



**A Common Community Vision  
For Greater Lowndes County**

**Report of Accomplishments  
December 2017**

# A Common Community Vision for Greater Lowndes County

Prepared by the Southern Georgia Regional Commission, the designated Metropolitan Planning Organization for the Valdosta Urbanized Area.

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## Introduction

The Valdosta-Lowndes Metropolitan Planning Organization is a federally designated regional transportation planning agency responsible for ensuring that existing and future expenditures for transportation projects and programs be based on a continuing, cooperative and comprehensive (3-C) planning process. Valdosta-Lowndes Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) is a transportation policy-making body made up of representatives from the local governments and transportation agencies with authority and responsibility in the metropolitan planning area.

One of the primary responsibilities of an MPO is to develop, and periodically update, a long-range transportation plan for the metropolitan area covering a planning horizon of at least twenty years that fosters (1) mobility and access for people and goods, (2) efficient system performance and preservation, and (3) good quality of life. The Valdosta-Lowndes MPO completed the required update of its long range transportation plan (LRTP), titled The 2040 Transportation Vision Plan, on September 2, 2015. The initial phases of this update process began in early 2013 with the Common Community Vision.

Prior to the initiation of the LRTP update process, it came to the attention of MPO staff that several other community-wide planning efforts would be underway during the same time period (2013 – 2016). These efforts included the update of the Greater Lowndes County Comprehensive Plan and the City of Valdosta Housing Plan update, among others. In addition, there are over 20 strategic and comprehensive plans guiding the growth and development of local governments, organizations and agencies. While these local plans cover vastly different subject material, there is a great deal of overlap in the goals, objectives and policies contained in the plans. However, no centralized effort was made to ensure coordination or consistency between the different plans, even though there are common themes and categories within them all.

Consequently, the 20-plus plans that govern the growth and development of our communities, health organizations, schools, universities, economic development agencies and many other institutions do not follow any common vision or goals. Staff and local officials felt that part of the update of the LRTP should include the review of local plans and the development of a common vision that could be utilized to unite all local planning efforts. This common vision became known as the Greater Lowndes County Common Community Vision. It involved a thorough and comprehensive review, analysis and public outreach effort to ensure the development of a current, comprehensive and coordinated vision and set of goals for the community.

By establishing a single set of goals that all local organizations may incorporate into their plans, the Common Community Vision provides a unified vision to the community. As a result, all those organizations are guided toward a common approach to local growth and development. Moving forward under these goals, all organizations work together toward the improvement of the community. These common goals also fulfill the requirements of the Georgia Department of

Community Affairs (DCA) Rules for Comprehensive Planning and the ten Emphasis Areas required for local Long Range Transportation Plans by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA).

## Common Community Vision

A resilient community where partnerships and coordination promote regional success in economic development, education, infrastructure, and a high quality of life.

The purpose of a Common Community Vision is for the local governments and agencies to implement their own mission as it relates to the Vision and aspirational goals identified here. Knowing that each organization has a different mission, it will be up to all to work collaboratively to reach the goals the community sets for itself. For instance, the Valdosta-Lowndes MPO is a transportation planning organization that can have little impact on housing policy or cultural resources. However, transportation planning can greatly influence economic development, land use and safety. Ultimately, it will be the responsibility of community and organization leaders to take their part of the Common Community Vision and implement it.

It is recommended that each local government and other local organizations review this Common Community Vision and their own plans and policies to determine how they can best work to achieve this Vision. The review should result in the organization selecting which goals it can have an impact on, and which goals it can cooperatively implement throughout the community. Local organizations and governments are encouraged to modify the language (but not the spirit or intent of the goals) and change strategies as needed in order to reach these goals and to better fit the mission of the agency as it works to implement positive changes in the community.

The Valdosta-Lowndes MPO, as a regional decision-making body that provides a forum for regional discussion of various topics, encourages the use of this Common Community Vision as a guiding document for local organizations to strive for and to achieve.

