



5-YEAR STRATEGIC PLAN

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Lake City Strategic Plan reflects a unified vision for the future of Lake City. The plan is the result of one of the most inclusive planning efforts in recent city history, which included extensive engagement with city leaders, local businesses, residents, and regional partners.

Planning Process Overview

We consulted a broad range of stakeholders including city staff, elected officials, county and school leaders, business owners, and representatives from HAECO, Weyerhaeuser, and HCA Lake City Hospital. Regional input came from Columbia County, JAXPORT, and state agencies. A community survey drew 546 responses from across all neighborhoods, reflecting diverse voices and strong public investment in Lake City's future.

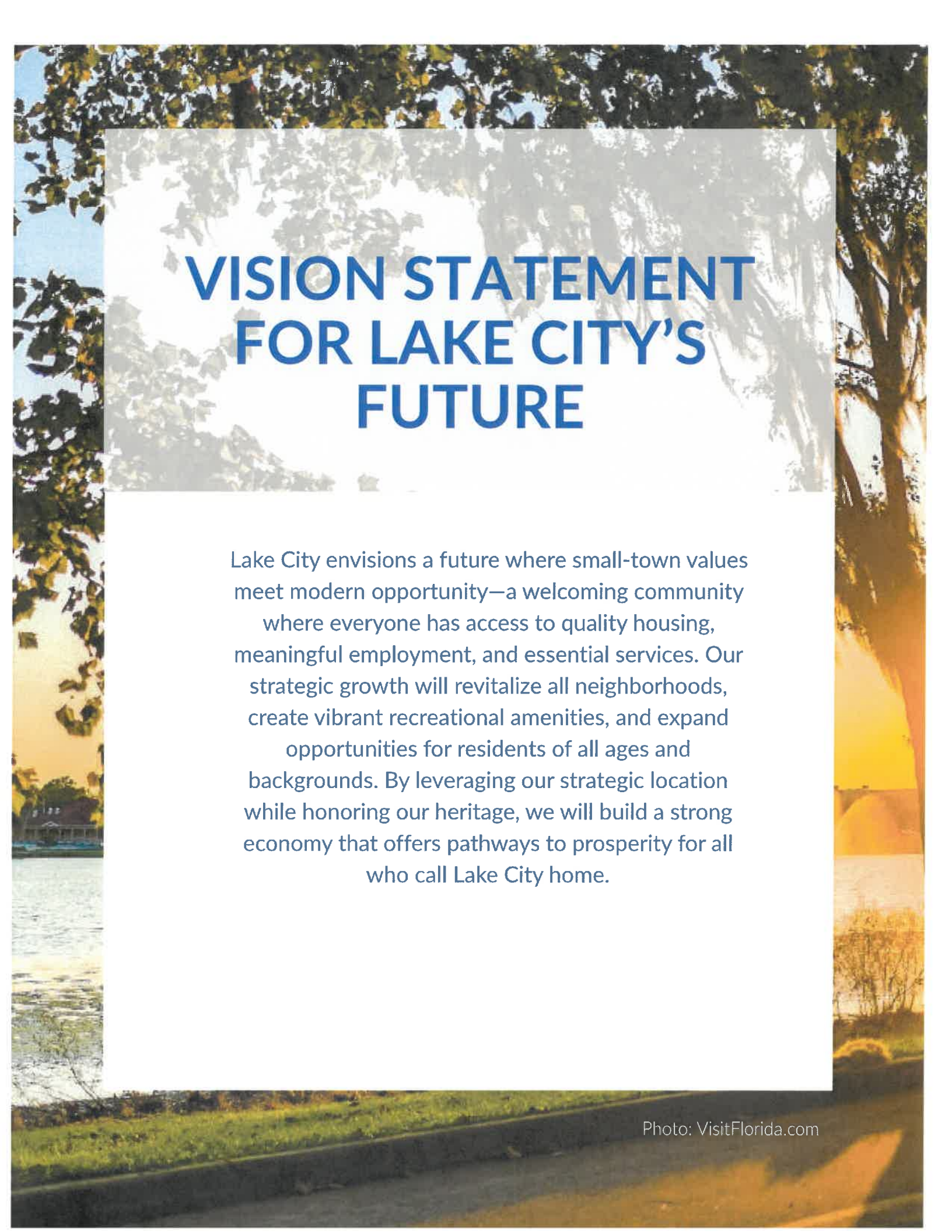
Implementation Framework

Led by the City Manager and department heads, implementation will begin with key actions in Year 1—such as launching the Housing Authority and improving development processes. Core initiatives will roll out over Years 2–3, with evaluation and institutionalization in Years 4–5. Long-term success depends on continued collaboration with Columbia County, schools, employers, and residents.

Lake City is ready to turn potential into progress. This plan charts a clear path forward—preserving our character while creating opportunity for all.

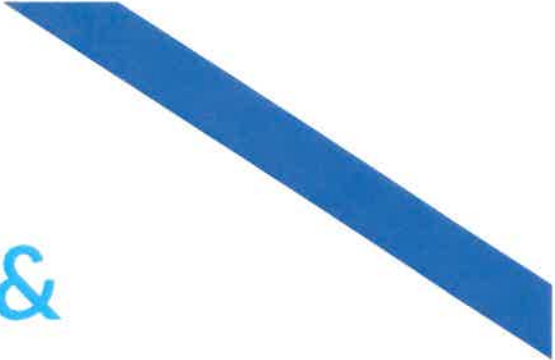
STRATEGIC PILLARS

- ▶ **Economic Development:** Leverage our I-10/I-75 location to grow Lake City Gateway Airport, support the North Florida Mega Industrial Park, and foster small business growth through workforce development and streamlined permitting.
- ▶ **Housing & Community Development:** Expand housing options through the new Housing Authority and public-private partnerships. Focus on neighborhood revitalization, downtown development, and recreation expansion, including a new Recreation Director and Lake DeSoto improvements.
- ▶ **Infrastructure & Sustainable Growth:** Expand utility capacity, streamline permitting, and coordinate with county and state partners. Growth will be balanced with natural resource protection and strategic annexation.
- ▶ **Public Safety & Community Engagement:** Strengthen community policing, youth programs, and neighborhood engagement to address safety concerns and build trust citywide.



VISION STATEMENT FOR LAKE CITY'S FUTURE

Lake City envisions a future where small-town values meet modern opportunity—a welcoming community where everyone has access to quality housing, meaningful employment, and essential services. Our strategic growth will revitalize all neighborhoods, create vibrant recreational amenities, and expand opportunities for residents of all ages and backgrounds. By leveraging our strategic location while honoring our heritage, we will build a strong economy that offers pathways to prosperity for all who call Lake City home.



INTRODUCTION & BACKGROUND

About Lake City

Lake City is known as "The Gateway to Florida" because of its strategic location at the intersection of Interstate 75 and Interstate 10, providing convenient access to major urban centers like Jacksonville and Gainesville. This prime position has long made Lake City an important transportation hub and logistics center, offering residents the opportunity to enjoy small-town living with relatively easy access to big-city amenities.

The city and surrounding Columbia County are blessed with natural beauty, including pristine springs, rivers, and forests that attract outdoor enthusiasts from across the region. The Osceola National Forest, Ichetucknee Springs State Park, and numerous other natural areas provide exceptional recreational opportunities for residents and visitors alike.

While Lake City offers many advantages, it also faces challenges common to smaller communities. The job market remains relatively limited, particularly for specialized careers, leading some residents to commute to larger cities for employment. Healthcare options, though improving with recent investments in HCA Lake City Hospital, are more basic compared to those available in larger metropolitan areas. Public transportation is minimal, creating access challenges for residents without personal vehicles.

Despite these challenges, Lake City possesses remarkable potential for growth and development, with a strong foundation of community assets and a strategic location that positions it well for future prosperity.

