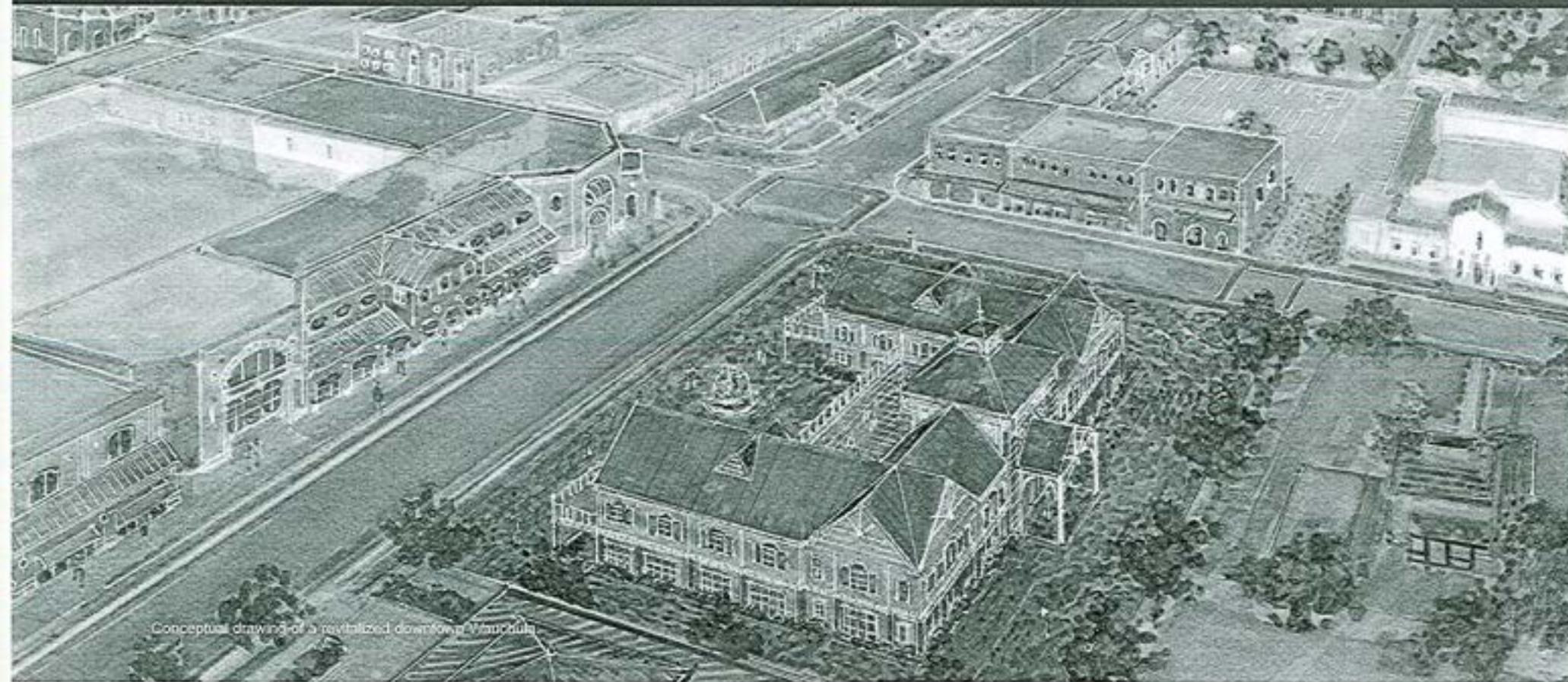


December 2004

# *Hardee County Long-Term Recovery Plan*



Conceptual drawing of a revitalized downtown Vero Beach.

U.S. Department of Homeland Security  
Washington, DC 20472



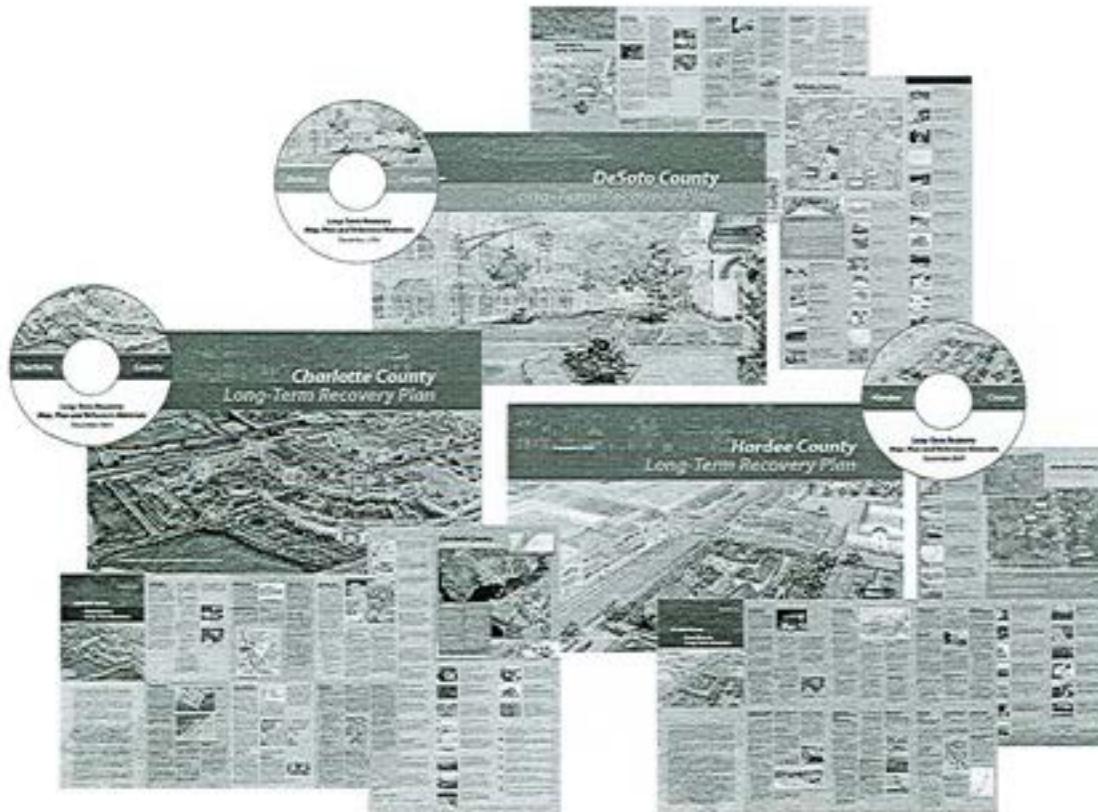
# FEMA

Federal Emergency Management Agency

FEMA Region IV  
3003 Chamblee Tucker Rd.  
Atlanta, GA 30341

FEMA Headquarters  
500 C Street, SW  
Washington DC 20472

[www.fema.gov](http://www.fema.gov)



## The Hardee County Long-Term Recovery Plan



In this Long-Term Recovery Plan you will find Hardee County's vision for rebuilding in the aftermath of the summer 2004 hurricanes, which caused widespread destruction. Responding to the severe impact of the hurricanes, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and the State of Florida's Department of Community Affairs (DCA) instituted a Long-Term Recovery initiative designed to provide an extra measure of support for Hardee County's recovery effort.

The Hardee County Long-Term Recovery Plan is the product of a highly intensive eight-week process involving a multitude of meetings between the Long-Term Recovery team, local officials, business owners, civic groups, and citizens. Hundreds of your neighbors either turned out for our public meetings or stopped by the Long-Term Recovery office to share their ideas on how to rebuild Hardee County. Your participation and comment sheets provided an invaluable source of feedback used to refine and prioritize the projects.



Hardee County was a special place before the hurricanes, and that has not changed. Your unshakable community spirit, and your resolve to build back better and safer, will continue to serve you well as you move forward with implementation of the plan. At the heart of the Hardee County Long-Term Recovery Plan is a simple guiding principle - keep the things that have always made Hardee County a great place to live, work and own a business, and then suggest ways to build upon the strengths of the community in order to make it even more prosperous, appealing, and livable.

Unlike a traditional planning document that presents general guidance to a community, the Long-Term Recovery Plan is an action-oriented menu of key projects intended to be used for making critical funding and resource allocation decisions. To further the on-going planning process, the plan is also available on the DCA website along with the DeSoto County and Charlotte County plans, at: [www.dca.state.fl.us/recovery/index.cfm](http://www.dca.state.fl.us/recovery/index.cfm). The City and County have been given a companion CD-ROM to this Long-Term Recovery Plan which contains, among other useful reference materials, an electronic version of the plan and detailed cost estimates of each project. A Road Map to Long-Term Recovery, designed for a broader public audience, was also created as part of this planning effort. The map was designed for public distribution. It summarizes projects under recovery themes and displays them geographically on a map.

Within this Recovery Plan, you will find 31 projects that form the foundation of a revitalized Hardee County. These projects are divided into three categories based upon their "recovery value": High, Moderate, and Community Interest. The High Value recovery projects are the most urgently needed and all available resources should be focused on immediate implementation. The Moderate Value projects, although not essential to recovery, are likely to produce substantial benefits for the community, and should be pursued as time and funding permit over the next few years. Community Interest projects are those that are of relatively less significance, but are still worthy of more discussion and thoughtful consideration as recovery proceeds.

Now that the Recovery Plan has been completed, the challenge is to find funding for the key projects. As we have discussed from the outset, the Long-Term Recovery initiative does not come with a dedicated funding source, so we must rely on our partners in the federal and state governments to help. Since most of the major government agencies have actively participated throughout this planning process, and have expressed a strong willingness to aid Hardee County, there is much reason for optimism.

It is important to remember that not all projects are of equal importance, and not all need to be initiated simultaneously. Recovery from a disaster of this scale is a process, not an event, and it will continue for several years; although, as funding is committed to the first few high priority projects, progress in Hardee County will become evident in a relatively short time period. Based upon our experience on similar recovery projects, Hardee County can expect to see a significant amount of activity during the first year post-disaster, and then gradually transition into a more normal growth and development pattern.

One of the first things that we talked about is how disasters create opportunities, and now with the Recovery Plan in place, Hardee County is well positioned to take full advantage of the chance to rebuild a more vibrant community. Unity is vital to your ultimate success. You cannot expect to be unanimous in all your decisions, nor should you necessarily agree with everything that is proposed, but you should stay united as a community and do your best to maintain a common vision for the future of Hardee County.



December 9, 2004

Dear Citizens of Hardee County:

Last week, the most traumatic hurricane season in Florida history came to a welcome end. Just over 100 days ago, Hurricane Charley slammed into Florida's west coast and was quickly followed by Frances, Ivan, and Jeanne. Already devastated by Charley, Hardee County was twice more in the path of nature's fury.

Thousands of Hardee County residents are among more than one million Floridians who registered with FEMA for hurricane relief and together with other Floridians have filed nearly 1.5 million insurance claims. The total estimate of damage in our state now exceeds \$42 billion. While we measure the financial impact of the storms by damage estimates and claims numbers, they don't tell the real story. The strong hearts and generous spirits of the people who live here tell the true story - your faith, tenacity, and hard work as you recover and rebuild convey your message of determination and commitment to your community.

Even as federal, state and local agencies launched emergency response efforts, the people of Hardee County recognized the need to do more than just replace what the storms ruined. You seized the opportunity to rebuild in a way that makes the most of your community's natural and economic assets, while preserving your historic rural character.

The plan captures the collective community vision for Hardee County's long-term recovery. My administration, through the leadership of the Secretary of the Department of Community Affairs, stands ready to help Hardee County achieve its goals. I also thank FEMA for its partnership in facilitating your development of the plan.

Hardee County can take pride in this achievement because it represents a tremendous spirit and willingness to do what it takes to rebuild a better Florida. Your plan also provides a roadmap for overcoming the significant challenges ahead. Rebuilding and creating economic vitality is a long-term effort. It will not be easy. It will not be quick. But, you have my commitment and support to help make it happen.

Sincerely,  
*Jeb Bush*  
Jeb Bush



STATE OF FLORIDA  
**DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITY AFFAIRS**  
"Dedicated to making Florida a better place to call home"

JEB BUSH  
Governor

THADDEUS L. COHEN, AIA  
Secretary

December 9, 2004

Dear Local Officials and Citizens of Hardee County:

In just over three months, the people of Hardee County have made remarkable progress in responding to the devastation created by Hurricanes Charley, Frances and Jeanne. While the destruction necessitates a painful and difficult rebuilding effort, I commend you for developing a roadmap for a brighter future.

Thanks to strong leadership and broad community participation, Hardee County citizens, businesses and governments have created a visionary plan for a better Hardee County. This long-term plan will guide both rebuilding and create opportunities for economic expansion. This plan serves as a unified vision and exemplifies the type of participation and partnership required for effective community planning that I hope to cultivate in each Florida community during my tenure at the Department of Community Affairs.

I am grateful for this opportunity to express my deep appreciation to the Federal Emergency Management Agency's Long-Term Recovery initiative. Its innovative support for this community planning effort and close partnership with the Department of Community Affairs will pay dividends in sparking economic growth and assuring that as rebuilding occurs, new and rehabilitated structures will withstand the effects of future storms. In particular, I commend the use of a planning approach that is both sensitive to what makes Hardee County unique and is unwaveringly focused on the communities' expressed priorities.

As I stated during the first community forum for developing this plan, the Department of Community Affairs will be your partner each step of the way. Through the coming year, the Department will work closely with the Governor's Office, other state agencies, FEMA, and the federal Long-Term Recovery Task Force to coordinate available resources and use creative approaches for existing programs to help you make this plan a reality.

Now is the time to move forward in shaping the new Hardee County.

Sincerely,

*Thaddeus L. Cohen*  
Thaddeus L. Cohen, AIA  
Secretary

TL/C/pfs

5555 SHUMARD OAK BOULEVARD, TALLAHASSEE, FLORIDA 32399-2100  
PHONE: 850 488 3400/TOLLFREE: 1 877 6488 FAX: 850 921 0791/SUNCOM: 321 5781  
MAILING ADDRESS: 5555 SHUMARD OAK BOULEVARD, TALLAHASSEE, FL 32399-2100

OFFICIAL STATE CONTRACTS & SERVICES  
2100 Shumard Oak Boulevard  
Tallahassee, FL 32399-2100  
(850) 488-3400

COMMUNITY AFFAIRS  
2100 Shumard Oak Boulevard  
Tallahassee, FL 32399-2100  
(850) 488-3400

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT  
2100 Shumard Oak Boulevard  
Tallahassee, FL 32399-2100  
(850) 488-3400

HOUSING & COMMUNITY IMPROVEMENT  
2100 Shumard Oak Boulevard  
Tallahassee, FL 32399-2100  
(850) 488-3400

U.S. Department of Homeland Security  
Washington, DC 20533



December 7, 2004

Citizens of Hardee County, Wauchula, Zolfo Springs and Bowling Green:

I commend you on the remarkable progress that you have made in your recovery from the devastating hurricanes that occurred earlier this year. I have seen the devastation first hand as I traveled to Florida on many occasions in the aftermath of the storms, and have received regular updates on your efforts to clean up and start the rebuilding process. In turn, I provide progress briefings to President Bush and the Secretary of Homeland Security on your recovery. It is encouraging to witness a community pulling together with strength and determination of its residents as you have done.

As you know, in the aftermath of Hurricane Charley, the U. S. Department of Homeland Security's Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) initiated a Long-Term Recovery Initiative for Hardee, DeSoto and Charlotte County. This is the first time that Homeland Security, through FEMA, has implemented a Long-Term Recovery effort in Florida. The three County Long-Term Recovery Plans are among a very few number of like-projects in the country.

