

FIVE YEAR STRATEGIC PLAN

JACKSON COUNTY, FLORIDA



PREPARED BY
VISIONFIRST ADVISORS
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ABOUT VISIONFIRST ADVISORS

VisionFirst Advisors brings a team of professionals who have extensive experience in developing community, regional and state strategy along with a comprehensive suite of services as it relates to community engagement, strategic marketing and communications, research and community benchmarking. Having led economic development in two states and working with hundreds of counties, VisionFirst has helped communities, regions and states move to a greater point of competitiveness. Learn more at <https://www.visionfirstadvisors.com/>.

Introduction »

After experiencing decades of rapid population increases, Florida is now the nation's fastest-growing state for the first time since 1957, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. Between 2021 and 2022, Florida's population increased by 1.9% to more than 22 million. For the third most-populous state to also be the fastest growing is notable because it requires extreme population gains.

Yet that growth is largely uneven, with many rural communities seeing population declines and an aging citizenry.

Understanding the demographic shifts and a desire to plan for the future, Jackson County's leadership recognized the need for a strategic plan to shape policies and programs for the next five years.

The plan on the following pages aims to guide how the county aligns short and long-term objectives with operations and budgets to provide purpose and measurable progress. However, implementation will not happen overnight. Each activity will take careful planning and execution.

But by doing so, the county can provide the services, safety and sustainability residents need and expect from local government while creating a vibrant economy.

The five-year strategic plan serves to set priorities, focus resources and strengthen operations. Implementing the activities will provide the services that residents expect from their government while creating a vibrant economy.

Project Approach »

VisionFirst's approach incorporated significant stakeholder feedback to add context to the data, guide the strategic planning process and establish a vision and mission for Jackson County. While each phase was unique, together the results provided the foundation to develop the recommendations.

01

Analyzed current economic factors and benchmarked Jackson County's data against similar-sized communities.

02

Engaged leaders and staff, municipal officials, stakeholders and residents about the county's priorities, values, strengths and challenges.

03

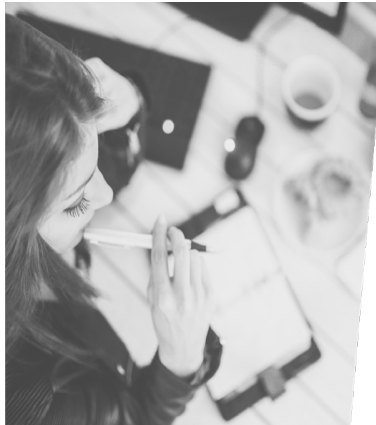
Assessed and evaluated the county's budget, GDP, policies, practices and demographic data to identify how those factors support effectiveness and resident needs.

04

Synthesized key findings, themes, data and leverage points for moving forward with recommendations that meet community objectives.

05

Developed a vision and mission to guide goals, strategies and tactics over the next five years. The goals align resources and offerings to serve residents while ensuring fiscal sustainability.



First Impressions »

The goal of the strategic planning process was to guide and strengthen the county's ability to address public investments in county services, quality of life amenities, economic development, tourism as well as the needs of the community.

Effective strategy development requires an understanding of where the county is today. As such, the information below outlines first impressions as perceived by those utilizing Jackson County services.



LEADERSHIP

Jackson County's elected and appointed leadership is seen as accessible, accountable and transparent.

Community engagement is a priority and has provided an opportunity for residents to learn more about government operations.

In addition, county staff is creative and capable in delivering services with limited funding and resources.



COMPETING COMMUNITY PRIORITIES

In the past, the county has been reactive in responding to individual resident needs.

Doing so created competing priorities and pulled resources from one project onto another.

Today, there is a willingness to implement a strategic plan that will better align services with revenue to create a high-performance organization.



FINANCIAL RESOURCES

While Jackson County's leadership is seen as responsive, financial and revenue generation challenges remain.

Rural counties throughout the state have leveraged opportunities for meaningful and fiscally conservative revenue generation measures.

Jackson County must explore additional revenue sources to support county operations and services.

County Data & Benchmarking »

To identify the best and most achievable strategies for Jackson County, VisionFirst conducted high-level research comparing the county to three others which were selected in conjunction with staff. The comparison counties are rural communities with similar demographics and are considered fiscally constrained by Florida Statutes: Washington County, Wakulla County and Okeechobee County.

The figures on the following pages provide a snapshot of indicators that demonstrate the vitality of a county and its residents. VisionFirst utilizes the data to provide insight into the community and offers the data as a benchmark for measuring the success of activities undertaken. VisionFirst compiled data from trusted state and national sources.

Figure 1: Demographic and Economic Overview ¹

	Jackson County	Washington County	Wakulla County	Okeechobee County	Florida
Population	47,409	25,094	32,855	41,611	21,216,924
Population Growth	-0.2%	0.3%	1.3%	0.2%	1.4%
People Per Square Mile	52.5	43.5	58.0	52.5	414.6
Median Age	42.2	41.3	42.3	40.9	42.2
Average Wage	\$42,690	\$39,684	\$44,638	\$45,453	\$62,489
Total Employment	15,816	6,918	7,232	12,782	10,303,095
Poverty Rate	18.1%	23.8%	7.5%	17.8%	13.3%
Cost of Living	88.5	91.1	93.8	87.7	105.8
GDP	\$1.25 B	\$0.4 B	\$0.7 B	\$1.0 B	\$1,226 B
Business Establishments	1,017	493	573	1,065	591,046

In looking at the data in Figure 1, there are several points worth noting:

- **The county's population is declining at -0.2% – the only county declining among the benchmarked communities.** Historically, Jackson County has seen stagnant or declining population growth since 2010, representing the need to identify economic development opportunities, infrastructure improvements and policies to foster a pro-business environment to attract and retain talent in the community.
- **The county's median age (42.2) aligns with the state of Florida (42.2) and comparative communities.** Age data is typically utilized to understand social and economic attributes to

¹ JobsEQ Q4 2022, Census Population Estimate for 2022, annual average growth rate since 2012.

plan and examine many public programs and policies, especially regarding health and safety for those under 18 and over 65.

- **As a rural county, Jackson County’s people per square mile is 52.5, comparable to other like-size rural counties.** Washington County has the fewest people at 43.3. People per square mile can be an important factor when evaluating public safety response times and government service deliveries.
- **The county’s cost of living at 88.5% of the national average is lower than most of the comparable counties and the state’s (105.6%).** The lower cost of living, coupled with a lower average salary (\$42,690), indicates saving opportunities for residents and employers.
- **The county’s poverty rate (18.1%) has decreased by 1.3% over the previous year.** However, it is higher than Wakulla (7.5%), Okeechobee (17.8%), state (13.3%) but lower than Washington County at 23.8%. A reduced poverty rate typically increases productivity and economic output for a community while decreasing supplemental government spending.
- **Jackson County’s GDP has increased by 4.8% year over year and total establishments have increased by 2.31% year over year.** The county is a regional hub for services for those traveling through it. These indicators outpace the comparable counties and indicate positive economic viability in Jackson County.

Figure 2: Local Governance Overview²

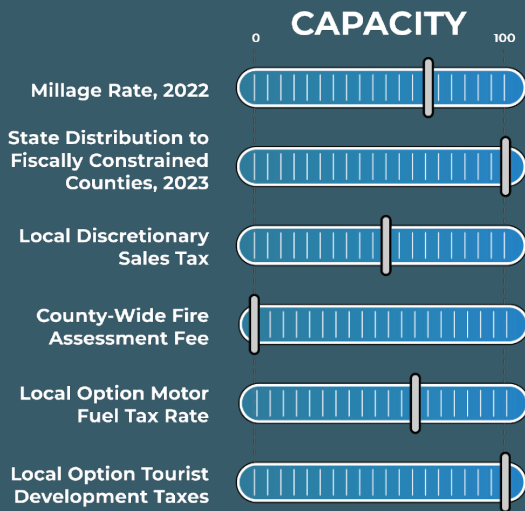
	Jackson County	Washington County	Wakulla County	Okeechobee County
# of Municipalities	11	6	3	1
Single Family Permits, 2022	111	106	421	18
Multi-Family Permits, 2022	15	0	0	8
Households with Access to Broadband, 2021	77.8%	82.3%	88.1%	72.9%
Government Spending Per Capita, 2023 Budget	\$2,237	\$5,878	\$4,035	\$2,076
Government Debt Per Capita Sept 2022	\$459	\$114	\$263	\$4
Total County Full-Time Employees (FTEs)	253	104	330	179
Average Salary of FTEs	\$38,863	\$34,632	\$53,086	\$52,895

In looking at the data in Figure 2, there are several points worth noting:

- **Jackson County is the largest county in population (Figure 1) and land.** It has more municipalities too, representing the need for intergovernmental coordination when considering the implementation of new revenues and policies.