## Annual Report of Accomplishments

This document is a one-year report of the accomplishments that have been made towards achieving the Common Community Vision. Various efforts that are already in progress to help meet our goals and Vision are highlighted here. News reports are used to document these efforts and can be retrieved by the reader via hyperlinks. Over the past year the VLMPO has used social media to highlight other efforts as they happen by using the hashtag #ccvination on Twitter and Facebook. Be sure to follow along in 2018.

## 2017 Report of Accomplishments

1. Promote and support our vital regional economic engines in collaboration with public and private sector partners.
  - Valdosta and Lowndes County's growth and development has continued to grow through the expansion of vigorous businesses and programs sufficient to the community.
    - [American Drill Bushing announces expansion at Valdosta Plant](#)
    - [STEM partnership renewed](#)
2. Provide coordinated, affordable and accessible workforce training opportunities for all that are interested in furthering their technical career skills through public and private resources and partnerships that provides for a 21<sup>st</sup> Century workforce.
  - Job training workshops increase, being a priority for workforce agencies, and accommodating local partnerships with education entities to serve grade level students and military veterans, among other factions.
    - [Jobs and Workforce Increase in Metro Valdosta](#)
    - [Wiregrass offers escort/pilot drive training](#)
    - [Valdosta named Cornerstone Community](#)
3. Develop basic transportation and utility infrastructure (roads, public transit, water, sanitary and storm sewers, power, telecommunications, etc.) that promotes economic development and private sector investments.
  - The past year has brought significant investment and national recognition to transportation and utilities infrastructure through road improvements that will contribute to the community's growing economy.
    - [Chamber: Economic development a new game](#)
    - [National Association of Development Organizations 2017 Innovation Award: Complete Streets Project](#)
    - [LMIG Program provides funding to repave City Streets](#)
    - [New Flashing Yellow Arrow Signals in Valdosta](#)
4. Support communitywide partnerships that encourage entrepreneurship and small business development for positive economic growth and self- sufficiency.
  - Local governments and organizations are perceptibly supporting local entrepreneurs who wish to start a business or already have an established business.
    - [Valdosta Observes Georgia Small Business Week](#)
    - [Local YEA! Students Learn the Business of Food](#)
5. Maintain a fully funded and coordinated regional economic development strategy that promotes public/private partnerships and readiness for globally competitive high-wage, high-skill jobs.

- Partnerships with local government entities and economic investment progress as a need for youth leadership expansion in the community.
  - [Great Promise Partnership expands](#)
  - [Chamber: Education, workforce affect business development](#)
- 6. Develop and support appropriate education programs in local schools that ensure students are ready for further education either at a university, technical college or on-the-job training which meet the needs of local employers in a 21<sup>st</sup> Century workforce.
  - Opportunities for youth leadership and growth are abundant through schools and community organizations, and the appreciation of academic programs contributes to local industries recruiting and retaining talent.
    - [Cason: City needs to retain teachers](#)
    - [Man Up conference scheduled](#)
    - [Students accepted to YEA!](#)
    - [Georgia Wins 18 National Awards at FFA Convention](#)
    - [VSU hosts artificial intelligence event](#)
- 7. Promote healthy eating and active lifestyles throughout the community.
  - Local governments and school systems are undertaking the promotion of local and national causes that aim to educate and inspire citizens to maintain a robust, non-sedentary lifestyle.
    - [W.G. Nunn Elementary Hosts Health and Wellness Fair](#)
    - [Downtown preps for improved Farm Days](#)
- 8. Continue to provide high-quality, locally-based, low-cost healthcare to a growing regional population in Southern Georgia.
  - Healthcare options in the community are growing and receiving much acknowledgment as the healthcare field emerges to recruit more physician to better assist the community, allowing patients the grace of not having to travel far for quality health treatment.
    - [Imaging Center earns accreditation](#)
    - [SGMC implements new record system](#)
    - [SGMC, doctors recruiting cardiologists](#)
    - [Authority Oks physician recruitment plan](#)
- 9. Develop coordinated, highly-trained, emergency and disaster response teams to plan for and respond to emergencies, in order to make our community more resilient to the impacts of disaster.
  - Local emergency responders and businesses gather to continue their progress from the past years in undergoing extensive drills and training, and providing quality emergency management that has led to prestigious relief to surrounding damaged communities affected by natural disasters.
    - [Gift cards gathered for storm survivors](#)

