report (2018).
- Policy 1.5.4** Businesses and industries that meet the demands of the existing labor force by providing employment opportunities and equitable salaries shall be given a high priority in recruitment efforts and in provision of support for expansion of existing local business.
- Policy 1.5.5** Businesses and industries that are willing to participate in the training of skilled and unskilled workers through the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) and/or other similar programs, shall be given a high priority in recruitment efforts and strongly encouraged to locate in Alachua County, and in provision of support for expansion of existing business.
- Policy 1.5.6** Alachua County shall support and encourage the development of public/private partnerships which assist small and minority-owned businesses that may otherwise not have access to adequate start-up capital.
- Policy 1.5.7** Alachua County shall support Welfare Transition Program employment/training projects in the County.
- Policy 1.5.8** Alachua County shall collaborate with local businesses and organizations, including builders, developers, contractors and labor unions, to create or support programs that enhance apprenticeship opportunities for vocational trades as part of the efforts to achieve economic equity. Recognizing the importance of State or Federally registered apprenticeship programs in workforce development, Alachua County shall explore adding consideration of employer apprenticeship programs as a factor to be included in its purchasing policies.
- Policy 1.5.9** Alachua County shall support the development of micro-enterprises and small businesses by coordinating with other economic development initiatives.
- Policy 1.5.10** Alachua County shall strive to compensate its employees with a combination of wages and benefits needed to cover the costs of life’s basics, including shelter, food, clothing, utilities, transportation, child care and health care and is based on economic conditions of North Central Florida.
- Policy 1.5.11** Alachua County shall promote affordable, diverse housing choices throughout the community to meet the needs of the workforce.

OBJECTIVE 1.6 - LIVABLE COMMUNITIES

Create livable communities that are attractive to diverse populations and new economic development opportunities, and promote greater economic prosperity, innovation, quality of life, and public safety.

- Policy 1.6.1** It is a goal of Alachua County for high-speed internet access to be available throughout the County as a means to encourage economic development, enhance education and healthcare access, facilitate inclusion and engagement of citizens, promote planning and resilience, and enhance public safety and emergency response.

- Policy 1.6.2** The County shall encourage expanded and new businesses to locate in well-designed, compact mixed-use communities as encouraged in the [Future Land Use Element](#).
- Policy 1.6.3** The County shall promote reduced work to home commuting distances through encouragement of Traditional Neighborhood and Transit Oriented Developments and compact, mixed-use Activity Centers.
- Policy 1.6.4** The Land Development Regulations shall include standards to ensure that new and expanded businesses provide for the health of the community by providing access to bicycle and pedestrian transportation facilities as well as roadways.

OBJECTIVE 1.7

Maximize local resource & energy-efficient food production and processing within the County's local foodshed. A robust local food system will:

- maintain agricultural land and support rural land stewardship
- protect incomes for family farms and provide local employment
- stimulate local food industries and enhance agritourism
- protect public health by improving food safety issues at harvesting, washing, shipping and distribution, and increasing the nutritional value of food
- increase food security and resiliency through providing affordable local food, protecting agricultural knowledge and traditions, and supporting biodiversity in our food crops

- Policy 1.7.1** Partner with community groups and other local governments in the region to delineate and promote a local foodshed for the development of a sustainable local food system.

Alachua County will participate in a study to establish baseline measures and measurable targets towards the increase of local food use by Alachua County institutions, including:

- (a) Identify and partner with relevant agencies and organizations, such as the City of Gainesville, area retailers, UF IFAS Extension, Florida Farm Bureau, Florida Organic Growers, UF Field to Fork, Working Food, Alachua County School Board, UF, UF Health, and SFC.
- (b) Identify components of the local food economy, such as appropriate food shed, distribution system, and local food segment of retail purchases. Set target goals and develop methodology to identify and track local food use by Alachua County institutions.

- Policy 1.7.2** Work with local governments, institutions and community groups within the defined foodshed area to determine processing facilities and other food-related infrastructure needed to process locally grown foods.