² JobsEQ Q4 2022, Florida Healthcharts, Florida Legislature Office of Economic and Demographic Research and Florida TaxWatch

- **Looking at 2022 single and multi-family building permits, Wakulla County (421 total permits) is the only comparison county that outpaces Jackson County (126 permits) –** as a bedroom community to Tallahassee. Only two counties issued multi-family permits in 2022, Jackson County and Okeechobee. Jackson County has the highest number of permits at 15, which could be contributed to rebuilding in the wake of Hurricane Michael.
- Three of the four counties are below the statewide percentage (87.2%) of households with broadband access in 2021, according to [Florida Healthcharts](#). **Jackson County ranks third with 77.8% of households with broadband access, which has increased by 9% since 2019.** Today, access to broadband is considered an essential service.
- **Jackson County ranks third regarding government spending per capita (\$2,237).** Only Okeechobee County spends less at \$2,076 per capita. Government spending is an indicator of the size of the government, the public services and programs provided to residents and how they are delivered.
- **Jackson County has the highest debt per capita at \$459 compared to Okeechobee at \$4.** Debt per capita is often used as a government sustainability indicator. PFM reports, that according to Moody's Cities and Counties Rating Calculator, Jackson County's credit scorecard indicated rating is A3.
- With the second highest number of full-time employees (243) among the counties, **Jackson County ranks the third lowest in the average salary of county employees at \$38,863.**



As shown in Figure 3 on the following page, Jackson County additional sources of revenue to support government operations and reduce its dependency on ad-valorem taxes.

Figure 3: Local Taxes and Fees³

		Jackson County	Washington County	Wakulla County	Okeechobee County
Millage Rate, 2022		7.4450	8.5000	8.2000	8.0000
State Distribution to Fiscally Constrained Counties Per Capita, 2023		\$21.96	\$31.05	\$42.20	\$36.03
Local Discretionary Sales Tax	Current Sales Tax Rate	1.0	1.0	1.0	2.5
	Maximum Potential Tax Rate	2.0	2.0	3.5	1.0
	Unutilized Tax Rate	1.0	1.5	2.5	1.5
County-Wide Fire Assessment Fee		No	No	Yes	Yes
Local Option Motor Fuel Tax Rate	Rate Per Gal	\$0.07	\$0.07	\$0.07	\$0.12
	Percentage Being Levied	58.3%	58.3%	58.3%	100%
Building Permit Fee Revenue, 2021		\$348,483	\$273,735	\$4,371,571	\$988,426
Local Option Tourist Development Taxes (TDT), 2022	Per Capita	\$11.85	\$5.21	\$8.93	\$12.21
	Current TDT Rate	5	3	4	3
	Maximum Potential Tax Rate	5	5	5	5
	Unutilized Tax Rate	0	2	1	2

In looking at the data in Figure 3, there are several points worth noting:

- **Jackson County has the lowest millage rate amongst the comparative counties, which generates approximately \$298.02 per capita.** Washington County levies the highest millage rate and brings in \$367.30 per capita. Millage rates are the primary source of revenue for local government operations in Florida and are typically subject to a ten-mill cap for county purposes, with two exceptions: voted debt service millage and voted millage not to exceed two years.
- Under Florida law, the legislature annually appropriates money to fiscally constrained counties to offset ad valorem tax revenue reductions resulting from various amendments in the Florida Constitution for the general revenue fund and conservation lands. **Jackson County receives approximately \$21.96 per capita, the lowest in comparison to the other three counties.**

³ Florida Legislature Office of Economic and Demographic Research, Florida Department of Revenue, Florida Department of Financial Services and Florida TaxWatch

- All four counties levy a discretionary sales surtax. Jackson, Washington and Okeechobee counties levy a small county surtax, while Wakulla levies a local government infrastructure surtax. **According to Florida Statute, a county cannot levy the local government infrastructure, small county, indigent care and trauma center and public hospital surtaxes more than a combined rate of one percent.** However, all four counties can levy an emergency fire rescue services and facilities surtax of up to one percent, subject to voter approval.
- Wakulla and Okeechobee counties levy a county-wide fire assessment fee. Okeechobee also levies an EMS assessment. Local governments that provide fire services can levy a fire service assessment fee to provide a dedicated and stable source of funding for fire services, including firefighter salaries, related fire stations/facilities, equipment and programs. **Florida Statutes allows Jackson County the ability to levy assessment fees for a special benefit, of which fire services meet this requirement.**
- Okeechobee County is the only comparative county to utilize 100% of the available local option motor fuel tax available to levy. Jackson County and the other two counties levy a \$0.07/gal tax. Okeechobee County levies \$0.12/gal. **The capacity for additional gas taxes provides the opportunity for additional revenue sources, especially given the number of exits along the I-10 corridor in Jackson County.**
- Since 2016, Jackson County has seen steady growth in new housing units authorized and building permit fees. For example, in 2021, Jackson County reported a total of \$348,483 in building permit fee revenues and issued 103 single & multi-family permits, approximately \$3,383 per permit. In comparison, Washington County reported a total of \$273,735 in building permit fee revenue and issued 90 single & multi-family permits, approximately \$3,041 per permit. Wakulla County reported a total of \$4.37 million in building permit fee revenue and issued 490 single & multi-family permits, approximately \$8,921 per permit. It should be noted that the “per permit” calculation does not include commercial permits as these numbers were not available. **Given the potential for more residential and commercial growth, there is an opportunity to conduct a study of the county’s permit fee schedule and rates.**
- All four counties levy Tourist Development Taxes (TDT) and are eligible to level additional TDT per Florida Statutes. Jackson County currently brings in \$11.85 per capita, exceeded only by Okeechobee County at \$12.21 – both counties have eco-tourism and agritourism assets. **Recently, Jackson County approved levying additional tourist development taxes, which maximizes the total TDT the county can levy.**

Resident & Stakeholder Engagement »

VisionFirst conducted more than 50 in-person interviews, led a facilitated exercise with 40 Citizens Academy members and garnered more than 600 responses to the online survey.

In assessing the needs and desires of Jackson County leaders and residents, VisionFirst Advisors, along with staff, outlined an engagement plan that included in-person interviews, conversations with municipal leaders, a facilitated session with Citizen Academy and an online resident survey. The goal of the engagement was to gather candid observations, feedback and ideas from the community to help direct focus and prioritize. A complete summary of the Citizen Academy feedback and survey results can be found in the appendix.

Regardless of the medium, stakeholder engagement was meant to seek answers to questions such as:

- What do you value about Jackson County? What are the county's values?
- What are your thoughts on ways you see Jackson County growing?
- Where do you think the county should go in terms of services provided?
- What opportunities do you see to grow, strengthen or diversify the county's services to the community?
- What opportunities do you see for the county to expand and/or diversify its funding sources to assure greater sustainability while continuing to meet critical needs in the community?
- How do you measure Jackson County's progress and impact?
- What are the items you want to use to measure the success of your strategic and operational plans moving forward?
- What does success look like?

VisionFirst identified the strongest themes, insights and supporting details to use in the analysis and ideation of goals and tactics. Key findings from the meetings are presented in aggregate on the following pages and have been grouped by the main themes that resulted from the stakeholder conversations.

The comments on the following page are a sampling of the feedback from the stakeholder engagement and do not reflect VisionFirst's opinion.

County Leadership, Employment & Governance //

- There is a renewed focus on government transparency and access to leaders.
- The changing economy and demographics provide a need for more long-term planning.
- Services and initiatives need to be proactive rather than reactive.
- There is a need to explore additional sources of revenue to support residents' needs.
- Increased revenue generation must be accompanied by transparent planning and spending.
- County offices are disjointed and underfunded which leads to resident and business owner confusion.
- The staff is highly committed to the county, but need additional resources, procedures, trainings and opportunities for advancement.

Tourism & Economic Development //

- The county's parks, recreation, product and location offer opportunities for increased job growth and capital investment.
- There is a need to engage local leaders who are industry/topic experts to assist in county efforts.
- Policies need to be reviewed and updated to be customer centric focused – such as consolidating office locations to create one stop shops for licensing and reviewing sign ordinances.
- The county must continue to promote and prioritize opportunities in Endeavor Park for economic development, tourism and county offices.
- Additional programming such as façade grants, community events and placemaking could encourage a positive shift in population growth.

Community Development & Infrastructure //

- Infrastructure improvements are necessary, such as sewer, and needed to support economic growth throughout the municipalities and county.
- Road paving has taken precedence over other county needs such as facilities and recreational services.
- Investments are needed to modernize and streamline services without sacrificing quality.
- Spending and projects need to benefit the entire county rather than specific districts.

Public Safety //

- There is a need to offer more cross-training for public safety employees to be in the best position to serve the public during states of emergency and natural disasters.
- Leaders should leverage opportunities of state resources for public safety, such as the operation of the jail.
- Demand for public safety and emergency services is increasing as the population gets older, putting a strain on emergency services.

SWOT Analysis »

Based on stakeholder engagement and data analysis, VisionFirst identified the county's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. This analysis relied on qualitative input as well as industry knowledge.