Since early October, a team of technical experts has worked with you to help develop a vision for the redevelopment of your community. FEMA has delivered this final Hardee County Long-Term Recovery Plan as a guide for rebuilding. As part of this process, FEMA will fund local recovery management staff through the Florida Department of Community Affairs for the next year to support you in the implementation of the key projects identified in the plan.

Now is the time for you to move forward in shaping the new Hardee County - including the Cities of Wauchula, Zolfo Springs and Bowling Green. The process will take time and will require a significant commitment of your collective energies, as well as substantial resources. Be assured that Homeland Security, through FEMA, will continue to be there and will assist by coordinating the numerous federal agencies that stand ready to help you, and by working in partnership with the State of Florida to coordinate state agencies.

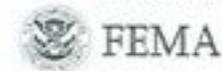
I wish you the best of success in your recovery and look forward to visiting you as the rebuilding progresses.

Sincerely,

Michael D. Brown  
Under Secretary  
Emergency Preparedness and Response

www.fema.gov

U.S. Department of Homeland Security  
2003 Chamber-Tulane Bldg  
Atlanta, Georgia 30331



December 6, 2004

Hardee County Board of County Commissioners and  
The Mayors of the Cities of Wauchula, Bowling Green and Zolfo Springs

Dear Sirs or Madams:

The terrible damage wrought by Hurricane Charley throughout Wauchula, Bowling Green, Zolfo Springs and Hardee County has changed the communities and created a unique opportunity for sustainable redevelopment into the future. A complex process of local, state and federal partnership has culminated in a vision for the sustainable redevelopment of Hardee County and the Cities of Wauchula, Bowling Green and Zolfo Springs. It is with the greatest pleasure that we offer our sincere congratulations on the hard work you have undertaken in the Long Term Recovery planning process for your communities. Your community citizens and leadership have been integral to the success of this planning effort and will continue to be crucial to the successful implementation of the plan in the future.

The Long Term Recovery Plan for Hardee County and Wauchula, Bowling Green, Zolfo Springs is part of a new beginning for the communities. We stand prepared to work with you and our partners in the State of Florida to ensure the county and city create a brighter future in the aftermath of this devastating natural disaster. The FEMA Region IV staff will work with you to make the vision described in the plans a reality.

We heartily endorse the vision within the Long Term Recovery plan for Hardee County and Wauchula, Bowling Green and Zolfo Springs. We know that together we can build a stronger and better community.

Sincerely,  
  
Mary Lynn Miller  
Acting Regional Director

www.fema.gov



Bill Nelson  
Florida

November 30, 2004

Dear Residents of Hardee County:

I would like to take this opportunity to commend you for resiliency, commitment, and strong sense of community. Despite the damage wrought by Hurricane Charley, you have remained strong in your resolve to rebuild and move forward. I would also like to extend thanks to the Federal Emergency Management Administration (FEMA), the State of Florida, and local volunteer agencies for their dedication to the community.

I understand FEMA, in cooperation with residents, is currently developing a Long Term Recovery plan. This plan, the product of local, state, and federal collaboration will be used as a guideline for the redevelopment of Hardee County. The input and insight you have provided is invaluable. I offer my full support for your efforts.

I will continue to work closely with you and your elected officials to implement the recovery plan. Please feel free to contact my Ft. Myers office at (239) 334-7760, should you need any assistance.

Sincerely,

Handwritten signature of Bill Nelson in black ink.

Bill Nelson  
U.S. Senator



December 1, 2004

Dear Friends:

I write today in enthusiastic support of the Long-Term Recovery effort underway in Hardee County. During the months of August and September, Hurricanes Charley, Frances, and Jeanne devastated this rural community. Thankfully, the challenges that lay in their wake have been met with extraordinary leadership and community spirit. As a result, I am confident that Hardee County will eventually be an even better place to live, work, and raise a family.

Having endured the fury of three major hurricanes, Hardee, DeSoto, and Charlotte County residents from all walks of life have linked arms in the determined effort to rescue, recover, and rebuild. The Federal Emergency Management Agency Long-Term Recovery Team has worked closely with state, county, and local leaders, as well as the residents of these counties to produce three individual Long-Term Recovery Plans for each county. As Hardee County's representative in Congress, I strongly encourage the appropriate federal and state agencies to make available every possible resource to assist the County with implementation of its Long Term Recovery Plan.

With an economic base dependent on agriculture, Hardee County faces unique challenges in their recovery efforts, including limited resources for economic diversification. The successful implementation of this thoughtful plan will result in the preservation of the county's rural character, history, and traditions, while encouraging more varied, vibrant, and vivacious economic opportunities for the good people of Hardee County.

I congratulate the people of Hardee County for meeting the unprecedented destruction of three hurricanes with extraordinary courage, determination. The task of rebuilding will continue to demand unprecedented unity, understanding, and patience. My staff and I will be at their side for ever step of this arduous effort to rebuild and strengthen their community. Please don't hesitate to contact my office if you require additional information.

Sincerely,

Handwritten signature of Katherine Harris in black ink.

Katherine Harris  
Member of Congress

HARDEE COUNTY  
 BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS  
 412 West Orange Street, Room 183  
 Wauchula, Florida 33983  
 (863)773-9436 \* (863)773-4893 \* Fax (863)773-4998

November 20, 2004

Dear Hardee County Recovery Supporters:

On August 13, 2004, Hurricane Charley hit Hardee County and in September we weathered Hurricanes Frances and Jeanne.

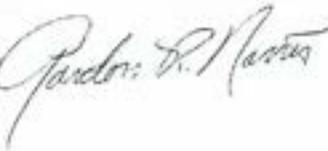
How much can one community endure? In watching and listening, we have seen that we can endure a great deal. From day one, our community has banded together to rebuild. Our community leaders have labored intensely to address the challenges that have come with such devastation. The FEMA Long Term Recovery Team assigned to Hardee County has worked diligently with each local unit of government and the community as a whole to determine what is needed to allow us to flourish and succeed.

Community-wide public forums for input into the Long Term Recovery Plan have been conducted and the citizen response has been overwhelmingly positive! We all have acknowledged the tremendous amount of work that needs to be done in order for us to overcome the ravages of these three storms, and we are committed to doing our part.

Hardee County is a great place to live and to raise a family. We need to know we can continue to rely on your help, your support and your prayers. Together, we can come back even better and stronger than we were before the storms, as our spirit and determination have not wavered.

Working for our future,

Gordon Norris  
 Chairman



CRW:val

Cc: members, Hardee County Board of Commissioners, file

Gordon B. Norris, Chairman - (863) 773-4893, Vice-Chairman  
 Mark L. Bryant, Bobby B. Smith - (863) 773-4893  
 County Manager Loren H. Whitton, Jr. - County Attorney Kim Furr

"An Equal Opportunity Employer"



CITY MANAGER  
 JIM PRICER  
 600 TRAFFIC

PO BOX 419  
 WAUCHULA, FL 33983-0419

November 20, 2004

Dear Hardee County Supporters:

On August 13, 2004, Hurricane Charley made our community look like a war zone. This type of devastation hadn't been inflicted upon our area since Hurricane Donna in 1960, a storm that reportedly was nowhere near as strong as Charley. To add to the destruction, Hurricane Frances hit on September 4<sup>th</sup> and Hurricane Jeanne hit on September 25<sup>th</sup>.

Our community had a disadvantage even before Charley hit. We were an economically strapped rural community. With the assistance of the recovery team, we've developed a plan for the area and will have the opportunity to make it an even better place than it was before these storms. With a plan in place, we will be better able to secure funding support from a variety of Federal, State, and local agencies and/or organizations for projects that will get Wauchula and Hardee County back on our feet and moving in the right direction.

On October 25<sup>th</sup>, the first Town Hall Meeting was held with over 500 people in attendance. This gave our residents an opportunity to express their needs and wants. More than 450 area residents attended the second Town Hall Meeting on November 16<sup>th</sup>. The rough draft of the plan was distributed and those in attendance help to prioritize the different projects. We are excited and looking forward to the presentation of the final plan on Thursday, December 9<sup>th</sup>.

I want to commend and most of all thank those who have served on our local Hardee County Long Term Recovery Team. You have worked long days and have poured your heart into our community to make it a better place and it is very much appreciated. Thanks in large part to your efforts, we will have a better place in which to live and a brighter future for our community.

Most Sincerely,



David H. Royal  
 Mayor

Cc: City Commission, file

## TOWN OF ZOLFO SPRINGS

1210 U.S. Hwy. 17 S.  
P.O. Box 262  
Zolfo Springs, FL 33980-0262

Phone: (863) 733-0603  
Fax: (863) 733-0684

December 3, 2004

Dear Hardee County Recovery Team:

In the summer of 2004, Hardee County and the Town of Zolfo Springs were impacted by three major hurricanes.

The destruction to businesses and housing was monumental. The task of trying to rebuild our community would have been overwhelming had it not been for the assistance of the FEMA Long-Term Recovery Team assigned to Hardee County.

This team has given our community outstanding support and has worked very diligently with the governments of Hardee County and each of the municipalities within our county. Public forums have been held and received positive input from the citizenry. We can at last see some light at the end of the tunnel. Plans are now being made to rebuild Hardee County and Zolfo Springs to make our community better than it was before the devastation of the hurricanes.

Zolfo Springs was particularly hard hit by the storms because we were already challenged by economic problems. We are an impoverished community with a high percentage of our population living below the poverty level. Though we are a poor community, we have residents who love their Town and would not dream of living somewhere else, because the rural lifestyle appeals to them.

While Zolfo Springs is determined to do all we can to recover from this year's unprecedented disasters, we are still crippled from the blows of three major hurricanes in six weeks. We need help from our friends and neighbors - many of whom also sustained nearly mortal blows - to get things back to normal, and we will profit from any helping hands on this long road to recovery. We will benefit from any possible help from the state and federal governments to help our Town and county rise above the devastation and become a better place to live, work, and play. With your continuing help and support, we believe that we can offer our residents the opportunity to repair, rebuild, and improve their lifestyle, while still maintaining the values that make life in Hardee County so appealing.

To each member of the team, we want to thank you most sincerely for all the many hours you have invested in helping us see the way to a brighter future. We will never forget your kindness and compassion.

  
Marilyn Aker,  
Mayor

**CITY OFFICIALS**  
David L. Esherson, City Manager  
Patricia S. Norton, City Clerk  
May Sue Russell, Deputy Clerk  
John School, Police Chief  
Gerald Hale, City Attorney



P. O. Box 678, 204 E. Main St.  
Bowling Green, FL 33634-0678  
(863) 375-2255, Fax (863) 375-3362

**COMMISSIONERS**  
Perry Knight, Mayor  
Flem Graham, Vice Mayor  
David Darnstein  
Wesley Caliper  
Eubank Herne

December 2, 2004

Dear Hardee County Supporters:

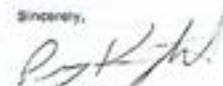
Less than four months ago, Hurricanes Charley, Frances, and Jeanne struck our City of 2,892 residents. Their paths of destruction brought widespread damage to homes, businesses, our grade school, numerous public facilities, and our Fire and Police Departments.

It is difficult to see what the future will bring for our community, but we are determined to rebuild and to strengthen it. The strong involvement of our community in the long-term recovery planning process is a reflection of our dedication and desire to move forward on the proposed projects that are so vital to our future.

Assisted by the Hardee County team of FEMA community planners, we have defined our needs and set priorities. Now we must implement our plan. We can't do it alone. However, with the help of Federal, State, and local agencies, we can repair, rebuild, and move ahead toward a brighter future for our children and grandchildren.

We appreciate the help that you've given us to date and need your ongoing assistance to make this plan a reality.

Sincerely,

  
Perry Knight  
Mayor

Cc: City Council, file



## Community Involvement



In August and September of 2004, three hurricanes slammed through Hardee County within a six-week period, leaving the 27,000 county residents to face heavy losses; physical, economic, and emotional; and overwhelming recovery challenges.

Even before the storms, Hardee County faced significant economic problems; this inland farming and mining community in southwestern Florida struggles with economic and social issues.

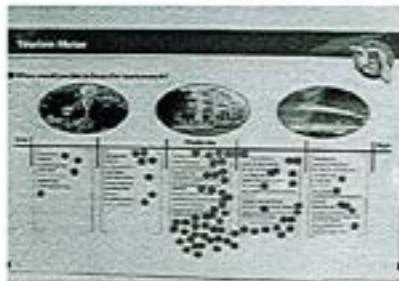
The Hardee County Long-Term Recovery Plan is based on the premise that the disaster also provides a window of opportunity, unprecedented in Hardee County history, to rebuild a new community - sound and strong - from the wreckage left by the 2004 hurricanes.

The plan is a community-driven document that reflects both the priorities expressed by the community and the experience of the team who helped facilitate the planning process in the Fall of 2004. The projects outlined are based on input received

from the community as a result of hundreds of interviews, two public meetings, e-mails, and comment sheets. More than 500 people attended the first public meeting on October 25, 2004. The purpose of the meeting was to determine what the community believed were its key recovery issues and concerns.

Several hours were spent with the recovery planning team discussing these issues and describing their community vision.

Thousands of comments were received and a Rough Draft Plan was created in response to discussions with local officials and community leaders. The Rough Draft Plan was presented back to the community at a second public meeting on November 16, 2004, when 450 people were able to review the draft, discuss the issues and provide input through an "electronic town hall" format. The electronic town hall format presented various issues to the



participants and asked for discussion and feedback. The format allowed for real-time polling of participants regarding key projects contained in the plan.

Key results of this polling include:

- 74 percent said that the county should try to attract new industries and businesses, while 20 percent believed existing industries and businesses should be enhanced.
- 75 percent thought it was very important to create and enforce standards for rental housing.
- More than 95 percent of respondents believe the planning process has identified important projects needed to help Hardee County recover from the 2004 hurricanes.
- Key economic initiatives were ranked in the following manner:
  1. Provide incentives for new and existing businesses.
  2. Create a Hardee Commerce Park.
  3. Develop marketing cooperatives to promote agricultural products regionally and nationally.
  4. Promote tourism through the Peace River Heritage Corridor.

Also at the second meeting, participants and the community in general were asked to pick their top five projects. Survey questionnaires were distributed, published, and available on line. The following top projects were identified through the survey:

1. Promote small business and enterprise development.
2. Assess cargo airport feasibility.
3. Build and rehabilitate local housing.
4. Expand higher education.
5. Grow downtown businesses and farmers market (tie).
5. Rebuild the stadium and athletic facilities (tie).

These community priorities and general discussions with Hardee County residents, elected officials, and community leaders provided guidance to the planning team as they continued to prepare the recovery plan document. The Long-Term Recovery Team used this input to further study and strengthen the projects in the plan.

On December 9, 2004, the final version of this Long-Term Recovery Plan was presented at a public meeting that included the Hardee County Commission and elected officials from the cities of Wauchula, Bowling Green and Zolfo Springs, as well as key federal and state officials.