Key Assets

- ▶ **Lake City Gateway Airport:** This general aviation airport provides a valuable transportation link and opportunities for expanded aviation services, including the potential for increased cargo operations and business travel.
- ▶ **North Florida Mega Industrial Park:** Located just outside city limits, this 2,622-acre, single-owner supersite between Jacksonville and Tallahassee represents one of the region's most significant economic development opportunities. The site's strategic location, combined with excellent transportation access, positions it as a premier location for manufacturing, distribution, and logistics operations. The site is one of only three in Florida and twelve in the Southeast.
- ▶ **Florida Gateway College:** This institution offers essential educational opportunities and workforce development programs that help prepare residents for careers in growing industries. The college's partnerships with regional employers ensure that training programs align with actual workforce needs.
- ▶ **Regional Medical Facilities:** HCA Lake City Hospital and other healthcare providers form the backbone of the region's healthcare system, offering essential services while creating valuable employment opportunities.
- ▶ **Diverse Transportation Infrastructure:** Beyond the highway intersections I-10 and I-75, Lake City benefits from rail access and proximity to deepwater ports in Jacksonville, creating a multi-modal transportation network that supports business development.
- ▶ **Rich Historical Heritage:** Lake City's historical significance, dating back to the 1800s, provides a foundation for cultural tourism and community identity.
- ▶ **Affordable Cost of Living:** Compared to larger metropolitan areas in Florida, Lake City offers a more affordable cost of living, making it an attractive option for families and retirees seeking quality of life at a reasonable cost.

Stakeholder Engagement Process

The development of this strategic plan has been guided by extensive stakeholder engagement, ensuring that it reflects the priorities and perspectives of the entire community. Key engagement activities included:

- ▶ **In-depth interviews* with city department heads and staff**, providing insights into operational challenges and opportunities as well as departmental priorities and needs.
* A full list of the stakeholders interviewed is included in Appendix 2.
- ▶ **Visioning sessions with City Council members** to establish high-level strategic direction and identify policy priorities.
- ▶ **Roundtable discussions with business leaders** to understand economic development needs and opportunities from the private sector perspective.
- ▶ **Meetings with education, healthcare, and transportation officials** to coordinate planning efforts and identify potential partnerships.
- ▶ **Collaborations with county leadership and regional partners** to ensure alignment with broader regional initiatives and maximize collaborative opportunities.
- ▶ **Input from major companies in the area including HACEO and Weyerhaeuser** to understand workforce needs and economic development potential.
- ▶ **Review of existing plans and documents** to build upon previous work and ensure continuity in planning efforts.
- ▶ **Public survey process** to incorporate the priorities of residents who live and work in Lake City in the plan.

Summary of Findings from Interviews

The discovery process for Lake City's strategic plan involved extensive stakeholder engagement including city department heads, county officials, education leaders, business representatives, and regional partners.

Across the board, stakeholders share a common vision of leveraging the City's location advantage to attract targeted investment, particularly in transportation, logistics, and advanced manufacturing. The recent improvements in city leadership and intergovernmental relations have created a favorable environment for strategic planning and collaborative growth.

The discovery process consistently revealed three interconnected challenges that must be addressed to unlock Lake City's potential: infrastructure constraints, housing shortages, and workforce development. Water and wastewater capacity limitations are currently restricting growth, with complex permitting processes further complicating expansion efforts. The severe lack of workforce housing has forced many employees to commute from surrounding areas, creating a significant barrier for business attraction and retention. Additionally, while the school system offers strong vocational programs, there remains a gap in creating sustainable career pathways that retain young talent and meet employer needs.

Quality of life considerations emerged as both challenges and opportunities. Many stakeholders highlighted the need for expanded youth recreation, downtown revitalization, particularly north of the railroad tracks, and more diverse entertainment options. These elements are seen as crucial not just for current residents but as essential components for workforce attraction and retention. The city's proximity to natural assets like Ichetucknee Springs and Osceola National Forest offers untapped potential for ecotourism development that aligns with preserving Lake City's character.

Stakeholders demonstrated remarkable alignment around priority initiatives: expanding infrastructure capacity, developing workforce housing across all segments, streamlining business processes, and enhancing quality of life amenities.

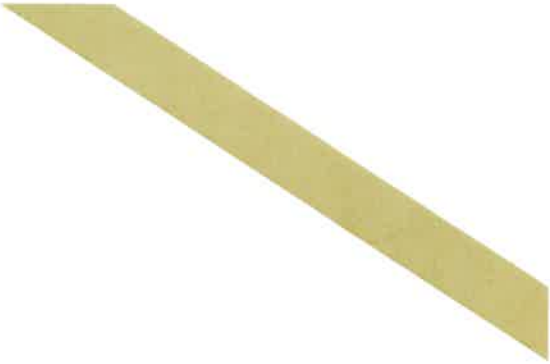
Major employers including HAECO, the hospital, and potential tenants of the Weyerhaeuser mega-industrial site are poised for significant growth if these foundational issues can be addressed. The city's improving financial position and openness to innovative approaches like the new Housing Authority provide promising pathways forward, though success will require sustained focus on implementation and meaningful performance metrics.

Lake City Community Survey Results Summary

The City of Lake City conducted a comprehensive community survey in Spring 2025 to gather input from residents regarding their priorities, concerns, and vision for the future. With over 540 responses from diverse neighborhoods across the city and surrounding areas, this survey provided valuable insights that have directly shaped the strategic priorities outlined in this plan. neighborhoods across the city and surrounding areas, this survey provided valuable insights that have directly shaped the strategic priorities outlined in this plan.

Respondent Demographics

Survey participants represented a broad cross-section of Lake City's population, with residency ranging from less than one year to more than 20 years. All age groups were represented, with the largest participation coming from residents aged 35-44 and 45-54, followed by residents aged 25-34. This diverse representation ensures that the strategic plan addresses the needs of both long-time residents and newcomers, as well as residents at different life stages.



Key Community Priorities

Infrastructure Improvements

Residents clearly identified infrastructure as a top priority for Lake City's future. The three most commonly requested infrastructure improvements were:

- ▶ Road repairs and maintenance (61% of respondents)
- ▶ Parks and recreational facilities (56%)
- ▶ Downtown revitalization (40%)

Additional infrastructure priorities included stormwater drainage (33%), street lighting (30%), and housing rehabilitation (30%).

Economic Development

Survey respondents strongly supported strategic economic development, with an emphasis on:

- ▶ Community entertainment and recreation (52%)
- ▶ Retail and shopping (56%)
- ▶ Dining and food service (27%)
- ▶ Arts and culture (26%)
- ▶ Eco-tourism/Agri-tourism (25%)

Notably, when asked to rate the importance of various factors to Lake City's future, 75% of respondents rated "small business incentives" as important or very important, and 66% rated "industrial/manufacturing growth" similarly. These findings underscore residents' desire for a balanced economic development approach that preserves Lake City's character while creating new opportunities.

Quality of Life Initiatives

The survey revealed strong support for quality of life improvements that would make Lake City more livable and attractive:

- ▶ Creating or improving parks and playgrounds (73%)
- ▶ Building or enhancing walking and biking trails (63%)
- ▶ Developing more community centers and picnic areas (54%)
- ▶ Improving public swimming pools (47%)
- ▶ Enhancing sports facilities (45%)

These preferences reflect residents' desire for more family-friendly recreational opportunities and accessible outdoor spaces.

Public Safety Concerns

When asked about public safety issues, residents identified several key concerns:

- ▶ Drug activity (68%)
- ▶ Violent crime (55%)
- ▶ Traffic safety and speeding (51%)
- ▶ Property Crime (44%)

These findings highlight the importance of comprehensive public safety strategies in the strategic plan.

Strengths and Challenges

The survey asked residents to identify Lake City's greatest strengths and most significant challenges.