Strengths

- Leadership is transparent and approachable
- Long-term and passionate county employees
- Leadership has provided consistency and improved the operational culture
- Improved community engagement and resident outreach
- Increased communication with municipal leaders
- Dedicated economic development and tourism teams
- Recognized recreational and tourism amenities



Weaknesses

- Limited financial resources and long-term revenue generation tools
- Constrained county staff with below average wages and high turnover
- Lack of priority list for infrastructure improvements
- Shortage of technology and ability to modernize functions
- Need for employee retention and recruitment efforts



Opportunities

- Refine permit policies to address housing
- Leverage federal and state funding and grants
- Expand business-friendly policies, resources and supports
- Explore additional sources of revenue to support county needs
- Explore economic, tourism and county office locations at Endeavor Park



Threats

- Lack of revenue generation to support programs and services
- Competing interests for limited resources
- Aging county facilities
- Declining and aging county population
- Lack of housing supply and escalating housing prices

Jackson County as a System »

Government operates as a system, one driven by the needs of its residents, guided by the policies of its elected officials and executed by staff and stakeholders and measured for desired outcomes.

The strategic plan process and subsequent goals are created to guide the system. Local goal setting and policy making is complex. It demands the best of local officials, staff and even residents. Each must look at the county holistically - rather than individually - to foster a system delivering prosperity for the county today and tomorrow.

The goals, priorities and policies adopted by Jackson County government impact everyone in the community – residents, businesses, customers and visitors. The pathway, priorities and policies determine what services will be provided, the level of those services, what kinds of development will occur and ultimately the community's future.

Consider Figure 4 below in relation to the local government system.⁴ When goals are clearly defined and assigned, stakeholders can determine effectiveness. When staff and resources are allocated, stakeholders can measure efficiency. When rules and policies are developed and reported, stakeholders can understand progress and celebrate successful outcomes.

Figure 4: Local Governance System

		Goals	Organization	Fiscal	Personnel	Procedures	Information		
WHAT		Vision & Values	Residents	Bonds & Taxes	Service Levels	Initiatives	Public Outreach	POLICY LEVEL	
		Strategies & Goals	Commissioners	Budgets & Debt Management	Salary & Benefits	Ordinances	Engagement		
-----		Strategic Plan	County Administrator	Finance Plan	Recruitment & Retention	Policies & Procedures	Annual Report	ADMINISTRATIVE LEVEL	
HOW		Department Plan	Department Heads	Budget Control	Professional Development	Standards & Benchmarks	Monthly Updates		
		Team Plan	Employees	Service Delivery	Smart Goals & Performance	Operations	Measures & Progress		
		Effectiveness		Efficiency		Monitoring			

However, prior to the development of goals and policies for Jackson County, it is important to gain an understanding of how current government operations were working as a system and adjust as needed.

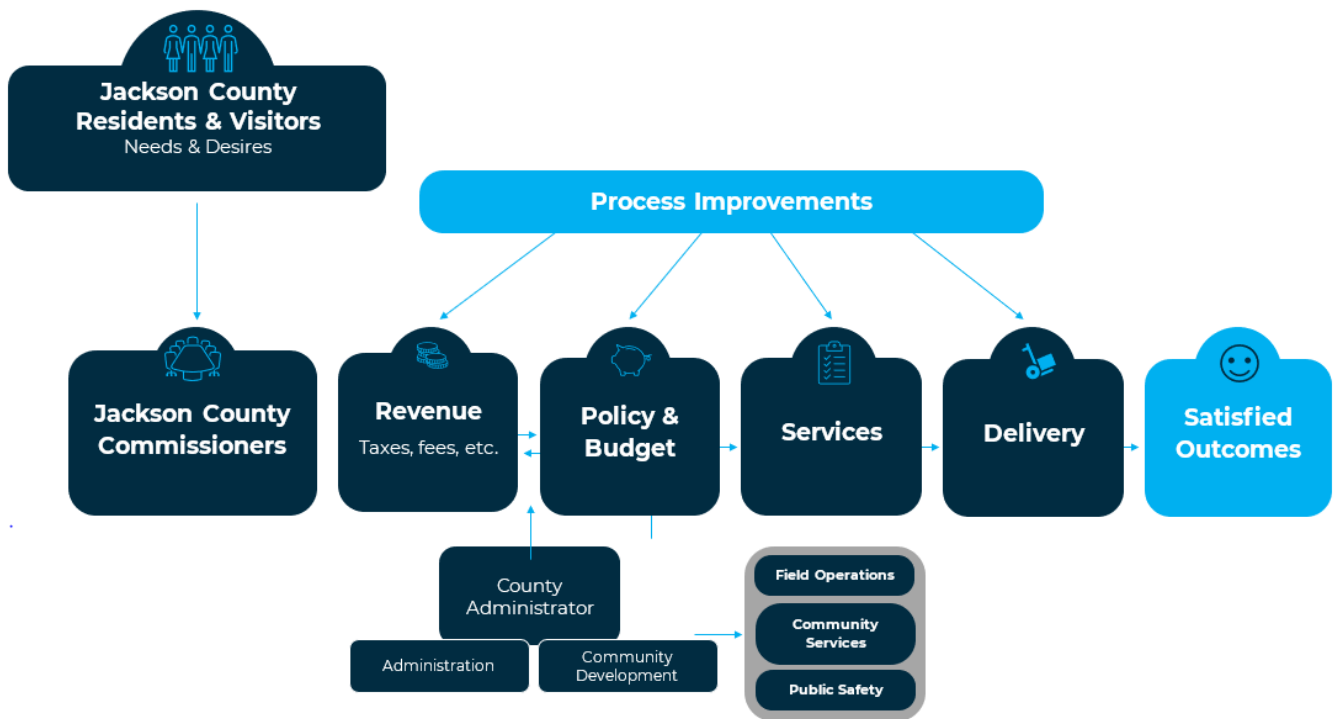
⁴ Municipal Research & Services

Figure 5 outlines Jackson County as a system today. In the system there are opportunities for improvement in processes that lead to successful outcomes. Using the same principles of Kaizen, which are widely recognized in the automotive industry. The same four steps can be applied to improving the system of government - **Plan, Do, Check and Act**.

1. Identify opportunities for change and make a **plan** to improve or change. This requires analyzing input and data collection. Policy decisions made with valid data and input will lead to more efficient government and less decision-making made on emotions.
2. Take action (**do** something) to implement the plan on a smaller scale as a test run to validate results.
3. Study (**check**) the results to see if desired results were obtained and adjust, as necessary.
4. Implement (**act**) the new process or improvement steps.

For Jackson County’s system to be high performing in implementing the plan, the four steps will need to be constantly utilized. **However, what remains constant is the focus of the residents at the top of the system driving prioritization, understanding and achievement.**

Figure 5: Jackson County as a System



Planning for Today & Tomorrow »

Jackson County is a community that is proud of its history and excited for its future. According to the survey, residents appreciate the conservative use of taxpayer funds and responsive public safety services. However, they also want to see infrastructure enhancements such as bike lanes and sidewalks, measures to improve job creation as well as improvements in housing inventory and affordability.

An effective system requires those that work directly or indirectly within it to have a shared vision, an achievable mission, aligned goals and strategies that achieve each.

The creation, implementation and measurement of the strategic plan represents the foundation for the road ahead. Aligning goals and strategies around a shared vision, mission and values allows those in charge of implementing the plan to understand their roles and responsibilities in realizing success while demonstrating programmatic and financial commitment to residents.

However, strategic plans are often developed without understanding the components and how each is interwoven. **While some components, such as the mission and vision, may remain steadfast over the next five years, others may need to adapt to achieve where Jackson County wants to go. The plan and the people implementing it need to be flexible and aware of emergent issues that need attention.** Figure 6 demonstrates the interconnectivity of each component.

Figure 6: Strategic Plan Components



Vision, Mission & Values »

Jackson County has already taken the most important first step in creating a vibrant economy – making the commitment to envision what the future holds. Now is the time to bring that hope to fruition. To do so, the community must have an agreed-upon “North Star” to guide those involved in implementing the plan.

All of those interviewed are well-intended, but without an agreed-upon strategic direction, past efforts were reactive and fragmented, hampering the county from delivering programs with desired outcomes.

Under the framework of the strategic plan, leaders, departments, staff and residents must collaborate and leverage their strengths and assets to arrive at a common destination. A collaborative and inclusive approach is imperative. Creating a positive dynamic and demonstrating effective collaboration fosters a momentum that excites and engages the community and provides a model that achieves results faster than ever seen before.

VisionFirst believes that communities who share an overarching vision to which their residents, organizations and government can work together to achieve, ultimately experience the most success.

In collaborating with communities and their citizens, **VisionFirst identifies the community’s North Star, as “a common vision that describes the community’s values and aspirations and creates a shared image of what they want their community to do. This vision is too big for any one organization, person or group to achieve by themselves – it can only be accomplished by working together.”**

This North Star, which resonates with all those who have a role in the future of Jackson County, is needed to focus the efforts, outline a course of action, provide inspiration and a means of knowing when the community has arrived at its destination.