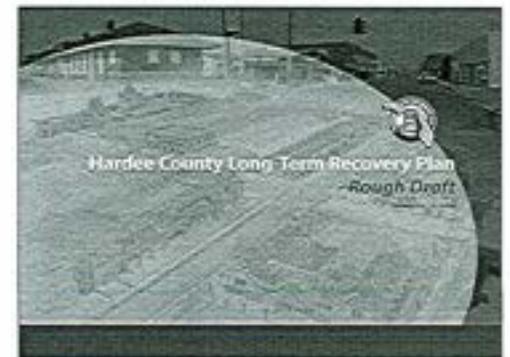




Table of Contents

<b>HARDEE COUNTY PROJECTS</b>		<b>REGIONAL PROJECTS</b> . . . . .	<b>23</b>
<b>CREATE ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES</b> . . . . .	<b>1</b>	Improve Regional Transportation Connectivity . . . . .	24
Stimulate Business Growth . . . . .	2	Develop a Peace River Heritage Corridor . . . . .	25
Construct a Multi-Purpose Community Facility . . . . .	3	Improve Telecommunications and Access to Broadband . . . . .	26
Assess Airport Feasibility . . . . .	4	Expand and Promote	
Rebuild the Arena . . . . .	5	Higher Education and Training . . . . .	27
Seek Flexibility for Mining Reclamation Projects . . . . .	5	Reduce Wildfire Risks . . . . .	28
Develop Agricultural Cooperatives . . . . .	6	Reinstate Tri-County Mobile Health Clinic . . . . .	28
Build Research Center and		Launch 2-1-1 Helpline, Web Site,	
Demonstration Farm on Reclaimed Mining Land . . . . .	6	and Volunteer Resource Center . . . . .	29
		Develop Agricultural Water Conservation Programs . . . . .	30
		Assess Water Quality and Environmental Issues . . . . .	30
<b>REVITALIZE DOWNTOWNS</b> . . . . .	<b>7</b>		
Re-energize Town Centers . . . . .	8		
Develop Land Adjacent to the New US 17 . . . . .	10		
<b>IMPROVE INFRASTRUCTURE</b> . . . . .	<b>11</b>		
Update Local Mitigation Strategy and Sheltering Plan . . . . .	12		
Upgrade Facilities for Public			
Safety and Emergency Management . . . . .	13		
Improve Water, Wastewater, and Stormwater Facilities . . . . .	14		
Develop a Hardee County Stormwater Master Plan . . . . .	14		
Connect People and Places . . . . .	15		
<b>BUILD HOMES AND COMMUNITIES</b> . . . . .	<b>17</b>		
Build Housing Capacity . . . . .	18		
Create Housing . . . . .	19		
Build a Neighborhood Development . . . . .	20		
Improve Health and Human Services . . . . .	21		
Enhance and Expand Athletic/Recreational Facilities . . . . .	22		
Enhance and Create Parks and Open Space . . . . .	22		



## Create Economic Opportunities

Prior to the hurricanes, Hardee County faced many economic challenges - slow economic growth, an 8.6 percent unemployment rate, and one of the lowest income levels in the state. In the post-disaster era, Hardee has the chance to increase the standard of living, create jobs, and generate economic growth. To do this, the county must consider both broad and focused initiatives, including incentives to attract new industry, loan programs to expand existing businesses, and construction of infrastructure/community facilities that complement local economic development.

The projects in this section target small business development, creation of a community multi-use facility, mining land reclamation, exploring airport options, creating agricultural cooperatives and a demonstration farm, and industrial commerce park development. Long-term economic recovery is integrated within many of the themes and projects in this plan. Important first steps toward long-term recovery include forming an economic strategy, identifying state and regional resources, expanding educational and workforce training opportunities, and launching a business recruitment campaign.



Create Economic Opportunities

## Stimulate Business Growth

Recovery Value: **HIGH**

### RECOVERY VALUE

Expediting the opening of the Hardee Commerce Park has a high recovery value because it will create jobs, attract new employers, and foster partnerships between businesses. Stimulating economic growth in Hardee County will impact not only downtown Wauchula, but also the entire community by increasing outside investment, adding to the tax revenue, and stimulating job growth. Transportation, workforce, and community development projects will also benefit from increased economic activity and investment. Long-term recovery for Hardee County depends on forming an economic strategy, identifying resources, expanding educational and workforce training opportunities, and undertaking a pro-active recruitment campaign.



### GOAL

Create an environment to attract key industries by enhancing the Hardee Commerce Park and providing financial and other incentives for new businesses.

### PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Create high-quality enterprise development space and offer incentives and financial resource assistance to start-up and fledgling business to accomplish the goal of this project. The following project options work to ensure success of local start-ups, fledgling companies, those who are launching a company, and existing businesses looking to expand. For effective implementation, flexible and responsive collaboration should occur with Florida Heartland Regional Economic Development Initiative (FHREDI), Enterprise Florida, and other rural economic development entities. The projects support goals and initiatives noted in state and local plans such as the Central Florida Regional Planning Council, Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (July 2003), and FHREDI.

### OPTIONS

#### Prepare and Implement a Countywide Economic Strategy

A comprehensive study will identify preferred economic development goals and strategies and gauge

how well the current workforce and infrastructure can meet these goals. An assessment will be conducted in such areas as education, training, transportation, childcare for employees, marketing, and outreach to potential new businesses.

This project provides a plan to attract and recruit key high impact industries to broaden and strengthen the local economic base. A study report of industry-sector strategies will be formulated with special consideration given to exploring ways to capitalize on the Florida Institute for Neurological Research (FINR) in Hardee County, higher value-added agricultural and horticultural products, specialty wood products, and other key industry clusters identified through FHREDI.

#### Construct a Hardee Commerce Park on SR 62

The Hardee Commerce Park will be managed by the county's Industrial Development Authority (IDA) and is comprised of approximately 160 acres located along SR 62, west of US 17, three miles from downtown Wauchula and in vicinity of the South Florida Community College.

The Hardee Commerce Park will implement a customized market-driven strategy, coordinated with the county's overall economic development plan, to identify a major industry or project as an anchor tenant for an industrial cluster. Before Commerce Park is developed, it is important to lay out roads, utilities, landscaping, site work, and broadband infrastructure. This infrastructure will allow the park to meet market needs and begin to create jobs. Once the infrastructure is in place, the following options could occur:

- Build a "spec" (speculative) building to attract new businesses.
- Build a business incubator within the park to help start-up business, entrepreneurs, or growing businesses through use of shared facilities, infrastructure, and marketing.

#### Institute Innovative Financial Mechanisms and Support

This project meets the needs of fledgling and start-up businesses and strengthens local community development opportunities at sites throughout the

county, supporting job creation at the Hardee Commerce Park, downtown, and along US 17. It would benefit small business establishments through funding, marketing, and accounting assistance. Micro-enterprise loans would help businesses achieve greater self-sufficiency by underwriting regular commercial and/or Small Business Administration loans. In addition, it would help cities and towns leverage scarce dollars and improve returns on capital facility, housing, and infrastructure projects.

Collaboration would occur with several institutions: the Florida Department of Community Affairs; Central Florida Regional Planning Council; Community Development Financial Institution; community development entities, such as the Florida Community Loan Fund, the Florida High Tech Corridor Council, the National Development Council, and other development finance institutions. The feasibility of using a nonprofit organization would be evaluated, to facilitate the use of innovative financing mechanisms. This entity would facilitate the use of New Market Tax Credits and other funding sources.

### COST

Project Option	Estimated Cost
Prepare and implement a	
Local Economic Strategy .....	\$80,000
Planning cost .....	\$40,000
Staff for one year .....	\$40,000
Marketing Plan .....	\$50,000
Construct Hardee Commerce Park	
Roads, Utility, Landscaping, Site .....	\$1,500,000
Incubator Space .....	\$2,500,000
Telecommunication Extension .....	\$170,000
Subtotal .....	\$4,170,000
A. Spec Building, commercial .....	\$8,076,000
B. Spec Building, office .....	\$10,938,000
<b>Total (option A)</b> .....	<b>\$12,246,000</b>
<b>Total (option B)</b> .....	<b>\$15,108,000</b>

Note: Assumes 100,000-square-foot spec building without tenant improvements; incubator space is inclusive of building and tenant improvements.

Recovery Value: HIGH

**RECOVERY VALUE**

A centrally located multi-purpose community facility can serve a variety of purposes: house a high-tech library; provide indoor and outdoor community meeting space; host a small business incubator; and provide training facilities for personal and professional growth. Locating a multi-purpose facility and farmers market in downtown Wauchula will increase traffic to the area, support local business-



Conceptual drawing of Multi-Purpose Community Center

es, spur retail development, and form an anchor for Main Street. As people increasingly visit the community facility, fledgling businesses will find greater support and new businesses will have incentive to relocate to downtown. For these reasons, this facility has a high recovery value. High-speed Internet/computer access will provide additional training and development options for small businesses, employees seeking to improve their capabilities, and job seekers.

**GOAL**

Construct a multi-purpose community center to stimulate the economy of downtown Wauchula by increasing foot traffic to support new and existing businesses.

**PROJECT DESCRIPTION**

Provide community space for organizations and local businesses, include an expanded library, and locate the facility to impact downtown development. Add a bookmobile to the library function that includes Internet access for the rural population. Include a Safe Room within the community facility for up to 150 people. Construct multi-purpose, covered outdoor space for farmers market.

**COMPONENTS****New Library**

Build a larger library in a central location in downtown Wauchula that includes room for future expansion and ample parking. This library will support local business information needs and will be easily accessible to all residents. The new building will include meeting rooms that can be made available for community or nonprofit needs and used by the library for special programs such as business training. Additional staff needed to run the newly expanded library may include programming staff, collections staff, and maintenance staff.

**Create Bookmobile Program**

Create a bookmobile program to transport books, videos, and other learning tools to area schools, business centers, senior centers, and other sites throughout the county. The program could also provide Internet access via satellite. Funding could be supported through the Florida Department of State Library Services and Technology Act Grants, and administered through the Heartland Library Cooperative, which includes DeSoto, Highlands, and Okeechobee counties. The bookmobile could serve a multi-county area.

**Collection Development**

Broaden the collections at the library to include more business and community enrichment reference materials, subscription databases, computer and CD-based training programs, books on tape, Spanish-language books for adults, early childhood/school readiness learning tools, and personal development/health and wellness materials. Also replace books in the general collections that were lost during the hurricanes.

**Community Space**

The addition of community meeting and educational facilities can stimulate local business and provide the foundation for further economic development. Job training, technology courses, and public meetings are some of the roles this space could fill. The space could also be used to house activities for seniors, children's programs, and cultural events. Additional services to the public could include high-speed Internet access and assistance for start-up businesses.

**Computer Access**

Seek funding to provide more computers and computer-based learning tools for patrons. This technology would increase the community's access to the Internet and create additional educational opportunities.

**Create a "retail incubator" for small businesses**

Space located in the community facility can be dedicated for tenants to share equipment, expenses, and expertise. These economies of scale would assist budding entrepreneurs. A local business entity could provide technical assistance in bookkeeping, marketing, and business development. Alternate locations for a retail incubator could be in Main Street buildings (e.g., Old Police Station building at 303 West Main).

The following options could address this project:

- Work with the University of Florida at Gainesville planning and architectural faculty and students to renovate properties (e.g., Feed Store, A.G. Smith Building, Old Carlton Bank Building, and others).

- Build new structures on vacant properties near existing retail properties.

**Provide a multi-purpose outdoor space**

The inclusion of multi-functional outdoor space in conjunction with the new community center can serve as a central gathering space for special occasions or as a space for farmers markets and craft sales. This space can help attract tourists to the area and increase the economic base of the community.

**Create an outdoor market for local goods**

A farmers/flea market could be situated in covered outdoor space attached to the main library/community center facility. The space could be converted during non-market times into additional parking space, and the multi-purpose covered outdoor area could be used for weddings, parade gatherings, public rallies, outdoor concerts, or other gatherings. The existing wholesale market would continue to operate, enhanced by the addition of a retail operation, featuring local farmers and vendors. The retail operation would sell local goods, produce, handicrafts, milk and dairy, breads, desserts and pastries, beverages, and arts and craft products to the general public and tourists.

**COST**

<b>Multi-purpose Community Facility</b>	<b>\$1,925,000</b>
10,000 square foot 2 Story Building	
Public Library	
Classrooms	
Library Equipment	
Site Improvements	
<b>Upgrade facility to serve as storm shelter</b>	<b>\$68,718</b>

## Assess Airport Feasibility

Recovery Value: **HIGH**



### RECOVERY VALUE

The proposed Florida International Airport has the potential to create large numbers of jobs in a rural area of critical economic concern and ranks high in recovery value. The airport could serve as a catalyst for a predominately agricultural economy and create a sustainable use for reclaimed mining land. In addition to creating jobs directly at the facility, the airport may attract other industry to locate nearby and would allow Hardee County better access to markets and industrial centers regionally and globally. The concept of a cargo airport has strong support from public officials and citizens.

### GOAL

The preparation of a Florida International Airport Feasibility Study will serve to identify the purpose and need for an airport proposed by a public/private partnership to independently analyze its regional economic impact.

### PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The study should be conducted in two discrete components. The first would evaluate the proposed airport in the context of the statewide and regional airport system. This initial study would identify facility requirements and prepare a forecast and demand analysis. The second part of the study should focus specifically on an airport's regional economic value.

To ensure that facilitation occurs, agencies should: (1) cooperate in an early pre-application conference of all involved agencies and the applicant to establish a coordinated and expedited review process for the project; and, (2) designate one contact person who will be responsible for overseeing that agency's participation in the permitting processes and for regular communications with the applicant and other affected agencies.

### COST

Airport feasibility study*	\$300,000
----------------------------	-----------

\*New cargo airport and related facilities: to be determined (based on outcome of feasibility study and detailed master plan). A fully automated facility would have an order of magnitude between \$250,000,000 to \$500,000,000.



Recovery Value: MODERATE

## Rebuild the Arena

### RECOVERY VALUE

Rehabilitating the Cattlemen's Arena will provide a place for the citizens of Hardee County to host large, multi-day events. This will draw more visitors to the area who will support the local economy through tourism and entertainment revenue and provide a degree of economic recovery.

### GOAL

Rebuild and expand the damaged Cattlemen's Arena to encourage large, overnight events and bring more visitors to the area.

### PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Rehabilitate the existing Cattlemen's Arena to provide a venue for horse and livestock events, exhibitions, graduation ceremonies, holiday presentations, and other large-scale events. Include stalls and covered stock pens for large, overnight expositions, as well as enhanced seating, restrooms, covered walkways and a meeting room for civic events and functions. Rehabilitation would ensure that the facility resists high winds.

Reconstruct the Cattlemen's Arena in its current location, and include additional facilities including expanded restrooms, overnight animal stalls, and other facilities that will enhance and improve the arena's capability to support rodeos, civic events, and large gatherings.

### COST

Reconstruction/expansion \$1,650,400



Recovery Value: MODERATE

## Seek Flexibility for Mining Reclamation Projects

### RECOVERY VALUE

Modified mitigation standards will provide future economic and ecological value to reclaimed lands. The ability for mining companies to invest in offsite mitigation could facilitate creation of programs that have a regional impact and would offer a moderate recovery value. This could allow the mining companies to focus efforts on habitat restoration in areas that provide the most value to the community. Projects such as the Peace River Heritage Corridor, could benefit from this flexibility.

### GOAL

Provide mitigation flexibility that will protect existing watersheds and habitat while increasing the amount of reclaimed land suitable for future agricultural or economic development use.

### PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Nearly half of Hardee County and a significant portion of DeSoto County contain phosphate reserves likely to be mined within the next 20 years. These lands contain significant water and environmental resources. Clay settling areas will occupy half of the reclaimed landscape but are not suitable for conversion into wetlands or other habitat. Under current requirements, these lands must be used to meet the environmental mitigation requirements for the entire mine. This leaves little room for mining companies to improve land in ways beneficial to the community.

Modifying mitigation requirements to allow mining companies to purchase and improve comparable offsite land to offset the clay settling areas will result in better environmental value while providing economic value for the area. Current mitigation standards would remain for the rest of the mining land.

### OPTION

- Obtain waivers or modify applicable administrative rules and/or legislation to allow offsite mitigation.
- Create a local/regional advisory board to work in conjunction with the Bureau of Mine Reclamation to determine location and extent of offsite mitigation required for future reclamation plans. Include a paid staff person to assemble and work with board and coordinate legislative change as necessary.

