POLK VISION

COMMUNITY VISION COMPREHENSIVE UPDATE

PREFACE

The Community Vision for Polk County adopted on August 2, 2004, was developed over an intense nine-month period by cross-sector leaders from all areas of the county. Polk Vision, Inc., (hereinafter referred to as Polk Vision) was established to actively facilitate processes through which Polk County could achieve this shared Vision.

Over the past two decades, Polk Vision has ensured the Community Vision remains vital and relevant by closely monitoring local conditions, identifying and building awareness of emerging priorities, promoting the alignment of programs and systems, and encouraging mutual accountability.

Through aligned stakeholder collaborations, considerable progress has been made towards achieving the shared Community Vision. However, amid unprecedented growth and its impact on our rapidly evolving community, it was evident the time had come to establish an updated Community Vision that is both responsive to the current dynamics and addresses the needs for the future.

To gain contemporary opinions from Polk County citizens, Polk Vision embarked upon a thorough and rigorous update to the Community Vision. To establish the methodology and to assist in performing the research and analysis, Polk Vision secured the services of a qualified consulting firm, Crescendo Consulting Group.

Updating the Vision began in January of 2023 when the Polk Vision Board of Directors tapped its Operating Board to serve as the Steering Committee for the project. This group of leaders spent months in deep discussion regarding the complexities impacting overall Quality of Life for the citizens of Polk County.

Following ten months of preparation, a countywide outreach launched in November of 2023 with seventy-two one-on-one interviews held with public, private, and civic leaders to discuss both current and emerging challenges. Throughout March and April of 2024, a series of thirteen focus groups were convened to gather the valuable insights and diverse perspectives of 215 residents. Following the Focus Groups, Polk Vision sought widespread input through an online survey which was open from May 1, 2024, through June 12, 2024, and garnered the opinions of 3,622 unique respondents.

The issues identified by this research are documented and organized within seven interdependent Areas of Focus. Priorities within each Area of Focus are tied to identified Strategies and data for Benchmarking. This provides a proven framework for the Community Vision implementation process and progress monitoring.

During a joint session of the Polk Vision Board of Directors and its Operating Board on June 20, 2024, the research results were reviewed and related strategies for improving outcomes were approved. On August 20, 2024, during a meeting of the Polk County Board of County Commissioners, the updated Community Vision was unanimously endorsed.

Polk Vision will continue to engage both public and private stakeholders to work together in alignment and make the Community Vision a reality.

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VISIONING PROCESS

Research began in October of 2023 and included a series of one-on-one interviews with seventy-two stakeholders from across the county; sixty-one were held in person and the remaining eleven were held via telephone or video conferencing. These interviews lasted on average one and a half hours and provided the opportunity for in-depth conversations about how current, local conditions are impacting the overall Quality of Life in Polk County.

Following the completion of stakeholder interviews, thirteen in-person focus groups were held across the county between March and April of 2024 with 215 participants discussing their perspectives on the essence of Quality of Life. This included in-depth two-hour open exchanges regarding the strengths and challenges residents are experiencing.

Notes of these discussions were captured through live transcription and recording. These notes were collected and aggregated by Crescendo Consulting Group creating a database for each Area of Focus. This analytical process aimed to delve deep into the content, systematically analyzing the aggregated data to extract meaningful insights and patterns. Through this methodical approach, the research team was able to identify core themes that underpinned the group discussions.[1]

Further research was conducted through an online survey from May 1, 2024, through June 12, 2024. The questionnaire included closed-ended questions, open-ended questions, and demographic questions. In total, there were 3,622 survey responses. Special care was exercised to minimize the amount of non-sampling error through the assessment of design effects (e.g., question order, question-wording, response alternatives). The survey was designed to maximize accessibility and comprehensively evaluate respondents' insights.[2]

The issues identified by this research are addressed throughout the Vision and Strategies for the seven interdependent foundations to provide a comprehensive Vision for Polk County. The seven Areas of Focus also provide a proven framework for the Vision Implementation Process.

[1] Appendix 1
[2] Appendix 2

LONG-TERM VISION

Our Vision

In order to achieve the over-arching priority of improved Quality of Life, strategies will be deployed in the seven Areas of Focus.

Before 2044 Polk County will have:

I. Growth Management and Infrastructure
Strategic growth management and resilient infrastructure that protects the environment and quality of life, supports the unique characteristics of distinct communities, enhances education opportunities, and promotes sustainable economic development.

II. Education
A collaborative educational network that connects students, families, academic institutions, community members and local businesses in support of holistic, inclusive, and dynamic learning opportunities.

III. Economic Advancement
An economic environment that attracts and retains industry-diverse businesses with high-paying careers and educates and retains qualified talent to align with targeted industry workforce needs.

IV. Community Health and Well–Being
A culture that prioritizes community health, wellness, and safety with equitable access to a range of high-quality, holistic resources enabling everyone to lead productive fulfilling lives.

V. Government
Collaboration among all levels of government that is efficient, customer-focused, and effective in serving the essential needs of its citizens.

VI. Civic Engagement
Citizens who actively learn, collaborate, and engage across both public and private sectors to ensure that Polk County continues to advance and prosper.

VII. Arts, Culture, and Recreation
An environment that promotes arts, cultural, and recreational opportunities that celebrate our diverse creative, historic, and natural resources.

KEY BENCHMARKS

The Key Benchmarks measure Polk County's annual progress. These benchmarks, developed by Vision Partners, are assessed annually as data becomes available. Achieving these benchmarks requires collaborative efforts in seven interdependent Areas of Focus: Growth Management and Infrastructure, Economic Advancement, Education, Community Health and Well-Being, Government, Civic Engagement, and Arts, Culture, and Recreation. Polk Vision aims to shape a desirable future for Polk County. Each year, the benchmarks indicate when we are successful and can celebrate or when we fall short, prompting Vision Partners to review, revise, and refocus their strategies and action steps.

I. Growth Management and Infrastructure

a. The Polk County TPO strives to maintain a coordinated, comprehensive, and continuing planning process meeting requirements set forth under Section 339.175, F.S. and develop both short and long-term plans and programs to meet the existing and future travel needs of Polk County. One of the primary areas of focus is monitoring the number of strategic plan projects completed and planned for completion on an annual basis. These projects, or plans, are designed to improve short and long-term mobility.

The baseline data for the TPO strategic plan projects is as follows

- In the fiscal year 2021/2022, 2 projects were completed.
- For the fiscal year 2022/2023, 12 projects were budgeted.
- The adopted budget for the fiscal year 2023/2024 also included 12 projects.
- Similarly, 12 projects are planned for the fiscal year 2024/2025. [3]

b. The County continues to invest in road projects to accommodate increased demand and in addition to projects currently funded in its 5-year CIP, has identified $2.1 billion of additional improvements.[4] Polk County is working

[3] https://www.polktpo.com/
[4] https://www.polk-county.net/

with developers on infrastructure agreements to provide improvements that are quicker and more cost-effective.

c. Polk County's Roads and Drainage Division is dedicated to providing efficient and cost-effective roadway resurfacing treatments to support the County's Pavement Management Program. This commitment is reflected in the division's ongoing efforts to recycle, maintain, and rehabilitate the county's roadways, ensuring they remain safe and functional for all residents.

The baseline data for the number of roads recycled, maintained, and resurfaced under this program is as follows:

Number of Roads Recycled (miles)[5]

- Actual FY 2021/2022: 5.50 miles
- Budget FY 2022/2023: 6.00 miles
- Adopted FY 2023/2024: 6.00 miles
- Planned FY 2024/2025: 4.00 miles

Number of Roads Maintained with Preventative Treatment (miles)[6]

- Actual FY 2021/2022: 56.00 miles
- Budget FY 2022/2023: 65.00 miles
- Adopted FY 2023/2024: 112.00 miles
- Planned FY 2024/2025: 195.00 miles

Number of Road Miles Resurfaced with Rehabilitation Treatment (miles)[7]

- Actual FY 2021/2022: 50.00 miles
- Budget FY 2022/2023: 88.00 miles
- Adopted FY 2023/2024: 76.00 miles
- Planned FY 2024/2025: 60.00 miles

These figures demonstrate Polk County's proactive approach to road maintenance and improvement. By recycling a substantial number of road miles each year, the county reduces waste and promotes sustainability. The significant increase in miles maintained with preventative treatment from FY 2021/2022 to FY 2024/2025 highlights the division's focus on extending the lifespan of roadways through timely interventions. Meanwhile, the

[5] https://www.polk-county.net/public-safety/roads-and-drainage/
[6] Ibid
[7] Ibid

rehabilitation treatment figures indicate a balanced approach to addressing more severe road conditions as needed.

d. Polk County's Roads and Drainage Division is committed to efficiently managing all Capital Improvement Program (CIP) projects to ensure they are completed within specifications and budget. This includes overseeing bridge construction and maintenance, as well as providing comprehensive oversight for all road construction projects.

The division's performance in managing bridge repairs and CIP project phases is illustrated by the following data:

Number of Bridges Repaired[8]

- Actual FY 2021/2022: 23 bridges
- Budget FY 2022/2023: 14 bridges
- Adopted FY 2023/2024: 10 bridges
- Planned FY 2024/2025: 15 bridges

Number of CIP Project Phases (design, right-of-way, permitting, construction) Completed[9]

- Actual FY 2021/2022: 25 phases
- Budget FY 2022/2023: 25 phases
- Adopted FY 2023/2024: 27 phases
- Planned FY 2024/2025: 30 phases

e. Polk County's Roads and Drainage Division is dedicated to providing efficient and cost-effective installation of new sidewalks, enhancing pedestrian safety and accessibility throughout the county. The division's commitment is demonstrated by the steady increase in the number of linear feet of new sidewalk installed annually.

Number of Linear Feet of New Sidewalk Installed[10]

- Actual FY 2021/2022: 23,607 linear feet
- Budget FY 2022/2023: 25,000 linear feet
- Adopted FY 2023/2024: 25,275 linear feet
- Planned FY 2024/2025: 25,275 linear feet

These figures reflect a consistent and proactive approach to expanding the county's sidewalk network. The increase from 23,607 linear feet in FY

[8] https://www.polk-county.net/public-safety/roads-and-drainage/
[9] Ibid
[10] Ibid

2021/2022 to the planned 25,275 linear feet in FY 2024/2025 indicates a strategic effort to meet the growing demand for safe pedestrian pathways.

By maintaining this upward trend, the division ensures that more areas of Polk County become accessible to pedestrians, promoting walkability and supporting healthier, more active lifestyles.

f. Polk County's Utilities Division is dedicated to ensuring that all new construction projects meet county standards through meticulous oversight and administration. This includes observing the installation of water mains, sewer mains, reclaim mains, lift stations, and new water and wastewater facilities. The division also manages testing and daily inspections, keeping detailed logs of project materials and progress.

Water, Sewer, and Reclaim Mains Observed[11]
- Actual FY 2021/2022: 10 projects
- Budget FY 2022/2023: 16 projects
- Adopted FY 2023/2024: 21 projects
- Planned FY 2024/2025: 18 projects

New Water Plant Construction[12]
- Actual FY 2021/2022: 2 projects
- Budget FY 2022/2023: 2 projects
- Adopted FY 2023/2024: 2 projects
- Planned FY 2024/2025: 1 project

Road Widening Projects Utility Adjustment[13]
- Actual FY 2021/2022: 3 projects
- Budget FY 2022/2023: 3 projects
- Adopted FY 2023/2024: 1 project
- Planned FY 2024/2025: 2 projects

Wastewater Plant Expansion[14]
- Actual FY 2021/2022: 3 projects
- Budget FY 2022/2023: 3 projects
- Adopted FY 2023/2024: 1 project
- Planned FY 2024/2025: 1 project

[11] https://www.polk-county.net/services/utilities/
[12] Ibid
[13] Ibid
[14] Ibid

The division's efforts are reflected in the increase in projects observed and overseen. The rise in the number of water, sewer, and reclaim mains observed from ten in FY 2021/2022 to a planned eighteen in FY 2024/2025 demonstrates a robust approach to managing infrastructure growth. While new water plant construction and wastewater plant expansions show a slight reduction in the planned projects, the division maintains a steady focus on these critical areas to ensure quality and compliance with county standards.

g. Increase the percentage of Polk County households with one or more computing devices to 98% by 2025. Polk County has shown significant progress in the adoption of computing devices among households over recent years. The percentage of households with at least one computing device has steadily increased, reflecting the growing digital inclusion and connectivity in the community.

- In 2019, 92.2% of Polk County households reported having one or more computing devices.
- By 2021, this figure had risen to 95.8%.
- In 2022, it reached 96%.[15]

h. Increase the percentage of Polk County households with an internet subscription to 94% by 2025. Polk County has made notable strides in increasing internet subscription rates among households in recent years. The percentage of households with an internet subscription has shown a steady upward trend, reflecting improvements in digital connectivity across the county.

- In 2019, 82.1% of households had an internet subscription.
- By 2021, this figure had risen to 88.6%.
- In 2022, it increased further to 91.2%.[16]

i. Ensure that Polk County has adequate affordable housing options. In Polk County, the housing affordability landscape is shaped by varying income levels and economic challenges, as illustrated by the ALICE (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed) data. This data provides insight into the financial realities faced by many residents and highlights the need for targeted affordable housing solutions.

[15] www.data.census.gov
[16] www.data.census.gov

According to the ALICE data:

- 52% of households are classified as "Above ALICE Threshold," meaning they earn enough to cover their basic needs and are not considered financially constrained.
- 33% of households fall into the "ALICE" category, which encompasses individuals and families who are employed but struggle to make ends meet due to limited assets and income. This group faces significant financial pressures, often finding it challenging to afford necessities such as housing, healthcare, and transportation.
- 15% of households are living below the poverty line. They experience severe financial hardship, making it difficult to meet even the most basic needs, including affordable housing.[17]

This distribution of household income levels highlights the ongoing challenges in achieving housing affordability in Polk County. While a significant portion of the population is financially stable, a notable percentage of residents, both ALICE and those below the poverty line, face considerable barriers to securing affordable housing.

In 2023, the median sale price for a single-family home in the Lakeland – Winter Haven MSA was $334,425. This is a 0.2% decrease from the previous year. From 2018 – 2022, the median gross rent in Polk County was $1,192. The ratio of median income to housing value was 28.2% for Polk County and 23.2% for Florida, while the ratio of median income to annual rent was 4.3 for Polk County and 3.9 for Florida.[18]

II. Economic Advancement

a. Decrease the number of people commuting outside of the county for employment. In 2020, 66,066 people lived in Polk County and worked outside of it, with 63,405 working in other Florida counties. In 2020, 34,751 people lived outside of Polk County and worked within it, with 33,623 coming from Florida counties[19]. The net commuting population was 29,782 for Florida counties and an additional 1,533 for non-Florida counties 1, or 10.9% and 0.6%, respectively, of the number of 272,200 nonfarm jobs. This is an increase from the 7.7% of net commuting jobs for Polk County in 2003.