Perceived Strengths:

- ▶ Location and accessibility (proximity to major highways and regional centers)
- ▶ Small-town feel and sense of community
- ▶ Natural resources and outdoor recreation potential
- ▶ Ability to come together during times of need

Perceived Challenges:

- ▶ Limited activities and amenities for youth and families
- ▶ Insufficient housing options across income levels
- ▶ Public safety concerns and drug-related issues
- ▶ Economic development needs and lack of high-paying jobs
- ▶ Infrastructure maintenance and improvements

Communication Preferences

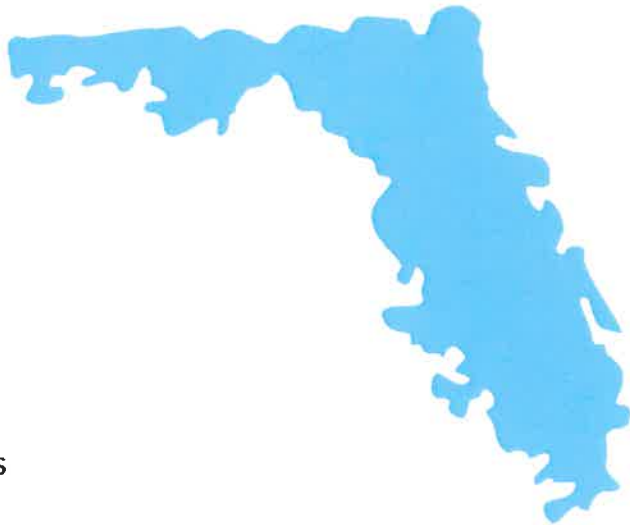
When asked how they currently receive information about Lake City events and news, most respondents cited the city's **Facebook page** (52%) and **word of mouth** (25%). When asked about their preferred communication methods, many indicated interest in **email updates, text notifications, and continued social media engagement**. This information will guide the city's communication strategy moving forward.



Integration into Strategic Planning

The findings from this community survey have directly informed the strategic priorities outlined in this plan. Based on resident feedback, the strategic plan places particular emphasis on:

- ▶ Infrastructure investment
- ▶ Economic development
- ▶ Quality of life enhancements
- ▶ Public safety initiatives
- ▶ Housing opportunities
- ▶ Communication improvements

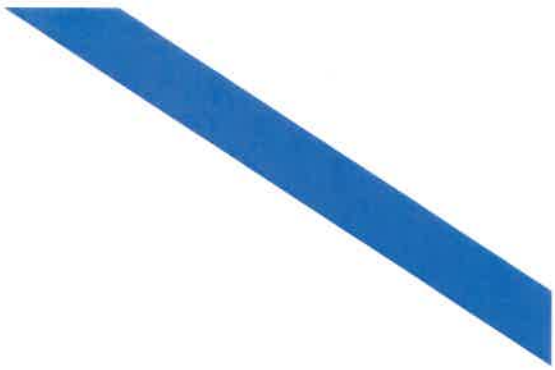


Lake City is committed to responsive, resident-centered governance. The survey results have provided a roadmap for addressing the most pressing concerns of residents while building on the city's existing strengths.

Executive Summary Conclusion

This multi-faceted engagement process has resulted in a strategic plan that truly reflects the community's priorities and vision. By bringing together diverse perspectives and expertise, Lake City has developed a roadmap that addresses immediate needs while positioning the community for long-term success.

The strategic goals and initiatives outlined in the following sections directly respond to the priorities identified through this engagement process. They reflect Lake City's commitment to creating a vibrant, safe, and economically sustainable community that preserves its small-town character while embracing strategic growth and development.



SITUATION ANALYSIS

Strengths Assessment

Strategic Location

Lake City's position at the intersection of I-10 and I-75 provides exceptional connectivity to major markets throughout the Southeast. This location, approximately one hour from Jacksonville, Gainesville, and Tallahassee, offers prime access for logistics, distribution, and manufacturing operations while maintaining a more affordable cost structure than larger urban centers.

Industrial Park

The North Florida Mega Industrial Park represents a premier economic development asset with tremendous potential to transform Lake City's economy. This 2,600-acre certified industrial site is one of only three mega-sites in Florida and among just twelve in the entire Southeast. The site features completed environmental studies, wetland delineations, and pre-permitted status, significantly reducing development timelines for prospective businesses. Strategic rail access from Norfolk Southern, combined with proximity to both I-10 and I-75, positions the park ideally for manufacturing, logistics, and distribution operations. The Industrial Park stands ready to attract investments that could generate substantial employment opportunities with higher-than-average wages for the region.

Transportation Assets

The Lake City Gateway Airport provides facilities for corporate aviation, maintenance services, and potential expansion. The presence of HAECO, a major aircraft maintenance provider, demonstrates the viability of aviation-related industries. Additionally, two major rail lines serve the area, offering multimodal transportation options that few communities our size can match.

Natural Resources

Lake City is surrounded by exceptional natural amenities, including the Ichetucknee Springs State Park, Osceola National Forest, and the Suwannee River. These resources offer outstanding recreation opportunities and potential for ecotourism development while contributing to quality of life for residents.

Educational Partnerships

The Columbia County School District offers strong K-12 education with career and technical programs that help prepare students for local employment opportunities. Florida Gateway College provides higher education and workforce training programs that can be aligned with industry needs.

Affordable Community

Lake City offers an affordable cost of living with housing prices below state and national averages, making it attractive for families and retirees. This affordability represents a competitive advantage for workforce recruitment if paired with quality housing options and amenities.

Small-Town Character

Residents value Lake City's small-town atmosphere, where personal relationships matter and community connections remain strong. This character, combined with strategic growth, creates a distinctive environment that appeals to those seeking alternatives to larger urban centers.

Challenges Assessment

Housing Limitations

A critical shortage of quality housing across all price points, but particularly workforce housing, represents a significant barrier to growth. This shortage affects business recruitment, workforce retention, and community vitality. The lack of diverse housing options forces many employees to commute from surrounding areas rather than living in Lake City.

Infrastructure Capacity Constraints

Water and wastewater capacity limitations, particularly related to state permitting for water withdrawal and wastewater discharge, restrict development potential. Additionally, aging infrastructure in some areas requires upgrading to support growth and maintain service reliability. The city's conservative tax rate—the lowest in the region—has constrained available capital for major infrastructure investments. While this approach has kept costs low for residents, it has also limited the city's ability to proactively upgrade systems and expand capacity to meet growing demand and support economic development initiatives.

Youth Engagement Gaps

Limited recreation, entertainment, and career exploration opportunities for youth were consistently identified as concerns. These gaps affect quality of life for families and contribute to challenges in retaining young residents and attracting new families to the community. While Lake City maintains the lowest tax rate in the area at 4.9%, this conservative fiscal approach has limited the city's ability to invest in youth programming, recreational facilities, and community amenities that would enhance quality of life for families.

Regulatory and Permitting Processes

Complex and sometimes lengthy regulatory processes, particularly related to water resource management and development approvals, can delay projects and create uncertainty for investors. Streamlining these processes while maintaining appropriate standards is essential for encouraging investment.

Public Perception Management

Addressing both internal and external perceptions is important for Lake City's future. Internally, overcoming resistance to change while demonstrating the benefits of strategic growth requires ongoing communication. Externally, ensuring Lake City's reputation reflects current realities rather than outdated perceptions is crucial for economic development.

Downtown Revitalization Needs

Despite its historic character and potential, downtown Lake City requires further investment and activation to become a vibrant center of community life. Vacant properties, limited evening activity, and the need for mixed-use development present both challenges and opportunities.

Leadership Continuity and Public Trust

Years of frequent turnover in city management and leadership positions have created skepticism among residents about the government's commitment to long-term initiatives and community needs. As current leadership demonstrates competence and forward-thinking vision, rebuilding trust will require consistent performance, transparent communication, and tangible results that demonstrate the city's genuine commitment to serving all residents and neighborhoods equitably.

Emerging Opportunities

Housing Authority Initiatives

The newly established Housing Authority provides a mechanism to address housing needs through strategic acquisition, rehabilitation, and development of properties. This entity can leverage public and private resources to expand housing options throughout the community.