PEOPLE
Jackson County
Residents



**VISION +
MISSION**



GOALS (4 Ws)
Who | What
Why | For Whom



**IMPLEMENTATION
& COLLABORATORS**
Staff | Community
Partners



**STRATEGY
& TACTICS**



OUTCOMES



**VIBRANT
HOLISTIC
ECONOMY**

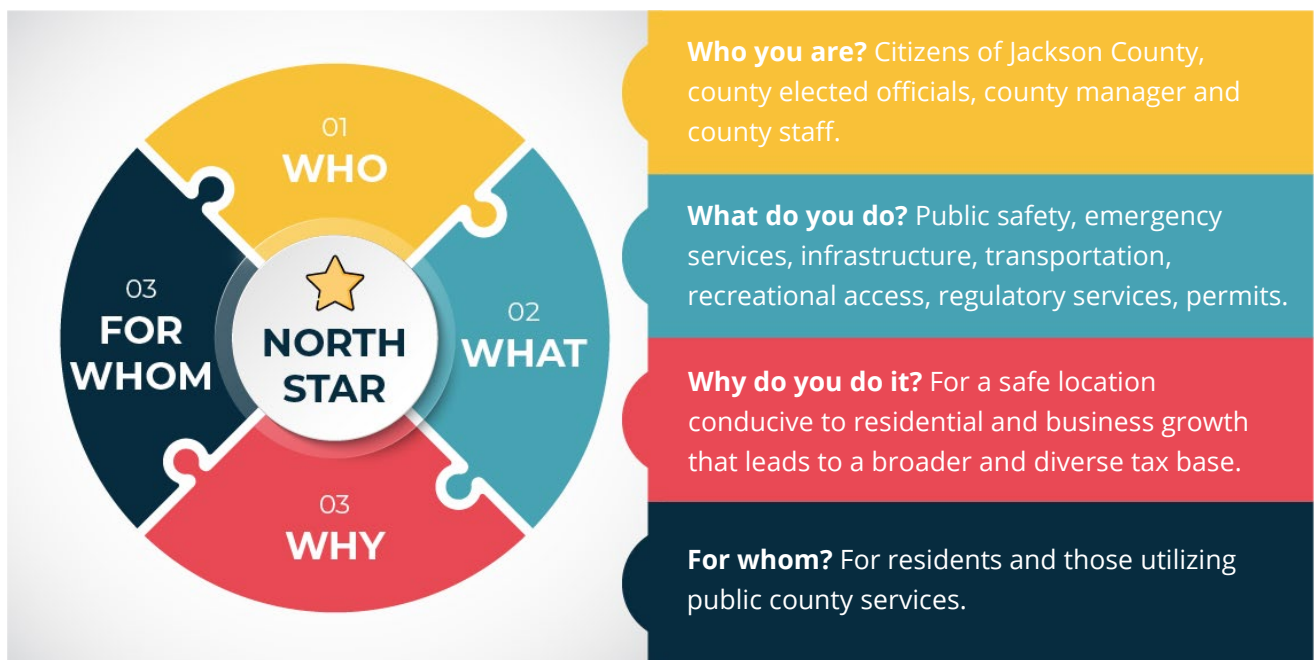
Planning for Jackson County is built upon the vision, mission, values, goals and strategies. Alignment of vision, mission and values with the community's desires and Jackson County's structure builds trust and confidence.

In considering Jackson County's priorities, stakeholders ideas centered around:

- Proactive, efficient, effective and approachable government services
- Creating community and resident prosperity
- Foster, retain and sustain jobs
- Improved and varied recreation and cultural amenities
- Well-maintained natural resources
- Appreciation of agriculture
- A well-planned community that is safe and accessible for all
- Modernization of programs, services and facilities

From these ideas, VisionFirst utilized the "Four W's": who you are, what you do, why you do it and for whom - to define the vision and understanding of the county's mission and values.

Figure 7: The 4 W Visioning Process



By the recommendation of VisionFirst, Jackson County's Leadership team coordinated a united effort to develop the following vision, mission, and values for the County to guide their efforts.



Vision

Our commitment is to cultivate a safe, engaged community, attuned to the needs of its citizens. Honoring the past, enhancing the present, and advancing the future.



Mission

Jackson County is dedicated to providing services that fuel economic growth and ensure public safety. Prioritizing wise stewardship of material, fiscal, and natural resources and enhancing our cultural heritage through collaborative governance and community participation.



Values

FOR Jackson. FOR Future. FOR YOU.

Core values help define and drive an organization's behavior and should be integrated into daily operations. VisionFirst recommends adopting the following core values to promote a positive organizational culture for employees and ensure the delivery of county government services that the residents of Jackson County value.

- **Trusted:** Delivering services in a professional and honest manner that conveys trust, mutual respect and open lines of communication with elected officials, employees and residents.
- **Transparent:** Clearly communicating and engaging residents about plans, priorities and progress as well as ensuring easy access to public information and services.
- **Responsive:** Consistently providing excellent customer service through active engagement and timely problem-solving to exceed expectations.
- **Innovative:** Creating an environment that supports innovative ideas, creative solutions and the modernization of operations that elevate the county's services and economy.



Goals, Strategies & Tactics

Successful communities are built through strong neighborhoods, high-performing schools, diverse job opportunities as well as robust social sectors, all of which contribute to long-term growth and the well-being of a county. Maintaining and building amenities, meeting residents' needs and adapting to the pace of change requires meaningful collaboration and candid conversations.

Jackson County is fortunate to have passionate and dedicated leaders, staff, partners and citizenry who love their community. **Government cannot tackle every issue on its own, strong partnerships are required with state agencies, non-profit organizations, the faith-based community and more.** By working together, and listening to one another, the plan can be successfully implemented, charting a new course for the county's future.

To guide the process, VisionFirst has developed four pillars which are high-level goals centered around the county's mission, values and core services of responsibility. They were developed based on research, best practices, stakeholder input and an understanding of community priorities.

The goals and subsequent strategies and tactics should inform everyday decision-making and guide the policy formation of government. Guiding the execution of the strategies and tactics is the cross-cutting principle of providing accessible, efficient, effective and responsive services to citizens, businesses and visitors.

Pillars (Goals)



SUSTAINABLE SERVICES & BUDGETING

Jackson County focuses on providing needed services and programs through sustainable revenue generation, responsible planning and accountable spending.



VIBRANT & GROWING ECONOMY

Jackson County promotes natural resources, recreational amenities and business-friendly policies to foster job creation, tourism and commercial growth.



INNOVATIVE FACILITIES & INFRASTRUCTURE

Jackson County invests in the modernization of facilities and infrastructure by leveraging technology and aligning priorities.



HEALTHY & SAFE COMMUNITY

Jackson County fosters thriving neighborhoods that offer a high quality of life, prepares for emergencies and protects personal safety.

PROVIDE ACCESSIBLE, EFFICIENT, EFFECTIVE AND RESPONSIVE SERVICES

Goal: Sustainable Services & Budgeting

Jackson County focuses on providing needed services and programs through sustainable revenue generation, responsible planning and accountable spending.

STRATEGY: INVEST IN EMPLOYEE DEVELOPMENT AND MAKE THE COUNTY AN EMPLOYER OF CHOICE.

Jackson County and its 253 employees are the foundation for the successful delivery of services to residents, businesses and visitors. The county aims to be an employer of choice to attract and retain highly qualified employees who provide exceptional customer service.

TACTICS

- **Develop and deploy employee climate survey every two years.** The goal of the survey should be to assess the current working environment and to inform strategic decisions and investments to help retain talent while generating new ideas for process improvements.
- **Update the employee compensation study.** Contract with a vendor to conduct an updated compensation study regarding the existing classification and compensation system with recommendations to improve the county's position within the labor market. To minimize costs and maximize benefits, consider partnering with surrounding small counties or other rural Florida counties. ([Best Practice: Charlotte County](#))
- **Create an employee engagement committee.** Under the leadership of the HR department, create an employee engagement committee to undertake initiatives such as continuing education, employee recognition, training and mentorship programs as well as policy updates and performance measure tools.
- **Enhance technology platforms.** Establish a cross-departmental technology working group to identify and prioritize technology needs and identify funding strategies to implement improvements. Ensure priority is given to moving systems online and providing for ease of constituent use and engagement.

STRATEGY: STRENGTHEN OPERATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS, MEASUREMENT AND ENGAGEMENT.

To be home to generations of residents and visitors, Jackson County should elevate operations both internally and externally allowing each department, committee or board to function with maximum effectiveness and transparency to the constituents they serve.