### COST

Part time staff person \$20,000/yr



## Develop Agricultural Cooperatives

### RECOVERY VALUE

A large part of Hardy County's economy is dependent on the agriculture industry. The financial condition of small and family-owned agricultural enterprises has both a direct and indirect effect on the regional economy. Building successful cooperatives could allow the small businesses to thrive and contribute to the local economy. This project is of interest to the agricultural community and can be commenced quickly with high visibility in the community.

### GOAL

Develop a local agricultural cooperative for small and family-owned enterprises.

### PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Create agricultural cooperatives which, by combining producer resources, can create extensive advertising campaigns and public education programs, widely promote members' agricultural products, and combine their yields to compete more effectively in the market. Hire a Cooperative Development Manager. This position might be housed at the research center and demonstration farm proposed elsewhere in this plan.

### USDA Rural Business Cooperative Service

Cooperative Development Services of the USDA Rural Business Cooperative Service provides technical assistance to help rural residents form new cooperative businesses and improve the operations of existing cooperatives. Local agricultural interests could work with this agency to determine the feasibility and technical logistics of developing a cooperative.

### COST

Project Option	Estimated Cost
Technical assistance from USDA .....	\$0
Management salary and benefits/year .....	\$50,000



## Build Research Center and Demonstration Farm on Reclaimed Mining Land

### RECOVERY VALUE

Continuation of agricultural pursuits is of great community interest in Hardee County. Over the next 30 years, nearly 300,000 acres of land will be reclaimed from phosphate mining activities within the Bone Valley district. To date, only small-scale studies of agricultural applications of reclaimed mine land have been undertaken, so the full extent of agricultural products that can be produced on reclaimed mining lands is not well documented. Creation of a research center to utilize reclaimed land to identify optimal agricultural production will allow future reclaimed lands to be used for more productive, beneficial purposes.

### GOAL

Conduct large-scale studies on traditional agricultural crops, alternative crops, and agricultural technologies to determine the best use for reclaimed mine land.

### PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Develop an agricultural research and development center along with a demonstration farm to study how to actively use reclaimed mining lands, particularly for high-value-added enterprises such as aquaculture and horticulture. First steps for this project include 1) securing the land for the facility; 2) constructing a small facility, including a small office building, equipment barns, and manager's living quarters; and, 3) acquiring equipment, supplies, and machinery to establish and maintain the research center and demonstration farm.

### Mining Industry and Agricultural Support

The successful implementation and sustainability of this project depends on its initial base of support. In November 2004, representatives from the phosphate industry and the University of Florida's Institute for Food and Agricultural Sciences (IFAS)

met to discuss this project. At this meeting, the industry representatives indicated an interest in pursuing methods by which they could participate in this project. IFAS representatives stated that they were embarking on a new, mandated study of reclamation lands and that the research center could serve as an important field center.

### COST

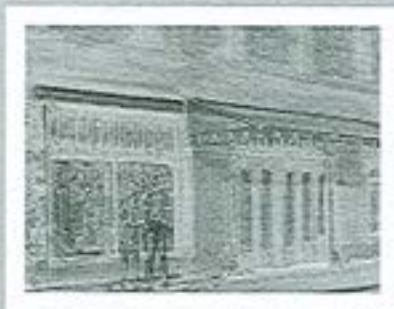
Project Option	Estimated Cost
Metal equipment barn, office/conference space and farm manager's apartment.....	\$435,192
Tractors and equipment .....	\$500,000-\$700,000
Personnel including director, receptionist/secretary and 6-8 farm hands.....	\$400,000-\$500,000



### Revitalize Downtowns

The purpose of the following projects is to create a vibrant downtown Wauchula and active towns in Zolfo Springs and Bowling Green. Downtown Wauchula is the economic center of the county and struggles with the loss of vitality on Main Street.

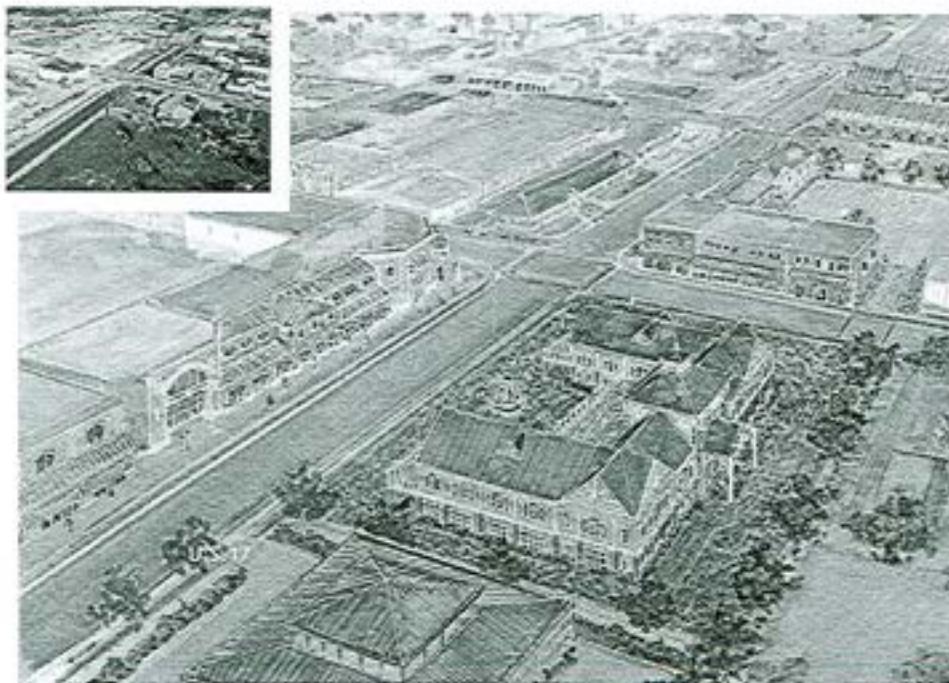
These projects outline a comprehensive and integrated approach by enhancing downtown, developing commercial/retail space, and expanding housing opportunities. A retail incubator space will help start-up businesses by pooling resources and creating a cluster of related shops. By revitalizing the focal points of greater Wauchula, Bowling Green, Zolfo Springs, and other communities, Hardee County will attract businesses, increase pedestrian traffic, and enhance quality of life.



# Revitalize Downtowns

## Re-energize Town Centers

Recovery Value: **HIGH**



Conceptual drawing of downtown Wauchula



Existing Feed Store Building



Conceptual drawing of renovated Feed Store Building

### RECOVERY VALUE

Vibrant downtowns and active town centers enhance the overall economic and civic health of a community. A downtown revitalization plan will identify improvements to local roads, lighting, sidewalks, housing, businesses, and infrastructure which will bring new life to the centers of Wauchula, Zolfo Springs and Bowling Green. This project will improve the business climate and enrich the lives of the residents in the county, providing a high recovery value for the area. It supports the goals of the Florida Heartland Rural Economic Development Initiative (FHREDI), Enterprise Florida, and local and county comprehensive plans.

### GOAL

Create an energetic and diverse downtown business district; improve and revitalize downtown Wauchula; increase commercial activity in Zolfo Springs and Bowling Green.

### PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Nearly one-third of Wauchula businesses suffered severe hurricane damage; many are closed, some indefinitely. Estimated total damage is \$50 million (City of Wauchula; Brewer and Associates, September 2004), representing at least a 15 percent loss in city revenues. Similar conditions exist in Zolfo Springs and Bowling Green. Given these conditions, there is a pressing need to revitalize downtown Wauchula and other focal points in Hardee County. The options below achieve this by working in concert with other projects within the guidelines of a plan and developing key opportunity sites.

### OPTIONS

#### Create a Framework for Development

A plan, shaped by extensive outreach and input from residents, businesses, and stakeholders, would serve to guide long-term recovery planning and decision-making. The framework plan would also include a visioning process in which the potential designs for vital town spaces would be illustrated. Key elements of the plan focus on enhancing: community character, ease of walking, traffic circulation, parking, housing options, guidelines for town/city gateways, facades and streetscapes, inventory of heritage buildings/places, and opportunities to optimize land

uses to attract businesses along the upgraded US 17 highway. Local development standards and codes would be amended when necessary.

#### Survey Downtown Buildings

An assessment would identify the extent and type of damage to property, buildings, structures, and infrastructure. It would also compile information regarding the zoning and ownership of individual parcels within downtown Wauchula and focal points in Zolfo Springs and Bowling Green. The survey would swiftly assess damage and the likelihood for rehabilitation, revitalization, and re-use of existing properties and buildings. The assessment would include recommended measures to reduce future disaster losses.

#### Restore and renovate key heritage structures in Wauchula

The downtown area has a rich history, embodied in many of the buildings and properties along Main Street, including the Feed Store, Stansfield Building, Old Theater, railroad depot, Old Carlton Bank, Rife Building, Ben Franklin buildings, A.G. Smith Building (217-219 E. Main), Brown Arcade, and others. Restoring, renovating, and maintaining key heritage structures and improving their ability to withstand future disasters will complement a revitalized downtown and attract businesses and residents. A rough list of key buildings and sites has been identified in meetings with the Main Street Association and other groups. Potential options at some of these buildings include:

- Adapt the depot into a visitor's center, a children's museum, and/or a lunch café;
- Adapt the Feed Store into a retail arcade or an antique mall; and
- Establish apartments on the top floor of the A.G. Smith Building.

#### Redevelop Key Opportunity Sites

In addition to the key heritage structures, many downtown spaces and buildings located close to one another would benefit from a targeted approach to redevelopment and renovation. Many of these spaces would also benefit from the simultaneous installation of streetscapes, attractive signage, benches, and other improvements to appearance and the pedestrian environment.

Recovery Value: HIGH

Conceptual drawing of Heritage Park



Due to the storm events, several highly visible sites in downtown Wauchula are underutilized or contain damaged buildings. These sites provide opportunities for redevelopment and implementation of the community's vision for a vibrant downtown. A range of new developments could include office, retail, commercial, and housing uses in downtown. It is important for the city to coordinate with property owners, tenants, etc., for the following sites:

Conceptual drawing of renovated Train Depot



**OPPORTUNITY SITES**

- Property between the new Police Station and Heritage Park
- Property south of the Coffee Club, behind Coker Fuel Building
- Property at 303 West Main Street (Old Police Station)
- Property (old hotel space) above Main Street Pub
- Property located at southwest corner of Main Street and US 17 North (old Carlton Bank)
- Parking lot along US 17 South between Main and Orange Streets

**POTENTIAL USES**

- Retail fronting the park
- Municipal parking lot with greenway to connect with Heritage Park
- Small office/retail uses with green space that visually connects with Heritage Park
- New housing options of 20-30 owner and rental units (700 to 1200 square feet per unit)
- Office/retail expansion and potential for housing above-ground floor uses
- Small offices and retail with parking available

Conceptual drawing of Main St. with streetscape improvements



**Restore and renovate opportunity sites in Bowling Green and Zolfo Springs.**

For example:

1. Develop the old train depot as shops with a park that connects with the new Post Office in Bowling Green. Develop a retail/office building between the depot and Post Office.
2. Redevelop underutilized and damaged sites as retail/small offices, and enhance existing shops along southbound US 17 in Zolfo Springs.



2nd Floor Housing

**Re-energize Town Centers**

**Create a Downtown Business and US 17 Development/Marketing Plan**

A business development and marketing plan for Wauchula will facilitate the redevelopment opportunities of some of the key sites noted above. The plan will highlight the downtown and US 17 corridor revitalization and will result in a brochure for marketing and a targeted action plan that will serve to highlight key themes, attractions, shops, restaurants, and places to stay and will help to attract businesses and capture a portion of the tourism market in rural Florida. A revitalized US 17 will create an attractive commercial corridor for businesses, public space and other high-quality uses, creating vibrant pedestrian activity in concert with an upgraded highway route.

**Encourage 2nd Floor Housing Downtown**

Utilizing existing downtown structures for housing may provide additional support for downtown businesses, sales tax revenue to the city and county, and help address the local housing shortage. Strategies to encourage people to live in downtown Wauchula include:

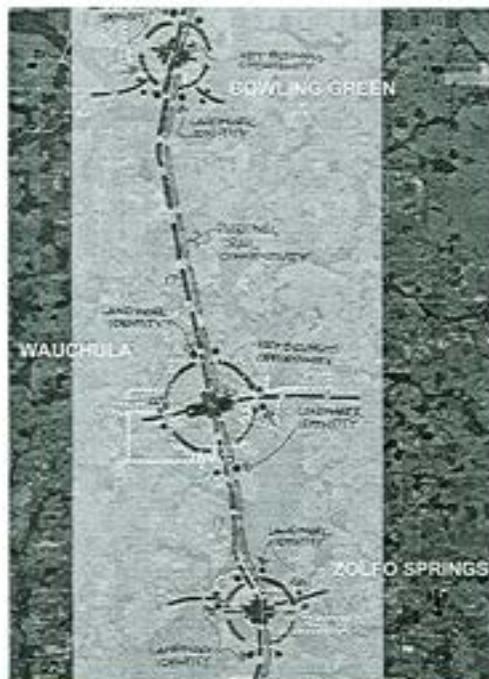
- Review and revise local zoning ordinances to ensure that residential uses are allowed above businesses in the downtown district.
- Set up a revolving loan program using Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funding for residential development.
- Rebate a portion of the incremental tax increase realized from new residential development to the owner.
- Waive building permit fees for residential projects in the downtown development area.

**COST**

Project Option	Estimated Cost
Renovate Wauchula train depot	\$1,549,000
Business and marketing plan	\$50,000
Survey downtown buildings	\$50,000
Development plan	\$75,000
Review and revise local zoning ordinances	\$15,000

## Develop Land Adjacent to the New US 17

Recovery Value: HIGH



### RECOVERY VALUE

The US 17 corridor is the major north-south roadway, which serves as the gateway to Hardee County and its communities. Preserving, showcasing, and marketing properties and buildings that are presently not being used and/or have sustained significant damage along US 17, especially in Wauchula, Zolfo Springs, and Bowling Green, will attract businesses and provide a high recovery value.

### GOAL

Increase economic activity and revitalize property and buildings to attract businesses, visitors, and pedestrians.

### PROJECT DESCRIPTION

A US 17 revitalization plan will identify improvements to specific sites, propose streetscaping, open space, community facilities, lighting and sidewalk improvements, and promote business and infrastructure projects to maximize the full recovery potential of each project.

### OPTIONS

#### Redevelop Key Opportunity Sites

There are several key sites along US 17 that are not being used to their greatest potential, despite their location along a major roadway. These sites provide opportunities for redevelopment and implementation of the community's vision for a vibrant downtown. Many of these sites are outside of the boundary that defines the downtown commercial district, but they form an important link to downtown and serve to draw the visitor in. The revitalization plan could identify more sites, but the following is a list of potential sites. It is important for the city to coordinate with property owners, tenants, and others for the following sites:



OPPORTUNITY SITES	POTENTIAL USES
• Parking lot/strip mall east of the existing US 17 north of Main Street	• Mixed-use commercial/residential
• Parking lot/park site west of the existing US 17 north of Main Street	• Mixed-use commercial/residential; welcome center
• Lot immediately north of the train depot, adjacent to new northbound US 17	• Office/retail uses with pedestrian/bicycle path and greenway
• Property between Palmetto and Oak streets and 5th and 4th avenues that is damaged and underutilized	• New retail and shops - space available for up to 70,000-square-foot building, and array of smaller retail establishments
• Southeast corner of the new northbound US 17 and Main Street	• Two-story library, civic space center; plaza for farmers market; retail
• Property south of the Wauchula State Bank between the new US 17 split pair	• Two-story parking structure surrounding by mixed-use commercial
• Property between East Bay and Orange Street and US 17	• Garden apartments

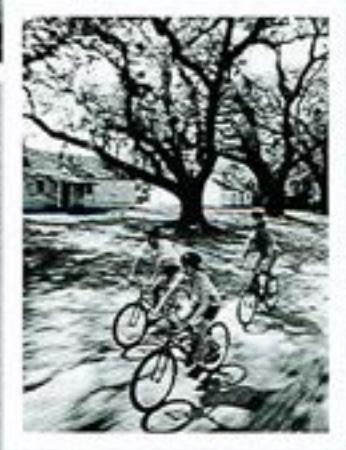


Conceptual drawing of the Welcome Center



### Improve Infrastructure

Infrastructure is the backbone of a community and directly supports economic growth, social welfare, and a better physical environment. Amenities such as water, wastewater, public safety, good roads, and sidewalks provide peace of mind and enhance quality of life. Continued growth within the county, combined with such important developments as opening the new US 17 northbound lanes, will require long-term infrastructure planning. These projects highlight some of the needed expansions to ensure that future growth in the county is supported.