[17] https://www.unitedforalice.org/demographics/Florida
[18] https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/US/PST045222
[19] www.data.census.gov

Commuting may cause stress on families and limit availability for volunteer work and community service. Additionally, the extra cars on the road cause a strain on transportation infrastructure. With its centralized location and affordability, Polk County will continue to attract residents working in neighboring counties.

b. Decrease the percentage of individuals in poverty to meet or be consistently below the state average. In 2022, the poverty rate in Polk County decreased to 14.8%, yet it remained above the state average of 12.9% and the national average of 12.5%.[20]

c. Maintain a working age/retirement age ratio[21] that meets or exceeds the state ratio to increase the wealth of residents. In 2022, the working age to retirement age ratio for Polk County was 3.0, as compared to 2.7 for Florida and 3.5 for the United States. While Polk County's ratio has remained stable since 2000, the ratio for Florida and the U.S. has fallen from 3.3 and 4.7, respectively.[22]

d. Maintain the upward trend of Polk County's taxable value as a percentage of Florida's taxable value. Polk County saw an increase in taxable value from FY 2023-24 to FY 2024-25 of $6,784,329,294.[23]

e. Increase the Polk County per capita income as a percentage of the United States to at least 90%. Polk County's per capita income, as a percentage of the U.S. per capita income, has remained relatively stable, increasing slightly from 81.1% in 2002 to 83.1% in 2022.[24] This ratio rose during the economic expansion of the early 2000s, fell during the subsequent recession, and stabilized around 80% before rising again in 2022.

f. Promote both job growth and increased earnings per job. From 2003 to 2023, Polk County saw a substantial increase in nonfarm jobs, rising from 182,300 to 272,200, reflecting a compounded annual growth rate of 2.02%. This outpaced Florida's compounded growth rate of 1.51% over the same period. Additionally, average weekly wages in Polk County grew by 2.76% from 2007 to 2023, surpassing Florida's wage growth of 2.40% over this same period.[25]

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[20] www.data.census.gov
[21] Calculated as the ratio of the population between 18 and 65 to the population of 65+ from the Census QuickFacts. https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/US/PST045222
[22] https://www.cfdc.org/resources/data-research/
[23] https://www.polk-county.net/business/budget-and-management-services/
[24] https://fred.stlouisfed.org/series/MEHOINUSA646N
[25] www.bls.gov

g. Improve residents' purchasing power by maintaining a Cost-of-Living Index in Polk County that is consistently below the state's index. By the fourth quarter of 2023, Polk County's annual average salary was $51,306, and the Cost-of-Living Index was 93.2. This resulted in a purchasing power of $55,077. In comparison, Florida's average salary was $63,911 with a Cost-of-Living Index of 93.2, yielding a purchasing power of $62,002. Nationally, the average salary had increased to $69,861, with a Cost-of-Living Index of 100.0 and a purchasing power of $69,861.[26]

III. Education

a. Increase the kindergarten readiness rate in Polk County to meet or exceed the statewide average. In the Fall of 2022, 43% of children in Polk County were considered ready to enter kindergarten (Scoring 690+ on FAST Star Early Literacy Assessment), compared to 49% statewide in Florida. By the Fall of 2023, the readiness rate in Polk County increased slightly to 44%, while the statewide readiness rate rose to 51%.[27]

b. Increase the percentage of students in Polk County reading on grade level (achieving a Level 3 or above on the English Language Arts FAST assessment) to meet or exceed the statewide average.

2022-2023	Polk County	State of Florida
3rd grade	49%	55%
5th grade	50%	55%
8th grade	42%	51%
10th grade	45%	53%

Data collected from the Florida Department of Education.[28]

c. Increase high school graduation rates to meet or exceed the statewide average. In 2022-2023, Polk County's graduation rate was 78.3%, while the statewide rate was 88%.[29]

[26] https://www.cfdc.org/resources/data-research/
[27] https://www.fldoe.org/
[28] Ibid
[29] Ibid

d. Increase the post-secondary enrollment rate in Polk County to meet or exceed the statewide average. Postsecondary enrollment rates provide information about students who graduate with a standard high school diploma and who then enroll in postsecondary education within the first academic year following their high school graduation. At the end of the 2021-2022 school year, Polk County's enrollment rate in "Any Florida Post-Secondary Enrollment" was 37.1%, compared to the statewide rate of 53.7%.[30]

e. Increase the percentage of adults aged 25 and over in Polk County with a bachelor's degree or higher to meet or exceed the statewide average. As of 2022, 21.4% of adults aged 25 and over in Polk County hold a bachelor's degree or higher. This is notably lower than the state average in Florida, where 32.3% of adults have attained this level of education, and the national average of 34.3%.[31]

f. Increase the percentage of adults aged 25 and over in Polk County with some college education or a higher degree to meet or exceed the statewide average. As of 2022, 53.9% of adults aged 25 and over in Polk County have some college education or a higher degree. This is lower than the state average of 62.9% in Florida and the national average of 63.6%.[32]

IV. Community Health and Well-Being

a. Reduce Polk County's infant mortality rate to meet or fall consistently below the state average. Between 2019 and 2021, Polk County's infant mortality rate was 7.2 per 1,000 live births, higher than Florida's average rate of 5.9. From 2020 to 2022, the rate in Polk County increased to 7.7 per 1,000 live births, while Florida's rate remained at 5.9.[33]

b. Reduce Polk County's overall and child food insecurity rates to meet or fall consistently below the state average. In 2022, food insecurity rates increased across the board. Polk County's overall food insecurity rate rose to 13.7%, surpassing Florida's rate of 13.2% and the U.S. rate of 13.5%. Similarly, Polk County's child food insecurity rate climbed to 20.8%, higher than Florida's rate of 19.1% and the U.S. rate of 18.5%.[34]

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[30] https://edudata.fldoe.org/ReportCards/Schools.html?school=0000&district=53
[31] https://data.census.gov/
[32] Ibid
[33] https://www.flhealthcharts.gov/charts/default.aspx
[34] https://www.feedingamerica.org/research/map-the-meal-gap/by-county

c. Increase the number of Behavioral Health/Mental Health Professionals to meet or exceed the state average per 100,000 people. In 2022-2023, Polk County averaged 77.9 professionals per 100,000 people, while the statewide average in Florida was 121.8 professionals per 100,000 people.[35]

d. Reduce the prevalence of overweight or obese adults and students in Polk County to meet or fall below the state average. In 2019, 71.4% of adults in Polk County were classified as overweight or obese, compared to 64.6% statewide. Data for adults from 2020 to 2022 was not available for Polk County, but statewide rates during this period were 64.1% in 2020, 67% in 2021, and 66.1% in 2022.[36] For students, 42% of middle and high school students in Polk County were overweight or obese in 2022, significantly higher than the 31.7% statewide average. In 2023, while Polk County data was unavailable, the statewide rate for students was 30.2%.[37]

V. Government

a. Increase the satisfaction rate of perceived government performance regarding growth management by at least 10% by the next Polk Vision Quality of Life Survey cycle in 2029. In the Polk Vision Quality of Life Survey conducted between May and June 2024, the community expressed a clear desire for improvements in growth management, with 29% of respondents identifying "responsible and economically sustainable growth management" as their top priority for the county's development.

   A comprehensive plan update entitled “Prosper 2050” is to be performed during 2024-2025 and will be aligned with the updated Vision established by Polk County residents in 2024.

b. Improve community satisfaction with government communications. In the Baseline Quality of Life Survey conducted between May and June 2024, the effectiveness of communication between government and citizens was identified as a key area for improvement. While 56.7% of respondents agree that "government officials are responsive to citizen input," 18.6% of respondents placed improving this communication as their fourth highest priority.

[35] https://www.flhealthcharts.gov/charts/default.aspx
[36] Ibid
[37] Ibid

VI. Civic Engagement

a. Increase voter registration and turnout in Polk County. As of July 12, 2024, Polk County has a total of 440,309 active registered voters distributed as follows: Republican Party of Florida: 180,076, Florida Democratic Party: 133,278, Minor Party: 12,751, and No Party Affiliation: 114,204.

Recent voter turnout percentages in Polk County are:

- General Election (November 3, 2020): 73.3%
- 2024 Presidential Preference Primary: 21.5%
- 2024 April Municipal Election: 14.89%.[38]

VII. Arts, Culture, and Recreation

a. Elevate Polk County's national ranking for arts and culture to a position in the top quartile (i.e. a score of 75 or higher). According to the 2023 Arts Vibrancy Index report, Polk County's current rating is 72.[39]

b. Promote the integration of arts, culture, and recreation within public education. Polk County Public Schools (PCPS) significantly increased their Fine Arts Budget from $363,639 in the 2022-23 fiscal year to $642,341, reflecting a strong commitment to enhancing arts education.[40]

[38] https://www.polkelections.com/Facts-Figures/Election-Results
[39] https://dataarts.smu.edu/ArtsVibrancyMap/
[40] https://www.polkschoolsfl.com/about/budgetandfinance

STRATEGIES

Interdependent Building Blocks that Support Our Long-Term Vision

I. Growth Management and Infrastructure

II. Economic Advancement

III. Education

IV. Community Health and Well-Being

V. Government

VI. Civic Engagement

VII. Arts, Culture, and Recreation

I. Growth Management and Infrastructure

VISION

Strategic growth management and resilient infrastructure that protects the environment and quality of life, supports the unique characteristics of distinct communities, enhances education opportunities, and promotes sustainable economic development.

STRATEGIES:

A. Comprehensive Planning

A Comprehensive Plan serves as a blueprint for future commercial and residential land uses, housing, conservation, cultural and recreational amenities. An essential component of the Comprehensive Plan is identifying the new infrastructure and growth demands needed to support the future physical and economic development of the county while aiming to preserve the environmental features and community character of the area.

1. Polk County government will maintain a Comprehensive Plan that is coordinated with countywide infrastructure plans.

    a. A comprehensive plan update entitled "Prosper 2050" is to be performed during 2024-2025 and will be aligned with the updated Vision established by Polk County residents in 2024.

    b. Through extensive resident engagement, "Prosper 2050" will enable citizens to envision the positive impacts on Quality of Life in Polk County through well-managed growth over the next 25 years.

    c. Polk County government shall strengthen its collaborations with Polk Vision, Inc., local municipal governments, regional and state agencies, and community residents to ensure alignment with existing regional municipal visions and infrastructure plans.

    d. Both public partnerships and public-private partnerships will be created and maintained for all elements of land use and infrastructure planning and development.

e. Polk County government together with Polk Vision, Inc. will provide the collaborative framework to strengthen and sustain these partnerships.

B. Smart Growth Management

Smart Growth management is an overall approach to development that encourages a mix of building types and uses, diverse housing and transportation options, development within existing neighborhoods, and requires robust community engagement. It can help support a growing economy, jobs creation, affordable housing, access to schools, libraries, and essential services, with limited development near agricultural lands, and the preservation of natural resources.

1. Smart Growth Strategies will be collaboratively identified, defined, and implemented encompassing the following elements:

- Future Land Use
- Housing
- Conservation
- Economic Development
- Infrastructure
- Transportation
- Recreation and Open Space
- Public School Facilities
- Intergovernmental Coordination
- Capital Improvements

2. The identified Smart Growth Strategies will include Future Land Use and Infrastructure plans that align with the Economic Development efforts of the county, municipalities, and the private sector that will serve to sharpen economic development and drive higher wages.

Specific attention will be given to the following targeted industries:

- Advanced Manufacturing
- Agribusiness & Agri technology
- Aviation & Aerospace
- Business Services
- Health Sciences
- Entertainment, Arts & Tourism
- Logistics, Supply Chain & Distribution
- Research & Technology

3. County and municipal Land Use and Infrastructure plans will provide the capacity required to meet the updated countywide Vision established by residents in 2024.

C. Area Strategic Plans

1. Area Strategic Plans will be developed as a positive addition to the Comprehensive Plan and provide a mechanism to ensure coordination between Polk County government and each of the seventeen municipalities and to best serve the interests of the county overall.

   a. Primary importance will be placed on ensuring cooperation, equity, and trust between Polk County government and each of the seventeen municipalities in the establishment and implementation of the Area Strategic Plans.

   b. All Area Strategic Plans will be coordinated and phased for build-out with the most efficient and effective construction of infrastructure elements.

   c. Incentives and disincentives may be used to create the most strategically advantageous plan and priority of sequence.

   d. Decisions will be made based on engineering, science, cost accounting and the best factual data available.

   e. The Area Strategic Plans will aim to reduce urban sprawl through both the creation of new neighborhoods and the redevelopment of established areas.

   i. Neighborhood designs will be linked by sufficient multi-modal transportation options that enable easy access to churches, schools, shopping, recreation, essential services, and amenities such as parks and play areas, which increase neighborhood interaction and build community connections.

   f. Development codes and ordinances will be stringently enforced and aligned with the land use plan and elements of the infrastructure master plans.

D. Redevelopment

1. Eliminate blighted areas through a combination of new development and the reconstruction and rehabilitation of residential, commercial and retail districts including sites designated for housing, business, industrial, and public buildings.

    a. Form collaborative partnerships that include residents, community groups and business leaders to create and implement innovative redevelopment plans for all county and city neighborhoods in distress and focus on reversing economic decline.

    b. Elements of the redevelopment plans will include measures aimed at addressing underlying issues that contribute to the existing problems in the area such as existing land tenure, infrastructure, and socioeconomic challenges.

    c. Coordinate stakeholder efforts to ensure continuity and protect against unintended market forces that might displace longtime residents and businesses.

E. Affordable Housing

Affordable housing is a vital component of infrastructure investment. In Polk County escalating housing costs are reported to be prohibitively high for even moderate-income households.

1. Strengthen existing and establish new collaborative partnerships between county and municipal governments, nonprofits, developers, and other stakeholders across the county to create and implement innovative housing strategies designed to close the housing affordability gap and achieve lasting sustainable housing solutions.

    a. Ensure the construction and preservation of an affordable housing stock that falls within the range of wages in Polk County.

    b. Collaboratively create and implement a range of comprehensive strategies on the basic premise that individuals and families of all incomes deserve safe, decent, affordable homes that are accessible to jobs, shopping, and other services and are available

at a cost that allows them to provide for necessities such as food, clothing, and medical care.

2. Continue to leverage resources and improve communities by assisting vulnerable populations through the Polk County government Housing and Neighborhood Development[41] (HND) programs, which prioritize federal and state grant funds across a range of areas including:

   i. Shelter for Homeless Population – The acquisition, construction, and/or rehabilitation of shelter facilities and housing for the homeless population.

   ii. Rental Assistance – Rental assistance and security or utility deposits for income-eligible individuals and households. Rapid housing for individuals and households at risk of or already experiencing homelessness.

   iii. Homeownership Assistance – Direct assistance to prospective low- and moderate-income homebuyers, including down payment and closing cost assistance, credit counseling, and homeownership education.

   iv. Housing Preservation – Acquisition, rehabilitation, and/or preservation of affordable housing for low- and moderate-income residents.

   v. New Housing – Acquisition, development, and construction of new affordable housing.

   vi. Neighborhood Improvements - Provide funding for public facility improvements in target areas, and in very low-, low- and moderate-income areas to improve the quality of life and health of neighborhood residents.

[41] https://www.polk-county.net/services/housing-and-neighborhood-development/

F. Capital Improvement Plan

1. The countywide Comprehensive Plan will include a Capital Improvement element that uses innovative funding for all infrastructure development on an annual basis.

    a. The Comprehensive Plan for Polk County includes a Capital Improvement element, otherwise known as the Community Investment Program[42] (CIP). The CIP is a rolling five-year plan that documents all capital infrastructure projects whether financed by Federal, State, County, School Board, municipal or other governmental authorities or entities. All projects are required to meet the service level required for each type of infrastructure and are included whether funds for construction are currently available or not.

    b. The CIP, with its five-year time frame, gives a fair indication of the County's foreseeable infrastructure needs. There may be bona fide reasons why a project is needed or desired in the immediate future; however, a project may be deferred because resources are unavailable. The CIP helps to structure this decision-making by reviewing capital project requests as well as the operational impact from the implementation of the program. Polk County's CIP is a dynamic program, whereby the program changes as identified projects require funding adjustments during the fiscal year and occasionally from year to year.

2. Combined new residential and commercial growth each year will be expected to pay for the incremental costs associated with infrastructure and the annual operational cost of such growth.

    a. This is to include, without limitation, the cost of upsizing utilities, providing land for schools, fire stations, Sheriff sub-stations, parks, open space, etc. in addition to impact fees and partial year assessments.

[42] https://www.polk-county.net/business/cip-projects/

3. Polk County government will be expected to either provide or arrange for municipal-type services in urbanized, unincorporated areas to ensure the availability of consistent, high-quality services to all residents.

G. Transportation

1. Transportation Planning

   The Polk Transportation Planning Organization[43] (TPO) is the lead transportation planning agency for Polk County. The TPO works with the Florida Department of Transportation and local governments to plan and fund transportation projects to meet the short and long-term travel needs of all users.

   The Polk Transportation Planning Organization (TPO) approved the Long-Range Transportation Plan[44] for 2045 on Dec. 10, 2020. This plan identifies and addresses future transportation needs and presents a vision for how transportation investments and policies will serve and promote the long-term growth management strategy for Polk County.

   Having safe, efficient, and reliable travel options is important for creating a thriving community with a strong economy. The Polk LRTP characterizes current and future transportation needs and highlights the various multi-modal recommendations to address those needs in our community.

