

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

Report of Accomplishments

December 2016



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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<http://www.sgrc.us/transportation-plans.html>

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Background and 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 eight 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 2017.

Report of Accomplishments

1. *Promote and support our vital regional economic engines in collaboration with public and private sector partners.*
 - Community leaders have continued to show their support for local and regional economic engines, which are contributing to Valdosta and Lowndes County's growth and the need for a small business incubator.
 - [Main Street Nationally Accredited](#)
 - [Myrna Ballard on the Valdosta-Lowndes County Chamber Incubator Project](#)
 - [In Moody's Defense: Officials Support Base](#)
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 21st Century workforce.*
 - Job training workshops continue to be a priority for workforce agencies, and accommodating local partnerships with education entities serve high school students and military veterans, among other factions.
 - [Job Connections Resume Writing Workshop](#)
 - [Valdosta Named First Cornerstone Community by GPP \(Great Promise Partnership\)](#)
 - [Wiregrass Named Bronze Award Recipient by Military Friendly](#)
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 investment.*
 - The past year has brought significant investment to transportation and utilities infrastructure through road, airport, and fiber optic enhancements that will contribute to the community's growing economy.
 - [Airport apron expansion nears end](#)
 - [GDOT Awards \\$27M in SW Georgia Construction Projects](#)
 - [Intersection Upgrades on Ashley and Patterson Streets](#)
 - [Hargray to Bring Fiber Optic Services to Valdosta Residents & Businesses](#)
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, focusing especially on low-income businesses.
 - [Chamber, city sponsor entrepreneurial workshop](#)
 - [SCORE establishes branch in Valdosta](#)
 - [Valdosta offers business loans](#)

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 colleges and universities and economic investment endure as emphases for local leadership.
 - [Valdosta-Lowndes receives chamber award](#)
 - [TCSG Commissioner Gretchen Corbin on Workforce & Business Partnerships Across Georgia](#)
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 21st Century workforce.*
 - Opportunities for youth leadership and growth are abundant through schools and community organizations, and the development of new academic programs, especially in supply chain and logistics, contribute to local industries recruiting and retaining talent.
 - [Parker Mathis Students Get “Wired” at Wiregrass for Career Day](#)
 - [Valdosta Youth Council](#)
 - [Valdosta State University Students Tour Local Supply Chain and Logistic Companies](#)
 - [Valdosta Middle School STEM Program](#)
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.
 - [Downtown Valdosta Farm Days](#)
 - [Safe Routes to School](#)
8. *Continue to provide high-quality, locally-based, low-cost healthcare to a growing regional population in Southern Georgia.*
 - Healthcare options in the community serve patients in multiple counties across the region, and osteopathic medicine is being explored as an education option in the community given the increasing need for doctors and healthcare professionals. A statewide tax credit was established to create a tax break for businesses and individuals who contribute to rural hospitals.
 - [Hospital Authority opens door for med school](#)
 - [Helping save rural hospitals through state tax credit](#)
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 have continued their progress from the past several years in undergoing extensive drills and training, and quality emergency management has led to prestigious grants and insurance ratings for the community.
 - [Valdosta’s ISO Rating Top in the Nation](#)
 - [VFD Receives \\$21,000 Homeland Security Grant](#)

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.*
- This year marked the establishment of the first conservation subdivision in the county, and environmentally conscientious land use and development will hopefully become a trend going forward.
 - [County balances development, conservation](#)
11. *Provide housing throughout the community that is safe, affordable and accessible to all income levels.*
- The addition of new programs through government sponsorship and/or public-private partnerships this year will aim to increase affordable housing options in the community.
 - [Think tank mulls housing](#)
 - [Habitat, Housing Authority partner with new program](#)
 - [Valdosta Celebrates Community Development Week \(3/28 to 4/1\)](#)
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.
 - [Participation Plan Comment Period Open House](#)
 - [Vacant Valdosta Board and Commission Positions](#)
 - [Valdosta City Maintenance App Helping with Storm Clean-Up](#)
 - [Transportation board travels to Valdosta](#)
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 the 2016 Greater Lowndes Comprehensive Plan Update contains language that communicates the growing need for conservation and design with minimal environmental impact.
 - Comprehensive Plan Update and Adoption by Governments
 - [City Council Adoption](#)
 - [County Commission Adoption](#)
14. *Promote 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 means for renewable energy, especially solar, was highly publicized this year, and entering 2017, alternative fuels are becoming a focus due to Interstate 75's distinction as an Alternative Fuel Corridor by the Federal Highway Administration.

- [Valdosta goes solar](#)
- [Rain barrel class offered](#)
- [Airport installs solar panels](#)
- [Valdosta plugs into electric-car network](#)

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.*

- Generous donations assist in developing recreational facilities for family and citizen use, and the community's management of trees and green space garnered state and national recognition.
 - [Grand Bay lands Langdale endowment](#)
 - [VLPRA Named State Agency of the Year](#)
 - [Arbor Day Honors City's 30th Year as Tree City USA](#)

16. *Provide well maintained, efficient, quality public 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.*

- This year was marked by infrastructural improvements in wastewater treatment along with the growing use of phone apps by citizens to request service.
 - [Wastewater treatment plant opens](#)
 - [Valdosta Citizen Engagement App Provides Convenient, Quick and Quality Service](#)

17. *Develop public/private partnerships to preserve historic buildings and our community's cultural resources, such as theater, music, and arts programs.*

- Public/private partnerships were developed with the Annette Howell Turner Center for the Arts to create more outlets for public art in the community.
 - [Arts district proposed downtown](#)
 - [Art goes public](#)
 - [Valdosta joins in city art project](#)

18. *Provide regional connectivity to global economic opportunities through an efficient, safe, accessible, and affordable multi-modal transportation system.*

- The Valdosta Pilot shuttle Program demonstrated the benefits and convenience that public transportation could establish for the community, and the widening of US 84 will bolster Valdosta's position as an industrial and transportation hub.
 - [Valdosta shuttle service ending](#)
 - [Shuttle shows need for public transit](#)
 - [Local Study of Public Transit Underway – Community Input Sought](#)
 - [Project will give Georgia a 4-lane highway between Bainbridge and Brunswick](#)