*improve Infrastructure*

## Update Local Mitigation Strategy and Sheltering Plan

Recovery Value: MODERATE

### RECOVERY VALUE

Local Mitigation Strategy (LMS) planning provides Hardee County the opportunity to reduce disaster losses and improve community safety. This plan will identify projects to minimize future losses and setbacks like those suffered during the storms of 2004.

### GOAL

Revise existing LMS plan and list of projects for Hardee County so that future losses can be reduced or prevented.

### PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The LMS process brings mutual-aid partners, local leaders and stakeholders together to identify and prioritize potential projects to reduce risk. The preparation of an updated LMS includes identifying potential hazards, analyzing vulnerability, and proposing specific mitigation measures. Updating these plans will provide a prioritized framework for decisions and actions, and the county can begin implementing the highest priority projects as soon as funding is available to provide safe shelter and protect lives and property.

The LMS is a pre-requisite for project-related funding under FEMA's Pre-Disaster Mitigation and Hazard Mitigation Grant Programs (HMGPs), which allow communities to compete for mitigation funding before and after disasters, and will assist in reducing losses throughout the region.

### OPTIONS

#### Assess Local Mitigation Strategy

Reach out to community leaders, local government leaders, non-governmental agencies, private non-

profits, the school district, and others to examine where projects stand in the current LMS, and list projects that should be added to it.

#### Examine Hurricane Evacuation Plan and Comprehensive Community Sheltering Plan

The county should update the existing Hurricane Evacuation Plan and Comprehensive Shelter Plan to consider recent growth and changes to infrastructure and demographics of Hardee County and the lessons learned from the 2004 hurricanes. Shelter space is scarce in Hardee County, and there is concern about using schools as shelters due to school days lost in the recent disaster. The plan should also address the sheltering of pets. Tie the sheltering scheme to the overall evacuation plan for various emergency/disaster scenarios.

#### Repair and Build New Shelters and SafeRooms

##### Alternative A:

- Rebuild damaged public structures that have been identified by the county as public shelters, incorporate strengthening or hardening technologies, and expand the effectiveness of available shelters.
- Construct at least two new multiple-use facilities to expand overall available shelter capacity of the community. Build them to Hurricane Category 4 survival levels and out of the 100-year flood plain. These facilities could include capacity for special needs individuals.
- Develop an incentive-based and/or financial assistance program to encourage the retrofitting of existing structures (especially such essential and critical facilities as the Florida Hospital, the Hardee County Health Department, and the Florida Institute for Neurological Rehabilitation) and incorporate SafeRoom technologies into new homes, businesses, and public buildings.
- Retrofit existing community centers as hardened shelters for manufactured home parks.
- Build at least one shelter for special needs populations.
- Develop a comprehensive educational program on evacuation and sheltering issues.

##### Alternative B:

- Rebuild damaged public structures that have been identified by the county as public shelters, incorporate strengthening or hardening technologies, and expand the effectiveness of available shelters.
- Develop a comprehensive education program on evacuation and sheltering issues.

### COST

Assess Local Mitigation Strategy .....\$10,000  
 Examine Comprehensive Community Sheltering Plan.....\$40,000  
 Repair and build new shelters and SafeRooms (estimated at a rate of 10 sq.ft./person and \$75/sq.ft.)

##### Alternative A -

Cost varies by size of structure .....\$12,000,000  
 Rebuild damaged public shelters  
 Construct two new multi-use facilities  
 Retrofit Community Center  
 Construct one special needs shelter

##### Alternative B -

Cost varies by size structure .....\$2,000,000  
 Rebuild damaged public structures



Floodproofing — house raised above flood level.



Homes built to current standards withstand coastal hurricane conditions



Hurricane shutter



Recovery Value: MODERATE

## Upgrade Facilities for Public Safety and Emergency Management

### RECOVERY VALUE

The hurricanes damaged Hardee County's public safety infrastructure, revealing vulnerabilities and jeopardizing the community's health and safety. Addressing these issues will provide a moderate recovery value as it will repair, strengthen, improve, and consolidate multiple facilities, allowing agencies to better respond to both disasters and everyday needs. For the community to fully recover and to avert future losses, it is important to provide state-of-the-art facilities and systems for these essential functions.

### GOAL

Provide facilities that are safe and secure for the staff, equipment, and public, to secure a full range of public safety services for residents of Hardee County to ensure quick and effective response to future disasters and everyday needs.

### PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Rebuild, improve, and strengthen Hardee County facilities housing fire, emergency medical services, law enforcement, 911 communications centers, and the emergency operations center and training center. Establish a mobile command unit and integrate public safety communications. Strengthen facilities to meet Florida hurricane standards for essential facilities and floodproof where needed. Expand and strengthen facilities to serve as emergency shelters, consistent with the evacuation and sheltering plans.

This comprehensive approach will help coordinate services among the Hardee County law enforcement, emergency management, and fire agencies. It will be funded by a combination of federal, state, local, and private funds. Elements of this system and estimated costs include:

### OPTIONS

- Improve county-wide public safety facilities incorporating multiple functions, including fire, emergency medical services, 911 communications services, emergency operations center, and law enforcement services. Combine and coordinate as appropriate. Harden and floodproof facilities to withstand high water and winds.
- Repair separate facilities for each of the county emergency operations center, fire, emergency medical services, and 911 communications services, only to pre-disaster conditions.

### COST

Project Element	Estimated Cost
-----------------	----------------

<i>(In order of priority identified by local public safety officials)</i>	
New, hardened joint fire/police stations in Bowling Green and Zolfo Springs,*	\$2,439,000ea.
A new central Hardee County emergency operations center, training and administrative center.	\$1,460,000
Improved public-safety communications systems including replacement tower(s) and UHF/800 MHz communications capability.	\$1,000,000
Floodproofing, hardening, and expansion of the County Sheriff's operation, including jail. Move emergency communications system above floodplain.	\$315,000
Hardening and improvements for Hardee County central Fire Station #1.**	\$600,000
Hardening for the Wauchula Police Station, including storm shutters.	\$45,000
Backup power generators for the sheriff, police (Wauchula, Bowling Green, and Zolfo Springs), fire, and emergency operations facilities.	\$150,000
Mobile command post.	\$400,000

\*Optional project could be limited to fire station only at an estimated cost of \$533,723 per community.

\*\*Optional project for Fire Station #1 could be limited to storm shutters at an estimated cost of \$45,000



Recovery Value: MODERATE

## Improve Water, Wastewater and Stormwater Facilities

### RECOVERY VALUE

Targeted improvements to the water, wastewater, and stormwater facilities are integral to the safety, health, and growth of the county. Upgrades are important for community quality of life and the county's ability to attract new business.

### GOAL

Enhance and build better public works infrastructure to support Hardee County's long-term growth.

### PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Improve water, wastewater and stormwater facilities. The county's water and wastewater plants need to be upgraded to support development of the industrial park and other planned development on the US 17 redevelopment corridor.

### OPTIONS

**Aerial Photo:** The county could have a one-foot interval aerial map to assist in planning infrastructure. The aerial photo could have countywide coverage, horizontal and vertical control, and the same coordinates as the county's current Geographic Information System (GIS).

**Master Plan:** Prepare a water and wastewater master plan. The objective is to provide a cost/benefit summary comparing the consolidation of water and wastewater for the county with separate systems. A master plan for stormwater is described in the next section.

**Generators:** The county does not have reliable alternative power for emergencies. With a new generator system in place, Hardee County will be able to independently run their water and wastewater systems with supplemental power. There should be at least six generators strategically placed near water wells, sanitary lifting stations, and water and wastewater treatment plants.

**Plant upgrades:** The county's water and wastewater system is in urgent need of an upgrade. Water and wastewater plants are operating at capacity. The wastewater plants at Bowling Green and Zolfo Springs need to be upgraded and new lines installed to increase capacity. The existing water plants and the water delivery system in all three cities should also be upgraded. The entire system is located in a corridor of less than 20 miles along highway US 17.

Springs need to be upgraded and new lines installed to increase capacity. The existing water plants and the water delivery system in all three cities should also be upgraded. The entire system is located in a corridor of less than 20 miles along highway US 17.

### COST

Project Option	Estimated Cost
Upgrade the Water Treatment Plants, Bowling Green and Zolfo Springs (Cost per plant) .....	\$4,500,000
Wastewater Collection System Improvements for Hardee County .....	\$2,376,000
Master Plan .....	\$1,000,000
Upgrade the Wastewater Treatment Plants, Bowling Green and Zolfo Springs (Cost per plant) .....	\$4,500,000
Water Distribution System Improvements for Hardee County .....	\$7,920,000
Back-up Generators .....	\$300,000



## Develop a Hardee County Stormwater Master Plan

### RECOVERY VALUE

Sound stormwater and floodplain management is critical for long-term sustainable development in Hardee County and is of great interest to the community. In the post-disaster period, Hardee County has an opportunity to improve planning, maintenance, and management of its stormwater system. A stormwater master plan for Hardee County will be facilitated because the tri-county area is linked regionally to the Southwest Florida Water Management District (SWFWMD), the state entity in charge of stormwater regulations. SWFWMD has a program to help local counties improve their stormwater facilities by matching 50 percent of the funds needed for improvements.

### GOAL

Provide enhanced stormwater and floodplain management to Hardee County to meet current needs and allow for future expansion and development.

### PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Prepare a stormwater master plan, including flood protection plans for Hardee County. The stormwater master plan will allow the county to make educated decisions on its infrastructure, land use, and land development. Creation of a stormwater utility company or entity will provide a mechanism for the county to collect old and new development funding to finance future stormwater and flood control improvements.

### OPTION

#### Initiate Phase I

Inventory stormwater structures. Initiate the implementation of a stormwater utility and flood protection plan. County staff will require a Geographic Information System (GIS) technician and software to accomplish the inventory.

Recovery Value: COMMUNITY INTEREST

### Proceed with Phase II

Identify urgent projects for construction and develop a 5-year capital improvement plan partially funded by the stormwater utility. The stormwater utility will generate revenues to fund the operation and maintenance of the system and would be expected to provide limited funding for the capital improvement plans.

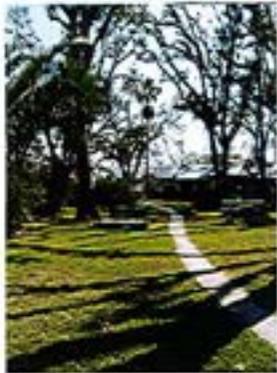
### COST

#### Hardee Stormwater

Master Plan (Phase I and Phase II) .....	\$400,000
--	-----------



Recovery Value: **COMMUNITY INTEREST**



**RECOVERY VALUE**

An important element of long-term recovery is the ability of individuals to physically access economic, social, and community services. An efficient transportation network promotes greater independence for seniors, individuals with special needs, teens, and low-income residents. A series of small-scale and neighborhood-level improvements complements and integrates with the larger regional connectivity project. The community has expressed great interest in this project.

**GOAL**

Enhance neighborhood-level transportation linkages and systems and improve quality of life for Hardee County residents.

**PROJECT DESCRIPTION**

Provide improved traffic controls and signals, which will be increasingly important as the new US 17 opens. Enhance sidewalks, especially on streets and corridors that link to school facilities. Pave roads in Wauchula and throughout the county to improve access.

**OPTIONS**

- Perform a signal warrant traffic study for Will Duke Road/US 17 intersection in Magnolia Manor.
- Improve the signal and traffic movement at SR 64/Oak Street intersection.
- Upgrade the existing roadway and facilities on SR 64, east of US 17 in Zolfo Springs that is prone to severe flooding.
- Rebuild the SR 64/East Main Street intersection in conjunction with the recently completed FDOT study.
- Pave and/or widen, install curbs, storm water control and sidewalks on unimproved streets including:
  - Captiva, Lee, and Monroe Streets south of Hardee Street just south of Bowling Green (4,000 linear feet).
  - McEwen, Keeton, Rainey and Rigdon Roads leading to a proposed school building in Wauchula Hills (5,000 linear feet).
  - Martin Luther King Jr. between Bay Street

**Connect People and Places**

and Will Duke Road in Magnolia Manor (7,000 linear feet).

- Riverside Drive and associated streets in Riverview (8,000 linear feet).
- Stormwater improvements for streets in Limestone.

**COST**

Project Option	Estimated Cost
Signal Warrant Study - Will Duke/US 17	.....\$10,000
SR 64/Oak Street Improvements	.....\$30,000
SR 64/East Main Street Rebuild	.....\$100,000
Sidewalk Construction	.....\$20 per linear foot
Curb and Gutter Construction	.....\$15 per linear foot
Subtotal sidewalk/curb/gutter	.....\$840,000
Asphalt paving (\$2 per square foot)	.....\$200,000

*(Costs reflect material, labor and overhead)*





## Build Homes and Communities

Projects identified within this section address the severe housing shortage in Hardee County in a progression, starting with planning, moving to developing housing resources at the local and regional level, and finishing with implementation of physical housing projects and associated services and amenities to address the needs of the community.

Initially, projects focus on planning for housing development. Assessing the needs of the community and the resources available creates an understanding of where to begin the difficult task of providing appropriate housing. In addition to gathering information, organizations at the local and regional level will help drive and prioritize the needs of the community. The creation of a Community Development Corporation can provide organization at the local level to address the housing needs of low-income residents.

The projects identified in Building Homes and Communities, demonstrate the ability of housing to move beyond the physical structure of the home to impact the greater community. Creating a safe and stable environment benefits not only individuals moving into a new home or apartment, but also helps stabilize neighborhoods that may be experiencing decline, resulting in a stronger community and greater economic investment.

Quality facilities make an area attractive for residents and newcomers to a community. These projects focus on improvements to services and facilities for health care, parks and recreation, and community facilities. The projects revitalize and stabilize communities, foster civic pride, and enhance the quality of life.

Building a new neighborhood development in a key location, with a mix of housing options that includes homeownership and rental opportunities and other community facilities, would serve as a starting point for additional investment in the surrounding community.



# Build Homes and Communities

## Build Housing Capacity

Recovery Value: HIGH

### RECOVERY VALUE

The demand for housing in Hardee County is substantial. To best utilize potential and existing resources, a study must be undertaken to identify the most effective way to build new homes and rehabilitate existing housing.

### GOAL

Develop the planning capacity and resource infrastructure to support a comprehensive approach to housing. Identify housing options for all income ranges and encourage housing growth, which meets the unique needs of Hardee County. Develop a plan to target resources and funding where they will achieve the greatest impact.

### PROJECT DESCRIPTION

A housing study and comprehensive plan should be undertaken to identify various housing needs, resources, locations, and housing delivery systems. Once the needs have been identified, local organizations can build capacity to plan, develop, and implement housing and community development programs and projects. The city and county governments can then engage community organizations, nonprofit housing providers, and for-profit developers in partnerships to develop targeted housing.