   Updated every two years, the Polk TPO produces a Unified Planning Work Program[45] (UPWP) describing the transportation planning projects and programs to be performed within Polk County, Florida. The planning tasks address transportation issues that concerned citizens, elected officials, and transportation professionals identify as priorities. The UPWP substantiates the level of effort for each task and the associated requirements for federal, state, and local funding.

[43] https://www.polktpo.com
[44] https://polktpo.com/what-we-do/our-planning-documents/2045-long-range-transportation-plan
[45] https://polktpo.com/who-we-are/about-the-tpo/unified-planning-work-program

a. Increase resident participation in the planning and decision-making process regarding transportation planning through outreach efforts to engage stakeholders from all community segments.

b. Continuously seek to provide existing residents and newcomers of all mobilities with more choices to get around through a variety of multi-modal options including driving, public transit, walking, rolling, biking, or new forms of micro-mobility.

c. Continuously work to ensure that Polk County receives its fair share of Florida and Federal transportation funding dollars.

d. Collaboratively seek grants to increase resources to meet the growing needs and address the growing list of identified yet unfunded roads projects.

e. Ensure that roads are continually improved and have adequate capacity.

2. Mass Transit Operations
   All public transportation across Polk County is provided by the Lakeland Area Mass Transit District, operating as Citrus Connection.[46]

3. Mass Transit Development Plan
   The Transit Development Plan (TDP) is a 10-year plan that is required of each transit agency receiving funds from the Florida Department of Transportation. In 2022, the Polk TPO, in coordination with Citrus Connection and the seventeen municipalities developed the 2023-2032 Major Update to the Polk Transit Development Plan entitled Polk Transit Vision 2032.[47]

f. Increase resident participation in the planning and decision-making process regarding transit operations through outreach efforts to engage stakeholders from all community segments.

[46] https://ridecitrus.com
[47] https://polktpo.com/what-we-do/our-planning-documents/transit-development-plan

g. Continuously seek to provide existing residents and newcomers of all mobilities with more choices to get around through a variety of public transit options.

h. Continuously work to ensure that Polk County receives its fair share of Florida and Federal transit funding dollars.

i. Collaboratively seek grants to increase resources to meet the needs of a growing population.

j. Continuously leverage all public access airports in the county to attract general aviation, charter, and commercial passenger air service.

H. Broadband

1. The Polk County Board of County Commissioners in partnership with Polk Vision, Inc., and its Smart Community Team serves as the Local Technology Planning Team in compliance with the statutory requirements set forth by the Florida Department of Commerce, Office of Broadband.

   The Office of Broadband works with local and state government agencies, community organizations and private businesses to increase the availability and effectiveness of broadband internet throughout the state, specifically in small and rural communities. Through these partnerships, the Office of Broadband encourages investment in grant funding opportunities for the broadband program that focus on the expansion of broadband.

   a. Maintain a high level of cross-sector stakeholder participation in the planning and decision-making process regarding broadband expansion.

   b. Continuously work to ensure that Polk County receives its fair share of state and federal broadband funding dollars.

   c. Collaboratively seek grants to increase resources to meet the growing broadband needs and address the list of yet unfunded projects.

   d. Ensure that broadband access is continually improved and that Polk County has adequate capacity.

e. Increase competition for internet service in unserved and underserved communities, which will lead to more affordable access and improved services to residents and anchor institutions.

I. Water Conservation

The State of Florida has identified sustainable water services as one of the top environmental and legislative priorities. The Department of Environmental Protection[48], responsible for the administration of the water resources at the state level, exercises general supervisory authority over the state's five water management districts, which are responsible for the administration of water resources at the regional level.

Polk County falls within two of these districts - Southwest Florida Water Management District[49] and South Florida Water Management District.[50]

1. Locally, the Polk County Regional Water Cooperative[51] (PCRWC) was formed to lead planning for Polk County's future water supply needs. Oversight of PRWC, a political subdivision of the State of Florida, is solely in the hands of elected officials representing Polk County government and fifteen municipal governments.

    a. Take aggressive action to ensure that sufficient water capacity is available and permitted to meet the growing individual and regional needs of Polk County.

    b. Continuously work to ensure that Polk County receives its fair share of state and federal water resource funding dollars.

    c. Align cross-sector support for the efforts of the Polk Regional Water Cooperative in developing strategies that meet the long-term water demands of Polk County, determining needed infrastructure, and facilitating a regional conservation program which encourages the responsible use of our water resources.

[48] https://floridadep.gov/water
[49] https://www.swfwmd.state.fl.us/
[50] https://www.sfwmd.gov/
[51] https://prwcwater.org/

d. Emphasize the crucial role of water by educating and engaging citizens in water supply, water conservation and water quality issues.

J. Environment and Natural Resources

1. The protection of natural habitat across Polk County is a high priority and a substantial and irreplaceable part of our natural heritage.

   a. Educate the community and align cross-sector stakeholders in support of the Environmental Lands Program[52] which acquires, preserves, protects, manages, and restores endangered and environmentally sensitive lands, water resources and important wildlife habitats.

   b. Support the efforts of Keep Polk County Beautiful[53] and its partner organizations in efforts to improve the aesthetic and ecological value of Polk County through litter control and prevention, beautification, waste reduction, recycling and proper handling and disposal of solid waste.

   c. Stringently enforce laws that curb illegal dumping.[54]

   d. Encourage our citizens and visitors to use and enjoy lakes and rivers while:

      i. Protecting and improving the natural environment of our lakes.

      ii. Developing lakefront areas to utilize Polk County's greatest natural resource.

      iii. reserving the water quality of our lakes.

      iv. Increasing wildlife habitats.

      v. Promoting community awareness and pride in our lakes. through activities that provide economic and environmental benefits.

[52] https://www.polk-county.net/things-to-do/parks-and-recreation/environmental-reserves/conservation/
[53] https://www.keeppolkcountybeautiful.org/
[54] https://www.polk-county.net/public-safety/code-enforcement/

2. Support reclamation efforts of phosphate land and advocate for the legislature to fully fund the trust fund for this purpose.

II. Economic Advancement

VISION

An economic environment that attracts and retains industry-diverse businesses with high-paying careers and educates and retains qualified talent to align with targeted industry workforce needs.

STRATEGIES:

A. Align the economic development efforts of the county, each of the seventeen municipalities, and the private sector for the greater good of all Polk County.

B. Encourage all economic development stakeholders to formally endorse the Vision and commit to providing the leadership, resources, and organizational alignment necessary to ensure its ongoing successful implementation.

1. Maintain a list of targeted job sectors that will sharpen the economic development focus on industries that drive higher wages.

- Advanced Manufacturing
- Agribusiness & Agri technology
- Aviation & Aerospace
- Business Services
- Health Sciences
- Entertainment, Arts & Tourism
- Logistics, Supply Chain & Distribution
- Research & Technology

a. Continue to emphasize Tourism[55], which not only provides job opportunities and increases public revenues but also emphasizes the county's distinctiveness and unique character and promotes the historical, cultural, and natural assets of our community.

[55] https://visitcentralflorida.org/

2. Develop a forward-thinking, non-competitive view of the county, neighborhoods, and local area.

   a. Maintain a countywide 'brand' for external economic development marketing purposes that reflects the regional promotion of Polk County and its municipalities.

3. Establish aggressive, competitively funded, dynamic economic development programs that generate job growth by attracting diverse industries to Polk County; support the expansion and retention of jobs by existing employers; and foster the creation of new enterprises.

   a. Utilize and maintain highly competitive incentive and tax exemption programs that attract new higher-paying jobs through relocation, expansion, retention, and new enterprise creation.

   b . Actively seek to identify and support the retention and expansion needs of existing businesses and consider these businesses as prospects for new job creation.

   c. Cultivate economic competitiveness by examining the reasons businesses choose not to locate in Polk County and those businesses that leave the county to understand their decision-making. Proactively address the identified issues.

   d. Foster an economic environment that supports small business and entrepreneurial development, with a focus on creating higher-paying careers.

      i. Align efforts with the Small Business Development Center in Polk County.[56]

      ii. Advance the development of business incubators.

      iii. Support the establishment of entrepreneurial networks.

      iv. Promote awareness of small business resources available through the Florida Department of Commerce.[57]

[56] https://sbdctampabay.com/polk/
[57] https://www.floridajobs.org/

v. Strengthen partnerships between Polk County businesses and research entities that commercialize research.

4. Maintain a countywide comprehensive inventory of available commercial and industrial certified real estate, including empty buildings, to be marketed by the Central Florida Development Council[58], other local economic development organizations, and commercial real estate brokers.

5. Identify sites that need land use changes countywide. Proactively initiate those changes by encouraging the landowner, the developer, the county, or the municipality to initiate the change.

   a. Recognize that the county and/or municipalities may have to compromise and share costs with landowners to make the needed land use and permitting changes.

   b. Encourage private sector collaboration to fund office/industrial parks and build speculative buildings.

   c. Recognize that when the private sector does not step up, the public sector may have to ensure that sites and projects are assembled, permitted, and ready for development.

   d. Recognize the public sector may have to be involved in rehabilitating existing buildings.

C. Strengthen existing partnerships with economic development organizations in the Tampa and Orlando region, the State of Florida, nationally and globally to assist in generating higher-paying jobs.

[58] https://www.cfdc.org/

III. Education

VISION

A collaborative educational network that connects students, families, academic institutions, community members, and local businesses in support of holistic, inclusive, and dynamic learning opportunities.

STRATEGIES:

A. Align community efforts with the strategic plans of Polk County Public Schools and local post-secondary institutions to provide countywide access to a comprehensive array of disciplines.

B. Establish a countywide culture that prioritizes educational attainment through collaboration and engagement among parents, community members, and the business community.

C. Support innovative, rigorous academic preparation that inspires, educates, and prepares students to achieve their full potential regardless of geographic, financial, or demographic circumstances.

1. Early Childhood Education
   Support early childhood care and education that focuses on the holistic development of a child's social, emotional, cognitive, and physical needs and establishes a durable foundation for lifelong learning and well-being.

   a. Align community efforts with the strategic plans of Polk County Public Schools, the Early Learning Coalition, and accredited early childhood learning programs offered around the county.

   b. Raise awareness regarding the importance of early childhood education and the role early childhood educators play in the development of a child’s emotional, cognitive, and social skills and improved readiness for school.

   c. Increase the number of licensed and accredited preschools and develop career pathways for early childhood educators.

2. K-12 Education and Skills Training
   Establish the expectation that every student will graduate from high school with the knowledge and skills necessary to either attend a university, college, or technical school or join the workforce.

   a. Align community efforts with the strategic plan of Polk County Public Schools.

   b. Promote partnerships between K- 12 schools, postsecondary institutions, and area businesses to provide a variety of structured academic and experiential training opportunities.

   c. Implement programs to enhance the career exploration education of middle and high school students in preparation to enter either a postsecondary institution, the workforce, or the military.

   d. Increase dual enrollment programming, career and technical education opportunities, and specialized experiential training including internships and apprenticeships, which meet the current and future needs of local businesses.

3. Post-Secondary Education
   Encourage connections between local educational institutions and area businesses to employ students in Polk County following graduation.

   Polk County's colleges and universities currently include:

   - Florida Polytechnic University
   - Florida Southern College
   - Keiser University
   - Polk State College
   - Ridge Technical College
   - Southeastern University
   - Traviss Technical College
   - Warner Southern University
   - Webber International University

   a. Encourage local K-12, colleges, and universities to create and expand degree and career and technical education programs aligned with targeted industry sectors as identified by Polk County's economic development organizations.

→ Advanced Manufacturing
→ Agribusiness & Agri technology
→ Aviation & Aerospace
→ Business Services
→ Health Sciences
→ Entertainment, Arts & Tourism
→ Logistics, Supply Chain & Distribution
→ Research & Technology

b. Provide responsive technical training for new and existing businesses to have a highly qualified workforce with the skills, knowledge, and attitudes required to keep pace with best practices and support the goals of the business.

c. Develop targeted industry training programs that may incentivize the relocation and/or expansion of businesses ensuring a qualified workforce necessary to support economic development.

4. Adult Education
Communicate widely the availability of continuing education courses and support the development of user-friendly transition programs for adults seeking to further their education.

a. Encourage every adult in Polk County without a high school diploma to obtain a GED.

b. Support the effective delivery of quality adult and family literacy and assist community-based literacy organizations with their training and program development needs.

c. Provide free or low-cost English classes to learn English as another language.

d. Support the development of accessible communication tools designed to attract and encourage prospective adult learners to continue their education.

e. Support continuing education by offering childcare for adult students.

f. Provide transportation where needed.

g. Develop a grant program for adults to pay for their first college course and/or GED.

h. Recognize and promote awareness of the Florida Department of Education "Open Door" grant program which provides funds to support student completion of short-term, high-demand credit, and non-credit career and technical education programs at Career Centers and Florida College Systems institutions.

IV. Community Health and Well-Being

VISION

A culture that prioritizes community health, wellness, and safety with equitable access to a range of high-quality, holistic resources enabling everyone to lead productive and fulfilling lives.

STRATEGIES:

A. Encourage all stakeholders to formally endorse the Vision and commit to providing the leadership, resources, and organizational alignment necessary to ensure its ongoing successful implementation.

B. Organize and align the efforts of a collaborative network of public and private stakeholders providing healthcare, education, public safety, emergency intervention, social services, and safety net programs.

C. Address the multifaceted aspects of wellness including physical, mental, emotional, social, intellectual, and spiritual health.

1. <u>Health Care</u>

a. Expand availability of and access to high-quality, affordable healthcare with sufficient choices in medical specialties, including treatment for substance use disorders and comprehensive, long-term behavioral and mental healthcare.

b. Emphasize the importance of preventative healthcare to manage existing health conditions that lead to chronic disease, disability, and premature death.

c. Promote widespread awareness of the publicly funded reduced fee and free healthcare options available in Polk County.[59]

2. Social Services and Safety Net

a. Support the expansion and development of programs that provide opportunities for all people to become self-sufficient and meet their basic needs.

b. Develop accessible, co-located "one-stop" social service delivery and prevention centers in enough locations countywide for reasonable accessibility.

c. Increase the awareness of social service availability through the United Way of Central Florida[60] 211 hotline and accompanying database.

3. Vulnerable Populations

Those at greater risk for poor health status and healthcare access, experience significant disparities in life expectancy, access to and use of healthcare services, morbidity, and mortality.[61]

a. Align partnerships with government and social service agencies to improve protection for the vulnerable, promote strong and economically self-sufficient families, advance personal and family recovery, and strengthen resiliency and well-being.

Abused and Neglected

i. Expand agency support focused on reducing abuse and neglect rates for children and spouses.

ii. Increase Guardian Ad Litem[62] volunteer representation for all children who are involved in dependency court because of physical abuse, sexual abuse, neglect, or abandonment.

[59] https://polkhealthcareplan.net/
[60] https://uwcf.org/
[61] American Journal of Managed Care, 2006
[62] https://guardianadlitem.org/

Homeless/Unhoused

iii. Increase awareness of the role of the Homeless Coalition of Polk County and its member agencies.

iv. Align cross-sector support in establishing a countywide unified approach to address the critical level of homelessness.

Older Populations/Aging Adults

v. Organize and align the efforts of a collaborative network of public and private stakeholders to establish and promote widespread awareness and the adoption of best practices for older citizens who want to age in place.

Food Insecure

vi. Continue to support the Polk County Food Security Council[63] and its members to align local and regional hunger solution efforts.

4. Built Environments
A healthy built environment ensures that all community members have opportunities to be healthy, regardless of age, income, gender, or other factors.[64]

a. Support interventions and policy changes at the local, state, and federal level that help reduce health and safety risks and promote healthy activities.

b. Expand opportunities for people to be physically active and increase social interactions through the creation and expansion of parks, mixed-use trails, sidewalks, and bike lanes.

[63] https://www.liveuwcf.org/servlet/eAndar.article/2198/Polk-County-Food-Security-Council
[64] https://search.cdc.gov/search/?query=built%20environments&dpage=1

5. Public Safety
   Public Safety is the protection of people and their property from harm, crime, and disaster and includes crime prevention and law enforcement, corrections, emergency medical services, public health, safety education, infrastructure, and the management of natural or human-made disasters.

   a. Maintain a well-equipped, well-trained, and well-coordinated public safety system of law enforcement, corrections, emergency medical services, fire services, and emergency management that equitably and effectively deploys services across Polk County.

   b. Protect people from exposures and hazards that cause illness, injury, and trauma.