Mega-Industrial Site Development

The Weyerhaeuser mega-industrial site, one of only three such sites in Florida, offers exceptional potential for large-scale manufacturing or distribution operations. Coordination between city and county on infrastructure and services can maximize this asset's economic impact. Partnership opportunity to collaborate with Weyerhaeuser and Jaxport on manufacturer recruitment.

Aviation Sector Expansion

Building on HAECO's established presence, opportunities exist to expand aviation-related businesses, training programs, and services at the Lake City Gateway Airport. Runway improvements could potentially accommodate larger aircraft and expand service capabilities.

Healthcare Growth

HCA Lake City Hospital's expansion plans and focus on specialized services create opportunities for healthcare sector growth, including related services and suppliers. This growth supports both economic development and quality of life improvements.

Tourism Development

Lake City's natural assets, combined with its strategic location, provide foundations for expanded tourism development focusing on ecotourism, outdoor recreation, and cultural heritage. These opportunities can diversify the economy while preserving natural resources.

Recreation Investment

Developing comprehensive recreation facilities and programming represents a high-impact investment that addresses multiple community challenges simultaneously. Recreation development can serve as a catalyst for neighborhood revitalization, provide positive outlets for youth development, and demonstrate the city's commitment to quality-of-life improvements that benefit all residents across demographic and geographic lines.



STRATEGIC PILLARS & INITIATIVES

This section includes details on the strategic pillars, as well as objectives and key initiatives to support Lake City's progress in that area. In addition, opportunity areas that emerged from our discovery process are highlighted.

STRATEGIC PILLARS

Pillar 1: Economic Development

Pillar 2: Housing & Community Development

Pillar 3: Infrastructure & Sustainable Growth

Pillar 4: Public Safety & Community Engagement

Pillar 1: Economic Development

Objective 1.1: Position Lake City as premier transportation & logistics hub

Initiative: Maximize Lake City Gateway Airport development potential

- ▶ Implement key elements of the Airport Master Plan to expand capacity and services
- ▶ Conduct feasibility study on extending the runway eastward to accommodate larger wide-body aircraft like Boeing 787s and 777s
- ▶ Pursue grant funding opportunities to assist with the \$9 million investment needed for hangar renovations, including new roofs and fire suppression systems
- ▶ Support HAECO's expansion plans through 2028, including two new production lines creating approximately 200 jobs
- ▶ Develop targeted marketing to attract aviation-related businesses
 - Example: Partner with HAECO to market their successful Space Florida apprenticeship program that brings in 10-15 new aviation workers every 10 weeks

Initiative: Support mega-industrial site development

- ▶ Collaborate with the county, JAXPORT and Weyerhaeuser business development teams to implement targeted marketing to industries that align with site capabilities and could benefit from port access
- ▶ Coordinate with Columbia County and Weyerhaeuser on infrastructure needs to recruit manufacturers to the mega-industrial site
 - Example: Increase utility capacity to meet the requirements needed for major industrial prospects

Initiative: Develop business-friendly processes & incentives

- ▶ Assign dedicated staff to act as a "concierge" service for businesses navigating development processes and streamline permitting and regulatory procedures
 - *Example:* Implement a "One Stop Permitting" system similar to FDOT's model to coordinate approvals for major developments
- ▶ Develop clear guides and resources for new and expanding businesses
- ▶ Establish regular communication channels with business community
- ▶ Develop city-level incentives that complement Columbia County's programs, which primarily target large businesses

Objective 1.2: Enhance Workforce Development

Initiative: Develop business-friendly processes & incentives

- ▶ Strengthen collaboration with Florida Gateway College on workforce programs
- ▶ Support Columbia County School District's career and technical education initiatives to create clear pathways from education to employment in Lake City
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- ▶ Support Columbia County School District's career and technical education initiatives to create clear pathways from education to employment in Lake City
 - *Example:* Increase utility capacity to meet the requirements needed for major industrial prospects
- ▶ Develop industry-specific training programs aligned with target sectors
 - *Example:* Create a formal mentorship program with HAECO and other large employers who have expressed interest in greater community engagement

Initiative: Implement workforce recruitment & retention strategies

- ▶ Partner with employers on talent attraction initiatives through downtown revitalization, recreation projects and other quality of life amenities
- ▶ Establish or expand youth entrepreneurship and career exploration programs

Initiative: Support small business development

- ▶ Establish small business incubator/accelerator programs
- ▶ Provide resources and support for entrepreneurs
- ▶ Create networking opportunities for business owners
 - Example: Partner with the Chamber of Commerce to foster relationships that bolster City initiatives.

Objective 1.3: Diversify the Economy Base

Initiative: Target complementary industry sectors

- ▶ Develop sector-specific value propositions highlighting Lake City's advantages
- ▶ Create targeted incentive programs for priority sectors
- ▶ Participate in regional economic development initiatives

Initiative: Enhance retail and commercial development

- ▶ Conduct retail gap analysis to identify underserved market segments
- ▶ Develop strategy for commercial corridor enhancement
- ▶ Support downtown business development
- ▶ Create design standards that enhance community character

Priority 2: Housing & Community Development

Objective 2.1: Increase housing availability across income levels

Initiative: Implement Housing Authority programs

- ▶ Establish Lake City Housing Authority with dedicated team including:
 - Authority Attorney and Bond Counsel
 - Bond Financial Advisor
 - City staff integration (City Manager, Assistant City Manager, Finance Director, City Planner/Growth Manager)
 - Department coordination (Police, Fire, Public Works, Water, Sewer, Gas, IT)
- ▶ Secure initial funding through partnership with First Federal Bank
- ▶ Launch Home Improvement Loan Program:
 - Provide up to \$50,000 per household for critical home repairs
 - Target properties under \$300,000 value within city limits
 - Focus on health, safety, and code violations; roofing; electrical/plumbing; accessibility modifications
 - Serve households earning up to 150% of Area Median Income (AMI)
- ▶ Implement 5-year loan agreements with construction beginning Summer 2025
- ▶ Develop Abandoned Homes Acquisition and Rehabilitation Program:
 - Purchase, rehabilitate, and bring abandoned properties up to code
 - Initially target 10-20 homes, particularly in Districts 10 and 12
 - Create rent-to-own pathway for qualified tenants
 - Provide homeownership training and transition support
- ▶ Establish Mortgage Down Payment Assistance Program:
 - Target first-time homebuyers for primary residences within city limits
 - Support 30-year fixed-rate mortgage qualification
 - Set income thresholds based on AMI guidelines

Initiative: Develop multi-family housing to address critical shortages

- ▶ Downtown Mixed-Use Development:
 - Pursue acquisition and redevelopment of downtown "junkyard" property through eminent domain if necessary
 - Develop mixed-use concept with approximately 300 housing units
 - Include ground-floor commercial space facing Marion Street and structured parking garage
 - Phase development over 3-5 years to manage financial feasibility
- ▶ Apartment Building Construction:
 - Construct 100-unit apartment building with affordable rents
 - Address Florida's shortage (only 25 affordable homes per 100 extremely low-income renters)
 - Utilize Housing Authority bonding capacity for financing
- ▶ Senior Housing Development:
 - Issue up to \$15 million in bonds for 100-unit masonry elevator apartment building
 - Target seniors aged 55+ earning less than 60% of AMI
 - Prioritize downtown and city-owned property locations
 - Address Florida's senior housing crisis (median rent \$1,719 with 12.1% senior poverty rate)
- ▶ Explore Container Home Development:
 - Investigate shipping container homes as affordable, sustainable housing option
 - Consider both basic affordable units and luxury container home options

Initiative: Support private housing development

- ▶ Create comprehensive incentive programs for housing developers with clear, publicly communicated criteria
- ▶ Streamline approval processes for projects meeting community housing goals
- ▶ Develop infrastructure to support housing in priority areas, particularly northern districts