#### Develop a Comprehensive Housing Plan

As a result of the disaster, the demand for housing in Hardee County is high. A comprehensive housing study should be undertaken to identify the best way to incorporate new and existing housing into Hardee County. A Comprehensive Housing Plan will identify the appropriate balance of housing opportunities and locations. Elements of the Housing Plan should include:

- Housing Assessment/Needs Study
- Infill Housing Plan
- Relocation Plan
- Housing Strategy
- Consider establishing a regional consortium to apply to HUD for federal HOME and Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funding.

#### Develop a Community Development Corporation

Establish a Community Development Corporation (CDC) with the assistance of local and national partners. The CDC could build capacity and experience by initially partnering with an established organization, such as Centro Campesino, Everglades Community Association, and Homes for Hillsborough, Volunteers of America, and others. The CDC could be effective in developing projects providing decent, safe and affordable housing for low and moderate-income persons. Projects the CDC may potentially undertake include:

- Coordinate and partner with housing organizations and developers to construct affordable housing developments.
- Build infill housing to utilize existing land within targeted neighborhoods.
- Acquire and rehabilitate housing for homeownership opportunities.
- Homeownership Counseling and Fair Housing Programs

#### Create a Regional Community Action Agency

A regional, multi-service, organization could provide an opportunity to obtain local dedicated funding from federal sources through an establishment of a consortium. The regional agency would also provide the opportunity to consolidate administrative overhead for operating existing programs such as the State Housing Initiative Program and Small Cities Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) and Community Services Block Grant (CSBG) programs. Combining programs under one organization would allow the agency to hire experienced staff and management. Some of these programs could include:

- Create a Housing Referral and Resource Center to provide information and services on housing opportunities throughout the county.
- Create a Rental Registration and Licensing Program to protect the health, safety and well being of the occupants of rental housing, a permitting process would require properties be inspected annually and prior to occupancy.

- Create a Title Clearance Program to assist Hardee County residents, non-profit organizations and the local government, in obtaining clear title to property for access to public programs and assistance.

#### Develop a Community Land Trust

A Community Land Trust (CLT) will enhance the community by acquiring neglected property and making it available for the purpose of affordable housing developments.

#### Increase Construction Capacity

The number of skilled trade workers in Hardee County could be increased through innovative programs that benefit both the individual and the community. These programs are job-training initiatives that increase the labor base, teach trade skills while potentially reducing labor costs for constructing homes across Hardee County. Programs might include:

- Create an apprenticeship program that could partner professionals and organizations with individuals interested in learning and working in specific trades for on the job training and future employment programs
- Implement a Section 3 Program to provide job training, employment, and contracting opportunities for low-or very-low income residents in connection with projects and activities funded with federal dollars.
- Create a Youthbuild program to train and employ local youth who have dropped out of high school.
- Support Self-Help housing initiatives, which lower the cost of home construction by reducing labor costs through volunteer and homeowner participation in building. Organizations currently working on self-help initiatives include Habitat for Humanity and Catholic Charities.
- Establish a Rehabilitation Specialist Program to help homeowners with assessing repair costs, negotiating with contractors, and obtaining permits.

### COST

Comprehensive Housing Study	\$60,000
Community Development Corporation (3-yrs)	\$225,000
Community Action Agency (3-yrs.)	\$300,000
Community Land Trust (3-yrs.)	\$60,000
Interfaith/interagency Coordinating organization/Increasing Capacity	\$60,000
<b>Totals</b>	<b>\$645,000</b>



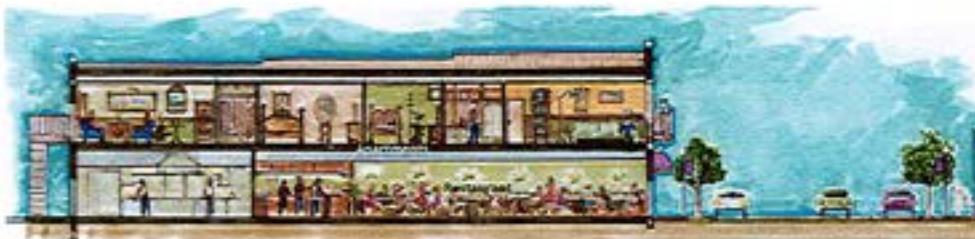
Recovery Value: HIGH

## Create Housing

### RECOVERY VALUE

As a result of the hurricanes, over 500 homes were damaged or destroyed in Hardee County. This represents a large portion of the housing stock, making housing a critical need and this project a high recovery value. The extensive damage to existing buildings and lack of adequate housing choices prior to the hurricanes make housing of all types an essen-

Section showing redeveloped AG Smith Building as mixed use



tial aspect of community stability and long-term recovery in Hardee County.

### GOAL

Provide a wide range of housing options within Hardee County, the City of Wauchula, and the Towns of Zolfo Springs and Bowling Green.

### PROJECT DESCRIPTION

A variety of housing options can be constructed to meet the needs of the diverse community. Multiple organizations, associations and government agencies can develop and implement each project, and a newly formed Community Development Corporation (CDC) could play a large role in forming partnerships and initiating the development of each of the projects.

#### Build a Neighborhood Development

To address the needs of Hardee residents, a CDC could develop a "Model Housing Project," in a key location, with a mix of housing options that include homeownership and rental. The development could serve as a magnet for additional investment in rehabilitation and growth of housing in the surrounding community. This planned community development

initiative would include: community facilities, recreation and other amenities to support the people that live there and the surrounding community.

Potential locations for development are along the new northbound US 17, near downtown Wauchula and at Hardee and Lake Branch Road in Bowling Green. A more detailed description of a neighborhood development can be found on page 22.

#### Develop an Affordable Senior Community

Construct a senior living facility in Hardee County to utilize available land for seniors wishing to move to a community environment or who can no longer afford to live in their current location. A development of 60 small one-bedroom apartments or clustered units could potentially serve low-income elderly. In addition to the living units, space can be designed to include a small community center for social and educational activities. Partnerships could be formed with the Hardee Housing Authority, HUD, the Florida Department of Elder Affairs and private partners. A location should be selected that is close to other facilities and retail developments to avoid isolating residents. Potential locations include: Main Street, west of downtown Wauchula or between Dixiana Drive and Chester Avenue in Bowling Green.

#### Develop Mixed-Use Housing Opportunities

Create livable space combined with retail to increase economic viability. Business owners will experience an increase in profits as residents seek out services nearest their homes.

Renovate or construct new buildings in Downtown Wauchula to provide rental units over commercial establishments. Mixed-use residential developments in this area could foster a vibrant downtown. Renovating two story buildings with at least 8,000 square feet of second story space would provide the greatest return on investment. To encourage the development of housing in conjunction with existing retail, tax credits could be offered for owners converting upper level downtown space to residential.

#### Rebuild or Replace HUD Assisted Housing

Rebuild and enhance HUD assisted housing stock to provide long term housing solutions to low-income residents displaced by the disaster. Demolish and

replace the approximately 100 units damaged during the hurricanes. Housing should be designed to ensure that all units are accessible to those with disabilities.

#### Options

- Rebuild units on land occupied by destroyed units.
- Relocate units to available tract of land large enough to accommodate replacement housing, at a location to be determined.
- Construct replacement units on scattered sites throughout the community.

Replacing housing units throughout the community instead of in one concentrated area could assist in encouraging mixed income housing developments, creating a diverse socio-economic community.

#### Develop Housing for Agricultural Workers and Families

Construct community targeted toward farm workers to provide an affordable, safe and sanitary environment. The development can include housing for families and single individuals, as well as services, such as daycare, health facilities and educational opportunities.

#### Build a Mixed Income Rental Housing Project

Create opportunities for rental through public-private partnership. Provide incentives for developers, such as tax credits. Potential locations for development could be along US 17 north of Wauchula or at the River Chase Complex in Wauchula.

Proposed Projects	Estimated Cost
Neighborhood Development	
40-Acre Development .....	\$35,600,000
Senior Community	
60 Units and community space .....	\$1,723,000
Mixed Use Housing	
20,000 sf renovation	
of residential over retail .....	\$3,000,000
Agricultural Worker Housing	
60 single family/60 apartment units .....	\$8,100,000

## Build a Neighborhood Development

Recovery Value: HIGH

### RECOVERY VALUE

Hardee County is in need of a multi-use development to provide the catalyst for social and economic growth. The development could provide homes, economic and educational opportunity, and serve as a model for future growth and expansion.

17, south of Main Street, close to downtown to allow residents to take advantage of services close to home. The development would be near the proposed multi-functional community center to create a corridor for active public and private development. Residents could support new business development throughout the corridor and utilize the library at the community center for job training and resources. Each aspect is discussed in full on other pages of the plan but are identified here to

family homes and 60 duplex homes could be constructed.

### Multi-Purpose Community Facility

A central community facility could contain a library, meeting rooms, a small business incubator, computers for public use and job training classes.

### Parks and Recreation

The park area could be incorporated into the neighborhood design and include a baseball field,

ment, along US 17, will utilize the newly constructed highway and serve to attract traffic to the area.

### Economic Opportunities

Integrating residential and retail in the development will encourage small businesses along US 17 and Main Street in Wauchula which could assist in the economic recovery of the community and the city. The community facility could serve the neighborhood by offering computer classes and job training workshops to increase employment opportunities for residents.

### Option

Other potential locations may be developed on a smaller scale, focusing on housing, but including space for community gathering and small-scale retail services. The 20-acre plot near Hardee and Lake Branch Road in Bowling Green could be feasible for a neighborhood development. The land is zoned for residential construction and near existing utilities, providing a natural fit into the surrounding community. An additional benefit of locating new homes and services in this area is the impact to the periphery area. Constructing quality, affordable single-family homes, parks and retail space in this location could serve as a catalyst to revitalizing the entire neighborhood by bringing resources to the community. The 20-acre development could contain 34 single-family homes, room for retail establishment, a soccer field, baseball field, two basketball courts, 2 playgrounds, a small pavilion and a picnic grove.



### COST

Project Option	Estimated Cost
Citrus Grove Park (Wauchula)	\$35,600,000
Lake Branch Road (Bowling Green)	\$7,423,000

### GOAL

The goal is to create a community, supported by a mix of housing, recreation, and education, to act as a catalyst for neighborhood development.

### PROJECT DESCRIPTION

An example of a neighborhood development project could be illustrated through the Citrus Grove Park development, along the new northbound US

demonstrate the connection of each element to neighborhood developments.

### Housing

A wide range of housing options, including market rate and subsidized; single-family and duplexes, could give all residents the chance to live in the house they can most comfortably afford. 68 single-

basketball courts, a picnic grove, small play parks, a soccer field and open green space for general use.

### Paths and Roadways

Constructing safe pedestrian walkways from the development to the downtown area and the potential community center could assist in creating an active downtown. The location of the develop-



Recovery Value: MODERATE

## Improve Health and Human Services



### RECOVERY VALUE

Improved health and human services will enhance the quality of residents' lives and support economic development by ensuring a healthy workforce. This project provides a moderate level of recovery for the county.

### GOAL

To increase the health and productivity of all Hardee County residents by providing a more complete range of health and human services.

### PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Damage to health and human service facilities has created challenges for these providers at a time when the storms increased demand for services. Addressing these issues and other ongoing needs will enable people to continue to live and work productively in the area.

This project includes several options for enhancing programs by making changes to existing facilities, such as the Hardee County Health Department and the Florida Hospital, or through other entities, including the Heartland Rural Health Network, the Health Care Task Force, or a Community Action Agency.

### OPTIONS

#### Assess, Form Strategic Alliances

Conduct an in-depth needs assessment. Identify programs and services to address issues, and hire a grants manager/planner. Create an integrated, cost-effective health care system through strategic alliances with providers, within and outside the county, to improve patient care.

#### Improve Florida Hospital Facilities and Services

##### Alternative A: Expand Emergency/Urgent Care and Medical Transport Services

The Florida Hospital's emergency center could be enhanced to improve access and urgent care facilities. It would be supported by expanded medical transport services.

##### Alternative B: Build New Surgery Center and Expand ICU

A new surgery center and more intensive care unit beds could be added to the current hospital. Currently, more than 90 percent of surgeries for county residents are performed outside Hardee County.

##### Alternative C: Establish an Outpatient Surgery Center/Ambulatory Care Center

An ambulatory center could be built to perform outpatient surgeries and to provide urgent care, cardiopulmonary rehabilitation services, and a birthing center.

##### Alternative D: Build New Hospital

The Florida Hospital building needs to be replaced with a larger, modern, hardened facility with operating rooms, additional diagnostic equipment, a 25-bed capacity with the ability to expand, an emergency room with private beds, Intensive Care Unit beds, obstetrics, and other services.

##### Establish a Multi-Specialty Office Complex

For ease of referrals and access to hospital care, this complex could be part of the Florida Hospital. It could also be placed elsewhere in the community. The following options could be housed separately or combined into a single complex.

- Develop a health and human services facility with a bilingual staff, evening office hours, and transportation services to accommodate a wider range of clients. This facility could include office spaces to be used by specialists from outside Hardee County on a rotating schedule. Specialties might include optometry, cardiology, obstetrics/gynecology, pediatrics, pulmonary, orthopedics, gastroenterology, endocrinology, neurology, etc.
- Develop a Family/Women's/Pediatric Health Clinic that includes a family practitioner, prenatal to primary care, health education, and dental.

##### Create Assisted Living and Long-Term Care Facility and Adult Day Health Services

Build a long-term care or assisted living facility. Increase adult day health and home health care services for the elderly and special needs individuals. Include transportation services, and reinstate

Meals on Wheels program. If a new hospital is built, the old Florida Hospital building may serve as a long-term care facility.

##### Provide Special Services and Mental Health Programs

These programs could include assessments, treatment plans, counseling, and referrals. Clients would include individuals or families with mental health/behavioral issues, alcohol and substance abuse problems, or special needs, as well as the homeless.

##### Build More Childcare Facilities

Build more childcare facilities in the Magnolia Manor area, Bowling Green, and Zolfo Springs. Existing facilities, such as the Hardee County Family YMCA local churches centers, could also be expanded to meet this need.

### COST

Project Option	Estimated Cost
Assessment .....	\$50,000-\$75,000
Grants Manager/Planner Salary .....	\$45,000
Expand Emergency/Urgent Care .....	\$500,000
New Surgery Center and Expanded ICU .....	\$2,000,000
Outpatient Surgery Center/ Ambulatory Care Center .....	\$4,500,000
Build New Hospital	
25 bed capacity .....	\$25,000,000
50 bed capacity .....	\$40,000,000
Multi-Specialty Complex (with either option) .....	\$5,000,000
Assisted Living/Long-Term Care Facility	
12 bed, private room .....	\$2,160,000
25 bed, private room .....	\$2,657,000
Safe room addition .....	\$20,000
Childcare facilities	
new, for 20 children .....	\$248,000
new, for 60 children .....	\$1,883,000
Childcare expansion (200 sq ft per child) .....	\$.65/sq ft

## Enhance and Expand Athletic/Recreational Facilities

### RECOVERY VALUE

High school football is a community institution, and the stadium has been an important fixture in local life since 1968. Due to damages the stadium sustained in the recent disaster, the community lacks a major sport facility, leaving many community and sports programs without a site for games. There is unified support in the community for enhancing and expanding athletic facilities and rebuilding the storm-damaged stadium. The project can be accomplished quickly and will be a visible sign of the area's recovery.

### GOAL

Rebuild, enhance, and expand athletic facilities to provide a place for recreational and sporting programs.

### PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Enhance and expand athletic and recreational facilities and fields for community use, including rebuilding and upgrading the Hardee Senior High School stadium facility. The community also needs better athletic facilities for soccer and baseball, better recreational facilities within neighborhood parks, and an expanded Hardee County Family YMCA. New and expanded facilities should be built and maintained in cooperation with the city, county, school board, and/or local YMCA.