V. Government

VISION

Collaboration among all levels of government that is efficient, customer-focused, and effective in serving the essential needs of its citizens.

STRATEGIES:

A. Increase the level of collaboration between the municipalities, county, school board, state and federal governments, the private sector, non-profits, and individual citizens to increase the effectiveness and efficient use of resources.

B. Encourage all government institutions and agencies to formally endorse the Vision and commit to providing the leadership, resources, and organizational alignment necessary to ensure its ongoing successful implementation.

C. Maintain a well-equipped, well-trained, and well-coordinated public safety[65] system of law enforcement, corrections, emergency medical services, fire services, and emergency management that equitably and effectively deploys services across Polk County.

[65] Public Safety includes the protection of people and their property from harm, crime, and disaster and includes crime prevention and law enforcement, corrections, emergency medical services, public health, safety education, infrastructure, and the management of natural or human-caused disasters.

D. Strengthen existing inter-agency planning among the municipalities, county, and school district to ensure an aligned approach and avoid conflicts, duplication, and overlapping services.

E. Adopt a customer-focused approach to improve citizen satisfaction, enhance public participation, increase efficiency and effectiveness, and build a stronger community.

1. Accessibility

    a. Expand the number of centers offering co-located services in enough locations countywide for reasonable accessibility.

    b. Seek continuous improvements to make it easier for residents to access and navigate services when seeking assistance.

2. Accountability

    a. Expect citizens to serve as a check and balance and demand accountability for the actions of government personnel and elected officials.

    b. Ensure that all levels of government strictly adhere to an abiding code of ethics.

    c. Increase voter registration and voter turnout through education initiatives, targeted outreach efforts, and other strategies that encourage a broad cross-section of citizens to vote.

3. Effective Communications and Education

    a. Continuously seek ways to improve the means, clarity, and frequency of communications with residents.

    b. Expand the number of citizen academies and education programs to familiarize residents with how local government works.

4. Policy Development

    a. Encourage citizen participation by actively soliciting input and capitalizing on diverse perspectives in defining, shaping, and implementing public policy and services.

5. Volunteer Boards and Committees

    a. Adopt standard selection processes to ensure diverse, knowledgeable, and skilled citizens as representatives on government committees and advisory boards, encompassing a wide range of perspectives.

VI. Civic Engagement

VISION

Citizens who actively learn, collaborate, and engage across both public and private sectors to ensure that Polk County continues to advance and prosper.

STRATEGIES:

A. Increase the civic health[66] of Polk County by organizing and aligning the efforts of a collaborative network of strong, positive, forward-thinking citizens committed to addressing critical issues.

B. Encourage all private sector leadership to formally endorse the Vision and commit to providing the leadership, resources, and organizational alignment necessary to ensure its ongoing successful implementation.

C. Promote a culture in which residents actively participate in the community, stay informed about public affairs, vote, engage in respectful discussions, and volunteer to contribute to the development and implementation of public policies and services that enhance the quality of life.

    1. Residents and Neighborhood Collaborations

        a. Support efforts at the personal and neighborhood scale in volunteering, participating in community service projects,

[66] University of New Hampshire, Carsey School of Public Policy, Local Civic Health Guide (5): ' … the ways in which residents of a community (or state) participate in civic activities that strengthen social capital, enhance interconnections, build trust, help each other, talk about public issues and challenges, volunteer in government and non-profit organizations, stay informed about their communities, and participate directly in crafting solutions to various social and economic challenges.' https://scholars.unh.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1460&context=carsey&utm_source=webpage&utm_medium=link&utmcampaign=carsey-chg-fy23

providing input to government, and advocating for policies that enhance quality of life.

b. Establish a countywide network of neighborhood associations to promote collaboration, provide organizational training, share best practices, and offer opportunities for purposeful discussions of shared concerns and conditions.

2. Nonprofits

a. Increase the access, quality, and capacity of Polk County's nonprofits by providing a way for people with shared beliefs to volunteer and work together in advancing civic health[67] by providing vital resources that significantly benefit individuals and the community.

3. Schools, Colleges, and Universities

a. Support educational institutions in their civic engagement activities designed to equip students with the knowledge, skills, values, and motivation for a lifetime of engaged citizenship.

4. Philanthropy

a. Maximize the individual and transformative impact of philanthropy by raising awareness of the critical role in providing opportunities for education, relief, growth, and success by addressing the source of underlying social problems, rather than only funding remedies for the symptoms of those problems.

5. Business

a. Support the role that business plays in adopting socially responsible corporate practices and meeting critical needs by sponsoring programs, mobilizing organizational support, and promoting volunteerism.

[67] University of New Hampshire, Carsey School of Public Policy, Local Civic Health Guide (5): ' … the ways in which residents of a community (or state) participate in civic activities that strengthen social capital, enhance interconnections, build trust, help each other, talk about public issues and challenges, volunteer in government and non-profit organizations, stay informed about their communities, and participate directly in crafting solutions to various social and economic challenges.' https://scholars.unh.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1460&context=carsey&utm_source=webpage&utm_medium=link&utmcampaign=carsey-chg-fy23

6. Polk Vision, Inc.

    a. Continue cultivating an environment of mutual trust and collaboration in bridging the public and private sectors while working with transparency and a high degree of accountability.

    b. Continue to serve as the neutral convener in addressing critical issues by providing central coordination and aligning the work of volunteers through partnerships with public, private, and civic organizations across Polk County.

    c. Continue to provide an array of quality leadership training programs and timely, topically relevant meetings, roundtables, town halls, focus groups, and conferences.

VII. Arts, Culture, and Recreation

VISION

An environment that promotes arts, cultural, and recreational opportunities that celebrate our diverse creative, historic, and natural resources.

STRATEGIES:

A. Align community efforts with the strategic plans of Visit Central Florida; Polk County Tourism and Sports Marketing; Polk Arts and Cultural Alliance; and county and municipal Parks and Recreation Departments.

B. Support countywide assessments of the economic and social impact of non-profit arts and culture organizations that evaluate the contributions of arts and culture to Polk County's quality of life.

C. Establish Polk County as a destination for arts, culture, and recreational opportunities.

D. Create a range of diversified arts culture and recreational choices for people of all ages that provide increased accessibility to high-quality arts and cultural programming.

    i. Maintain and widely distribute a calendar of Polk arts and recreation activities.

E. Increase business support for arts, culture, and historic preservation throughout the county.

F. Develop a framework for sustained ecotourism, including supportive government policy interventions to ensure effective conservation of environmental and natural resources.

G. Promote the development of natural recreation areas, urban reforestation projects, and the expansion of parks throughout the county to provide open green space, nature trails, bike and jogging paths, access to clean lakes, etc.

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Polk County Vision Update Qualitative Research Summary

July 2024

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Qualitative Analysis

Key Takeaways

The rapid pace of growth is diminishing the "sense of community" for many residents.

A qualitative research methodology was adopted to understand the social reality of Polk County residents. It focused on attitudes, beliefs, motivations, and direct experiences in their everyday lives. The research included a series of individual stakeholder interviews followed by collaborative focus group discussions. Care was taken in seeking input from a diverse cross-section of community members from a variety of sectors.

Participants were encouraged to share their perspectives on the various strengths and challenges impacting the Quality of Life in Polk County within seven identified Areas of Focus:

- Growth Management and Infrastructure
  - Housing
- Economic Advancement
- Education
- Community Health & Well-Being
- Arts, Culture and Recreation
- Government
- Civic Engagement

These Areas of Focus provided the framework within which the complexities of life in Polk County were explored. Through these collaborative discussions, researchers gained insights into the nuanced interplay and interdependence between the various elements of significance to residents. This information served as the platform for developing an updated long-term Vision for the community.

One-on-One Interviews & Focus Group Discussions

Research began with a series of one-on-one interviews with 72 stakeholders from across the county; 61 were held in person and the remaining 11 were held via telephone or Zoom. These 90-minute interviews provided the opportunity for in-depth conversations about how current, local conditions are impacting the overall Quality of Life in Polk County.

Following the completion of stakeholder interviews, 13 in-person focus groups were conducted around the county with 215 participants to discuss their perspectives on the essence of Quality of Life. This included in-depth 2-

hour open exchanges regarding the strengths and challenges residents are experiencing within each of the seven Areas of Focus.

As the group discussions unfolded, participants shared their diverse viewpoints, offering insights on the local economy and housing affordability, rate of growth and infrastructure, social cohesion, environmental sustainability, education, and community health and safety.

These conversations provided insights into what aspects of Quality of Life residents value and wish to preserve, as well as areas of concern and calls for improvement.

Notes of these discussions were captured through live transcription and recording. In spring 2024, Crescendo Consulting Group (CCG) worked with Polk Vision to review the notes and recordings from the following focus groups:

Date and Community
March 7th – Lakeland Neighborhood Association Coalition - Peggy Brown Building – Lakeland
March 19th – Polk Vision Quality of Life Team - Florida Children's Museum – Lakeland
March 20th – UWCF Partner Agencies – Polk State College – Lakeland Campus
March 26th – Community Members - City of Davenport – Tom Fellows Community Center – Davenport
March 27th – Community Members - City of Haines City – Haines City Public Library
March 28th – Auburndale Chamber Members - Lake Myrtle Sports Complex – Auburndale
April 2nd – Staff and Clients - Redlands Christian Migrant Association – Mulberry
April 4th – Older Adults- Age-Friendly Lakeland - Peggy Brown Building – Lakeland
April 5th – College Students - Polk State College – Lakeland
April 9th – Community Members - Inwood Neighborhood Association – Tabernacle of Praise – Winter Haven
April 11th – Young Business Leaders - Endeavor Serves – Winter Haven Chamber of Commerce
April 15th – Community Members - Offices Community Redevelopment Agency – Haines City
April 17th – Municipal Clerks - Polk County City Clerks Association – Studio 37 - Mulberry

Notes were then collected and aggregated by Crescendo Consulting Group creating a database for each major Area of Focus. This analytical process aimed to delve deep into the content, systematically analyzing the aggregated data to extract meaningful insights and patterns. Through this methodical approach, the research team was able to identify core themes that underpinned the group discussions.

April 2, 2024 - Focus Group held in Mulberry, with staff and clients of Redlands Christian Migrant Association.

Overview

How do community members feel about the Quality of Life in Polk County?

Community members expressed mixed sentiments regarding the overall Quality of Life in Polk County. Residents have a strong affinity for the community and cherish the distinctive hometown character that is found across the county. However, there is widespread concern about the relentless pace of growth and its associated challenges. Many expressed feeling overwhelmed by the number of new housing developments, the strain on existing resources, and the never-before-experienced traffic congestion.

This widely shared viewpoint emphasizes the importance of striking a balance between inevitable growth and preserving the qualities that make Polk County a desirable place to live.

The stakeholder interview guide & focus group moderator's guide can be found in the Appendix on page 63.

Key Takeaway

Affordable, accessible housing and the ability to earn a living wage are of top concern to residents.

If you were to encourage a friend or relative to move here, what two things would you use to persuade them to relocate here?

March 20, 2024 - Focus Group held at Polk State College Lakeland Campus with United Way of Central Florida Agency representatives.

People are drawn to Polk County for several reasons, including the county's strategic location for those seeking a balance between affordability and proximity to larger metropolitan areas.

Despite housing and rental costs being somewhat high, Polk County offers affordable options compared to nearby cities like Tampa and Orlando. Although commuter transportation options are limited, the county's central location between major cities provides residents with access to an array of employment, world-class entertainment, and unique recreational opportunities while enjoying the slower pace offered to those living in Polk County.

Residents mentioned that they feel safe and secure living in Polk County. This overall sense of safety has a significant impact on the health and well-being of a community. The way residents perceive public safety also directly affects their trust in government and local law enforcement.

Several major hospital networks are operating in Polk County, providing numerous options for primary healthcare along with various specialties, including mental health services.

Families with children are pleased with the choice of public and private options available for K-12 students as well as the number of post-secondary academic institutions including technical colleges.

The allure of Polk County extends beyond practicalities to include its abundance of natural resources as well as cultural and recreational offerings. Residents appreciate the small-town feel combined with access to amenities typically associated with larger urban centers. Habitat preservation efforts underscore a deep connection to the area's heritage, fostering a sense of place and belonging among residents.

Overall, Polk County stands out as a welcoming, bustling area with a rich history that makes for a powerful sense of identity and an attractive place to live for individuals of all ages.

What are a couple of things that would help improve the Quality of Life in Polk County?

Topping the list of shared concerns is affordable, accessible "workforce" housing, which links to the ability to earn a living wage. High home ownership costs and a shortage of affordable rental options have created a significant financial burden for a growing number of singles and working families, especially those of low and moderate income.

Residents are saying that growth in Polk County could be more effectively managed. Suggestions include improved road conditions, better traffic management, and stepped-up law enforcement to alleviate traffic congestion and address motor vehicle safety concerns.

Many community members would like to see more resources directed at increasing the availability of sidewalks and mixed-use trails, and the expansion of bus services to improve access to jobs, healthcare, and shopping.

Concerns were voiced over difficulties accessing specialized education programs due to barriers such as geographic location and transportation. Residents are calling for an increase in the variety and availability of educational programs and hands-on skills training that meet the needs of all students more equitably in preparation for life beyond high school.

Residents are disturbed by the erosion of the rural characteristics of the area, the loss of agricultural lands, and the proliferation of new housing without an appropriately balanced investment in communal spaces, parks, and playgrounds.

By addressing these challenges comprehensively, Polk County can enhance the Quality of Life for all its residents and foster a thriving, inclusive community.

Results By Area of Focus:

What People Think About the Areas of Focus

Each group discussion included lengthy conversations about each of the Areas of Focus. Participants were asked high-level questions about each theme, such as, "What comes to mind when you think about Community Health and Well-being in Polk County?" Discussions also included conversations about the perceived strengths and weaknesses of each Area of Focus and the greatest ways to improve the Quality of Life for residents.

The summary results of these discussions are below.

Growth Management and Infrastructure:

What do people think about Growth Management and Infrastructure?

Citizens are urging city and county leaders to work together to take the necessary measures to better regulate land use so future generations will be able to enjoy the abundance of natural beauty in Polk County. Managing growth is critical for the long-term sustainability and well-being of the community. This includes not only addressing land use, but also planning for utilities and essential services, road repairs and road expansion, traffic management, and sustainability to accommodate population growth while preserving the current Quality of Life.

March 7, 2024 - Focus Group hosted by the City of Lakeland at the Peggy Brown Building with members of the Lakeland Neighborhood Association Coalition.

Infrastructure across Polk County presents a mixed landscape with both strengths and areas for improvement. The county faces challenges in transportation, particularly in public transit. There is a growing need for better connectivity and accessibility, especially for students and employees seeking to rely on buses to commute to school and work. As

the county continues to grow, addressing these issues is imperative, ensuring reliable and efficient transportation options for all residents.

There is some growing interest in the transition to electric vehicles, but the perception is that the county lags in infrastructure readiness compared to some neighboring counties. To keep pace with the evolving transportation landscape, more investment in the evolving infrastructure, including charging stations and supportive policies, may be necessary.

March 26, 2024 - Focus Group hosted by the City of Davenport at the Tom Fellows Community Center.

Moreover, Polk County grapples with traffic congestion and vehicular safety concerns, reflecting the strain on its infrastructure as the population grows. Residents report longer commute times and express the need for more trails, bike lanes, and sidewalks to alleviate congestion. They are also calling for increased enforcement of traffic laws.

In summary, while Polk County currently faces both growth management and infrastructure challenges it also presents opportunities to extend beyond traditional land use planning, zoning, and control measures. A more cohesive environment for residents can be created by addressing community concerns such as the protection of natural spaces, sufficient and affordable housing, delivery of affordable utilities, the preservation of buildings and places of historical value, providing places where residents can gather socially, and providing sufficient space for public schools as well as conduct business, a more cohesive environment for residents can be created.

Economic Advancement:
What do people think about Economic Advancement?

When discussing Economic Advancement and ways that it impacts the Quality of Life in Polk County, five themes emerged.

