



Agenda Item Summary

File #: 26-00070

Agenda Date: 1/27/2026

Agenda Item Name:

Update on Forward Focus Initiative

Presenter:

Missy Daniels; Sean McLendon

Description:

Presentation on Forward Focus Initiative Year One Accomplishments and Year Two and Three Work Plan

Recommended Action:

Receive the presentation

Prior Board Motions:

June 2024: to develop a scope of work for developing a needs assessment for the 301 corridor and bring back during budget cycle with a focus on attracting grant funding that could address immediate social service needs for Eastern County as well as economic development needs.

Fiscal Note:

There is \$250,000 budgeted in several operating accounts in General Fund Special Expense for the Forward Focus Project, Phases 2 and 3 for FY26.

Strategic Guide:

Social and Economic Opportunity, Housing, Environment, Public Safety, Infrastructure

Background:

The Forward Focus Initiative was launched in October 2024 at the direction of the County Commission to conduct a comprehensive needs assessment of eastern Alachua County. The assessment is intended to identify gaps in services, including healthcare access, job availability, workforce training and education, and access to healthy food.

Staff formed a cross-departmental team and adopted a “listen first, act together” approach. Forward Focus was designed as a three-year initiative: the first year dedicated to listening to residents and stakeholders; the second year focused on compiling and analyzing data to clearly define needs and identify potential County actions, including partnerships with the community; and the third year centered on developing actionable strategies, including identifying funding opportunities and grants to address those needs.

During the first year, staff secured an ICMA Economic Mobility and Opportunity grant, which supported a year-end summit featuring local subject-matter experts in health and well-being, early childhood and youth development, and jobs and workforce training. The grant also provided access to extensive economic mobility data and opportunities for peer-to-peer learning with local governments across the country working on similar challenges.

This presentation provides an update on the first year of the Forward Focus Initiative and outlines the work planned for the next two years.