### OPTION

- Rebuild the existing stadium at its current location; upgrade facilities to include improved public restroom facilities, new concession stand, repaving of the track surface and new visitor stands.
- Fund a master plan to determine the placement and layout of future athletic fields and explore options for using the middle school buildings for athletic facilities when the school moves in August 2006.

- Build a new soccer field complex on existing parkland just north of the Agri-Civic center site along Altman Road. Promote the construction and maintenance of athletic facilities in conjunction with future housing developments.
- Consider the feasibility of constructing a small water park at Pioneer Park.
- Develop an expansion plan for the Hardee County Family YMCA that may include an indoor track, basketball courts, and an indoor pool facility.
- Develop and enhance neighborhood parks in the following locations, including restrooms, play gyms, and athletic fields or equipment.
  - Magnolia Park in Magnolia Manor
  - Pyatt Park in Bowling Green
  - New neighborhood park on the east side of Zolfo Springs (exact location to be determined).
  - New neighborhood park in Limestone, perhaps coupled with existing churches in the area (exact location to be determined).

### COST

Project Option	Estimated Cost
Repair Hardee High School Stadium	\$600,000
Construct 2 improved soccer fields, an informal practice space, a field house with restrooms and 12 field lights at the existing park north of the Agri-Civic center	\$735,000
Construct the same as above at a new location (site acquisition not included)	\$1,141,000
Indoor courts, pool facility, track and associated support areas (potentially built in conjunction with the YMCA) approx.	\$3,592,000
Develop and Enhance Neighborhood Parks (average of 22,000)	\$300,000

## Enhance and Create Parks and Open Space

### RECOVERY VALUE

Development of new open space opportunities and enhancements to existing parks is an important community need. Enhancing existing park facilities and creating new open space opportunities in downtown is important to long-term economic recovery as it supports local business, draws visitors and tourists, and builds civic pride.

### GOAL

Develop open spaces and recreational parks, especially in downtown Wauchula, to complement the commercial and civic developments outlined within this plan.

### PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Town centers in Wauchula, Bowling Green, Zolfo Springs, and elsewhere in the county can be enhanced and improved with practical landscaping and infrastructure enhancements. Many park improvements could be made that would have manageable long-term maintenance costs.

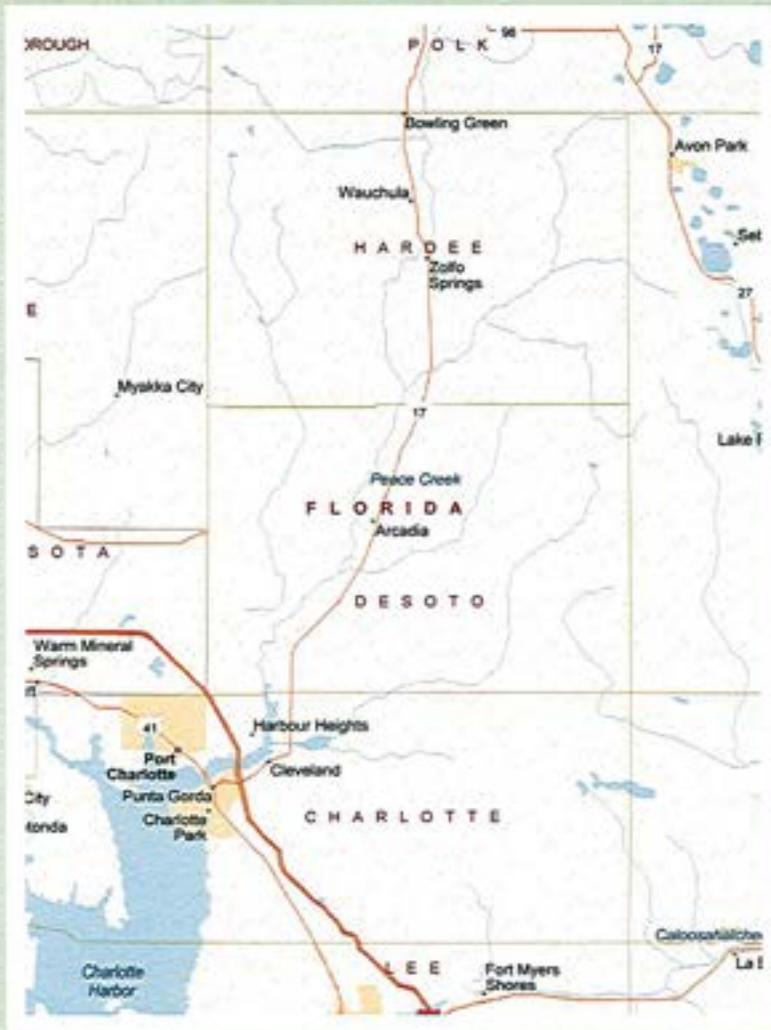
### OPTIONS

- Expand and enhance existing small-scale pocket parks in downtown Wauchula, particularly the existing park facility near the garden center. Improvements may include new seating, trash receptacles, lighting, planters or landscaping, and play gyms.
- Develop parking and a greenway trail between the Old Police Station site and the existing Heritage Park along the back of the Coker Fuel building.
- Develop a design plan for the existing former railway right-of-way strip of land, parallel to the new US 17 North, in which the Train Depot is sited.
- Install landscape features and enhancements to existing parking lots within downtown Wauchula. This may also include the installation of pervious paving options using grass and/or aggregate stone placed existing parking lots and alleys.

### COST

Project Option	Estimated Cost
Pocket park installation (\$9/sq.ft.)	\$90,000
Improvements to parking lots (\$2-\$6/sq.ft.)	\$2,000-\$6,000





## Regional Projects

The hurricanes affected a large section of south central Florida, uniting communities in Charlotte, DeSoto and Hardee counties behind the goal of recovery. Although the disaster caused problems, it also opened opportunities for regional cooperation on projects that could not be undertaken by a single entity.

The following projects address a variety of important regional community needs for the Florida heartland region, including better regional transportation connectivity, enhanced telecommunications, higher education and training opportunities, tri-county health programs, and environmental assessment. Taken as a group, these projects have the ability to build unprecedented cooperation and collectively leverage the region's influence for long-term recovery.

*Regional Projects*

## Improve Regional Transportation Connectivity

Recovery Value: **HIGH**



### RECOVERY VALUE

Improving the regional transportation connectivity has a high recovery value due to the strong relationship between transportation networks and commerce. Upgrading major transportation routes within the region will improve transportation flow; inter-regional linkages and access to markets; and the functional effectiveness of the state's emergency evacuation routes. Immediate improvements to regional routes, such as US 17 and potential east/west routes, will foster existing and new business opportunities.

US 17 is the economic spine of the region. Substantial economic development within Hardee and DeSoto Counties is highly unlikely without these improvements. Completion is critical to Charlotte County, as well, for both economic development and public safety as the primary evacuation route. The projects mentioned below, which are both short- and long-term in nature, support the local, county, and state transportation initiatives and Florida's Strategic Intermodal System (SIS).

### GOAL

Provide continuous north-south and east-west linkages from Charlotte and through DeSoto and Hardee Counties to improve inter-regional linkages and access between economic regions.

### PROJECT DESCRIPTION

#### EXPEDITE COMPLETION OF US 17 IMPROVEMENTS

Fast-track the construction schedule of US 17 to complete four lanes from Charlotte County (US 17/SR41) to Hardee County (US 17/SR 664). These upgrades are critically needed to increase inter-regional mobility for people and freight while also providing better community linkages between the Tampa Bay, Heartland, and Southwest economic regions.

The proposed project action is to upgrade the existing two 12-foot lanes to four 12-foot lanes with median and 5-foot paved shoulders along certain segments of the corridor. Choke points and two-lanes in Charlotte County and at other segments along the US 17 corridor limit the highway's full capacity and ability to serve the region. Other segments that are in need of upgrade are from Charlotte County to Arcadia, DeSoto County; from Arcadia to Zolfo Springs, Hardee County; and from north Wauchula to Bowling Green, Hardee County.

#### CREATE A DEVELOPMENT PLAN AND ACCESS MANAGEMENT STRATEGY ALONG US 17

Because transportation investment shapes land use patterns, livability of communities and the quality of the environment, in conjunction with the completion of the four-lane upgrade of US 17, a land use/development plan would serve several purposes: (1) where appropriate, provide a land use and access management strategy especially for those areas along the corridor near downtown and other focal points of commercial concentration; (2) address how to optimize economic opportunities especially for damaged, vacant buildings, and vacant/underutilized lots along the corridor.

#### EVALUATE EAST-WEST TRANSPORTATION CORRIDORS

Improving the reliability, operational performance, economic opportunities and evacuation route options are objectives in evaluating east-west transportation alternatives between State Route (SR) 70/SR72 and SR 62.

SR 62 and SR 64 function as key east/west corridors and are in need of upgrading to facilitate economic development and better serve as evacuation routes. A transportation alternative analysis would evaluate

upgrading these and other east-west alternate routes in the county. FDOT gives greater emphasis to strategic links, and this corridor would provide links between coastal routes, relieve Interstate 4, and link Port Manatee facilities to the east as well as facilitate evacuation. Options for this project could include:

- Analyze and upgrade SR 62;
- Analyze and upgrade SR 64; or,
- Analyze and upgrade a different route.

#### Estimated Cost

Development Plan and Access Management Strategy Along US 17	
Hardee County: .....	\$150,000
DeSoto County: .....	\$15,000
Charlotte County: .....	\$250,000
East/West Corridor Study .....	\$50,000



## Improve Telecommunications and Internet Access

Recovery Value: **HIGH**

### RECOVERY VALUE

Upgrading the telecommunications and broadband infrastructure will significantly improve the region's ability to attract new and progressive businesses that compete within the global marketplace and utilize e-commerce over the next 20 years. This project will greatly improve the economic conditions of the counties by increasing the higher-wage job opportunities.

The modernization of the telecommunications system for the tri-county region will be a long-term initiative with multiple benefits. State-of-the-art wireless technology advances training and educational programs are essential to expanding economic opportunities for individuals and businesses and the quality of life for residents who use the Internet.



This project is identified in the state's strategic plan for economic development of rural areas and is consistent with the mission of Florida's High-Tech Corridor Council.

### GOAL

Enhance regional competitiveness and support sustainable enterprises to grow the regional economy. Improve telecommunications infrastructure and capabilities within the tri-county region.

### PROJECT DESCRIPTION

#### Develop a Telecommunications Plan and Implementation Strategy

In coordination with the state, counties, regional economic development entities, and private partners, evaluate the existing telecommunications system. Develop a plan that identifies desired systems (broadband, wireless technologies, cellular and local internet services), and establish a plan for phasing in necessary telecommunications upgrades. The plan will assess present capabilities and facilities and include the following steps:

- Inventory current sub-networks and functionality
- Evaluate the location of current nodes and service providers
- Develop a possible network of the above and vendors
- Identify telecommunications upgrades and new infrastructure
- Implementation strategy to include estimated costs and funding sources.

The plan will provide strategies for installation efficiencies, including the coordination of telecommunications upgrades with other public and private infrastructure improvements, such as the extensions and improvements planned for US 17 and other roadways.

#### Improve Linkages within Florida's High-Technology Corridor

The tri-county area is well positioned to incorporate a fiber-optic backbone for a network to connect to Florida's High-Tech Corridor along US 17. By expanding this designated corridor to Charlotte, DeSoto, and Hardee counties to the Tampa/Sarasota/Orlando/Space Coast High-Technology corridor. This crucial link will advance educational opportunities and training programs essential to expanding economic opportunities of individuals and businesses in the tri-county region.

### INFRASTRUCTURE OPTIONS

Work with public partners, such as the U.S. Economic Development Administration and Federal Trade Commission, other federal and state agencies, private partners, utility companies, telecommunication industries, and local businesses to identify appropriate telecommunications upgrades and new infrastructure options. New or enhanced infrastructure could include:

- Cell towers
- Fiber-optic cable
- Digital Subscriber Line
- Local multi-point distribution system
- Multi-point, multi-channel distribution system

### Estimated Cost

Planning: .....	\$200,000
Cell towers: .....	\$220,000/tower
Fiber-optic cable: .....	\$35,000/mile of cable
Digital Subscriber Line: .....	To Be Determined
Local multi-point distribution system: .....	To Be Determined
Multi-point, multi-channel distribution system: .....	To Be Determined

Recovery Value: MODERATE

## Expand and Promote Higher Education and Training



### RECOVERY VALUE

Education supports the growth of local businesses by attracting new companies and assisting in economic recovery of the area. Educational and training opportunities in a community directly affect the ability of people to pursue good jobs and move forward in their careers. In addition, people of all ages enjoy a higher quality of life through new learning opportunities.

Expanded educational and training opportunities will improve workforce capabilities. This project supports the Florida Heartland Rural Economic Development Initiative (FHREDI) in linking academics to job creation.

### GOALS

Provide additional training programs to increase the community's ability to grow and attract businesses. Ensure that young people and adults can obtain locally the educational training they need to pursue rewarding careers that support the area's economy.

### PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Identify emerging or unmet educational needs in DeSoto, Hardee and Charlotte counties. Confirm additional courses or training programs that should be offered through the high schools, technical centers, community colleges, and regional universities. Promote the value of higher education and increase awareness about local offerings to increase participation.

### OPPORTUNITIES

#### DEVELOP AND IMPLEMENT AN EDUCATIONAL/TRAINING NEEDS ASSESSMENT

A needs assessment study will identify the kind of jobs and training that people in the community need today and in the future. Participants would include students, parents, educators, area businesses, economic development specialists, government, faith and civic leaders.

#### ESTABLISH EDUCATION TASK FORCE

Establish a collaborative Education Task Force comprised of leaders from the county school board; education institution directors, presidents and/or superintendents; business leaders; and economic development specialists. This multi-agency group would meet regularly to coordinate efforts. Their goal would be to use the latest information available to provide the best overall mix of classes and courses of study to support current and future workforce development needs locally.

#### OFFER ADDITIONAL COURSES OR TRAINING PROGRAMS

Additional courses should be offered, based on the needs assessment study, in each county. They should include dual-enrollment (high school and college), vocational and agricultural extension training, college credit, workforce development and continuing education courses. These should be coordinated across the tri-county area to avoid unnecessary duplication while expanding the educational choices available. Remote learning options should be provided for place-bound individuals who cannot commute long distances.

#### PROVIDE MORE CLASSES FOR NON-TRADITIONAL STUDENTS

Provide additional off-site and night classes to increase access throughout community.

Expand English as a Second Language classes to include advanced levels.

Expand the number of vocational certificate training classes for working adults who have completed their high school classes, but have not graduated or obtained their GED.

#### EXPAND BACHELOR AND MASTER'S DEGREE PROGRAMS AND RESEARCH OPPORTUNITIES

Expand the number of programs offered locally through major universities, such as the University of South Florida, Florida Gulf Coast University, University of Florida and/or Barry University, in conjunction with area community colleges. Pursue graduate research opportunities on selected topics with area businesses.

#### DEVELOP EDUCATIONAL AWARENESS INITIATIVES

Develop marketing materials that educate and encourage middle and high school students to pursue advanced education and training opportunities.

Expand outreach efforts by local college and technical center counselors and increase the number of advisors and career fairs within the county school systems.

Set up additional mentoring and internship programs with area businesses to expose middle- and high-school students to career opportunities. This can include the Youth Build program for the construction profession.

Develop outreach marketing strategy and materials to promote Farm Workers Tuition Reimbursement program.

