

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

Report of Accomplishments

December 2015



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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www.sgrc.us/transportation

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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 2016.

Report of Accomplishments

1. *Promote and support our vital regional economic engines in collaboration with public and private sector partners.*
 - Community leaders highlighted how important our regional economic engines are to our local economy, both in terms of monetary contributions and in terms of the talent each employee brings to the region.
 - [GDOL to Co-Host Moody Transition Workshop for Valdosta Employer](#)
 - [Dr. Cecil Staton on VSU's Economic Impact](#)
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.*
 - Many local organizations in the past year have worked to provide opportunities for training and job placement for individuals throughout the community to better their own quality of life.
 - [Job Fair for Convicted Felons](#)
 - [VSU Presents TIES Conference](#)
 - [Wiregrass Students Participate in Automotive Internship Day](#)
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.*
4. *Support communitywide partnerships that encourage entrepreneurship and small business development for positive economic growth and self-sufficiency.*
 - Many local governments, educational institutions and other organizations have been working hard to make sure small businesses have what it takes to be successful.
 - [Valdosta-Lowndes County Chamber Business University Seminar](#)
 - [Government Contractor Workshop](#)
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.*
 - Local organizations are working to make sure economic investment is front and center in the region, with a focus on business expansion, retention, and a better understanding of the strengths of our community.
 - [Six Valdosta-Lowndes County Expansions Spur \\$27.25M Investment](#)
 - [VLCDA Joins Forces with World Trade Center Savannah](#)
 - [Chamber Hosts Economic Summit](#)
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.*
 - Local public and private organizations are making sure our students are educated in the most current technology, at all levels.
 - [SEFCU Awards \\$1K to Pine Grove Middle STEM Project](#)
 - [Wiregrass Tech Celebrates High School CTAE Month](#)
7. *Promote healthy eating and active lifestyles throughout the community.*

- The community is growing more aware of needing healthy food options and needing infrastructure for healthy, active lifestyles. Georgia Grown is active in our community, promoting agri-tourism and locally grown food options.
 - [Downtown Valdosta Welcomes Back Farm Days](#)
 - [Georgia Grown in Our Schools](#)
8. *Continue to provide high-quality, locally-based, low-cost healthcare to a growing regional population in Southern Georgia.*
 - South Georgia Medical Center continues to be a regional award-winning leader in medical services. Other local organizations continue to assist the community in accessing high-quality, low-cost healthcare.
 - [New Urgent Care Center at SGMC Improves Access to Healthcare](#)
 - [Lowndes County Board of Health Program Receives State Grant](#)
 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.*
 - The local law enforcement and first responder agencies use the latest technology and training to respond to local and regional emergency needs.
 - [Valdosta Citizen's Fire Academy](#)
 - [Valdosta Airport Holding Exercise for First Responders](#)
 - [VPD, Lake Park upgrade body cams](#)
 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.*
 - The management of development policies in any local community is likely to be debated, especially when property owners feel their rights or the use of their land are infringed upon. A healthy debate in any community is important for economic development and sustainability of regional economic engines.
 - [Lowndes Planning Commission deliberates Moody AFB zoning](#)
 - [Regulation on development?](#)
 11. *Provide housing throughout the community that is safe, affordable and accessible to all income levels.*
 - Providing safe, affordable housing is important to the sustainability of any community. Valdosta has developed a new Consolidated Plan to help guide housing and neighborhood development for years to come.
 - [Home Buyer Education 101](#)
 - [Valdosta wins state housing award](#)
 12. *Develop regional leadership in local government that promotes transparency, citizen engagement, and coordinated delivery of government services.*
 - Several local governments are working more to engage citizens on topics of interest to the community through various means, including more use of websites and social media to encourage citizen engagement, involvement and transparency.
 - [Valdosta Youth Council provides leadership opportunity](#)
 - [Valdosta, Fire, and Police Departments Utilize Social Media To Encourage Transparency](#)
 - [Hahira residents call for DDA town hall](#)

- [Central Valdosta Development Authority to Host Town Hall Meeting](#)
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.*
- The aesthetics of the community go hand in hand with businesses and economic development, and can have a powerful influence on people’s impression of the community.
 - [City leaders raise legitimate zoning questions, concerns](#)
 - [Valdosta Cuts Ribbon on Gateways](#)
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.).*
- Local governments and organizations throughout the community are becoming more aware of the needs of finding alternative fuels for lowering costs as well as protecting the environment. Local organizations have also become better stewards of our environment through implementing recycling programs throughout the community.
 - [Valdosta City Schools Purchases Propane School Bus](#)
 - [VSU is the recipient of a 2015 recycling bin grant](#)
 - [5th Annual Alternative Fuel Vehicle Roadshow Comes to Valdosta](#)
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.*
- The Valdosta and Lowndes County region has many opportunities for outdoor recreation. These facilities continue to grow in both number and popularity. The partnership between Moody Air Force Base and Lowndes County to open the popular military park, Grassy Pond, to all residents speaks to all that our environment has to offer as well as our friendly military partnerships.
 - [Grassy Pond open to public](#)
 - [If you walk or bike often, you may want to check out Valdosta's Azalea City Trail](#)
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.*
- While both Lowndes County and Valdosta continue to improve their water and wastewater infrastructure (see 2014 CCV Annual Report), other areas of infrastructure need maintenance and improvement. In 2015, Valdosta’s focus has been on street lights and electrical infrastructure.
 - [Georgia Power Continues Manhole Cover Replacement Project](#)
 - [Valdosta Reduces Carbon Footprint with New LED Roadway Lighting](#)
17. *Develop public/private partnerships to preserve historic buildings and our community’s cultural resources, such as theater, music, and arts programs.*
- Tourism and the arts are growing attractions in Valdosta and Lowndes County, centered on agri-tourism, public art displays and award winning arts organizations at local schools, Valdosta State University and non-profit organizations throughout the community.
 - [Georgia Agritourism Association Conference Held in Valdosta](#)
 - [More public art coming to downtown Valdosta](#)

- [City of Valdosta and Annette Howell Turner Center for the Arts receive state recognition](#)

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

- Transportation is important to any community for economic development and access to jobs, shopping, and recreational needs. This year was an important year for transportation, not only in Valdosta and Lowndes County but also in Georgia and the nation. HB 170 in Georgia included approximately an additional \$900 million in transportation funds. The FAST Act brings long-term funding to national transportation programs as well.
 - [\\$3.6 Million Expansion At Valdosta Regional Airport Could Mean Larger Planes, More Flights](#)
 - [\\$1 Billion Planned for Transportation Improvements in Region, Comments Sought for VLMPO](#)
 - [Shuttle Transportation Program Introduced](#)
 - [GPA aiming for new inland port](#)