

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

Report of Accomplishments

December 2018



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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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 (VLMPO) 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. In 2018 the VLMPO kicked off the development of the 2045 Transportation Vision Plan which continues to build on the successes of 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 twenty strategic and comprehensive plans guiding the growth and development of local governments, organizations and agencies in Lowndes County. 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 for the success of the entire community.

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. Press releases and other news reports are used to document these efforts and can be retrieved by the reader via hyperlinks.

Report of Accomplishments

- Promote and support our vital regional economic engines in collaboration with public and private sector partners.*
 - The economic engines of the Valdosta and Lowndes County community have been centered on the military, education, and healthcare for many years. As the community continues to grow and become more diverse the investment in other economic drivers is evident in the amount of economic impact parks have in the community.
 - [Leadership Moody Learns About Economic Development](#)
 - [South Georgia Loves Moody Week](#)
 - [Working to Play: Parks Boost Economic Growth, Quality of Life](#)
- 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.*
 - The Valdosta and Lowndes County community have worked hard to grow and retain businesses and jobs that are already in the community through innovative educational offerings for mid-career professionals as well as on-the-job training for high school students learning about how local government works.
 - [BRAT Hosts Manufacturing and Industry Excellence Leadership Luncheon](#)
 - [Ten VHS Seniors Graduate from City's GPP Program](#)
- 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 City of Valdosta has worked recently to improve the flow of traffic around the community to improve traffic around many popular destinations.
 - [City Reveals Traffic Improvements for Busy Mall-Area Intersections](#)
 - [Valdosta Traffic Management Upgrading Traffic Lights](#)
- Support communitywide partnerships that encourage entrepreneurship and small business development for positive economic growth and self-sufficiency.*
 - Whether it is for adults looking to start a new business or school children learning about developing business and marketing plans, the Valdosta region continues to develop resources for entrepreneurs to start businesses locally.
 - [Planting the SEEDS for Business Growth](#)
 - [Valdosta-based Conference Rallies Regional Attendees and Speakers](#)
 - [YEA! Students Reveal Businesses at Trade Show](#)
- 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.*

- The Valdosta and Lowndes County community have come together this past year to focus on what drives economic development in the community and they are developing strategies to improve on what works and change what doesn't.
 - [Community Council Meeting Focused on Lowndes Economic Progress](#)
 - [Selection of Firm to Develop Community & Economic Development Strategy](#)
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 youth in the Valdosta and Lowndes County area continue to be engaged and involved in opportunities that allow them to learn about the community, gain first-hand experience about the challenges facing the community, and to give back to the community through enriching volunteering.
 - [Valdosta Youth Council Completes Productive Third Year](#)
 - [Youth Embark on Health-care Experience](#)
7. *Promote healthy eating and active lifestyles throughout the community.*
- Local organizations throughout the community are continuing to work to educate residents on healthy habits that promote healthy lifestyles.
 - [Local Partnerships Encourage Youth to be Heart Healthy](#)
 - [VSU Earns National Recognition for Supporting Healthy Living](#)
8. *Continue to provide high-quality, locally-based, low-cost healthcare to a growing regional population in Southern Georgia.*
- South Georgia Medical Center and other healthcare providers continue to work to provide high-quality healthcare that is affordable to all residents of the community through programs like training new doctors to clinics that offer reduced cost care for those who need it.
 - [SGMC Welcomes VCOM Students](#)
 - [SGMC Renews Annual Support of Partnership Health Center](#)
 - [VMC Helps Medicare Beneficiaries Get Affordable Healthcare](#)
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 governments throughout Lowndes County continue to invest in training and technological resources to respond to emergencies throughout the community.
 - [City of Valdosta and Lowndes County Add Flood Mapping Resource](#)
 - [Public Works Declared First Responders](#)
10. *Implement land use and development management techniques that promote conservation of natural resources and mitigate impacts to wetland areas, while providing incentives to mitigate the impacts from existing development on conservation and wetland areas.*
- As Valdosta and Lowndes County continue to develop into a more urban community there will always be challenges of balancing land use and development with the preservation of

natural resources and other impacts on the community. Local governments take these challenges very seriously and consider each proposed development carefully.

- [County Approves Branham Project](#)
- [County Tables Val-Del Road Zoning Case](#)

11. *Provide housing throughout the community that is safe, affordable and accessible to all income levels.*

- Ensuring that safe, affordable and accessible housing is available to all residents of the community is important for local governments to plan for. A part of the planning process includes listening to the residents and developing new housing around the needs today and the future.
- [City Talks About Neighborhood Revitalization](#)

12. *Develop regional leadership in local government that promotes transparency, citizen engagement, and coordinated delivery of government services.*

- Local governments in Lowndes County continue to be proactive in training staff and volunteer leaders to represent not only the community, but all of South Georgia. As the largest community in South Georgia, Valdosta and Lowndes County continues to provide regional leadership and set the example for surrounding communities.
- [Locate SouthGeorgiaLEADS Expands Regional Impact, Graduates Second Cohort](#)
- [Emergency Management Plans Open House](#)

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 communities in Lowndes County continue to develop through private investment in new homes, businesses and industries. To help maintain a desirable community for investment and to live and work in Valdosta has taken new measures to ensure properties throughout the city present positively the values of the community. The City of Remerton has recently supported reinvestment in its historic mill property that will provide housing for new residents.
- [City Cracks Down on Parking](#)
- [Remerton OKs Old Mill Zoning](#)
- [City Approves Blight Tax](#)

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.).*

- The City of Valdosta has been a leader in promoting renewable energy and water quality for many years and has continued to do so this past year. Other local government agencies are also installing renewable energy sources like the Valdosta Board of Education and Valdosta Regional Airport.
- [Valdosta Receives APWA Award for ‘Powering Up With Solar’ Project](#)
- [“Make & Take” Rain Barrel Lunch and Learn Informs Citizens on Ways to Conserve Water](#)

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 community has invested recently in parks and recreation facilities for residents as well as for hosting visiting recreational events that provide significant economic impact on the community. From youth sports to special needs facilities the community is investing in a broad range of facilities.
 - [New Playground at Vallotton Youth Athletic Complex](#)
 - [Lowndes OKs \\$5.8 million Soccer Complex](#)
 - [New Miracle League Field Nearing Completion](#)

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.*

- The Valdosta and Lowndes County community have continued to make investments in utility infrastructure that promotes a clean and safe environment. When negative environmental impacts have occurred in the community from utility infrastructure, the community has been responsive to notify appropriate parties and clear-up any spills.
 - [City Celebrates Clean Water](#)
 - [School Board OKs Solar Project](#)

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

- The Valdosta and Lowndes County community has recognized private sector and non-profit entities for their investment in the community to preserve and utilize historic structures as well as providing cultural resources like resources for film, art, theater, dance, handi-crafts, etc. in the community.
 - [10th Annual Historic Preservation Award Winners Announced](#)
 - [Valdosta's Oldest House Being Considered for an Events Center](#)
 - [Valdosta Sets Stage for South Georgia Film Festival](#)

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

- As the first County after entering the State of Georgia, the communities of Lowndes County continue to be leaders in investing in being a welcoming community to visitors and residents alike through investments in transportation infrastructure that connect this regional community to surrounding counties, the nation, and world.
 - [Valdosta Awarded Grant from GDOT for 'Welcome to Georgia' Beautification Project](#)
 - [T-SPLOST Approval Leads Region](#)