- [Regions Bank Supports Storm Recovery through Special Services for Impacted Customers](#)
  - [Emergency Responders Stage at Moody](#)
10. Implement land use and development management techniques that promote conservation of natural resources and mitigate impacts to wet-land areas, while providing incentives to mitigate the impacts from existing development on conservation and wet-land areas.
- Last year marked the establishment of the first conservation subdivision in the county and the community has since committed to environmentally conscientious land use and development going forward.
    - [City Honored for Commitment to Environment](#)
11. Provide housing throughout the community that is safe, affordable and accessible to all income levels.
- In addition to the new programs through government sponsorship and/or public-private partnerships last year, the city has approved housing construction in areas and provides summits aiming to increase affordable housing options in the community.
    - [Freedom Heights in Valdosta Approved for Construction in 2017](#)
    - [Affordable Housing Summit and Town Hall Meeting](#)
12. Develop regional leadership in local government that promotes transparency, citizen engagement, and coordinated delivery of government services.
- The utilization of technology, combined with open house meetings and publicizing committee vacancies all contribute to driving conversations about the community's strengths and weaknesses and increasing transparency between citizens and leaders which has earned national and regional recognition through awards.
    - [National Association of Development Organizations 2017 Innovation Award](#)
    - [10 Opportunities to Serve the Community](#)
13. Develop land use management and community development policies that promote natural resource conservation, aesthetic urban design, access to community infrastructure and amenities, and balances private development rights.
- Sustainable land use management is increasingly important, and authorities are working vigorously to design, develop, and meet the needs of the community.
    - [Development Authority working to create strategic plan](#)
14. Promotes recycling and renewable energy and resource efforts throughout the community through education on the impact and benefits of recycling and energy conservation and the use of renewable resources (ex: solar/wind power, water conservation, etc.)
- Installing and expanding means for renewable energy, especially solar, was highly broadcasted for the year.
    - [School board weighs solar application](#)

- [Solar arrays planned for land](#)
15. Develop high-quality recreational facilities and programs to improve the local quality of life, and promote an active, healthy lifestyle and the conservation of natural resources.
- Parks and recreation facilities continue to provide a means of exercise and extracurricular activity for all in the community.
    - [YMCA league offers athletic freedom to those with disabilities](#)
    - [Hundreds participate in Special Olympics](#)
16. Provide well maintained, efficient, quality utility infrastructure (water, storm water, and sewer) that meets the needs of a growing community, and is not harmful to human health or negatively impacts the natural environment.
- Entities in the community continue to contribute and provide the latest and sufficient economic equipment needs to ensure the community's water and sewer are of only positive environmental impacts.
    - [Withlacoochee Plant Warranty Repairs Underway](#)
    - [City engineering project receives Innovation Award](#)
    - [New wastewater treatment plant improves water quality in Valdosta, Georgia](#)
17. Develop public/private partnerships to preserve historic buildings and our community's cultural resources, such as theater, music, and arts programs.
- Historic preservation awards were awarded to the community while the arts for the public continues to emerge for display for the end of the year and upcoming year.
    - [City Honors Winners of 2017 Historic Preservation Awards](#)
    - [Historical society in South Georgia marks 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary](#)
    - [Arts Halftime: Arts season returns with big shows in 2018](#)
18. Provide regional connectivity to global economic opportunities through and efficient, safe, accessible, and affordable multi-modal transportation system.
- To ensure accessibility for all, Valdosta continues to develop, implement, and restructure new and existing roadway improvements for the city.
    - [Road projects up for review](#)
    - [North Ashley Street Signal Upgraded at Woodrow Wilson Drive](#)
    - [Uber "Unlocks" Valdosta for New Transportation Service](#)