1. Education and Workforce Development: Education is considered integral to Economic Advancement, with calls for improved career counseling services, industry-targeted workforce education, and financial support for college applications and tuition. There is a call for addressing disparities in opportunities and the accessibility of specialized skills training due to factors including geographic location and transportation. Additionally, there is a workforce shortage in schools, particularly among teachers and counselors needed to facilitate education and opportunity alignment.

2. Targeted Recruitment of Diverse Variety of Industries: Community members see economic diversification as inextricably linked with economic advancement and poverty reduction. They are calling for an increase in both the variety and quality of jobs in the face of a rapidly growing population and a rising, youthful workforce.

3. Affordable Housing and Living Wage: Escalating housing costs and a lack of affordable options contribute to economic challenges, leaving many first-time buyers unable to afford homes. Parents struggling to pay for childcare, health care, and essential goods and services underscore the importance of earning a living wage.

4. Growth Management and Infrastructure: The pace of growth in Polk County and the impact on infrastructure was highlighted as a barrier to economic advancement. Conversations consistently led to the need for better planning and expanded transportation options.

5. Corporate Support and Community Engagement: The presence of excellent corporate investment is noted as an asset for economic advancement. Collaborative efforts between corporations, local governments, educational institutions, and community organizations can drive economic advancement initiatives and address issues such as employment barriers and workforce education.

April 4, 2024 - Focus Group hosted by the City of Lakeland at the Peggy Brown Building with members of Age-Friendly Lakeland.

In summary, Economic Advancement in Polk County requires addressing disparities in opportunities, investing in education and workforce development, ensuring access to affordable housing and livable wages, and addressing infrastructure challenges. Aligned strategic investment between various stakeholders is essential to sustaining economic growth and improving the overall community's well-being.

Key Takeaway

Residents are calling for improved access to specialized education and career and technical training.

Education:
What do People Think About Education?

When considering educational resources residents recognize the wealth of higher education opportunities available in Polk County. However, concerns (or lack of awareness) persist regarding the public school system. Privatized education initiatives incentivized by public policy are viewed as polarizing public opinion and potentially overshadowing the recent advancements in the overall quality and range of K -12 educational resources available in Polk County.

Despite these challenges, community members highlighted positive aspects such as the availability of technical and industry-specific training, career academies, specialized STEM programs, as well as dual enrollment where students can earn college credits while still in high school.

However, concerns were expressed regarding the accessibility of these programs, especially for individuals and families unable to secure

Key Takeaway

Improve overall communication and increase efforts to engage residents in the decision-making process.

transportation to distant schools for better opportunities. Additionally, there are issues related to shortages in staffing, teacher qualifications, and resources for students with special needs. There is a call among residents for additional locations, updated facilities, and increased support for both students and educators to keep up with population growth and ensure equitable access to high-quality education for everyone.

April 9, 2024 - Focus Group hosted by the Inwood Neighborhood Association at the Tabernacle of Praise in Inwood.

Community Health and Well-being:

What do people think about Community Health and Well-being?

Based on the provided comments, there are some challenges in ensuring the safety and well-being of residents. Safety concerns include the proximity of houses (especially in some high-density sections of the county) and limited space for children to play safely, leading to them playing in the streets. These conditions not only jeopardize physical safety but also contribute to mental health stressors for families. The lack of sufficient sidewalks, multi-use trails, and bike lanes poses safety concerns for pedestrians and cyclists highlighting the necessity for mandatory sidewalks in new developments and retrofitting existing areas with pedestrian-friendly infrastructure.

Residents find it challenging to access comprehensive medical care due to long wait times to see doctors and a lack of local specialty and pediatric care. Oftentimes, residents must drive long distances, sometimes out of the county, to see providers within their insurance network.

Addressing the health and well-being challenges in Polk County requires a multifaceted approach. Efforts may focus on improving awareness and access to healthcare services, including recruiting more physicians and expanding specialized care options, especially for pediatric and mental health services.

Community-wide initiatives aimed at enhancing safety for pedestrians and bicyclists including the widespread adoption of the Target Zero strategies including engineering, enforcement, and education initiatives are needed to address the high rates of death and serious injury prevalent in Polk County.

Government:
What do people think about Government?

Based on the feedback provided, "government" in Polk County faces a mix of commendations and challenges from residents.

There is a consensus that government plays a vital role in ensuring safety and maintaining law and order, with Polk County earning praise for its reputation of being tough on crime. Most residents feel secure in their neighborhoods and community.

However, communication gaps and accessibility issues persist, leading to frustration among some residents. While there is acknowledgment of efforts by government to notify citizens of issues, there are also concerns about the clarity of messages and difficulties in contacting certain departments or agencies. Additionally, there's a call for more inclusive practices, such as translation services and improved navigation supports, to ensure all residents can engage effectively with their government.

Despite communication and navigation challenges, officials are perceived as accessible by citizens. However, there are instances where accessibility may not translate to satisfactory follow-up or action from government, indicating a need for improved coordination and the timeliness of response within administrative channels. Residents express a desire for government to be proactive in addressing community needs, emphasizing the importance of long-term solutions and opportunities for meaningful engagement.

Overall, there is an expectation that government should work collaboratively with citizens to address issues and improve the Quality of Life in Polk County, fostering a sense of partnership and accountability between residents and their elected representatives.

March 28, 2024 - Focus Group hosted by the City of Auburndale at the Lake Myrtle Sports Complex Campus with members of the Auburndale Chamber of Commerce.

Civic Engagement:
What do people think about Civic Engagement?

In Polk County, Civic Engagement is perceived as variable. There is a sentiment that citizens tend to become involved in civic matters only when they are directly affected by them, leading to what is described as "delayed engagement."

There is also recognition that early conversations and proactive engagement are more effective in mobilizing citizens. Despite pockets of active engagement, there is a concern that a relatively small group of individuals often lead these efforts, indicating a need for broader participation.

On a positive note, there is a comparative perspective from newer residents suggesting that the local population is more engaged than in their previous communities. Overall, while there are indications of moderate civic engagement, there is also a recognition of areas for improvement, including the need for the development of proactive engagement strategies to create broader participation including improved communications and education.

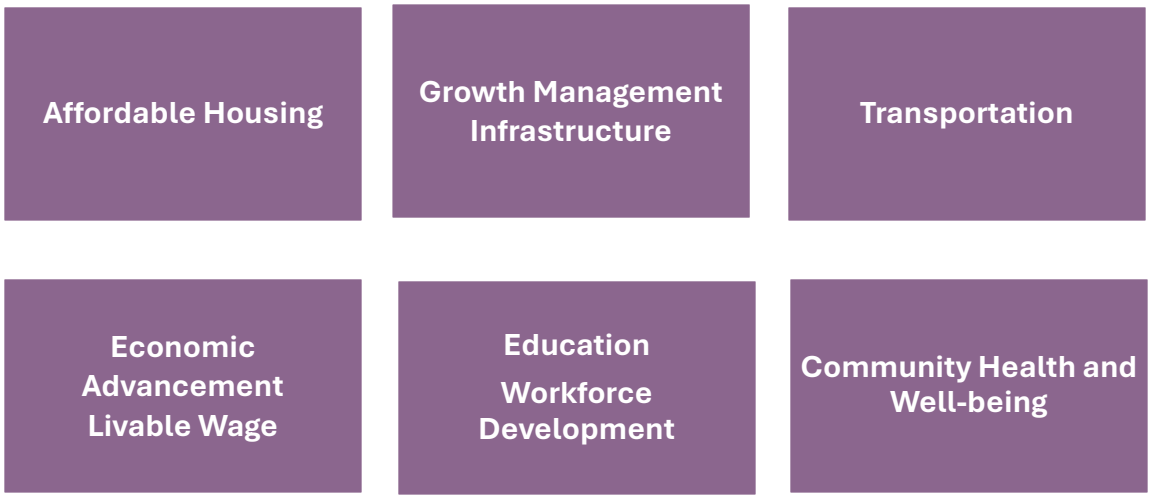
Arts, Culture & Recreation:
What do people think about Arts, Culture, and Recreation?

Polk County is viewed as having a vibrant arts, culture, and recreation scene. The county is enriched with an abundance of natural resources as well as parks and trails offering residents and visitors ample opportunities

for outdoor recreation and leisure activities. Positioned as a gateway to tourism, Polk County's prime geographic location attracts visitors seeking enriching experiences and diverse entertainment options. Residents take pride in the arts and culture offerings, which include theaters, museums, and other venues such as local history centers, and the events and celebrations produced by area organizations and municipalities.

Despite this landscape, some residents feel that creating their own entertainment is necessary, suggesting potential areas for improvement. Addressing concerns such as increased utilization of public spaces, further development of cultural corridors, and expanding access to arts and recreational facilities can contribute to fostering a more vibrant and inclusive arts and culture scene in Polk County.

What are the top themes to prioritize to improve Quality of Life in Polk County?



Based on the frequency and importance indicated in the comments, the top themes to prioritize are:

1. **Affordable Housing (availability and cost):** A recurring theme amongst residents is the lack of available and affordable housing that underscores the urgent need for "workforce housing" options in Polk County.

   When rental and homeownership costs are prohibitively high, individuals and families are often forced into precarious living situations, facing the threat of eviction and potentially homelessness. Furthermore, the lack of affordable housing options exacerbates issues of inequality, disproportionately affecting

historically marginalized members of the community who already face systemic barriers. Securing affordable housing allows households to prioritize other important expenses such as food, transportation, healthcare, clothing, and education, and enables households to grow their savings and engage in better financial planning. By providing resources and support for individuals and families to purchase homes, communities can increase homeownership rates and promote stability and vitality within neighborhoods.

2. **Growth Management and Infrastructure**: Citizens are urging city and county leaders to work together to take necessary measures to better regulate land use so future generations will be able to enjoy the abundance of natural beauty in Polk County. Managing growth effectively and responsibly is critical for the long-term sustainability and well-being of the community. This includes not only addressing land use, but also planning for utilities and essential services, road repairs and road expansions, traffic management, and sustainability to accommodate population growth while maintaining the current Quality of Life.

3. **Transportation**: Recognizing the significance of accessible transportation, residents consistently expressed this area as a top priority in planning and development initiatives. Community members voiced that access to vital resources such as jobs, healthcare facilities, educational institutions, as well as shopping and recreational activities is hampered by a lack of public transportation options. Participants discussed the need for increased sidewalk coverage, improved biking lanes, multi-use trails and expanded mass transit services. Residents hope for collaborative efforts between government entities, urban planners, and community stakeholders, to establish robust transportation networks that address the diverse mobility needs of residents now and into the future.

4. **Economic Advancement and Livable Wage:** Participants shared through various conversations the need to ensure that workers receive compensation that aligns with the cost of living in Polk County. A livable wage serves as a cornerstone for enabling residents to meet their basic needs, uphold a decent standard of living, and address the pressing need to mitigate poverty, enhance financial stability, and elevate the overall quality of life within the community. Therefore, by advocating for policies and initiatives that prioritize fair wages and equitable compensation practices, Polk County can effectively address the systemic barriers to financial well-being and promote economic resilience. Furthermore, economic advancement can be bolstered through continued investment in workforce development programs and fostering partnerships between local businesses and educational institutions.

March 19, 2024 – Focus Group hosted by the Florida Children's Museum in Lakeland with diverse member representation by the Polk Vision Quality of Life Team.

5. **Education and Workforce Development:** Community members have voiced the importance of providing access to quality education and workforce training opportunities as a pivotal aspect of enhancing the quality of life in Polk County. Recognizing the transformative power of education, they emphasize the need to equip residents with the skills and knowledge required to thrive in today's competitive job market. By bridging the gap between available employment opportunities and the skills of the local workforce, communities can ensure that individuals are adequately prepared to secure stable and well-paying jobs. Through collaborative efforts between educational institutions, employers, and community organizations, initiatives can be developed to offer relevant training programs and educational resources tailored to the community's needs. This proactive approach empowers individuals to achieve economic independence and contributes to the overall prosperity and vitality of Polk County.

6. **Community Health and Well-being:** Access to comprehensive healthcare services, including mental health resources, is crucial for overall community well-being. Residents find it difficult to secure doctor appointments due to provider shortages. There is a recognized need for more physicians, especially to address the growing demand for pediatric care and specialized services. Mental health resources are also lacking, with a limited number of providers and a lack of awareness of how to access and navigate the system. Additionally, Polk County faces challenges in ensuring both the physical safety and well-being of some community members. Residents expressed safety concerns in high-density sections of the county with limited space for children to play which not only jeopardizes physical safety but also contributes to mental health stressors for families. Initiatives such as the creation of more recreational spaces and providing sidewalk connections will contribute significantly to improving pedestrian safety and overall well-being.

Appendix

Discussion Guide

Polk Vision Refresh Project

Focus Group Discussion Moderator's Guide

Rev March 8, 2024

DIRECTIONS FOR MODERATOR

1. Identify the type of individuals (or communities) who will attend each group and modify the conversations/questions/topics accordingly.
2. With all groups, it is truly important to explain the purpose of the discussion, the value of their insight, and "next steps" – how the information will be used to confirm and help prioritize the Polk Vision core themes. Ultimately, the information will be used to improve the quality of life for people living in Polk County by focusing programs and resources where they can make the greatest impact.
3. Explain the format of the discussion:
    a. Two hours including lunch.
    b. Agenda review
        i. Review Focus Group Background and Goals (see #2, above)
        ii. Provide Some level-setting: Definition of "Quality of Life" and Core Themes. Description and expectations of the "Table discussions"
        iii. Conduct Table Discussions
        iv. Break
        v. Review Table Discussion Results and Prioritization
        vi. Review Next Steps

TABLE DISCUSSION FORMAT

Format	Table 1	Table 2	Table 3	Table 4	Table 5
If TWO Tables					
If THREE Tables					
If FOUR Tables					
If FIVE Tables					

REVIEW FOCUS GROUP BACKGROUND AND GOALS

Good morning [or afternoon]. My name is [name] from [place]. Polk Vision is conducting a "Refresh" of its strategic plan core themes.

PROVIDE SOME LEVEL-SETTING: DEFINITION OF "QUALITY OF LIFE" AND CORE THEMES

How do we define "Quality of life?" This is important because Polk Vision's focus is on, and will be on, supporting and coordinating with projects that improve the quality of life for people I Polk County. Based on earlier work in the project, we have identified about seven Areas of Focus.

- Economic Advancement
- Education
- Community Health & Well-Being
- Arts, Culture and Recreation
- Growth Management and Infrastructure
- Government
- Civic Engagement

To see if we missed anything and to identify the current pros and cons for each of these themes, we are going to have some separate conversations within our tables, then after about 45 minutes, we'll come back together and discuss the results of our "table talk."
Any questions?

ADJOURN AND BREAK INTO THE TABLES.

CONDUCT TABLE DISCUSSIONS

Ask for a scribe who can take notes and then report out (with Table Leader's assistance, if needed, when we reconvene. Restate that you only have 45 minutes to complete the conversation and that you, as Table Leader, will need to move along the conversation to meet the time constraints.

QUESTIONS DURING THE TABLE SESSIONS

First, I have a few questions about quality of life generally.

1. Regarding the overview of Quality of Life, did we miss anything? What aspects of living in Polk County help provide you with a good quality of life? What is important to you?

2. If you were to encourage a friend or relative to move here, what two things would you use to persuade them to relocate here?

Let's think about our two [or three] assigned topics.

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

1. When you think about Civic Engagement, what things come to mind?
2. Tell me a few strengths or "pros" about Civic Engagement in Polk County.
3. Tell me a few weaknesses. What would you like to see more of (within this theme)?
4. Within this quality of life category or "theme," what two or three things are the greatest priority? Where should see as a community focus?

ECONOMIC PROSPERITY

5. When you think about Economic Prosperity, what things come to mind?
6. Tell me a few strengths or "pros" about Economic Prosperity in Polk County.
7. Tell me a few weaknesses. What would you like to see more of (within this theme)?
8. Within this quality of life category or "theme," what two or three things are the greatest priority? What should we see as a community focus?

EDUCATION

9. When you think about Education, what things come to mind?
10. Tell me a few strengths or "pros" about Education in Polk County.
11. Tell me a few weaknesses. What would you like to see more of (within this theme)?
12. Within this quality of life category or "theme," what two or three things are the greatest priority? 13. What should we focus on as a community?