TACTICS

- **Establish and adopt parliamentary procedures for commission meetings.** Managing county commission meetings and public hearings can be challenging, especially when dealing with contentious policy and budgetary decisions in today's political climate. According to the [Municipal Research and Services Center](#), there are several reasons to adopt meeting rules and procedures, such as governing the conduct of a meeting, increasing meeting efficiency and effectiveness and managing conflict. Jackson County should work with the county attorney to implement parliamentary procedures for

commission meetings to create a meeting atmosphere that promotes positive public engagement and civil discourse. ([Resource: National Association of Counties: The Right Way to Run a Meeting](#))

- **Incorporate strategic plan alignment into all funding and policy decisions.** Services, programs, projects and policies should be explicitly evaluated based on alignment with the strategic plan. The board and staff should examine existing and potential funding sources for opportunities to shift resources towards strategic priorities. Each agenda item brought to the board should clearly state the fiscal impact on the county and how the item aligns with the strategic plan.
- **Streamline protocols to accomplish strategic plan tactics.** Streamline routine administrative procedures and workflows and delegate more signature authority to department heads to align resources to implement strategic priorities.
- **Host an annual retreat with staff and commissioners to report on achievements, review the progress and set annual priorities to continue implementation.** The retreat should be conducted in advance of budget workshops to ensure funding for plan priorities. The retreat should review progress of the strategic plan including celebrating what has been accomplished throughout the year. The retreat should also review and evaluate the tactics and strategies and make modifications or additions as necessary.
- **Develop an online dashboard reflecting key performance metrics and overall progress.** Utilize the Citizen’s Academy members to develop ideas for dashboard ideas and functionality. ([Best Practice: Cabarrus County North Carolina](#))
- **Formalize intergovernmental coordination for municipalities, state and federal issues.** Expand monthly meetings hosted by the county administrator with local municipal leaders to identify grants, coordinate new policies and advocate at the state and federal level. The meetings should also allow the county and the municipalities to align priorities with the strategic plan.
- **Identify operational efficiencies and opportunities to consolidate or jointly provide government services with municipalities.** Given financial and operational challenges, Jackson County should work with municipalities to examine opportunities to deliver services to their residents that could benefit from consolidation or jointly provided services through contracting for programs.
- **Continue pro-active citizen engagement.** Jackson County is at the forefront of its efforts to engage residents through the citizens academy as well as through social media and an easy-to-navigate website. Of the survey respondents, 36.2% indicated that the county is excellent or good at listening and responding to residents, while 34.2% stated that county does a fair job of keeping residents informed and engaged. This presents an opportunity for the county to engage its residents through additional interactions such as setting up office hours for residents to meet with commissioners or hosting “coffee talk” with the county officials. With significant fiscal decisions ahead, additional engagement through advisory boards, focus groups, fact sheets and surveys will be necessary to clearly articulate the benefits of new initiatives and policies.

STRATEGY: EXPAND REVENUE GENERATION SOURCES TO MEET COUNTY SERVICES AND PROVIDE FOR ADDITIONAL AMENITIES.

Jackson County's 2022-2023 budget totaled more than \$103 million to provide the services and amenities required and requested by residents and businesses, but there is still more to accomplish. To provide a safe, vibrant and growing community, Jackson County should identify and adopt new revenue generation sources that leverage county dollars with non-local funding sources.

TACTICS

- **Identify and implement alternative revenue streams that reduce dependency on ad valorem tax revenue.** As a fiscally constrained county, defined by Florida Statute, Jackson County should identify additional revenue streams to support the growing demands of the community beyond the use of ad valorem taxes. In researching similar sized counties and best practices as well as consulting with PFM Financial Advisors, there are options for consideration that would not put an undue financial burden on constituents – taxes and fees along with state and federal grant opportunities.
- **Increase the local option motor fuel tax.** Currently, Jackson County levies 58.3% of the available local option motor fuel tax. Increasing this revenue source to \$.12/gal is estimated to generate \$1.5 million **Error! Bookmark not defined.** and would be paid for by residents and visitors/travelers throughout the county. The increase would leverage the additional traffic that will be seen because of the Florida Department of Transportation's projects at the I-10 exit and along U.S. 90.⁵ The additional fuel tax could support transportation infrastructure improvements from new road and bridge construction to maintenance and repairs to sidewalks and bike lanes. Under state law, funding could also be dedicated to necessary transportation infrastructure that directly supports economic development efforts, such as ingress and egress to industrial sites.
- **Update grant manager job description to reflect a dedicated position to pursue state and federal grant opportunities.** Recognizing the importance of a grant coordinator position, the county recently went through a



In 2021, Jackson County saw a 26.6% increase in visitor spending. Building on this increase in tourism, the Commission recently approved additional **1% TDT which could potentially generate \$140,000 to support tourism efforts.** This additional funding will directly support the county's efforts to increase marketing efforts and promote the county as a tourism destination.

Per Florida Statute, Jackson County can increase the gas tax \$0.12 per gallon. It is estimated that **this could provide the county with an additional \$1.5 million.**

⁵ [Florida Department of Transportation County Projects](#)

reorganization of positions and dedicated personnel to grant coordination. The county is currently advertising for this position. The grant manager position will allow the county to leverage funding that can help bridge the gap between county/department resources and its needs. The grant manager job description should include being responsible for strategizing funding support by conducting prospect research and maintaining relationships with [non-profit, state and federal funders](#). Having dedicated personnel solely responsible for identifying, applying and reporting on grant requirements best positions the county to identify new revenue sources and leverage state and federal funding opportunities.

STRATEGY: MANAGE REVENUE AND DEBT TO MAKE SOUND FINANCIAL INVESTMENTS AND IMPROVE OUTCOMES.

As a fiscally constrained county, funding for capital improvements is limited but extremely necessary to deliver services how, where and when residents need them. Jackson County should expand planning and budgeting for physical expenditures such as land, buildings, public infrastructure and equipment to offer service excellence.

TACTICS

- **Develop and annually review and revise a capital improvement program.** The plan should identify deficiencies and future growth needs of county facilities as well as create a schedule for the replacement of equipment.
- **Establish a forward-leaning funding plan for facilities.** Determine priority capital improvements, renovations and new amenities for facilities, accompanied by cost estimates, funding plan and proposed phased timelines. Aging and co-located county offices should be given priority to alleviate customer confusion and efficiency challenges.
- **Research opportunities for a public private partnership to build a county services complex.** Investigate the feasibility of optimizing the monetary value of county properties through a public private partnership to develop office space consolidating government services into building(s) that require less maintenance and require no increases in taxes.
- **Develop department work plans with specific timelines and resource requirements to guide tactic implementation.** The workplans should be developed prior to budget workshops.
- **Implement a formal process for budget monitoring.** The [Government Finance Officers Association \(GFOA\)](#) recommends that government entities implement a formal set of processes to monitor financial performance. By creating a formal budget monitoring process, Jackson County will be able to manage accountability for spending and adjust for variations. ([Best Practice: Mecklenburg County, N.C.](#))

Goal: Vibrant & Growing Economy

Jackson County promotes natural resources, recreational amenities and business-friendly policies to foster job creation, tourism and commercial growth.

STRATEGY: ENHANCE THE BUSINESS ENVIRONMENT TO ATTRACT AND RETAIN EMPLOYERS, INVESTMENT AND TALENT.

Since 2018, the Jackson County Economic Development Council (JCEDC) has announced the recruitment of 12 businesses expected to create more than 350 jobs and nearly \$200 million in capital investment. To build on this success, Jackson County should enable economic development opportunities to diversify industries and expand the tax base.

TACTICS

- **Evaluate development processes for efficiencies and modify to support economic development efforts.** Jackson County should evaluate its development processes (planning, permitting and building services) for efficiency and make modifications in coordination with the JCEDC. This evaluation should also include a permit fee study. The county should ensure that the comprehensive plan, and any amendments to the plan, support economic growth. To track development statistics, the county should list in the annual report the number of single-family, multi-family and commercial permits issued each year.
- **Identify short- and long-term area plans for targeted growth corridors.** Jackson County should collaborate with local partners and stakeholders, such as the Jackson County Chamber and JCEDC, to identify short- and long-term area plans for targeted growth corridors. Once these corridors have been identified, the county should develop a strategy to ensure the infrastructure and zoning is in place to best position the county to take advantage of economic development opportunities, promote job creation and encourage private sector investment.
- **Leverage publicly owned infrastructure to encourage investment in economic development opportunities and private-sector partnerships.** By using publicly owned assets such as Endeavor Park, Jackson County is uniquely positioned to incentivize and encourage economic investment to promote job creation. The county should work closely with JCEDC to identify these opportunities and create creative strategies to attract investors. This is especially important given that economic development has changed with the elimination of Enterprise Florida and the creation of a new Department of Commerce.



To track development statistics, the county should **list the number of single-family, multi-family and commercial permits issued each year in the annual report.**

- **Implement business façade/edge grant program.**⁶ The county should partner with municipalities to implement façade improvements, placemaking improvements and beautification funding programs for area business in key corridors of the unincorporated area and/or downtowns. Small amounts of funding can be offered to begin to both existing and new businesses with larger opportunities available over the long term. The county should also partner with JCEDC, the Jackson County Chamber, Mainstreet and Apalachee Regional Planning Council to develop this program. ([See Best Practice at Section End](#))

STRATEGY: PROMOTE JACKSON COUNTY AS A DESTINATION FOR VISITORS TO STAY AND EXPLORE.

With tourism assets such as state parks, rivers and natural amenities to attract visitors to the community, Jackson County should promote and market the community as a desirable location to explore outdoor recreation, agri-tourism and cultural and heritage tourism activities.