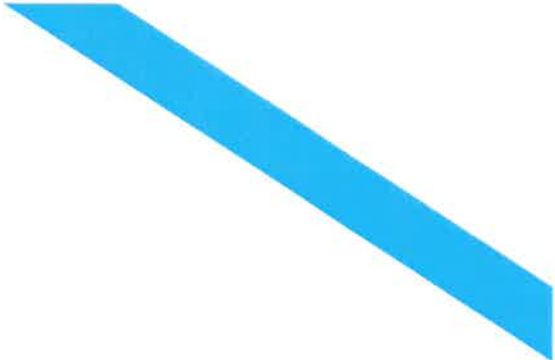
Objective 2.2: Revitalize Neighborhoods

Initiative: Focus on northern neighborhood improvement

- ▶ Strategic investment in Districts 10 and 12
 - Leverage Community Redevelopment Agency (CRA) district funding
 - Partner with Columbia County on CDBG grants and senior home programs
 - Coordinate with Housing Authority abandoned property acquisition program
 - Address abandoned and deteriorating properties through systematic identification and intervention
- ▶ Improve infrastructure and streetscapes
- ▶ Road paving and utility upgrades
- ▶ Lighting improvements for safety and business support downtown
- ▶ Coordinate with utility expansion plans
- ▶ Support neighborhood-based organizations and initiatives

Initiative: Develop neighborhood identity and pride through inclusive engagement

- ▶ Create distinct neighborhood identities that celebrate unique assets and history
- ▶ Support neighborhood leadership development – engage a cross-section of the Lake City community
- ▶ Community leadership development:
 - Engage cross-section of Lake City community in neighborhood planning
 - Conduct regular community meetings to hear directly from residents about priorities (safer streets, better housing, jobs, cultural spaces)
 - Support resident-led improvement initiatives
- ▶ Implement neighborhood beautification programs
 - Partner with local businesses on improvement projects
 - Implement public art installations and cultural programs
 - Support tree-planting, urban gardening, and environmental initiatives



Objective 2.3: Enhance quality of life amenities

Initiative: Expand recreation opportunities

- ▶ Create a Recreation Director position to coordinate citywide programs for youth, adults, and seniors
- ▶ Partner with the school district to explore city operation of the swimming pool to expand community access
- ▶ Expand successful community events like the 3,000-4,000 person BBQ competition
- ▶ Develop Lake DeSoto as a community focal point for outdoor recreation

Initiative: Support arts and cultural development

- ▶ Enhance community events and festivals
- ▶ Develop public art program
- ▶ Support performing arts opportunities
- ▶ Celebrate Lake City's cultural heritage

Initiative: Create vibrant gathering spaces

- ▶ Develop Lake DeSoto as a community focal point
- ▶ Enhance downtown as a community gathering place
- ▶ Create neighborhood centers in underserved areas
- ▶ Design public spaces that encourage interaction and community building

Pillar 3: Infrastructure & Sustainable Growth

Objective 3.1: Expand utility capacity to support growth

Initiative: Address water/wastewater capacity constraints

- ▶ Work with government relations expert to streamline Suwannee River Water
- ▶ Develop water conservation programs to maximize existing capacity

Initiative: Expand utility capacity to support growth

- ▶ Explore alternative water sources and technologies
- ▶ Upgrade existing wastewater treatment facilities
- ▶ Coordinate with county on regional wastewater solutions
- ▶ Implement phased approach aligned with development needs

Objective 3.1: Implement strategic annexation plan

Initiative: Annex priority development areas

- ▶ Develop criteria for strategic annexation decisions
- ▶ Focus on areas with existing or planned utility service
- ▶ Create annexation information program for property owners
- ▶ Coordinate with county on annexation approach

Initiative: Enhance city-county relationship and service coordination

- ▶ Develop interlocal agreements for service areas
- ▶ Create consistent development standards across jurisdictions
- ▶ Establish regular coordination mechanisms between city and county
- ▶ Coordinate joint tourism marketing and development initiatives to leverage regional attractions

Pillar 4: Public Safety & Community Engagement

Objective 4.1: Enhance public safety services

Initiative: Expand Police Department Staffing and Infrastructure

- ▶ Implement a comprehensive plan to expand and upgrade the police department building to address overcrowding and improve operational efficiency
- ▶ Increase police staffing by 5 officers annually over the next 5 years to support traffic units, evidence processing, and expanded patrol zones for newly annexed areas
- ▶ Expand use of Flock, the gunshot detection system, beyond the north side to full citywide implementation

Initiative: Expand community policing initiatives

- ▶ Increase Breakfast with the Chief events from quarterly to monthly, with rotating locations to cover all city districts
- ▶ Expand Coffee with a Cop sessions from 6 to 8 annually
- ▶ Expand Citizens Police Academy capacity from one to two sessions per year, increasing graduates from 30 to 60 annually
- ▶ Grow the Police Explorer Program from 11 to 25 active participants, with particular focus on recruiting from underrepresented city neighborhoods
- ▶ Expand the Summer Youth Employment Program from 20 to 30 positions to provide 20+ local youth with job skills and professional development opportunities annually
- ▶ Increase Farm Share and food distribution events from 4 to 6 annually, expanding reach from 1,177 to 1,500 households per year
- ▶ Establish dedicated traffic enforcement units for each patrol squad to focus on high-crash corridors
- ▶ Launch a comprehensive "Lock It or Lose It" public education campaign to reduce vehicle-related crimes

Initiative: Enhance Fire Department Capabilities

- ▶ Add at least three new personnel—one per shift—to achieve minimum staffing of six firefighters per emergency response.
- ▶ Complete ongoing ISO evaluation process and work to improve rating from 4 to at least 3, potentially reaching 2
- ▶ Evaluate and potentially increase fire assessment rate from current \$311 per resident to ensure adequate funding for enhanced services
- ▶ Evaluate and upgrade emergency response equipment and apparatus to ensure optimal response times
- ▶ Implement advanced training programs for specialized emergency responses (hazmat, technical rescue, water rescue)
- ▶ Develop comprehensive emergency response protocols for high-risk locations identified through pre-fire planning

Initiative: Expand Community Education and Outreach

- ▶ Increase fire safety education presentations in schools from current levels to monthly programs in each district school
- ▶ Launch "Fire Safety Week" annual community-wide education campaign
- ▶ Develop CPR/First Aid training programs for community members, with quarterly public classes
- ▶ Create fire department youth programs including junior firefighter camps and school visit programs
- ▶ Establish fire safety education programs for senior living facilities and assisted living communities
- ▶ Expand fire department participation in community events from current levels to presence at all major city festivals and gatherings

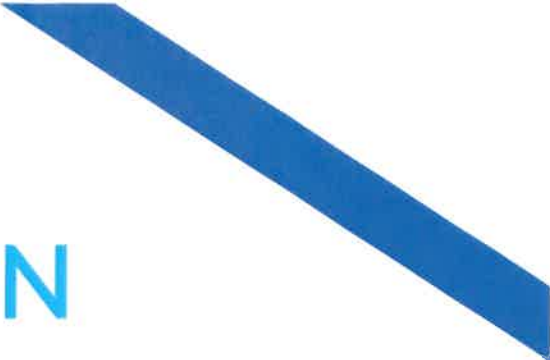
Objective 4.2: Strengthen citizen engagement

Initiative: Enhance communication channels and improve public safety communication

- ▶ Develop comprehensive communication strategy both for emergencies and less emergent public safety announcements
- ▶ Enhance emergency communications through full integration with the Columbia County Combined Communications Center
- ▶ Expand the department's social media presence and monthly video recaps to improve community awareness

Initiative: Create opportunities for public input

- ▶ Establish quarterly meetings with community leaders, including faith leaders and neighborhood associations, with focus on historically underserved areas (See: Objective 2.2)



IMPLEMENTATION FRAMEWORK

The Strategic Plan Implementation Team will be led by the City Manager and including department heads, with periodic reporting to the City Council. The team will:

- Meet monthly/quarterly to review progress on initiatives
- Coordinate cross-departmental efforts
- Identify resource needs and constraints
- Recommend adjustments based on implementation experience
- Prepare progress reports for City Council and the public

TIMELINE AND PHASING

Phase 1 (Year 1 - underway)

- ▶ Establish implementation structures and baseline metrics
- ▶ Begin high-priority initiatives with existing resources
- ▶ Develop detailed action plans for all key initiatives across all departments
- ▶ Build partnerships essential for implementation

Phases 2 and 3 will take more concrete form as each department's key initiatives are added to the timeline.