#### Estimated Costs

Needs Assessment .....	\$35,000 - \$45,000/county
Education Outreach Programs .....	\$30,000 - \$50,000/county



## Reduce Wildfire Risks

### RECOVERY VALUE

This project will reduce future damages to property and help to sustain future development. The implementation of these strategies will significantly enhance the safety of the region over the next several years.

### GOAL

Reduce potential loss of life and property damage by identifying and addressing potential wildfire risks.

### PROJECT DESCRIPTION

This project will use proven mitigation techniques and develop a multi-step process in coordination with the Florida Department of Forestry and other partners, to reduce the overall wildfire risks and vulnerabilities to lives and property.

### ACTION STEPS

#### DEFENSIBLE SPACE AND FUEL REDUCTION

Identify at-risk properties and create defensible space around them. Conduct fuel reduction efforts by priority in Wildland-Urban Interface (where buildings and structures meet forests). Educate community members to create defensible space for their own properties, and allow downed trees and other vegetative debris to decompose naturally.

#### BUILDING CODES AND ORDINANCES

Enhance construction codes and improve better enforcement of existing codes in the Wildland-Urban Interface.

#### REFORESTATION

Replant in strategic areas using specific species of trees. Allow existing trees and other plants to reproduce according to their normal cycles.

#### TREE TRIMMING AROUND POWER LINES

Thin trees near power lines to reduce vulnerability to power interruption.

### ESTIMATED COSTS

Defensible Space .....	\$250/acre
Fuels Reduction .....	\$400/acre
Building Codes and Ordinances .....	Minimal
Reforestation .....	\$50/acre
Tree Trimming near Power Lines .....	\$5000/mile



## Reinstate Tri-County Mobile Health Clinic

### RECOVERY VALUE

Providing a health outreach initiative through a tri-county mobile health clinic is a Community Interest project that will help ensure a more productive workforce, healthier families who contribute to the community's economic growth, children who are ready to learn in school, and essential services for the elderly and disadvantaged.

Reinstating convenient access to affordable health care within the next 12 months will support people's ability to return to work, keep their jobs, and perform effectively for current employers and prospective new businesses. This project supports FHRED's initiative to link health care with economic development.

### GOAL

Ensure that all people, including those who are low-income and/or lack adequate transportation and live in outlying areas of Charlotte, DeSoto and Hardee counties, can receive vital medical, dental and vision services.

### PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Reinstate the mobile health clinic, known as the Care-A-Van, through a collaborative partnership with the county health departments, area hospitals, physicians, dentists, optometrists, volunteers and other social service agencies. Provide complementary services through a local clinic as appropriate in each county.

### OPTIONS:

#### Operate a Care-A-Van

Provide basic medical services through the Care-A-Van from Tuesday through Saturday in Hardee, DeSoto, and Charlotte counties. Staff the van with a physician's assistant, licensed nurse practitioner, and intake coordinator. Also involve medical and nursing program interns from the University of South Florida, University of Florida, Florida Gulf Coast University, Edison Community College and/or South

Florida Community College. Provide medications to clients on a donation payment basis.

#### Operate a Care-A-Van and Local Clinic

Operate a local health clinic that complements the Care-A-Van's outreach services. The local clinic would provide more primary care services, prenatal, pediatric and women's services, laboratory and diagnostic services. It also would provide dental and vision services. Staffing would include: a medical director, advanced registered nurse practitioner, three licensed practical nurses, one medical intake coordinator, two dental coordinators, one dental hygienist, and one dental and vision intake coordinator. Ten to 12 volunteer dentists and optometrists, as well as graduate-level interns, would participate on a rotating basis.

#### Estimated Cost

Operate Care-A-Van: .....	\$300,000/year
Operate Care-A-Van and One	
Local Health Clinic: .....	\$650,000/year

Note: Costs do not include the acquisition of the van which is currently owned by Bon Secours-St. Joseph Healthcare.





Recovery Value: COMMUNITY INTEREST

Launch 2-1-1 Helpline, Web Site, and Volunteer Resource Center



**RECOVERY VALUE**

The community has shown interest in launching a 2-1-1 helpline, web site, and a volunteer center. Non-profit and government health and human service agencies contribute to a community's vitality by assisting individuals and families with critical quality-of-life issues. Needs for these services exist on a daily basis, both within each county and throughout the region. They also must be addressed rapidly in crisis situations, which include the recent hurricanes, as well as major influenza outbreaks or other illnesses. Providing effective support requires the ability to connect people with the most appropriate services as quickly and efficiently as possible.

Launching a 2-1-1 Helpline, web site and Community Volunteer Center will improve communications and help people in Charlotte, DeSoto and Hardee counties address health and service needs that adversely affect their livelihoods and quality of life.

**GOALS**

Ensure that people have easy, centralized ways to access the community's extensive network of health and human service organizations and specialized programs. Also fully leverage the community's investment in its social services infrastructure and volunteers' offers to provide support.

**PROJECT DESCRIPTION**

Create a 2-1-1 Helpline and web site that will provide easy-to-remember, single points of contact that people can use to access needed services. Also establish a comprehensive, centralized Community Volunteer Center that effectively matches volunteers and donations with appropriate agencies and supports volunteer housing needs. Integrate the related databases.

**ACTION STEPS**

**LAUNCH 2-1-1 HELPLINE AND WEB SITE**

A 2-1-1 Helpline will be established to provide people with convenient access to comprehensive information about health and human service agencies and programs to meet their needs. By calling one number, callers can get information 24 hours a day, seven days a week, from trained information and referral counselors. A related web site and compre-

hensive social services database will be maintained and updated regularly.

In the tri-county area of DeSoto, Hardee and Charlotte counties, the initial 2-1-1 Helpline will be operated by the Charlotte County Human Services Department. It will be staffed by two full-time, trained information and referral counselors with additional support from the CARE agency. They will provide callers with helpful information from a database that includes 650+ support agencies and 1300+ programs.

The 2-1-1 Helpline and web site for DeSoto and Hardee counties will be established either as local county initiatives or in partnership with the Charlotte County operations to increase operating efficiencies. Other counties, such as Sarasota and Manatee, may also provide support or help create a larger, regional database about health and human services.

**ESTABLISH COMMUNITY VOLUNTEER CENTER**

The Community Volunteer Center will connect volunteers with agencies that need assistance. The center will support hurricane response needs initially, then ongoing volunteer assistance requests. Database management systems will help link volunteers' skills and interests with the right agencies. The center will be launched with a 48-bed volunteers' housing facility through Charlotte County Habitat for Humanity and the Interfaith, Interagency Network of Charlotte County. It also will include office space for INCC, the county's new unmet needs coordinating organization.

The Community Volunteer Center can be expanded regionally to support communications and volunteer needs in DeSoto and Hardee counties. Alternatively, separate, county-specific centers can be established.

**PROMOTE THE NEW 2-1-1 HELPLINE, WEB SITE AND VOLUNTEER CENTER PROGRAMS**

Launch these new programs with public awareness marketing campaigns.

**ESTIMATED COSTS**

2-1-1 Helpline and Web Site: ...\$80,000 in Charlotte  
 Community Volunteer Center: .....\$400,000  
 (land, infrastructure and building) in Charlotte  
 Marketing Campaign: \$10,000 - \$15,000 per county  
 (less with donated media placements)



## Develop Agricultural Water Conservation Programs

### RECOVERY VALUE

With 2003-2004 revenues in excess of \$71.5 million, citrus production is clearly the dominant economic driver in Hardee County. Enhancing the ability for growers to remain competitive by reducing their water distribution costs ensures that directly related local enterprises will continue to operate. These enterprises including, grove caretaking businesses, harvesting companies, juice processing plants, ladder producers, and fertilizer companies have a greater potential to remain in business and continue to employ county residents that are critical to the support of local businesses. In addition to reducing costs, participation in water conservation programs ensures that citrus growers will have the water needed to maintain healthy groves for generations to come. It also serves in reversing the perception of southern county residents that citrus production wastes water and instead promotes citrus growers as concerned citizens who recognize the importance of utilizing water wisely.

### GOAL

Develop mechanisms to strengthen citrus production in the region and conserve water. To significantly reduce citrus grower's up-front costs for participation in the FARMS (Facilitating Agricultural Resource Management Systems) program operated by the Southwest Florida Water Management District (SWFWMD).

### PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Existing programs such as FARMS provide a means for citrus growers to reduce the amount of water used while maintaining the grove's health. Currently, participation in these programs is minimal due to the large up-front investments required of the growers who over a 5- to 20-year period receive a 50 or 75 percent reimbursement of those costs.

- Increase funding to the FARMS program operated by the Southwest Florida Water Management District (SWFWMD) in order to provide citrus growers with 100 percent of all up-front costs. Require that the grower pay either the 25 or 50 percent match back to the funding agency over a period of five to twenty years.
- Establish a community development corporation in order to provide citrus growers with 100% of all up-front costs to participate in the FARMS program. Require that the grower pay either the twenty-five or fifty percent match back to the funding agency over a period of five to twenty years.

### ESTIMATED COST:

Initial .....	\$5 million
Annual Appropriations .....	\$1.5-2 million.



## Assess Water Quality and Environmental Issues

### RECOVERY VALUE

The quality of the rivers, streams, and Harbor are has sparked a lot of community interest among the residents of the three counties, and maintaining that quality is critical for their economies. An environmental assessment will ensure that important natural resources are preserved and development occurs in a sustainable manner over time.

### GOAL

Assess the current environmental quality of key regional resources and determine what mitigation efforts are needed to maintain and/or improve the environmental quality of the area.

### PROJECT DESCRIPTION

#### PREPARE A REGIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Undertake an environmental assessment to resolve questions related to existing and future water quality, potential environmental impact of significant projects in the region, and other key environmental issues identified by the state and the political subdivisions in the region.

The environmental assessment will cover the tri-county area and possibly beyond. Such an undertaking will require coordination among the three counties and the State of Florida. The assessment should address issues that are critical to the environmental quality of the area.

### ESTIMATED COST

Planning: .....	\$1,000,000
-----------------	-------------







# Hardee County Long-Term Recovery Projects



### 1 Plan for Downtown Development

Reevaluate downtown starting with a planning process and development forecasts, plan a historic development and marketing plan, and the redevelopment of lost opportunity vacant lots and historic downtown blocks.



### 2 Develop Land Adjacent to the New US 17

Reevaluate vacant, undeveloped building along US 17. Coordinate land use plans with transportation investment to optimize commercial development, maintain competition, and enhance quality of life.



### 3 Enhance Enterprise Development

Stimulate county-wide growth with projects such as a local economic center, an industrial center, a park, and innovative financial support mechanisms including micro-enterprise loans.



### 4 Assess Airport Feasibility

Facilitate an independent study to determine whether a proposed international cargo airport is feasible and would be a viable economic engine for the county and region.



### 5 Improve Regional Transportation Connectivity

Upgrade major transportation and emergency evacuation routes, including US 17 and a network of state roads, to improve mobility and economic linkage throughout the region and beyond.



### 6 Build Homes and Communities

Build a variety of housing options to appeal to diverse community members, including seniors, agricultural workers, people with special needs, and low- and moderate-income residents.

### 7 Plan for Housing Development

### 8 Build Capacity for Delivering Housing



### 7 Construct a Multi-Purpose Community Facility

Construct a multi-purpose facility and library to meet educational needs and provide activity spaces, a health/wellness resource center, opportunities, and improved access for state-of-the-art production.



### 8 Upgrade Telecommunications and Access to Broadband

Widespread improved telecommunications systems with state-of-the-art advanced technology, consistent with state goals for cost-efficient development, to expand economic opportunities and improve the quality of life.



### 9 Increase Tourism Develop a Peace River Heritage Corridor

Increase job and business opportunities and attract life locally by developing, marketing, and marketing the Peace River corridor and linking it to communities throughout the region.



### 10 Improve Water, Wastewater, and Stormwater Facilities

Protect public health and promote growth by targeting key improvements for water, wastewater, and stormwater services, such as expanded plants, upgraded and emergency backup power.



### 11 Expand and Promote Higher Education and Training Opportunities

Improve students' skills and make the area more attractive to businesses by identifying and providing additional courses targeted to higher education and regional training needs.



### 12 Develop Mixed-Use Opportunities

Reevaluate selected multi-story downtown buildings to include mixed-use housing such as loft/apartments, office space, a critical housing shortage and provide mixed-use opportunities as the ground floor (such as offices).



### 13 Enhance and Expand Athletic/Recreational Facilities

Rebuild the damaged Franklin High School stadium, develop enhanced athletic fields and playing fields, expand neighborhoods and regional park and recreation facilities.

## COMMUNITY VISION

The County's vision for the future is to be a vibrant, growing community that is safe, healthy, and economically strong. The County's vision is to be a community that is safe, healthy, and economically strong. The County's vision is to be a community that is safe, healthy, and economically strong.

The County's vision for the future is to be a vibrant, growing community that is safe, healthy, and economically strong. The County's vision is to be a community that is safe, healthy, and economically strong. The County's vision is to be a community that is safe, healthy, and economically strong.

The County's vision for the future is to be a vibrant, growing community that is safe, healthy, and economically strong. The County's vision is to be a community that is safe, healthy, and economically strong. The County's vision is to be a community that is safe, healthy, and economically strong.

The County's vision for the future is to be a vibrant, growing community that is safe, healthy, and economically strong. The County's vision is to be a community that is safe, healthy, and economically strong. The County's vision is to be a community that is safe, healthy, and economically strong.



### 14 Improve Health and Human Services

Expand and improve medical, health, and human services throughout the county, including hospitals, clinics, specialty long-term care, mental health, and child care facilities.



### 15 Build Research Center and Demonstration Farm on Reclaimed Mining Land

Conduct agricultural research to study optimal use of mining land.



### 16 Rebuild the Arena

Rebuild the Community Center to provide a venue for home and business events, exhibitions, production activities, public presentations, and other large-scale events.



### 17 Develop a Hardee County Stormwater Master Plan

Provide for sound economic and floodplain management by developing a stormwater master plan, implement urgent projects, and create a stormwater utility to fund maintenance.



### 18 Update Local Mitigation Strategy and Sheltering Plan

Update local plans to reduce disaster losses and provide safe shelter and emergency services, implement the highest priority projects, such as tubular and reinforced shelters.



### 19 Develop Agricultural Cooperatives

Strengthen local and family-owned agribusiness enterprises by developing a local agricultural cooperative that can market, add value, and promote members' products.



### 20 Upgrade Facilities for Public Safety and Emergency Management

Invest in public buildings and facilities for fire, law enforcement, emergency management, emergency medical, and communication services. Create a coordinated, comprehensive system, with joint or separate facilities.



### 21 Rebuild the County Mobile Health Clinic

Provide affordable health care by rebuilding, upgrading mobile health care units, in partnership with county health departments, medical services, and other service agencies.



### 22 Enhance Mining Reclamation

Modify requirements to allow off-site reclamation that meets environmental requirements to grow and breakback and build while increasing the available supply of mining land.



### 23 Launch a 1-1 Helpline, Walk Stop, and Volunteer Resource Center

Enhance access to the health and social services through a central helpline and walk stop, a 24-hour helpline center to assist and manage volunteers.



### 24 Connect People and Places

Create more accessible, connected, and more neighborhood and improve community quality of life by providing needed parking, landscaping, storm drainage, trails, bikeways, and sidewalks.



### 25 Assess Water Quality and Environmental Issues

Assess the quality of water and other key regional water resources and determine what mitigation measures are needed to preserve or improve the environment.



### 26 Enhance and Create Parks and Open Space

Enhance existing and create new local parks and open space with walking, biking, and play areas and neighborhoods that are connected with property rehabilitation and housing opportunities.



### 27 Reduce the Risk of Wildfire

## Recovery Value Indicators

- High
- Moderate
- Community Interest