INFRASTRUCTURE AND GROWTH MANAGEMENT

14. When you think about Infrastructure and growth management, what things come to mind?

15. Tell me a few strengths or "pros" about growth and Infrastructure in Polk County.
16. Tell me a few weaknesses. What would you like to see more of (within this theme)?
17. Within this quality of life category or "theme," what two or three things are the greatest priority? What should we focus on as a community?

GOVERNMENT

18. When you think about Government, what things come to mind?
19. Tell me a few strengths or "pros" about Government in Polk County.
20. Tell me a few weaknesses. What would you like to see more of (within this theme)?
21. Within this quality of life category or "theme," what two or three things are the greatest priority? Where should see as a community focus?

COMMUNITY HEALTH & WELL-BEING

22. When you think about Health & Community Well-Being, what things come to mind?
23. Tell me a few strengths or "pros" about Health & Community Well-Being in Polk County.
24. Tell me a few weaknesses. What would you like to see more of (within this theme)?
25. Within this quality of life category or "theme," what two or three things are the greatest priority? Where should see as a community focus?

ARTS, CULTURE & RECREATION

26. When you think about Arts, Culture & Recreation, what things come to mind?
27. Tell me a few strengths or "pros" about Arts, Culture & Recreation in Polk County.
28. Tell me a few weaknesses. What would you like to see more of (within this theme)?

29. Within this quality of life category or "theme," what two or three things are the greatest priority? Where should see as a community focus?

REVIEW TABLE DISCUSSION RESULTS AND PRIORITIZATION

Welcome back!

We are going to very briefly report some of the things that we discussed. For each of the five categories or themes of quality of life issues, we'd like to hear each group's top two Polk County STRENGTHS and the top two WEAKNESSES or areas that need additional focus.

Theme	Strengths / Pros	Weaknesses / Cons	Notes
30. Civic Engagement			
31. Economic Prosperity			
32. Education			
33. Infrastructure			
34. Government			
35. Health & Community Well-Being			
36. Arts, Culture & Recreation			

37. **Of all the things we've discussed, where do we start? What do you think are the most important two or three things to address?**

REVIEW NEXT STEPS

ADJOURN

Overall, the community's Vision for the county is one where all residents have equitable access to essential services, feel safe and connected, and enjoy a high quality of life that encompasses both basic needs and opportunities for personal fulfillment.

Appendix 2: Survey Research Summary

Vision Update Survey Research Summary

July 2024

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Survey Approach & Methodology

The survey was available online in English and Spanish from May 1, 2024, through June 12, 2024. The questionnaire included closed-ended questions, open-ended questions, and demographic questions. Polk Vision and its partners distributed invitations to participate through channels including email, website, and social media. Strategic outreach was conducted to ensure maximum participation from community members. Polk Vision offered and completed weekly random drawings for $100 gift cards for the duration of time the survey was open.

In total, there were 3,622 survey responses, 95.9% of which were through the English language survey and 4.1% of which were through the Spanish language version. Special care was exercised to minimize the amount of non-sampling errors through the assessment of design effects (e.g., question order, question wording, and response alternatives). The survey was designed to maximize accessibility and comprehensively evaluate respondents' insights.

The survey served as a practical tool for capturing insights of individuals across Polk County. Respondents opted to participate in the survey, so the findings – though broad-based and inclusive – should not be interpreted as statistically reflective of the entire Polk County population. Additionally, sample sizes of demographic subpopulations are not large enough in some cases to consider samples to be representative of the broader populations from which responses were received. However, the survey analysis sought to examine potential differences based on race and ethnicity. In most cases, there were no notable variations. Nevertheless, in instances where important distinctions exist, comments are made in the report. Also, tables that show comparative, prioritized rankings on core theme activities by race and ethnicity are included in the appendices.

Survey Respondent Profile

Among valid responses to the survey (n=3,622), the majority of respondents completed the survey in English (95.9%), with the remainder of surveys completed in Spanish (4.1%).

EXHIBIT: IN WHAT LANGUAGE WOULD YOU LIKE TO TAKE THE SURVEY?

Response	Total
English	95.9%
Spanish	4.1%

About half of survey respondents (56.3%) were under the age 45. One of eight (12.5%) were age 65 or older.

EXHIBIT: WHAT IS YOUR AGE?

Response	Total
18 to 24	4.3%
25 to 34	26.0%
35 to 44	26.0%
45 to 54	17.8%
55 to 64	13.5%
65 to 74	9.6%
75 or older	2.9%

The majority of respondents identified as white (75.7%). One of 12 respondents (7.9%) identified as Black or African American.

EXHIBIT: WHICH RACE BEST DESCRIBES YOU?

Response	Total
More than one race	6.6%
African American or Black	7.9%
American Indian or Alaska Native	5.3%
Asian	2.0%
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	1.4%
White	75.7%
I identify in another way	1.2%

Note: One in four (25.2%) identified as Hispanic.

Three of seven respondents (42.2%) said that they have earned a Bachelor's degree or higher. Note that Hispanics were less likely to have earned a Bachelor's degree or higher than non-Hispanics (29% compared to approximately 46%). Blacks / African Americans were slightly less likely to have earned a Bachelor's degree or higher and twice as likely to have not earned a high school diploma or equivalent than non-Blacks / African Americans.

EXHIBIT: WHAT IS THE HIGHEST LEVEL OF SCHOOL THAT YOU HAVE COMPLETED? (PLEASE CHOOSE ONLY ONE)

Response	Total
Less than high school	2.0%
Some high school, but no diploma	3.8%
High school diploma or GED	13.9%
Some college, no degree	18.0%
Vocational / Technical school	8.9%
Associates degree	11.2%
Bachelor's degree	25.0%
Master's / Graduate or professional degree or higher	17.2%

Three of ten (30.0%) of respondents have an annual income of $100,000 or more – higher among Whites (30.7%) than Blacks / African Americans (21.7%) and Hispanics (17.0%). Slightly more than one of three respondents have a family income under $50,000 (34.2%). There is little difference between Whites and Blacks / African Americans, yet it is slightly higher among Hispanics (42.2%).

EXHIBIT: HOW MUCH TOTAL COMBINED MONEY DID ALL PEOPLE LIVING IN YOUR HOME EARN LAST YEAR? (PLEASE CHOOSE ONLY ONE)

Response	Total
$0 to $9,999	2.8%
$10,000 to $19,999	6.7%
$20,000 to $29,999	6.9%
$30,000 to $39,999	7.8%
$40,000 to $49,999	10.0%
$50,000 to $59,999	7.9%
$60,000 to $69,999	7.1%
$70,000 to $79,999	8.4%
$80,000 to $89,999	6.4%

$90,000 to $99,999	6.1%
$100,000 to $124,999	12.1%
$125,000 to $149,999	6.2%
$150,000 or more	11.7%

Purpose of the Survey

The purpose of this survey was to maximize accessibility and comprehensively evaluate community members' insights regarding the overall Quality of Life in Pok County. This survey, as part of the Polk Vision 20 Year Refresh, also enabled a greater share of people living and working in Polk County to share their perspectives on the unique barriers, challenges, and potential solutions to improve quality of life throughout the community.

Quality of Life

Quality of Life Impact

Survey respondents identified housing, education, and opportunities for economic advancement as their top overall issues that impact quality of life in Polk County.

EXHIBIT: REGARDING THE IMPACT ON QUALITY OF LIFE IN POLK COUNTY, PLEASE SELECT THE THREE MOST IMPORTANT ISSUES

Rating (Based on "Total")	Response	Total
1	Affordable, safe housing	34.0%
2	Quality Education	26.9%
3	Ample Opportunities for Economic Advancement	22.7%
4	Effective / Efficient Infrastructure	21.7%
5	Accessible Health & Community Well-Being	21.3%
6	Helpful, Efficient Government	17.7%
7	Robust Arts, Culture & Recreation	15.7%
8	Active Civic Engagement	11.5%

Quality of Life Summary

Survey respondents were asked:

> *"What aspects of living in Polk County help provide you with a good quality of life? What is important to you?"*

The comments included both positive and negative sentiments about life in Polk County, with a focus on sense of community, impact of growth, infrastructure (especially roads), and economics. Long-term Polk County residents highly valued the traditional small-town atmosphere and natural beauty but were worried about overdevelopment, rising costs, and infrastructure challenges. There was also a significant emphasis on the need for better planning and services to accommodate the growing population.

Five top themes were identified:

- **Community Atmosphere and Safety**. Many respondents appreciate the sense of community and the perceived safety it provides. This includes small-town charm and low crime rates. Concerns were raised about maintaining this atmosphere amidst rapid development and increasing population.

- **Infrastructure and Traffic**. Traffic congestion and poor road conditions are major issues due to the rapid growth and the perceived lack of long-term planning.

- **Affordable Housing and Economic Challenges.** Affordable housing is a critical concern, with rising property values, insufficient living wages, and high rent making life difficult.

- **Growth and Overdevelopment**. Many comments highlight the negative impact of uncontrolled growth, including loss of green spaces, increased traffic, and the impact on the environment, utilities, schools, and healthcare.

- **Recreational and Natural Spaces.** Polk County residents highly value access to parks, hiking trails, and other recreational facilities. The natural beauty of the area is seen as important for quality of life.

Survey respondents were also asked:

> *"If you were to encourage a friend or relative to move here, what two things would you use to persuade them to relocate here?"*

Based on the survey comments, five key themes emerge:

- **Natural Beauty and Outdoor Activities**. Polk County residents enjoy a variety of outdoor activities such as hiking, camping, fishing, and visiting beautiful parks and lakes. Many also highlight the good weather and overall high quality of life.

- **Community and Safety**. A strong "sense of community." Safety is also a recurring theme, as residents generally feel secure (e.g., safer than in Orlando or Tampa) and appreciate law enforcement.

- **Cost of Living and Economic Factors.** The cost of living in Polk County is generally perceived as lower compared to other areas. However, this may be an "endangered" sentiment as there is concern about rising costs and insufficient wages to match the cost of living. There are job opportunities and economic growth, but some feel the need for more and better-paying jobs.

- **Growth and Infrastructure Challenges.** Many comments reflect concerns about overpopulation, traffic congestion, and unsustainable growth. When thinking about encouraging relatives or others to move to Polk County, residents worry about the impact of the current growth on infrastructure, green spaces, and overall quality of life.

- **Cultural and Recreational Opportunities**. Survey respondents say that Polk County offers a good set of cultural events, restaurants, and recreational opportunities. The area's proximity to major attractions in Orlando and Tampa is a plus – "close enough but not too close!"

Survey Analysis of Core Themes

Infrastructure

Respondents identified vehicular traffic capacity (46.4%) – which includes the traffic capacity of intersections, roads, streets, and highways – as the most frequently desired infrastructure improvement. This was true regardless of race or ethnicity. The second most frequently desired infrastructure improvement was road quality and repair (32.0%), followed by increased and enhanced public transportation (23.4%).

Geographically, respondents' priorities are similar throughout Polk County.

EXHIBIT: IF YOU WANTED TO FURTHER IMPROVE (MAKE MORE AVAILABLE) THREE OF THE FOLLOWING, WHICH WOULD YOU CHOOSE?

Rating (Based on "Total")	Response	Total
1	Vehicular traffic capacity (intersections, roads, streets, and highways)	46.4%
2	Road quality and repair (potholes, rough, worn, rutted)	32.0%
3	Increased and enhanced public transportation (buses, trams, railways, etc.)	23.4%
4	Pedestrian walkways / sidewalks	19.5%
5	Traffic control and management (signals, signs, road markings)	17.2%
6	Property development and land use zoning	16.3%
7	Increased enforcement of traffic safety laws	16.0%
8	Bike paths and trails	15.2%
9	Broadband / high speed internet access	10.8%
10	Bridges, overpasses, and similar structures	10.6%
11	Electric and gas utility services	7.5%
12	Garbage collection and waste management	7.2%
13	Water and sewer management	6.8%

**** Tables that show rank-order comparisons by race and ethnicity are contained within the appendices. Additional appendices show variations by geography within Polk County.**

Across all demographics, survey respondents were asked to what degree they agreed or disagreed with the following statements. Most (85.9%) either agreed or strongly agreed that expanded public transit services are needed. This was followed by 83.6% who either agreed or strongly agreed that traffic congestion and local travel delays are a frequent problem.

EXHIBIT: INFRASTRUCTURE – AGREE/DISAGREE

To what degree do you agree with the following statements?		Percent who Agree or Strongly Agree
Statement	Desired Outcome	Total
Expanded public transit services are needed. (routes, frequency, coverage).	Low	85.9%
Traffic congestion and local travel delays are a frequent problem in my community.	Low	83.6%
People who live in my community feel safe while walking or riding their bicycles along roadways.	High	45.4%
People who live in my community have access (live within half a mile) to affordable transit services to get to the place they need to go (the doctor, grocery store/food banks, pharmacy, school, wo	High	49.9%
Roadways are safe and in good repair.	High	51.2%
There are sufficient pedestrian sidewalks in my community.	High	52.0%
Infrastructure in my community is adequate to withstand extreme weather events. (storm water drainage, flooding, erosion.)	High	61.1%
Special transportation service (STS) is available for people who live in my community with special needs (e.g., elderly, people with disabilities).	High	61.7%
Water is a safe and reliable resource.	High	75.9%
People who live in my community have adequate access to internet services that meets requirements for health care, education, work, and entertainment.	High	76.1%

Education

Respondents desire more opportunities for students to explore career options and receive technical training (31.7%), equitable access to educational opportunities (31.3%), and increased partnerships between schools and businesses (28.5%).

Respondents indicate that their priorities are similar regardless of geography within Polk County.

EXHIBIT: IF YOU WANTED TO FURTHER IMPROVE (MAKE MORE AVAILABLE) THREE OF THE FOLLOWING, WHICH WOULD YOU CHOOSE?

Rating (Based on "Total")	Response	Total
1	Opportunities for students to explore career options and receive technical training in a skilled trade	31.7%
2	Equitable access for students to attend the school that best meets their needs regardless of school zone, home address, or other student circumstances	31.3%
3	Increased partnerships between schools and businesses for on-the-job training, job shadowing, and internships	28.5%
4	Quality, affordable trade and technical schools	21.2%
5	Schools and learning environments for students with developmental, mental health, behavioral, or other special needs	21.0%
6	After school and summer programming aimed at increasing academic performance	20.5%
7	English language classes for individuals who speak other languages	17.0%
8	Skills training (or re-training) for adults changing careers	14.7%
9	Options with higher-education partners for students to earn college credit while still in high school	14.0%
10	Schools and programs that teach music, theatre, or other classical arts	12.3%

**** A table that shows rank-order comparisons for Hispanics, non-Hispanics, Blacks / African Americans, and non-African Americans is contained in the appendices. Additional appendices show variations by geography within Polk County.**

Fewer than half of respondents (44.6%) agree or strongly agree that high school graduates are prepared to enter the workforce. A similar percentage (47.0%) is confident that schools effectively deal with bullying, harassment, and illicit drug use.

EXHIBIT: EDUCATION – AGREE/DISAGREE

To what degree do you agree with the following statements?	Percent who Agree or Strongly Agree
Graduating high school students are prepared to enter the workforce (e.g., have skills needed to obtain employment).	44.6%
Schools are effective in dealing with matters such as bullying, harassment, and illicit drugs.	47.0%
All children in my community have access to a high-quality education.	58.3%
Graduating high school students are prepared for technical school, college, or university.	61.7%
Graduating high school students know how to apply for college, trade, or technical school.	63.8%
Schools in my community provide a good education for students.	66.2%
Students in my community have many options for school sponsored extracurricular activities.	68.7%
There are quality trade and technical schools in the area that prepare graduates with the technical skills to get a decent job.	69.5%
Schools provide adequate protections to keep students safe from violence at school and when participating in school-related activities.	70.5%
There are a number of local colleges and universities in the area that prepare graduates for good careers.	78.8%
Adults have opportunities to take adult education classes.	78.8%
Early childhood education resources are available for young children Head Start (or Early Head Start or similar programs are available to young children.	79.3%
GED classes are available for adults seeking to complete high school.	84.4%

Economic Advancement

Regardless of race or ethnicity, survey respondents desire to earn a living wage (33.6%), have equitable access to jobs (24.1%), and have employees with strong soft skills, such as critical thinking and teamwork (21.1%). Interestingly, survey respondents who live in Polk County south of Mulberry and Bartow are somewhat less likely to prioritize "Public transportation to help people get to work" as a high-level need than others. Other responses are similar across all geographies.