- Policy 1.7.3** The land development regulations shall permit and encourage dispersed, small scale agricultural production and sale direct to the public.

Policy 1.7.4 Increase support for farmers' markets through partnerships with local governments, institutions and community groups.

OBJECTIVE 1.8

Increase the use of locally grown and/or processed foods in County facilities where food is provided and encourage other local government facilities to do the same.

Policy 1.8.1 Work with the Alachua County Jail to develop a plan for an agricultural program to grow food onsite and teach sustainable farming methods.

Policy 1.8.2 Alachua County shall work to facilitate partnerships between local farmers and local government organizations such as the Alachua County School Board to implement the 2009 Alachua County Hunger Abatement Plan and future updates and provide healthy, fresh foods in local schools and other institutions.

OBJECTIVE 1.9

Encourage the use of community gardens, green roofs and edible landscapes by Alachua County residents.

Policy 1.9.1 Identify potential sites for community gardens on appropriate county-owned lands considering areas such as parks, libraries, recreation and senior centers, public easements, rights-of-way and surplus lands.

Policy 1.9.2 In cooperation with the Alachua County Library District, explore the feasibility of a county-sponsored community garden program at District library sites.

Policy 1.9.3 Explore opportunities to incorporate community gardens, low maintenance perennial edible landscaping and green roofs at county-owned facilities and rights-of-way. Evaluation shall include an audit of all available public spaces on County properties where such uses may be appropriately located.

Policy 1.9.4 The land development regulations shall encourage the use of perennial edible plants in landscaped areas.

Policy 1.9.5 The land development regulations shall address the use of open space areas for community gardens and allow portions of green roofs to count toward the open space required for new developments in accordance with Objective 5.2 of the Conservation and Open Space Element, and Policy 5.2.3 specifically.

OBJECTIVE 1.10

Support and encourage local agricultural operations in the use of sustainable agricultural practices including organic farming.

Policy 1.10.1 In accordance with the policies of Objective 6.1 of the Future Land Use Element, the County shall work with landowners to facilitate participation in programs that meet or exceed best management practices, cost share programs, and to assist in the pursuit of funding sources to aid in the development of a sustainable local food system.

Policy 1.10.2 Reduce use of and dependence on fossil-fuel based synthetic fertilizers in Alachua County consistent with adopted Best Management Practices and Florida Statutes, incorporating research based information.

Policy 1.10.3 Work with IFAS and local agricultural groups to encourage use of sustainable agricultural practices that maximize carbon sequestration, conserve energy and water, minimize soil erosion and protect ecosystems and water quality.

Policy 1.10.4 Partner with IFAS, local farmers, and community groups to develop and implement educational strategies on the benefits of purchasing locally grown and/or processed foods.

- (a) County Extension, in partnership with Florida Department of Agriculture, shall provide GAP [Good Agricultural Practices] and BMP training for county farmers to facilitate crop production in partnership with Florida Department of Agriculture.
- (b) Focus efforts of IFAS/County Extension Ag education and Master Gardener program to increase participation of at-risk youth
- (c) Alachua County Extension will work with government agencies, businesses, County departments, schools, farmers, organizations actively working with pollinators, and the public to increase both food resources and suitable nesting habitat for pollinator species. Approaches may include:
 - (1) Adopting and implementing policies that promote pollinator health and habitat;
 - (2) Exploring alterations to current County land management practices that improve habitat of pollinators on County-owned land;
 - (3) Educating the general public and County departments on the issue of pollinator decline and strategies that can be implemented to improve pollinator health and habitat; and
 - (4) Creating and fostering partnerships that assist in the advancement of pollinator health at the local, regional, and federal levels.

Economic Element Definitions

Edible landscaping: The use of food-producing plants yielding vegetables, herbs, fruits, nuts as part of landscaped areas.

Foodshed: The area of agricultural land needed to meet all or a significant portion of a population center's food needs. Commonly used measures for personal foodsheds are a 100 mile radius from a person's home for necessary foodstuffs. Scope and scale of a foodshed area requires input from consumers, producers and the community at large in establishing a vision for the necessary food systems to support the targeted population.