TACTICS

- **Develop and implement a five-year tourism strategic plan.** The county should work in conjunction with the Jackson County Chamber of Commerce, JCEDC, Mainstreet, the Tourism Development Council and municipalities to develop a five-year strategic plan to guide tourism activities over the next five years. The plan should identify operational efficiencies, destination marketing, visitor service needs and emerging tourism trends that will increase economic contributions from visitors and provide recreational opportunities for residents.
- **Partner with outdoor outfitters and tourism development councils in the region to market Jackson County's outdoor recreation assets.** Jackson County has a host of tourism assets from outdoor recreation, such as the trails, boating, fishing, the Florida Caverns, Merritt's Mill Pond and Lake Seminole. Tourism development councils and outdoor outfitters (retail entities and influencers) throughout the region actively promote these assets as part of their marketing efforts, including Leon County and Walton Outdoors. ([See Hamilton County Best Practice.](#))
- **Expand the promotion of farm-based experiences, local culinary and craft products.** Agri-tourism is a natural companion to eco-tourism/outdoor recreation. These tourism activities are predominately found in rural areas and offer unique experiences that capture targeted marketed visitors. Jackson County should explore niche marketing opportunities, such as Farm Flavor to promote agri-tourism activities in the community. The county should also partner with the Florida Agri-tourism Association to list agri-tourism assets.

⁶ Tactic from Opportunity Florida's Strategic Job Action Plan, of which Jackson County and community stakeholders were included as part of the process.


- **Implement the recommendations from the Historic Highway 90 Corridor Master Plan to improve the promotion of culture and heritage tourism activities.** The county should also collaborate with others in the corridor to promote the regional historical and cultural points of interest along the western end of the original Florida Mission Chain and Old Spanish Trail.

STRATEGY: ENHANCE COMMUNITY VIBRANCY TO SUPPORT RESIDENTS WHILE ATTRACTING NEW TALENT AND VISITORS.

Jackson County understands the challenges of rural communities to attract and retain residents while encouraging new business growth. To offer an enriched community landscape, Jackson County should create initiatives and partnerships that enhance quality of life for residents, businesses and visitors alike.

TACTICS

- **Increase access to broadband by partnering with service providers.** Jackson County should pursue partnerships with broadband service providers to bring the county in alignment with the state average percentage of households with broadband access. In addition, the Florida Department of Economic Opportunity's (soon to be the Florida Department of Commerce) Office of Broadband's strategic plan aims to attract providers to serve rural and low-population density areas. The county should work with current service providers and coordinate closely with the state to identify new service providers for the area and grant funding. ([Best Practice: Clay County Broadband Project](#)).



Only 77.8% of households have access to broadband in the county, which is a 9% increase since 2019. The state average of 87.2%.

Jackson County veterans' population (age 18-64) is 6.5%, exceeding the state's at 5.2%

- **Facilitate the availability of affordable and workforce housing.** The county should create a partnership with industry experts, private sector, community experts, non-profit leaders and members of the Affordable Housing Advisory Committee to identify strategies and resources to create an environment favorable for workforce housing development. The county could also explore "creative solutions other communities and regions have pursued to encourage the building of attractive, affordable workforce housing, such as incentives to developers, tiny home communities, etc." ([From Opportunity Florida Strategic Plan](#))
- **Explore additional opportunities for programs that assist and entice homeowners living in older homes.** According to Florida Housing Finance Corporation, the county is projected to receive \$464,21 in SHIP funding in 2023. Given the demographics of Jackson County's aging population, the county should consider implementing small grants or low-interest loans to repair homes, including upgrades that would lower ongoing energy costs for lower-income homeowners living in older housing beyond what SHIP funding is currently being utilized. The county should work with members of the Affordable Housing

Advisory Committee to explore these additional opportunities. ([From Opportunity Florida Strategic Plan](#))

- **Foster life-long learning opportunities within the county system.** Today, county libraries are no longer just for housing books, but for providing resources to encourage life-long learning. For example, the Jackson County Library currently offers employment and unemployment assistance online. The library should expand to teach digital literacy, designate space for co-working, host activities/events focused on seniors, outdoor recreation and agriculture, such as creating a seed library. The county should also re-establish the Friends of the Library to support these efforts and develop a volunteer network. ([Best Practice: Becoming an Untraditional Library](#))
- **Promote the county as the one-stop location to assist veterans, their dependents and survivors.** The county has successfully assisted veterans with securing disability compensation and pension benefits, as shown in a 7% increase over 2021. The county should highlight and further promote the veteran affairs division as the one-stop location to not only assist veterans, dependents and survivors with VA and state benefits, but also employment, healthcare and schooling. By doing so, the county could continue to experience an increase in its assistance to local area veterans and leverage additional support resources.

BEST PRACTICE: SUPPORTING THE OUTDOOR RECREATION INDUSTRY

The [Roanoke Regional Partnership in Virginia](#) includes the outdoor industry as one of its targets, highlighting the area's natural resources including trails, events such as marathons and cycling events, parks and conservation lands – all amenities Jackson County can also boast. The region commissioned a study comparing it to other regions known for their outdoor lifestyle and promoted it in industry magazines and sites. The region also hosted the outdoor blogger summit, providing social media influencers with a firsthand look at what the community offers. The efforts have been incredibly successful, with the region home to two outdoor gear distribution centers, nearly 10 small manufacturers and a host of small businesses ranging from skills training to outfitters to retail.

BEST PRACTICE: FAÇADE IMPROVEMENT GRANTS

In 2017, the [Hamilton County Development Authority \(HCDA\)](#) announced the pilot program of a Commercial Beautification Micro-Grant Program aimed at improving the visual appearance of businesses in Hamilton County. The micro-grant program provides matching funds to renovate and improve the visual impact of the properties in the county. This grant is available to all retail, commercial and industrial property owners. The board of the HCDA authorized a budget of \$25,000 for the initial pilot program with eligible businesses able to receive up to \$1,000 in matching funds – the effort has since been renewed. The funds can be used for beautification purposes for such things as exterior painting, new awnings, sign improvements, planting shrubs, flowers, trees, etc. The goal of the grants is to help stimulate redevelopment and increase property values while providing safe and attractive environments.

Goal: Innovative Facilities & Infrastructure

Jackson County invests in the modernization of facilities and infrastructure by leveraging technology and aligning priorities.

STRATEGY: CONSTRUCT AND SUPPORT SAFE AND SUSTAINABLE TRANSPORTATION AND STORMWATER INFRASTRUCTURE.

Jackson County invests in its people, programs, projects and buildings to foster a connected community network. The county should maintain and build infrastructure that promotes growth opportunities and maintains the quality of place for residents today and tomorrow.

TACTICS

- **Update the county's comprehensive plan to align land use, transportation and recreation.** The plan serves as the blueprint for future growth by setting priorities and policies for commercial and residential land uses, transportation, housing, recreation and culture, and conservation. Initially implemented in 1990, Jackson County should update and modernize the plan to identify the long-range community needs and economic development priorities of the JCEDC. ([Best Practice: Hennepin County's Complete Streets Policy](#))
- **Coordinate with municipal leaders and regional partners to improve the transportation network.** Jackson County should work closely with municipal leaders and regional partners including the Regional Planning Council and the Florida Department of Transportation when planning long-term transportation projects. The county should also meet quarterly with FDOT District 3 to ensure that they are aware of priority projects that can be budgeted into the DOT's five-year work plan. This close coordination will help leverage state and federal funding.
- **Create an in-depth road analysis inventory to prioritize roadway construction, repairs and maintenance.** Jackson County should create a road inventory that is utilized to prioritize construction, repairs and maintenance of both paved and dirt roads throughout the county. Once completed, the priority projects should be incorporated into the capital improvement plan.
- **Develop in-house tools for measuring infrastructure projects' impact.** For example, with more than 560 miles of paved roads and 930 miles of dirt roads, it is important for the county to develop a tool that measures the cost-benefit of each proposed infrastructure project. Using qualitative and quantitative analysis will allow the county to objectively evaluate projects and develop a prioritized list. The tool should also assess the impact of economic development opportunities that a project could support.

STRATEGY: PRESERVE AND PROTECT JACKSON COUNTY'S ENVIRONMENTAL AND NATURAL RESOURCES THROUGH SUSTAINABLE MANAGEMENT PRACTICES.

Jackson County's natural resources protect water quality, offer recreational opportunities, provide habitat for wildlife and enhance the overall quality of place. The county should implement sustainable management practices that promote intentional growth and conserve natural assets.

TACTICS

- **Protect water quality and provide a safe and dependable supply of water.** Jackson County should identify state and federal grant opportunities to protect and provide a safe and dependable supply of water for residents, businesses and agriculture.
- **Promote growth that protects environmentally sensitive lands and natural resources.** Jackson County should utilize well-balanced and reasonable regulations and incentives that protect environmentally sensitive lands and natural resources for commercial and residential development.
- **Partner with municipalities to develop a prioritized multi-year investment plan for water and sewer needs.** The plan should identify areas to eliminate septic systems where feasible and consider the expansion of utilities to Highway 231 along the Campbellton and Cottondale corridors for commercial growth. The elimination of septic tanks must be accompanied with grants to not place financial burdens on residents and businesses.