Phase 2 (Years 2-3)

- ▶ Implement core initiatives across all strategic priorities
- ▶ Secure additional resources for expanded implementation
- ▶ Evaluate initial results and adjust approaches as needed
- ▶ Scale successful pilots to full implementation

Phase 3 (Years 4-5)

- ▶ Complete major initiatives
- ▶ Evaluate overall Strategic Plan outcomes
- ▶ Begin planning for next Strategic Plan cycle

PARTNERSHIP OPPORTUNITIES

Successful implementation requires relationship building and partnerships with the below.

Government Partners:

- ▶ Columbia County
- ▶ Suwannee River Water Management District
- ▶ Florida Department of Transportation

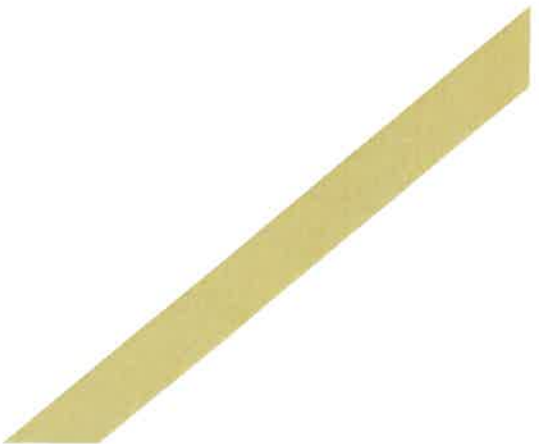
Educational Institutions

- ▶ Florida Gateway College
- ▶ Columbia County School District
- ▶ University of Florida (extension programs)

Business Organizations

- ▶ Chamber of Commerce
- ▶ Major employers (HAECO, Weyerhaeuser HCA Hospital, etc.)
- ▶ Small business organizations
- ▶ Regional economic development organizations

Community Organizations

- ▶ Neighborhood associations
 - ▶ Faith-based organizations
 - ▶ Service clubs and nonprofit organizations
 - ▶ Youth and senior organizations
- 

Financial Strategy

Current Financial Position

Lake City enters this Strategic Plan period with a stable financial foundation, including:

- Utility enterprise funds that support infrastructure maintenance and improvement
- Bonding capacity for strategic investments
- Grant-writing capacity through in-house staff

Revenue Enhancement Strategies

The Lake City tax rate is the lowest in the area at 4.9%. A moderate increase in the tax rate to 5.5-8% would make room for an increase in quality of life services outlined in the initiatives of this report.

Grants and Federal Funding Federal infrastructure and housing grants State economic development programs Foundation funding for community initiatives Regional partnership opportunities	Enterprise Fund Optimization Strategic utility rate adjustments Expansion of customer base through annexation and growth Operational efficiencies to maximize revenue Infrastructure investments that reduce long-term costs
Public Private Partnerships Housing development partnerships Infrastructure cost-sharing with developers Business improvement districts for targeted areas Joint ventures for commercial development	Expansion of the Tax Base Strategic annexation to expand tax base Economic development to increase property values Redevelopment of underutilized properties Diversification of revenue sources 1-3% tax increase

Capital Improvement Planning

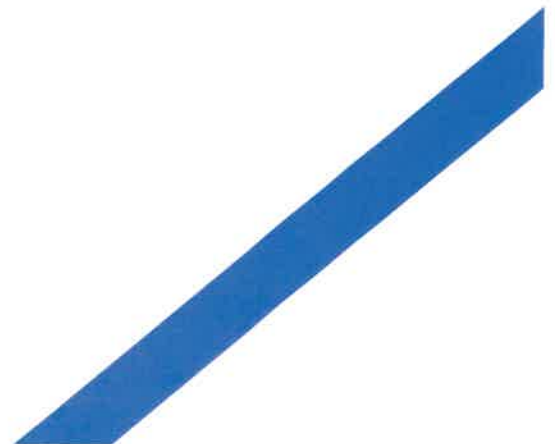
The below capital projects emerged as opportunities or needs during the discovery process for this strategic plan.

- ▶ City Hall
- ▶ Public safety building
- ▶ Water and wastewater capacity improvements
- ▶ Parks and recreation facilities
- ▶ Technology infrastructure

Budget Alignment

Annual budgeting processes will be aligned with Strategic Plan priorities through:

- Department budget requests linked to Strategic Plan initiatives
- Performance-based budgeting for key initiatives
- Mid-year budget reviews to address emerging needs
- Long-term financial planning for multi-year initiatives



CONCLUSION AND NEXT STEPS

The Lake City Strategic Plan establishes a clear vision for our community's future and a practical roadmap to achieve it. By focusing on our four strategic priorities—**Economic Development, Housing & Community Development, Infrastructure & Sustainable Growth, and Public Safety & Community Engagement**—we will transform challenges into opportunities and build a community that works for all residents.

Successful implementation requires commitment, collaboration, and adaptability. The plan provides structure while allowing flexibility to address changing conditions and emerging opportunities. Regular progress reviews and transparent communication will ensure accountability and build community trust in the process.

IMMEDIATE NEXT STEPS (FIRST 90 DAYS)

Establish Implementation Structure

- ▶ Form Strategic Plan Implementation Team
- ▶ Develop detailed work plans for Year 1 initiatives
- ▶ Create performance measurement dashboard

Launch Priority Initiatives

- ▶ Finalize Housing Authority establishment
- ▶ Begin development process for downtown mixed-use project
- ▶ Initiate utility capacity enhancement planning
- ▶ Implement business development "concierge" service

Communicate the Plan

- ▶ Develop Strategic Plan summary materials
- ▶ Host community information sessions
- ▶ Create online platform for tracking implementation progress
- ▶ Engage partners in implementation planning

Secure Funding

- ▶ Identify grant opportunities aligned with plan priorities
- ▶ Explore financing options for major capital projects
- ▶ Begin partnership discussions with key stakeholders

APPENDICES

A1. Discovery Process Notes

The discovery process took into account a cross-section of stakeholders who deeply understand the priorities and needs for Lake City, including public officials and employees as well as private citizens. In addition, we reviewed any relevant materials and/or preexisting plans and initiatives from each stakeholder.

Stakeholder meetings held:

- City Manager and City Executive Team
- City Council
- Columbia County School District
- Florida DOT
- HCA Lake City Hospital
- JAXPORT
- HAECO
- Weyerhaeuser
- Business round table with local business representatives

Stakeholder insights

City Department Heads

- Identified infrastructure, housing, and jobs as the three foundational priorities
- Expressed need for more proactive versus reactive governance
- Highlighted interdepartmental communication improvements
- Concerned about bureaucratic barriers to growth
- Emphasized need to improve city's reputation/perception

County Officials

- Expressed willingness to collaborate on utilities and development
- Highlighted the mega-industrial site as critical opportunity
- Stressed importance of workforce development aligned with growth
- Noted improving intergovernmental relations

Stakeholder insights, cont.