EXHIBIT: IF YOU WANTED TO FURTHER IMPROVE (MAKE MORE AVAILABLE) THREE OF THE FOLLOWING, WHICH WOULD YOU CHOOSE?

Rating (Based on "Total")	Response	Total
1	Ability to earn a living wage	33.6%
2	Equitable access to jobs and training regardless of socio-economic status, race or ethnicity, geographic location, or other personal circumstances	24.1%
3	Employees with soft skills such as critical thinking, teamwork, professional attitude, work ethic, communication skills, and others	21.1%
4	Job training sites and facilities for adults changing careers Job training sites and facilities for young adults	19.8%
5	Public transportation to help people get to work	18.6%
6	Jobs in a greater range of industries	14.9%
7	Increased variety and types of job training opportunities	14.2%
8	Ability to start a new business	14.0%
9	Variety of jobs that match the education and career interests of local job seekers	13.8%
10	High-tech, high-wage industries	13.8%
11	Robust ability for employers to hire well-trained or qualified employees	7.9%
12	Professional community and networking opportunities	7.9%

**** A table that shows rank-order comparisons for Hispanics, non-Hispanics, Blacks / African Americans, and non-African Americans is contained in the appendices. Additional appendices show variations by geography within Polk County.**

Low wages, affordable transportation, and workforce capacity are seen as current, lingering challenges to economic advancement by survey respondents.

EXHIBIT: ECONOMIC ADVANCEMENT – AGREE/DISAGREE

To what degree do you agree with the following statements?	Percent who Agree or Strongly Agree
Wages and salaries make it possible for people who live in my community to live comfortably.	40.0%
There are adequate affordable transportation options to make commuting to a job easy.	43.5%
If you are seeking a job, you can find one that pays a living wage in my area.	45.3%
Area businesses have enough workforce to meet their needs.	46.6%
People who live in my community can find jobs in fields related to their education and training.	52.8%
People who live in my community have access to a variety of employment and job opportunities.	57.6%
There are career opportunities for young professionals and recent graduates.	59.2%
New businesses are providing more job opportunities in my community.	62.8%
Educational and job training opportunities are available to people in my community.	63.7%
Employment assistance is available to those seeking a job.	66.0%
Small businesses can succeed in my area.	70.1%
Soft Skills – critical thinking, teamwork, professional attitude, work ethic, communication skills, and others – are essential characteristics of a successful employee.	88.5%

Community Health and Well-Being

Affordable medical care (28.2%), dental care (21.1%), and normalized mental health care (21.1%) are top-of-mind for survey respondents. Most see these issues as the most needed services. There are few differences based on race or ethnicity, though non-Hispanics tend to prioritize public safety slightly higher than others.

Respondents' priorities, regardless of geography within Polk County, are similar.

EXHIBIT: IF YOU WANTED TO FURTHER IMPROVE (MAKE MORE AVAILABLE) THREE OF THE FOLLOWING, WHICH WOULD YOU CHOOSE?

Rating (Based on "Total")	Response	Total
1	Affordable, quality medical care	28.2%
2	Normalizing mental health care	21.1%
3	Affordable, quality dental care	21.1%
4	Public safety: free of fear of violence, theft, or other criminal activities	18.4%
5	Active community involvement and social networks	14.4%
6	Senior services and supports	12.6%
7	Availability of qualified specialty care	12.3%
8	Chronic disease (e.g., Asthma, COPD, cancer, diabetes, Heart disease, or other care)	12.1%
9	Community-based clinics and health centers	11.0%
10	Access to healthcare resources and services	11.0%
11	Sense of belonging, acceptance, and inclusion	9.7%
12	Cultural activities that celebrate diverse populations	8.5%
13	Churches and other faith-based institutions	8.2%
14	Volunteer opportunities	4.5%
15	Pre-natal care	3.1%

**** A table that shows rank-order comparisons for Hispanics, non-Hispanics, Blacks / African Americans, and non-African Americans is contained in the appendices. Additional appendices show variations by geography within Polk County.**

The majority of survey respondents, regardless of race or ethnicity, either agreed or strongly agreed that their community was a good place to raise children (79.2%). Similarly, survey respondents reported that community members are generally happy (77.7%) and that the community is clean and well-maintained (75.7%). However, just three of five (60.4%) say that people who live in their community are healthy.

EXHIBIT: HEALTH & WELL-BEING – AGREE/DISAGREE

To what degree do you agree with the following statements?	Percent who Agree or Strongly Agree
People who live in my community are healthy.	60.4%
People who live in my community have enough to eat on a daily basis.	63.6%
People who live in my community know how to access health care and mental health services.	65.3%
People who live in my community feel safe from violence, theft, and other criminal activities.	65.6%
People in my community have access to food resources when in need.	72.2%
People who live in my community are involved with local groups (e.g., volunteers, religious organizations, neighborhood associations, etc.)	73.8%
People in my community feel a sense of pride and belonging.	75.1%
People in my community know and have positive relationships with their neighbors.	75.2%
People who live in my community are accepting of diverse backgrounds (ethnicities, races, religions, and lifestyles).	75.5%
My community is clean and well-maintained.	75.7%
People who live in my community are generally happy with where they live.	77.7%
My community is a good place to raise children.	79.2%

Government

Respondents say that growth management (29.0%) and the related issue of management of roads and utilities (24.1%) are the leading government-related issues to address.

Responses are fairly consistent regardless of geography within Polk County.

EXHIBIT: IF YOU WANTED TO FURTHER IMPROVE (MAKE MORE AVAILABLE) THREE OF THE FOLLOWING, WHICH WOULD YOU CHOOSE?

Rating (Based on "Total")	Response	Total
1	Growth management that is responsible and economically sustainable	29.0%
2	Management of roads, sewer, utilities, and other infrastructure	24.1%
3	Government-sponsored health and human services (healthcare, housing, and neighborhood development)	21.3%
4	Effective communications between government and citizens	18.6%
5	Fair taxes	16.8%
6	Government officials that are receptive to new ideas	15.9%
7	Responsible effective, and fair environmental safeguards (air, water, soil)	14.6%
8	Equitable access to government supported community service centers	12.5%
9	Fair and equitable local ordinances	10.5%
10	Fiscal responsibility by government entities	10.1%
11	Responsive public safety and law enforcement agencies	8.1%
12	Opportunities to engage directly with government officials	6.5%

**** A table that shows rank-order comparisons for Hispanics, non-Hispanics, Blacks / African Americans, and non-African Americans is contained in the appendices. Additional appendices show variations by geography within Polk County.**

There is tremendous support for law enforcement and first responders in Polk County, as seven of eight survey respondents (88.3%) agree or strongly agree that law enforcement, firefighters, and emergency services are responsive. However, fewer than half (46.4%) agree or strongly agree that government officials do a decent job managing growth. Regarding taxes, 63.6% of respondents believe taxes to be fair but 55.1% question whether those dollars are being used wisely.

EXHIBIT: GOVERNMENT – AGREE/DISAGREE

To what degree do you agree with the following statements?	Percent who Agree or Strongly Agree
Government officials do a decent job managing growth.	46.4%
Local government uses tax dollars wisely.	55.1%
Government officials are responsive to citizen input.	56.7%
Local government is responsive to complaints or concerns.	60.1%
The demographics of elected leaders and government staff reflect the people they represent.	60.2%
Local government collaborates with community organizations and stakeholders to address community needs.	60.7%
Local taxes are fair.	63.6%
People in my community have opportunities to share requests or opinions with government leaders and be heard.	65.8%
People in my community feel safe from crime.	65.8%
All members of the community are treated with respect and dignity.	68.1%
People in my neighborhood feel safe and secure.	72.3%
Law enforcement, firefighters, and emergency services are responsive.	88.3%

Civic Engagement

The most commonly noted areas of need within the Civic Engagement focus area are community development and environmental management (23.7%), youth mentoring and related activities (20.4%), and activities for people living with disabilities (17.0%) and activities for seniors (16.8%). However, Hispanic respondents prioritized "programs serving migrants, new Americans, or others" higher (i.e., in the top five) than non-Hispanics. Also, Blacks / African Americans prioritize "Programs engaging racial or ethnic minority groups" higher than others (i.e., in the top five).

Note that there are few notable differences based on geography within Polk County.

EXHIBIT: IF YOU WANTED TO FURTHER IMPROVE (MAKE MORE AVAILABLE) THREE OF THE FOLLOWING, WHICH WOULD YOU CHOOSE?

Rating (Based on "Total")	Response	Total
1	Community development and environmental management	23.7%
2	Youth mentoring, coaching, teaching, scouting, wellness, or similar activities	20.4%
3	Activities supporting people living with disabilities	17.0%
4	Senior support activities	16.8%
5	Participation in local government (elected, nominated, or volunteer)	13.3%
6	Legal aid programs	13.2%
7	Community outreach to ensure voter access	11.0%
8	Health-related volunteer activities	11.0%
9	Programs engaging racial or ethnic minority groups	9.9%
10	Service on lay boards, committees, and advisory councils that impact public policy	9.2%
11	Programs serving migrants, new Americans, or others	9.0%
12	Voting in all elections	8.6%
13	Service with, or membership in, charitable organizations and related activities	7.2%
14	Volunteerism	6.6%

**** A table that shows rank-order comparisons for Hispanics, non-Hispanics, Blacks / African Americans, and non-African Americans is contained in the appendices. Additional appendices show variations by geography within Polk County.**

Only about half of respondents (53.5%) agree or strongly agree that there are adequate programs to help people living with a disability. A similar (relatively low, 59.2%) percentage say that elected leaders and key government staff are representative of their community. However, most (80.3%) indicate that there are many ways to participate in the electoral process.

EXHIBIT: CIVIC ENGAGEMENT – AGREE/DISAGREE

To what degree do you agree with the following statements?	Percent who Agree or Strongly Agree
There are adequate programs to help people living with a disability.	53.5%
Elected leaders and key government staff are representative of my community	59.2%
People in my community make a significant impact by helping to address local issues.	60.8%
People who live in my community make a difference by participating in government meetings and workshops addressing local issues.	61.5%
People who live in my community participate in civic and local government meetings (e.g., school board, lay boards, city council).	61.5%
Senior-oriented programs are in place to help older Polk County residents.	62.6%
There are opportunities to participate in local government.	66.6%
Opportunities to volunteer are plentiful.	72.7%
Volunteer opportunities are plentiful.	72.7%
Members of my community are actively involved with local groups (volunteering, religious organizations, neighborhood associations, etc.).	72.9%
There are many ways to participate in the electoral process (e.g., helping to run elections or voter participation).	80.3%

Arts, Culture, and Recreation

Survey respondents indicate that access to fields or courts for athletics (20.3%) is a top area needing improvement. Note that people living in certain areas of Polk County indicate a slightly greater desire for more resources than others. However, county-wide, there is no notable difference among respondents based on race or ethnicity.

Geographically within Polk County, residents living south of Mulberry and Bartow are more likely to say that more parks and playgrounds are needed than others. While those living north of I-4 would like to see more public pools and hiking trails in their community (relative to those in other parts of Polk County).

EXHIBIT: IF YOU WANTED TO FURTHER IMPROVE (MAKE MORE AVAILABLE) THREE OF THE FOLLOWING, WHICH WOULD YOU CHOOSE?

Rating (Based on "Total")	Response	Total
1	Access to fields (or courts) to play baseball, soccer, softball, tennis, pickleball, football,	20.3%
2	Children-focused museums and similar learning opportunities	16.2%
3	Art galleries, museums, and exhibits (e.g., painting, sculpture, other media)	15.5%
4	Concerts and other live, large-audience performances	15.2%
5	Live music events and festivals	13.6%
6	Fitness opportunities	12.1%
7	Nature preserves	10.6%
8	Hiking or running trails	10.6%
9	Parks and playgrounds	10.4%
10	Ballet, opera, orchestral music, or similar classical arts	9.1%
11	Lectures and opportunities for ongoing education	8.5%
12	Gardening clubs or similar groups	8.4%
13	Public pools	8.1%
14	Movie theaters	5.1%
15	Professional or semi-pro sporting events	4.3%

**** A table that shows rank-order comparisons for Hispanics, non-Hispanics, Blacks/African Americans, and non-African Americans is contained in the appendices. Additional appendices show variations by geography within Polk County.**

Among all survey respondents, most (81.4%) either agreed or strongly agreed that parks and other outdoor spaces provide opportunities for community members to gather. Few agree or strongly agree that "Museums and art galleries are near me or within a short distance" (54.7%) or that "Community art projects are located in my neighborhood" (47.8%)

EXHIBIT: ARTS, CULTURE, AND RECREATION – AGREE/DISAGREE

To what degree do you agree with the following statements?	Percent who Agree or Strongly Agree
Parks and other outdoor spaces provide opportunities for community members to gather.	81.4%
Air and water quality are good and support outdoor recreational activities.	76.8%
People in my community have access to places for outdoor physical activity (playground, sports court/field, outdoor gym, walking loop, bike trail).	75.2%
People in my community have safe places to walk and enjoy the outdoors.	72.2%
Organized activities such as Boys And Girls Clubs, the Y, Girls Inc, scouting, and similar activities are available for youth in my community.	70.0%
There are spectator sporting events for individuals and families to enjoy watching.	63.1%
Activities promoting culture and the arts are accessible for all people who live in my community.	61.4%
There are safe, well-kept, indoor recreational facilities where children and families can gather in my community.	60.5%
Families and individuals can enjoy events such as concerts and other live events.	59.2%
There is a good range of clubs, civic organizations, and similar community groups for adults and families.	59.0%
There are adequate after-school and summertime organized recreation and arts programs for youth of all ages.	58.7%
Children, adults, and families have access to live theatre, symphony, dance, and similar performing arts.	56.8%
Museums and art galleries are near me or within a short distance.	54.7%
Community art projects are located in my neighborhood.	47.8%

Housing

Affordable housing (or lack thereof) is a major community need (38.5%). Alternatively, though, the majority of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that their community has housing which is safe to live in (75.7%).

EXHIBIT: HOUSING – AGREE/DISAGREE

To what degree do you agree with the following statements?	Percent who Agree or Strongly Agree
Housing is affordable in my community.	38.5%
There is enough support for people in my community who are experiencing homelessness.	45.1%
It is easy to rent a place to live.	46.7%
Homelessness is not a major problem in my town/city.	47.1%
It is easy to become a homeowner in my community.	47.2%
I know where to find help in dealing with challenges related to housing in my community.	47.9%
People who live in my community experiencing homelessness have access to shelters that are safe.	50.3%
It is easy to find a good place to live in my community.	56.1%
There are a variety of housing types (single family home, apartments, condos, etc.) available to people who live in my community.	67.9%
In my community, housing is safe to live in (e.g., clean water, no mold, no lead, structurally sound).	75.7%

Appendix 1: Rank-order Comparisons by Race and Ethnicity

Infrastructure

The numbers in the table below represent the rankings by Race (i.e., Black or African American and All Others) and Ethnicity (i.e., Hispanic or Non-Hispanic) shown in the header.

If you wanted to further improve (make more available) THREE of the following, which would you choose?					
Response	Black or African American	All others		Hispanic or Latino	Not Hispanic or Latino
Vehicular traffic capacity (intersections, roads, streets, and highways)	1	1		1	1
Increased and enhanced public transportation (buses, trams, railways, etc.)	2	3		3	3
Road quality and repair (potholes, rough, worn, rutted)	3	2		2	2
Pedestrian walkways / sidewalks	4	4		4	4
Bridges, overpasses, and similar structures	5	10		6	10
Traffic control and management (signals, signs, road markings)	6	5		8	6
Bike paths and trails	7	8		5	8
Property development and land use zoning	8	6		7	7
Broadband / high speed internet access	9	9		10	9
Increased enforcement of traffic safety laws	10	7		9	5
Electric and gas utility services	11	11		11	13
Water and sewer management	12	13		12	12
Garbage collection and waste management	13	12		13	11

Education

The numbers in the table below represent the rankings by <u>Race</u> (i.e., Black or African American and All Others) and <u>Ethnicity</u> (i.e., Hispanic or Non-Hispanic) shown in the header.