STRATEGY: PROVIDE EFFICIENT MAINTENANCE AND OPERATIONS OF COUNTY FACILITIES AND EQUIPMENT.

With five unique departments offering a myriad of citizen and business services, Jackson County should ensure that county operations, public facilities and equipment are effectively managed and maintained to meet long-term needs.

TACTICS

- **Manage the county's infrastructure through sound fiscal policies.** By developing and implementing a five-year capital improvement plan, the county can proactively plan for repairs and maintenance of county-owned and operated facilities. In addition, the county should also develop a replacement schedule for all county-owned equipment. This approach will help the county manage and plan for future infrastructure needs county-owned facilities and equipment.
- **Conduct a facility space needs assessment for county operations.** Throughout the interviews with elected officials, constitutional officers and staff, several discussions addressed the need to examine the use of space for county operations. Jackson County should conduct a space needs assessment to identify current and future infrastructure needs as well as the best use of its current facilities. Once identified, the county should incorporate the findings into a five-year capital improvement plan.
- **Develop a parks and recreation master plan.** The county should develop and implement a parks and recreation master plan for the repair and maintenance of existing parks, trails,

boat ramps and landings, community centers and other recreational facilities. A plan for the construction of any new projects should also be included. The plan should incorporate the ability to utilize and train justice involved individuals in operations as opportunities for post incarceration employment. As part of the plan, the county should consider revenue strategies that create unique park amenities for residents and visitors.

Goal: Healthy & Safe Community

Jackson County fosters thriving neighborhoods that offer a high quality of life, prepares for emergencies and protects personal safety.

STRATEGY: MAXIMIZE COORDINATION, INNOVATION AND MANAGEMENT OF EMERGENCY RESPONSE SERVICES.

To protect the well-being of residents and create a safe and secure community for all, Jackson County should ensure that public safety and emergency management services are coordinated and delivered effectively.

TACTICS:

- **Pursue a dedicated revenue source for fire services.**
Jackson County should explore two options to provide a stable source of funding for fire services for salaries, facilities/stations, equipment and programs. One option is levy up to a 1% emergency fire rescue services surtax, which would need to be approved by the voters. Another option is levy a fire assessment fee, which is not subject to voter approval. This assessment is typically collected on the annual ad valorem tax bill and is identified as a non-ad valorem assessment. If the county wishes to consider levying a fire assessment fee as a revenue source, then the fire assessment study would need to be updated.
- **Conduct a space needs assessment for fire rescue stations throughout the county.**
This assessment should also include analyzing future station needs for east side and west side Fire Rescue stations to be constructed. Once the assessment is completed, a funding source should be identified and included in county's five-year capital improvement plan.
- **Ensure public safety agencies have the training, equipment and resources needed.**
Understanding the impacts from Hurricane Michael, the public safety department should develop its own annual plan that addresses training, procedures, continuity of operations efforts and public outreach for emergency planning and preparedness.
- **Strengthen and enhance overall public safety through cross-training of employees.**
Within emergency management and fire departments, develop ways to measure and report on the quality of recruitment, retention and training efforts of public safety departments.



Fire rescue services and fire protection have met the requirements to impose special assessment fees according to Florida case law.


- **Create an organizational culture of operational readiness and preparedness.** According to the National Association of Counties, only 53% of small counties have continuity of operations/government plans. To ensure that the Jackson County government and community are prepared for natural and man-made disasters, the county should standardize its emergency operations plan to align with national standards.
- **Monitor and refine public safety response times and procedures that consider the county's size and demographics.** Currently, nearly 40 percent of the county's population is either under 18 or over 65, 18.1% live in poverty and 11.4% are uninsured – each of these statistics demonstrates a need for an increase in public safety and health services. (See [Figure 8 for historical statistics.](#))

STRATEGY: EXAMINE OPPORTUNITIES TO STRENGTHEN CORRECTIONAL FACILITY OPERATIONS AND WORKFORCE PROGRAMMING.

Public safety plays a critical role in the overall health and well-being of a community, from children to visitors to aging adults. Jackson County should manage correctional operations in a manner that provides a safe and secure environment for staff, justice involved and the community.

TACTICS:

- **Establish a criminal justice coordinating committee.** Currently, the county hosts a bi-monthly judges' luncheon at the jail. This could serve as the foundation for the new criminal justice coordinating committee. The committee would provide a forum where sheriff's office officials, county government leadership and non-profit partners can address social justice system topics as well as facility management. Throughout the stakeholder process, there were conversations about the challenges in funding the current jail and the need for facility improvements. This new committee could also explore transferring the correctional facility and operations to the sheriff.
- **Bolster programs and resources that reduce recidivism and support successful offender re-entry.** Through workforce training and social services, Jackson County, the sheriff and partners should increase career programs while also providing opportunities for justice involved individuals to perform facility and vehicle maintenance, groundskeeping, animal control and office support. The efforts should go beyond typical inmate labor and offer meaningful employment with local companies after release. Partnering with industry, Chipola College, existing businesses and the non-profit sector will be critical for success. Due to the



Per Florida Statute, the board of county commissioners is responsible for the maintenance and operations of the county jail. The board may choose, through adoption of a county ordinance, to designate the sheriff as the chief correctional officer. Currently, **nine county jails are operated by the county government, and one is operated by a private contractor.**

stigmatizing mark of a criminal record along with the association between education levels and employment, relatively high rates of unemployment have been observed for correctional populations.⁷

STRATEGY: EXPAND AVAILABILITY AND AWARENESS OF RESOURCES TO ADDRESS PUBLIC HEALTH OUTCOMES.

Jackson County should promote awareness and expand availability of resources related to the public health needs of the community.

- **Create an advisory committee of state and local organizations and agencies to improve citizen health outcomes.** Leverage partnerships to discuss and address issues such as affordable housing, underemployment and unemployment, mental health, maternal health and addiction services.
- **Review data related to the county’s code enforcement activities and neighborhood demographics.** Utilize the data to understand challenges related to vacancy, property ownership, local housing markets and property conditions.
- **Collaborate with partners to promote adoptions, encourage vaccines and educate on quality pet care.** According to [Human Animal Support Services](#), animal control is a key component of public health and safety by enforcing animal cruelty and neglect laws and seeking to address the root cause of animal problems. Animal control officers should provide information to residents on access to care and resources available for animal welfare. Given the large geographic region of the county and limited staff, Jackson County should work with Partners for Pets and community partners to educate residents on proper pet care, vaccines and promote adoption events for animals to help reduce call volumes.

Figure 8: Demographic Data for Public Services

Jackson County - ACS 5-Year Estimates Summary											
	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Population (ACS)	49,334	49,537	49,589	49,326	49,105	48,900	48,721	48,571	48,472	47,945	47,409
Under 18 Years	20.5%	19.9%	19.7%	19.3%	19.0%	18.8%	18.7%	18.9%	18.6%	18.6%	18.5%
65 to 74 Years	8.5%	8.7%	8.9%	9.2%	9.5%	9.7%	10.0%	10.4%	10.6%	10.9%	11.3%
75 Years and Over	6.9%	7.0%	7.0%	7.2%	7.4%	7.5%	7.7%	7.7%	8.0%	8.4%	8.5%
Poverty Level (of all people)	19.7%	15.1%	15.5%	19.9%	21.3%	22.1%	22.9%	21.6%	20.6%	19.4%	18.1%
Households Receiving Food Stamps/SNAP	N/A	N/A	14.6%	17.5%	17.7%	18.1%	17.2%	17.0%	17.3%	18.1%	19.6%
Disconnected Youth	2.7%	2.4%	1.9%	3.2%	5.2%	3.5%	5.4%	5.7%	4.2%	4.0%	6.1%
Uninsured	N/A	N/A	15.1%	15.0%	13.6%	13.2%	12.5%	11.9%	11.3%	11.3%	11.4%
With a Disability, Age 18-64	N/A	N/A	19.0%	18.6%	18.9%	18.3%	18.5%	16.3%	16.0%	15.9%	16.6%

⁷ [A better path forward for criminal justice: Training and employment for correctional populations](#)

Moving Forward »

The plan and recommended goals, strategies and tactics reflect a bold and ambitious agenda for implementation. But implementation is a series of steps that will ultimately achieve the county's mission.

Over the coming weeks, collaboration needs to be the starting point. Together, the staff and the commission, need to begin with:

1. **Make the decision.** The strategic plan outlines the collective vision of the community, not just the staff or the commission. Therefore, approving and adopting the strategy is one of the most important decisions the county commission can make.
2. **Prioritization.** If everything is important, then nothing really matters. Setting and approving an implementation plan with timelines helps outline priorities for the next five years to achieve the community's (and commission's) strategic plan. Consider the use of timelines by fiscal year to best allocate funds to implementation.
3. **Oversight.** Annual progress reports should be reviewed with the commission and shared with the public. Measures and results are shared in detail to explain the performance and to discuss improvement actions.