Education Leaders

- Proud of strong career/technical education programs and certifications
- Seeking more youth engagement opportunities
- Interested in expanded internship programs with local businesses
- Concerned about student retention and career pathways
- Expressed desire for more city support with facilities like the pool

Large Employers

- HAECO sees potential for significant expansion with right conditions
- Hospital planning substantial growth with new facilities
- Weyerhaeuser positioned to attract major industrial development

County Officials

- Identified housing as critical barrier to growth
- Emphasized need for streamlined permitting and development processes
- Expressed interest in downtown revitalization
- Highlighted youth engagement and development as community priority
- Want more support for small business growth

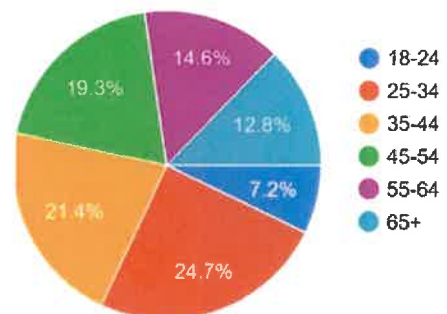
APPENDIX 2: SURVEY RESULTS

The City of Lake City conducted a comprehensive community survey in Spring 2025 to gather input from residents regarding their priorities, concerns, and vision for the future. **With over 550 responses** from diverse neighborhoods across the city and surrounding areas, this survey provided valuable insights that have directly shaped the strategic priorities outlined in this plan.

Responder Demographics

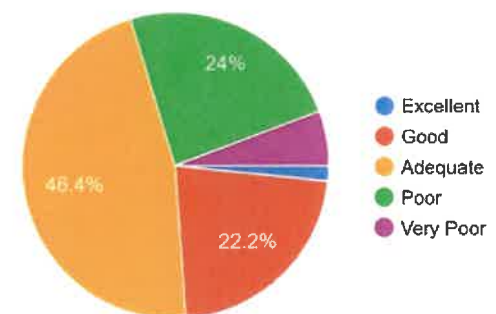
Survey participants represented a broad cross-section of Lake City's population, with residency ranging from less than one year to more than 20 years. All age groups were represented, with the largest participation coming from residents aged 35-44 and 45-54, followed by residents aged 25-34.

What is your age? (555 responses)



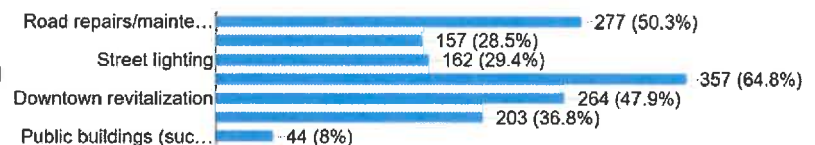
Respondents largely rated the roads and streets Adequate or Good. A sizeable portion, >25%, found the roads Poor or Very Poor.

How would you rate the current condition of Lake City's roads and streets? (554 responses)



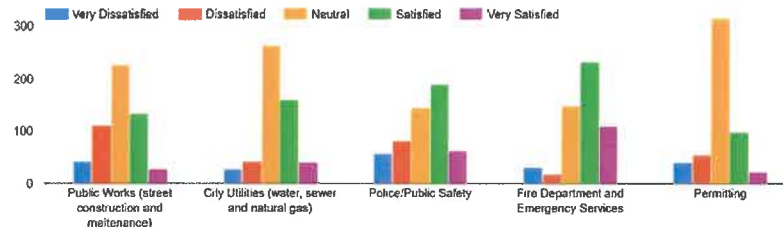
Notable proportions of respondents view road repairs/maintenance, street lighting, downtown revitalization and public buildings.

Which public facility improvements should be prioritized to better support the community? (551 responses)



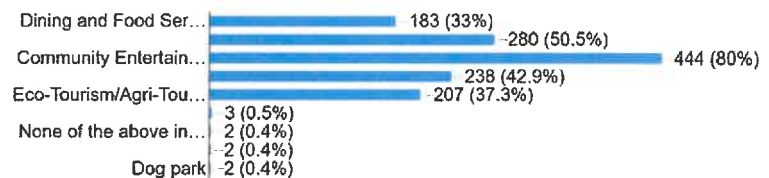
The majority of respondents feel neutral about the Public Works, City Utilities, Police/Public Safety, Fire Department and Emergency Services, and Permitting. **The Fire Department** shares the largest share of **Satisfied** or **Very Satisfied** customers.

How satisfied are you with city services?



A significant proportion of respondents would like to see additional **dining and food services, community entertainment** and **eco-tourism/agri-tourism** in Lake City in the future.

What types of new businesses or developments would you like to see?



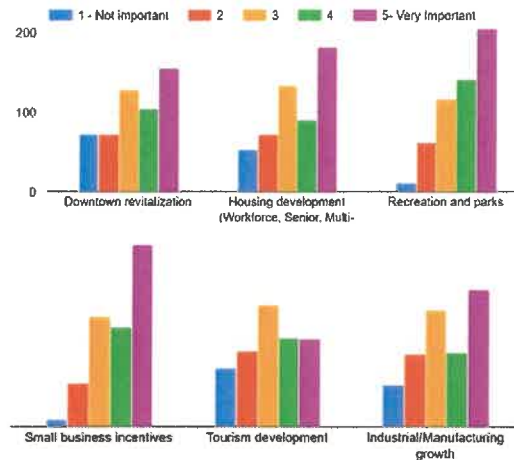
A significant portion of respondents would like to see improved **Community centers, Parks, Public Swimming pool, sports facilities, and Walking/biking trails** in Lake City's future.

Which community amenities would you like to see created or improved? Select all that apply.



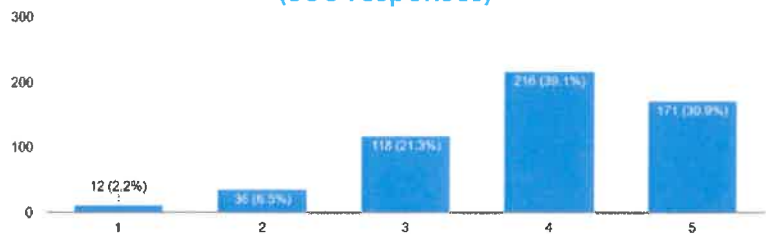
The majority of respondents ranked **Small business incentives**, **Housing Development**, **Recreation and Parks** as **important or very important** for Lake City's future. Tourism development, and industrial/manufacturing growth were viewed as less important by comparison.

How important are the following to Lake City's future?



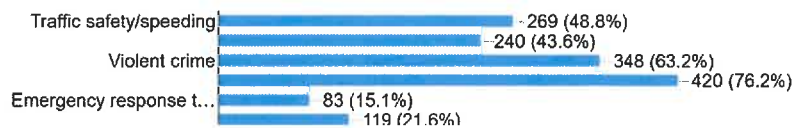
The majority of respondents (70%) feel **Safe** or **Very Safe** in their neighborhoods. 8.7% of respondents feel **Unsafe** or **Very Unsafe**.

How safe do you feel in your neighborhood? (553 responses)



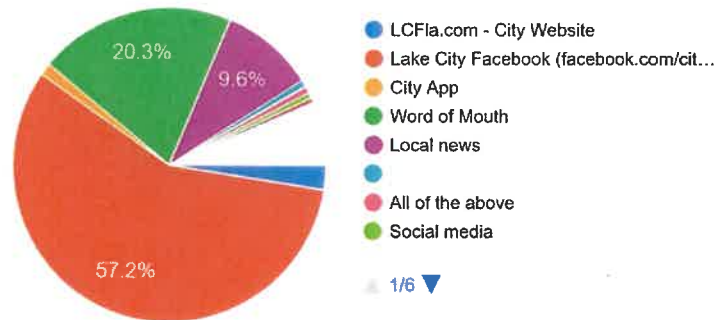
The top safety concerns in Lake City according to survey respondents are: **Traffic safety/speeding** (49%), **Property Crime** (44%), **Violent crime** (63%), **Drug activity** (76%), **Emergency response times** (15%), and **Street lighting** (21%).