If you wanted to further improve (make more available) THREE of the following, which would you choose?					
Response	Black or African American	All others		Hispanic or Latino	Not Hispanic or Latino
Equitable access for students to attend the school that best meets their needs regardless of school zone, home address, or other student circumstances	1	2		1	2
Increased partnerships between schools and businesses for on-the-job training, job shadowing, and internships	2	3		2	3
Opportunities for students to explore careers options and receive technical training in a skilled trade	3	1		3	1
After school and summer programming aimed at increasing academic performance	4	6		6	6
Schools and learning environments for students with developmental, mental health, behavioral, or other special needs	5	5		5	5
English language classes for individuals who speak other languages	6	7		4	9
Quality, affordable trade and technical schools	7	4		8	4
Skills training (or re-training) for adults changing careers	8	8		9	7
Options with higher-education partners for students to earn college credit while still in high school	9	9		7	8
Schools and programs that teach music, theatre, or other classical arts	10	10		10	10

Economic Advancement

The numbers in the table below represent the rankings by Race (i.e., Black or African American and All Others) and Ethnicity (i.e., Hispanic or Non-Hispanic) shown in the header.

If you wanted to further improve (make more available) THREE of the following, which would you choose?					
Response	Black or African American	All others		Hispanic or Latino	Not Hispanic or Latino
Ability to earn a living wage	1	1		3	1
Equitable access to jobs and training regardless of socio-economic status, race or ethnicity, geographic location, or other personal circumstances	2	2		2	2
Employees with soft skills such as critical thinking, teamwork, professional attitude, work ethic, communication skills, and others	3	3		1	5
Public transportation to help people get to work	4	5		7	3
Ability to start a new business	5	10		4	10
Job training sites and facilities for adults changing careers Job training sites and facilities for young adults	6	4		5	4
High tech, high wage industries	7	9		9	8
Jobs in a greater range of industries	8	6		6	9
Variety of jobs that match the education and career interests of local job seekers	9	8		10	6
Professional community and networking opportunities	10	12		11	12
Increased variety and types of job training opportunities	11	7		8	6
Robust ability for employers to hire well-trained or qualified employees	12	11		12	11

Community Health and Well-Being

The numbers in the table below represent the rankings by Race (i.e., Black or African American and All Others) and Ethnicity (i.e., Hispanic or Non-Hispanic) shown in the header.

If you wanted to further improve (make more available) THREE of the following, which would you choose?					
Response	Black or African American	All others		Hispanic or Latino	Not Hispanic or Latino
Affordable, quality medical care	1	1		1	1
Affordable, quality dental care	2	3		2	3
Active community involvement and social networks	3	5		3	7
Normalizing mental health care	4	2		4	2
Cultural activities that celebrate diverse populations	5	13		11	12
Chronic disease (e.g., Asthma, COPD, cancer, diabetes, Heart disease, or other care)	6	8		5	9
Community-based clinics and health centers	7	10		6	10
Public safety: free of fear of violence, theft, or other criminal activities	8	4		7	4
Senior services and supports	9	6		13	5
Availability of qualified specialty care	10	7		9	6
Churches and other faith-based institutions	11	12		8	13
Sense of belonging, acceptance, and inclusion	12	11		10	11
Access to healthcare resources and services	13	9		12	8
Volunteer opportunities	14	14		14	14
Pre-natal care	15	15		15	15

Government

The numbers in the table below represent the rankings by Race (i.e., Black or African American and All Others) and Ethnicity (i.e., Hispanic or Non-Hispanic) shown in the header.

If you wanted to further improve (make more available) THREE of the following, which would you choose?					
Response	Black or African American	All others		Hispanic or Latino	Not Hispanic or Latino
Government-sponsored health and human services (healthcare, housing, and neighborhood development)	1	3		1	3
Growth management that is responsible and economically sustainable	2	1		2	1
Management of roads, sewer, utilities, and other infrastructure	3	2		5	2
Effective communications between government and citizens	4	4		4	4
Equitable access to government supported community service centers	5	8		3	9
Government officials that are receptive to new ideas	6	6		7	5
Fair taxes	7	5		6	6
Opportunities to engage directly with government officials	8	12		11	12
Fair and equitable local ordinances	9	9		8	10
Fiscal responsibility by government entities	10	10		10	8
Responsible effective, and fair environmental safeguards (air, water, soil)	11	7		9	7
Responsive public safety and law enforcement agencies	12	11		12	11

Civic Engagement

The numbers in the table below represent the rankings by Race (i.e., Black or African American and All Others) and Ethnicity (i.e., Hispanic or Non-Hispanic) shown in the header.

If you wanted to further improve (make more available) THREE of the following, which would you choose?					
Response	Black or African American	All others		Hispanic or Latino	Not Hispanic or Latino
Community development and environmental management	1	1		1	1
Activities supporting people living with disabilities	2	4		2	4
Youth mentoring, coaching, teaching, scouting, wellness, or similar activities	3	2		3	2
Legal aid programs	4	6		7	5
Programs engaging racial or ethnic minority groups	5	9		9	11
Participation in local government (elected, nominated, or volunteer)	6	5		4	6
Community outreach to ensure voter access	7	8		6	7
Senior support activities	8	3		10	3
Health-related volunteer activities	9	7		8	10
Programs serving migrants, new Americans, or others	10	11		5	14
Service with, or membership in, charitable organizations and related activities	11	13		12	13
Service on lay boards, committees, and advisory councils that impact public policy	12	12		11	9
Volunteerism	13	14		14	12
Voting in all elections	14	12		13	8

Arts, Culture, and Recreation

The numbers in the table below represent the rankings by Race (i.e., Black or African American and All Others) and Ethnicity (i.e., Hispanic or Non-Hispanic) shown in the header.

If you wanted to further improve (make more available) THREE of the following, which would you choose?					
Response	Black or African American	All others		Hispanic or Latino	Not Hispanic or Latino
Access to fields (or courts) to play baseball, soccer, softball, tennis, pickleball, football, etc.	1	1		1	1
Art galleries, museums, and exhibits (e.g., painting, sculpture, other media)	2	3		2	5
Concerts and other live, large audience performances	3	4		4	2
Children-focused museums and similar learning opportunities	4	2		3	4
Fitness opportunities	5	6		5	6
Ballet, opera, orchestral music, or similar classical arts	6	10		6	13
Live music events and festivals	7	5		11	3
Lectures and opportunities for ongoing education	8	11		10	11
Gardening clubs or similar groups	9	12		7	12
Movie theaters	10	14		14	14
Parks and playgrounds	11	9		9	9
Hiking or running trails	12	7		8	8
Public pools	13	13		13	10
Nature preserves	14	7		12	6
Professional or semi-pro sporting events	15	15		15	15

Housing

The numbers in the table below represent the rankings by Race (i.e., Black or African American and All Others) and Ethnicity (i.e., Hispanic or Non-Hispanic) shown in the header.

To what degree do you agree with the following statements?					
Statement	Black or African American	All others		Hispanic or Latino	Not Hispanic or Latino
In my community, housing is safe to live in (e.g., clean water, no mold, no lead, structurally sound).	1	1		1	1
There are a variety of housing types (single family home, apartments, condos, etc.) available to people who live in my community.	2	2		2	2
It is easy to find a good place to live in my community.	3	3		3	3
Homelessness is not a major problem in my town/city.	4	7		7	7
It is easy to rent a place to live.	5	8		6	8
I know where to find help in dealing with challenges related to housing in my community.	6	5		8	6
People who live in my community experiencing homelessness have access to shelters that are safe.	7	4		4	4
It is easy to become a homeowner in my community.	8	6		9	5
There is enough support for people in my community who are experiencing homelessness.	9	9		5	9
Housing is affordable in my community.	10	10		10	10

Appendix 2: Rank-order Comparisons by Location Within Polk County

Infrastructure

The numbers in the table below represent the rankings within each Polk County location shown in the header.

Issue	Lakeland and vicinity	Winter Haven and vicinity	Mulberry and Bartow vicinities	Polk County south of Mulberry and Bartow	Northeast - Davenport, Haines City, Dundee vicinities	North Polk County
Vehicular traffic capacity (intersections, roads, streets, and highways)	1	1	2	3	1	1
Road quality and repair (potholes, rough, worn, rutted)	2	2	1	1	2	2
Increased and enhanced public transportation (buses, trams, railways, etc.)	3	3	3	2	3	5
Pedestrian walkways / sidewalks	4	4	4	4	7	9
Traffic control and management (signals, signs, road markings)	7	6	5	8	4	3
Increased enforcement of traffic safety laws	6	5	7	7	5	4
Property development and land use zoning	5	7	8	6	6	6
Bike paths and trails	8	9	6	5	10	7
Broadband / high speed internet access	9	8	9	12	8	8
Bridges, overpasses, and similar structures	10	13	10	9	11	11
Electric and gas utility services	11	10	13	11	12	12
Water and sewer management	13	12	12	13	9	10
Garbage collection and waste management	12	11	11	10	13	13

Education

The numbers in the table below represent the rankings within each Polk County location shown in the header.

Issue	Lakeland and vicinity	Winter Haven and vicinity	Mulberry and Bartow vicinities	Polk County south of Mulberry and Bartow	Northeast - Davenport, Haines City, Dundee vicinities	North Polk County
Opportunities for students to explore careers options and receive technical training in a skilled trade	1	1	1	1	1	1
Equitable access for students to attend the school that best meets their needs regardless of school zone, home address, or other student circumstances	2	3	2	4	2	4
Increased partnerships between schools and businesses for on-the-job training, job shadowing, and internships	3	2	3	2	4	3
Quality, affordable trade and technical schools	6	4	6	3	3	2
Schools and learning environments for students with developmental, mental health, behavioral, or other special needs	4	5	4	9	6	9
After school and summer programming aimed at increasing academic performance	5	6	5	5	8	5
Skills training (or re-training) for adults changing careers	7	7	7	6	7	8
English language classes for individuals who speak other languages	10	9	10	8	5	7
Schools and programs that teach music, theatre, or other classical arts	9	8	9	7	9	10
Options with higher-education partners for students to earn college credit while still in high school	8	10	8	10	10	6

Economic Advancement

The numbers in the table below represent the rankings within each Polk County location shown in the header.

Issue	Lakeland and vicinity	Winter Haven and vicinity	Mulberry and Bartow vicinities	Polk County south of Mulberry and Bartow	Northeast - Davenport, Haines City, Dundee vicinities	North Polk County
Ability to earn a living wage	1	1	1	1	1	1
Equitable access to jobs and training regardless of socio-economic status, race or ethnicity, geographic location, or other personal circumstances	4	2	3	4	3	2
Public transportation to help people get to work	5	5	8	2	2	4
Job training sites and facilities for adults changing careers and for young adults	2	3	2	5	6	3
Employees with soft skills such as critical thinking, teamwork, professional attitude, work ethic, communication skills, and others	3	6	4	3	9	7
Variety of jobs that match the education and career interests of local job seekers	7	4	9	6	7	9
Jobs in a greater range of industries	8	7	7	10	5	5
Increased variety and types of job training opportunities	6	9	5	8	8	8
High tech, high wage industries	9	10	10	7	4	6
Ability to start a new business	10	8	6	9	10	11
Professional community and networking opportunities	11	12	12	12	11	10
Robust ability for employers to hire well-trained or qualified employees	12	11	11	11	12	12

Community Health and Well-Being

The numbers in the table below represent the rankings within each Polk County location shown in the header.

Issue	Lakeland and vicinity	Winter Haven and vicinity	Mulberry and Bartow vicinities	Polk County south of Mulberry and Bartow	Northeast - Davenport, Haines City, Dundee vicinities	North Polk County
Affordable, quality medical care	2	1	1	2	1	1
Normalizing mental health care	1	2	3	3	4	5
Affordable, quality dental care	3	3	2	1	3	2
Public safety: free of fear of violence, theft, or other criminal activities	4	4	5	4	2	4
Senior services and supports	7	5	9	9	5	3
Availability of qualified specialty care	6	6	4	11	7	8
Active community involvement and social networks	11	7	8	8	6	9
Community-based clinics and health centers	5	9	12	7	9	7
Access to healthcare resources and services	8	8	7	5	10	10
Sense of belonging, acceptance, and inclusion	9	10	10	14	11	6
Cultural activities that celebrate diverse populations	12	12	11	10	8	12
Chronic disease (e.g., Asthma, COPD, cancer, diabetes, Heart disease, or other care)	10	11	6	6	12	11
Churches and other faith-based institutions	13	13	13	12	13	13
Pre-natal care	14	14	14	13	14	14

Government

The numbers in the table below represent the rankings within each Polk County location shown in the header.

Issue	Lakeland and vicinity	Winter Haven and vicinity	Mulberry and Bartow vicinities	Polk County south of Mulberry and Bartow	Northeast - Davenport, Haines City, Dundee vicinities	North Polk County
Growth management that is responsible and economically sustainable	1	1	1	1	2	2
Management of roads, sewer, utilities, and other infrastructure	3	2	3	3	1	1
Government sponsored health and human services (healthcare, housing, and neighborhood development)	2	4	2	6	5	9
Fair taxes	6	3	5	7	4	4
Effective communications between government and citizens	7	6	8	4	3	3
Government officials that are receptive to new ideas	4	5	4	5	6	6
Responsible effective, and fair environmental safeguards (air, water, soil)	5	7	6	2	7	5
Fiscal responsibility by government entities	10	8	7	11	11	7
Equitable access to government supported community service centers	8	10	9	9	8	11
Fair and equitable local ordinances	9	11	10	10	10	8
Responsive public safety and law enforcement agencies	11	9	11	8	9	10
Opportunities to engage directly with government officials	12	12	12	12	12	12

Civic Engagement

The numbers in the table below represent the rankings within each Polk County location shown in the header.

Issue	Lakeland and vicinity	Winter Haven and vicinity	Mulberry and Bartow vicinities	Polk County south of Mulberry and Bartow	Northeast - Davenport, Haines City, Dundee vicinities	North Polk County
Youth mentoring, coaching, teaching, scouting, wellness, or similar activities	2	1	2	3	1	2
Community development and environmental management	1	2	1	1	2	3
Senior support activities	3	3	3	4	4	1
Activities supporting people living with disabilities	4	4	5	6	3	7
Legal aid programs	6	5	4	2	6	6
Participation in local government (elected, nominated, or volunteer)	7	6	6	12	7	5
Voting in all elections	12	8	14	14	5	4
Programs engaging racial or ethnic minority groups	5	9	11	9	10	14
Community outreach to ensure voter access	9	10	10	5	8	9
Service on lay boards, committees, and advisory councils that impact public policy	8	7	8	8	14	11
Health-related volunteer activities	11	11	7	13	9	8
Programs serving migrants, new Americans, or others	10	14	9	7	13	10
Volunteerism	14	13	13	11	12	13
Service with, or membership in, charitable organizations and related activities	13	12	12	10	11	12

Arts, Culture, and Recreation

The numbers in the table below represent the rankings within each Polk County location shown in the header.

Issue	Lakeland and vicinity	Winter Haven and vicinity	Mulberry and Bartow vicinities	Polk County south of Mulberry and Bartow	Northeast - Davenport, Haines City, Dundee vicinities	North Polk County
Access to fields (or courts) to play baseball, soccer, softball, tennis, pickleball, football,	3	1	2	1	1	2
Live music events and festivals	2	3	3	8	4	5
Concerts and other live, large audience performances	1	4	1	6	7	1
Children-focused museums and similar learning opportunities	5	2	4	2	5	12
Art galleries, museums, and exhibits (e.g., painting, sculpture, other media)	4	7	5	5	3	6
Fitness opportunities	7	10	7	13	2	9
Nature preserves	6	6	9	4	9	7
Parks and playgrounds	12	5	12	3	6	11
Hiking or running trails	9	8	8	11	8	4
Public pools	13	9	6	10	12	3
Lectures and opportunities for ongoing education	8	11	11	7	13	8
Gardening clubs or similar groups	10	13	13	12	14	10
Professional or semi-pro sporting events	14	14	14	15	15	15
Live theatrical performances (not movie theaters)	11	12	15	14	10	13
Movie theaters	15	15	10	9	11	14
Professional or semi-pro sporting events	14	14	14	15	15	15

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