The strategic plan is just that, a plan. Now is where the real work begins. Every initiative and project identified in the strategic plan needs to be assigned to a department and project manager, who must incorporate them into the departments' work plans, and regularly report back on progress.

Consider this quote, "Strategy in the public sector is about choosing to do things that will strengthen the community while knowing you cannot do it all."⁸ The strategic plan reflects the commitment of government to work on behalf of its constituents. To do successfully, Jackson County's operations must function as a system.

As noted previously, the system needs to be driven by residents, guided by policies of elected officials and implemented by staff. To execute the strategies and tactics effectively, staff should continuously **plan, do, check and act** - all the while keeping in mind that needs of the community in mind. Following this process will allow **Jackson County to operate as a high performing system** and deliver governmental services through a proactive approach that considers the needs of residents today and tomorrow.

⁸ International City/County Management Association

APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Resident Feedback

In assessing the needs and desires of Jackson County residents, VisionFirst, along with staff, outlined an engagement plan to include in-person interviews, conversations with municipal leaders and a facilitated session with Citizen Academy. VisionFirst conducted three days of in-person interviews with more than 50 stakeholders including elected officials, county staff, chamber and economic development leaders, business leaders, community members and residents.

The open dialogue with public and private sector leaders, staff and the online survey provided context as VisionFirst developed a suite of recommendations and strategies that is reflective of the priorities of the community, with an awareness of the existing challenges and a focus on measurable as well as achievable goals and objectives for the county. The interviews provided important baseline information that is incorporated into the development of the vision, mission, values and strategic priorities for the county.

Citizen Academy Engagement »

On May 3, 2023, VisionFirst Advisors facilitated a strategic planning meeting with Jackson's County Citizen Academy to discuss community priorities and values. During the meeting, residents were given \$1,000 and asked to prioritize areas of funding for the county, which included the follow service areas:

- Bridges, Roads and County Facilities
- Water & Sewer Utilities
- Quality of Place: Parks, Libraries and Arts & Culture
- Economic Development & Tourism
- Public Safety & Health
- Community Development: Permitting, Building, Planning & Code Enforcement
- Environmental Sustainability & Recycling
- Governance & Fiscal Accountability: Administration, Budget, Procurement & Government Efficiency

Many of the citizens prioritize funding for economic development, tourism and quality of life to support the growth of the community and provide new job opportunities for residents and promote tourism activities in the area to generate more revenue for the county. The majority of residents also prioritize funding for bridges, roads and county facilities to ensure that infrastructure is safe and secure. Other top areas of priority were public safety and health as well as environmental sustainability to protect natural resources. Residents also noted that governance and fiscal accountability should be adequately funded as it was necessary and good leadership is important.

Utilizing their funding priority areas, residents were encouraged to write down the values of Jackson County. These values have been grouped below and along with key themes:

Economic Development & Tourism:

- Prosperity
- Create, retain and sustain jobs
- Opportunity for all people

Quality of Life:

- Clean and green
- Recreation and culture
- Progressive

Environmental Sustainability:

- Well-maintained natural resources
- Agriculture

Community Development:

- Well-planned for a positive future
- Safe and accessible for all

Governance & Fiscal Stewardship:

- Proactive
- Approachable

VisionFirst utilized these priority areas of funding, values, interviews with over 50 stakeholders' interviews and an online survey with residents as key components to developing a vision, mission and priority areas of the strategic plan to ensure that is sustainable and flexible.

Resident On-line Survey »

In addition to the staff and stakeholder interviews, an online survey was conducted to broaden the audience base and gather a greater level of understanding. The short survey posed questions on the county's strengths and challenges. Resident input is essential for the development of the strategic plan and to build a base of understanding and support to accomplish the goals that are laid out later in the plan.

To that end, public input was sought through an online survey. The survey was open for three weeks and published across social media platforms, the newspaper and distributed to residents, garnering 605 responses. The response, while not large enough to be considered a representative sample, provides a broad perspective from the community to add to other sources, input and feedback as previously noted.

How long have you been a resident of Jackson County?	
Answer Choices	Responses
Less than 1 year	1.65%
1 – 5 years	10.58%
6 – 10 years	8.26%
11 – 15 years	3.80%
16 – 25 years	12.23%
25+ years	63.47%

How would you rate Jackson County as:				
Answer Choices	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor
A place to live and raise a family	27.11%	48.60%	21.49%	2.81%
A safe and healthy community	16.36%	52.23%	27.93%	3.47%
A place for recreation	14.05%	38.02%	30.58%	17.36%
A place with affordable housing options	7.60%	36.03%	39.50%	16.86%
A tourism destination	6.78%	27.44%	35.37%	30.41%
A place to work and find a job	4.96%	23.97%	45.79%	25.29%

If Jackson County, how important are the following issues to you and your family:				
Answer Choices	Very Important	Somewhat Important	Not Too Important	Not Important
Water Quality	89.75%	9.26%	0.99%	0.00%
Crime & Public Safety	89.26%	9.59%	1.16%	0.00%
Access to Reliable & Affordable Internet	79.01%	16.20%	3.97%	0.83%
Economic Development & Job Creation	75.70%	20.50%	2.81%	0.99%
Sustainability of Natural Resources	73.72%	23.97%	1.98%	0.33%
Quality of Growth & Development	65.12%	28.93%	3.80%	2.15%
Affordable Housing	61.49%	30.08%	6.61%	1.82%
Transportation & Regional Mobility (roads, sidewalks, bike lanes)	58.51%	33.39%	7.27%	0.83%

In Jackson County, how satisfied are you and your family with the following issues:				
Answer Choices	Very Satisfied	Somewhat Satisfied	Not Too Satisfied	Not Satisfied
Water Quality	24.63%	59.01%	9.92%	6.45%
Crime & Public Safety	20.66%	59.67%	14.71%	4.96%
Access to Reliable & Affordable Internet	7.60%	35.37%	25.62%	31.40%
Economic Development & Job Creation	5.29%	41.16%	32.73%	20.83%
Sustainability of Natural Resources	12.40%	64.79%	15.54%	7.27%
Quality of Growth & Development	6.78%	47.11%	31.90%	14.21%
Affordable Housing	7.27%	46.94%	28.76%	17.02%
Transportation & Regional Mobility (roads, sidewalks, bike lanes)	7.77%	49.75%	26.45%	16.03%

Please rate Jackson County's performance in the following categories:

Answer Choices	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor	No Opinion
Listening & Responding to Citizens	6.61%	29.59%	32.73%	23.97%	7.11%
Keeping Residents Informed & Engaged	10.74%	30.41%	34.21%	22.31%	2.31%
Transparency & Accessibility	7.77%	25.95%	34.71%	25.62%	5.95%
Delivery of High-quality Essential Services	6.94%	32.40%	36.36%	22.15%	2.15%
Responsible Use of Taxpayer Dollars	6.45%	26.61%	32.23%	28.76%	5.95%

Please rate the quality of county services

Answer Choices	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor	No Opinion
Library Services	22.48%	36.36%	17.19%	5.95%	18.02%
Veteran Services	7.11%	18.68%	22.64%	15.04%	36.53%
Fire Rescue	32.40%	39.34%	16.03%	4.13%	8.10%
Emergency Management Services	20.33%	43.80%	21.32%	5.79%	8.76%
Permitting, Building, & Code Enforcement	6.28%	29.26%	28.26%	17.36%	18.84%
Animal Control Services	7.11%	25.95%	26.12%	22.15%	18.64%
County Parks, Trails, & Community Centers	14.38%	39.50%	28.93%	14.55%	2.64%
Sidewalks & Bike Lanes	3.31%	28.60%	35.04%	22.98%	10.08%
Local Economic Development	4.96%	26.12%	34.21%	29.42%	5.29%
Building & Maintaining Roads	3.31%	28.43%	35.04%	32.40%	0.83%

Which of the following do you use to get information on Jackson County activities, services and government operations?

Answer Choices	Response
Social Media (Facebook, Twitter, etc.)	76.20%
Word of Mouth	52.73%
Online News Source	38.68%
Newspaper	35.70%
County Website	29.75%
County Bulletins, Emails, Newsletters	17.85%
Other (TV, Radio, Chamber Newsletters, Civic Clubs)	6.12%
None of the Above	0.83%

What is your age?	
Answer Choices	Response
18 – 24	2.98%
25 – 34	8.76%
35 – 44	17.36%
45 – 54	20.33%
55 – 64	23.14%
65 and Over	27.44%

What level of education have you completed?	
Answer Choices	Response
Some High School, No Diploma	0.83%
High School Graduate	25.45%
Associate Degree	20.33%
Bachelor's Degree	23.47%
Master's Degree or Higher	21.32%
Trade/Technical/Vocational Training	8.60%

What is your employment status?	
Answer Choices	Response
Full-Time	55.70%
Part-Time	2.64%
Seeking Opportunities Currently	2.81%
Retired	33.55%
Prefer Not to Say	5.29%

Do you own or rent your home?	
Answer Choices	Response
Rent	8.93%
Own	91.07%

THANK YOU



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