What public safety issues concern you most? (553 responses)



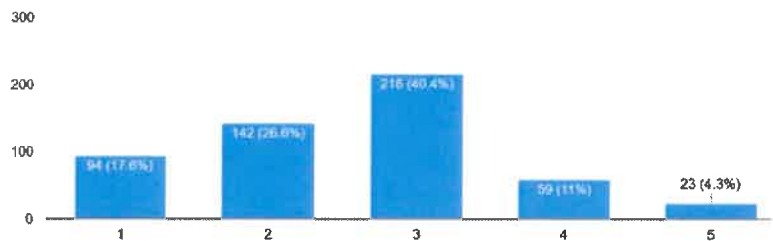
The majority of respondents get their news about Lake City from the City's **Facebook page** (57%) or **Word of Mouth** (20%). 7% get information from the **local news**.

How do you currently get information about Lake City events and news? (552 responses)



On a scale of Not Responsive (1) to Highly Responsive (5), 44% of respondents indicated the city is **not responsive**. 40% felt neutral about this city's responsiveness and a small portion, 15%, noted that the city is highly responsive.

How would you rate the responsiveness of city government to resident concerns? (534 responses)



APPENDIX 3: BEST PRACTICES RESEARCH

Below is background research that was compiled in formulating this plan. It includes rationale for these policy ideas as well as examples of cities who have had success with these tactics.

CULTIVATING NEIGHBORHOOD IDENTITIES FOR COMMUNITY BUILDING

- ▶ **Empower Local Leadership:** Establish neighborhood councils or associations with real decision-making power over local issues like small infrastructure projects, community events, and beautification efforts. Give them modest budgets to implement their priorities.
- ▶ **Create Distinct Visual Identity:** Support neighborhoods in developing unique branding through murals, gateway signage, street banners, and consistent architectural elements that reflect local history or character.
- ▶ **Foster Regular Gathering Spaces:** Ensure each neighborhood has accessible community spaces - whether community centers, pocket parks, or regular street festivals - where residents naturally interact.
- ▶ **Connect Through Shared Systems:** While celebrating uniqueness, create city-wide programs that link neighborhoods, such as coordinated festivals, inter-neighborhood sports leagues, or shared sustainability initiatives.

Successful Small City Examples

- ▶ Decatur, Georgia (population ~25,000) created a neighborhood association network that gives each area real influence over local development decisions. Their annual "Decatur Book Festival" brings all neighborhoods together while individual areas host their own themed events throughout the year.
- ▶ Northampton, Massachusetts (population ~29,000) established neighborhood councils with small grants programs. Each council can fund local improvements up to \$5,000 annually. The Florence neighborhood created a distinctive arts district identity, while others focused on historic preservation or sustainability themes.

- ▶ Burlington, Vermont (population ~45,000) developed a ward system where each neighborhood has both unique character-building initiatives and representation in city-wide planning. Their Old North End neighborhood transformed from struggling to thriving through resident-led placemaking.
- ▶ Traverse City, Michigan (population ~16,000) created neighborhood "stewardship groups" that adopt local spaces and organize signature events. Each group develops its own identity while participating in city-wide coordination meetings and shared resource pools.

The key is balancing local autonomy with city-wide connection - letting neighborhoods develop their own personalities while ensuring they don't become isolated silos. Start with pilot programs in 2-3 neighborhoods before expanding city-wide.

PUBLIC ART PROGRAM FOR DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION

A public art program could address several Lake City priorities:

Crime and Public Safety

- Target north side neighborhoods mentioned in city discussions
- Focus on youth engagement to address concerns about idle youth
- Partner with police department's community engagement initiatives

Downtown Revitalization

- Support the downtown redevelopment priorities identified in city plans
- Create destinations that support local businesses
- Complement the mixed-use development goals

Education and Youth Development

- Collaborate with Columbia County School District's career programs
- Integrate with existing internship and summer youth employment programs
- Support the 50% of students who don't pursue college with creative career pathways

Tourism and Economic Development

- Leverage natural and historical assets through artistic interpretation
- Create Instagram-worthy destinations to support tourism goals
- Support the cultural events and festivals expansion mentioned in city objectives

Documented Positive Impacts of Public Art Programs

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania - Mural Arts Program

Established: 1984

Scale: 4,000+ murals across the city

Documented Impacts:

- **Crime Reduction:** Studies show 5-15% reduction in certain crimes in neighborhoods with new murals
- **Community Engagement:** 95% of residents report feeling more connected to their neighborhood
- **Educational Outcomes:** Schools with mural programs show increased student engagement and attendance
- **Economic Development:** Property values increase 8-15% within 500 feet of public art installations

San Antonio, Texas - Centro de Artes Program

Focus: Latino cultural heritage through public murals in underserved neighborhoods

Community Benefits:

- **Academic Achievement:** Schools in participating neighborhoods show 18% improvement in standardized test scores
- **Youth Programs:** 300+ young people participate annually in mural creation
- **Crime Prevention:** 30% reduction in youth arrests in target neighborhoods

Grand Rapids, Michigan - ArtPrize

Model: Annual citywide art competition using public spaces

Economic and Social Impact:

- **Economic Boost:** \$15+ million in annual economic impact
- **Education:** Partnership with schools reaches 20,000+ students annually
- **Safety:** Downtown crime decreases 25% during festival periods, with lasting effects

IMPACTS OF HOUSING AUTHORITIES IN SMALL SOUTHERN CITIES

Best Practices

- ▶ **Start with Strategic Planning:** Conduct comprehensive housing needs assessments and create 5-10 year plans that address both immediate repairs and long-term community development goals.
- ▶ **Focus on Mixed-Income Development:** Reduce concentration of low-income housing by creating developments that serve families at various income levels, including workforce housing for teachers, firefighters, and other essential workers.
- ▶ **Climate Resilience:** Southern housing authorities increasingly focus on hurricane/tornado resistance and energy efficiency for hot, humid climates.
- ▶ **Historic Preservation:** Many Southern cities successfully combine affordable housing with historic district revitalization, using tax credits creatively.
- ▶ **Rural Partnerships:** Small Southern cities often coordinate with county housing authorities to serve broader regions more efficiently.
- ▶ **Employer Partnerships:** Industries like healthcare, education, and manufacturing in small Southern cities create natural partnerships for workforce housing development.

Examples of Cities with Successful Programs

Florence, South Carolina (population ~38,000, but started smaller)

Focused on homeownership counseling and down-payment assistance programs alongside traditional rental housing.

- Generated 312 first-time homebuyers over 5 years with 92% still maintaining homeownership after 7 years
- \$18.6 million in new mortgage lending in the local market
- 34% reduction in crime rates and 28% increase in high school graduation rates over 8 years.

Greenville, Mississippi (population ~29,000, but started smaller)

Transformed their public housing through the HOPE VI program, replacing deteriorating high-rise projects with mixed-income townhomes and single-family homes. They created the historic Lakeview community that became a model for other Delta cities.

- Replaced 300 units of distressed housing with 180 mixed-income units plus 85 homeownership opportunities.
- Crime in the area decreased 74% and childhood asthma rates dropped 45% due to improved quality of housing.

Opelika, Alabama (population ~30,000)

Developed innovative partnerships with Auburn University to create affordable workforce housing. Their housing authority focused on downtown revitalization, converting historic buildings into mixed-income housing while preserving the city's character.

- Generated \$45M in private investment within 3 blocks of public housing developments
- Property values in the area increased 127% over 8 years, and downtown vacancy rates dropped from 40% to 8%.

Thomasville, Georgia (population ~19,000)

Created successful public-private partnerships through their housing authority, working with local employers to develop workforce housing for teachers and hospital workers. They focused on scattered-site housing rather than concentrated developments.

- Reduced teacher turnover from 23% to 11% annually, saving the school district \$180,000 per year.
- Local hospital reported 40% reduction in nursing staff turnover

Tuskegee, Alabama (population ~9,000)

Partnered with Tuskegee University to create innovative homeownership programs and renovate historic neighborhoods. Their housing authority emphasizes resident ownership and community wealth-building.

- Local unemployment dropped from 18% to 9% in targeted neighborhoods.



This strategic Plan was commissioned by City Manager Don Rosenthal and his executive staff. If you have any questions, comments or concerns, contact us at <https://www.lcfla.com/contact>.