

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

Report of Accomplishments

December 2019



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 (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. 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 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. 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 Valdosta and Lowndes County community supports the vital regional economic engines that are centered on the military, higher education, and healthcare. This past year the community support for the military was honored, higher education was recognized among the nation's best, and regional economic impact of healthcare was documented.
 - [Dr. Lucy Green Receives AFA's New W. Parker Greene Legacy Award](#)
 - [SGMC Provides Economic Stability, Growth](#)
 - [VSU Ranked Among Nations Best](#)
- 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.*
 - As the national economy continues to add jobs, so does that of Valdosta and the surrounding area. The Valdosta community is working to train the next generation of workers through unique programs and highlighting what the community does to offer younger generations.
 - [Valdosta Produces Next Gen Video Series](#)
 - [Wiregrass Students Sign Apprenticeship Agreements with Local Industry](#)
- 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 local governments of Lowndes County have continued to make investments in public infrastructure throughout the past year. In November 2019, local voters approved the SPLOST VIII referendum that includes significant investments in utility and other infrastructure improvements.
 - [Valdosta Expects to Focus over Half of SPLOST VIII on Utilities](#)
 - [Lowndes County Residents Respond to New Law for County Roads](#)
- Support communitywide partnerships that encourage entrepreneurship and small business development for positive economic growth and self-sufficiency.*
 - Several institutions in Valdosta are ensuring that the business leaders of tomorrow have the help they need as entrepreneurs just starting their businesses. From leadership training to job shadowing, resources are available in the community to help entrepreneurs succeed.
 - [Community Xccelerator Prepares for Launch](#)
 - [VSU Career Opportunities Hosts Groundhog Shadow Day](#)
 - [UGA SBDC at VSU presents Six Week Guardian Bank Entrepreneurship Academy](#)
- 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.*

- Like Valdosta and Lowndes County, many communities have learned that economic development is not done in a vacuum, but it involves many communities, resources, and team members to get the job done.
 - [Agribusiness Harvesting Growth in Stormy Weather](#)
 - [Purvis Co-Chairs One Valdosta-Lowndes](#)
 - [Wiregrass Hosts Employers 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.*
- Valdosta State University has been a leader in the local community ensuring that younger students are prepared for education after high school. Through programs that focus on STEAM learning and programs that keep students engaged during school breaks, VSU helps to keep them from falling behind.
 - [VSU Partners with Community Organizations to Keep Youth Academically Engaged During Summer Months](#)
 - [VSU Offers STEAM Camps During Spring Break](#)
7. *Promote healthy eating and active lifestyles throughout the community.*
- Healthy, active lifestyles continue to be a goal for many people. Organizations in Valdosta are helping to make sure that happens. VSU has worked to develop health living initiatives on its campus, while the Executive Director of the Valdosta-Lowndes Parks and Recreation Authority was recognized with a national award.
 - [Chili Cook-off Supports Healthy Living Initiatives at VSU](#)
 - [VLRA Director Wins National Award](#)
 - [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.*
- Healthcare continues to be a subject of debate for many reasons across the nation and in South Georgia. Local healthcare institutions have been recognized for their quality and their programs to improve the health of the community.
 - [SGMC Only 4-Star Quality Rated Hospital in the Area](#)
 - [SGMC Hosts Program to Help New Parents](#)
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.*
- Well-trained first-responders are essential to having a community that is safe, affordable, and a desirable place for people to live. The City of Valdosta continues to make sure that they meet the highest standards for their police and fire departments and that they work in the community to improve their relationship with residents.
 - [VPD Successfully Completes Remote Web-Based Assessment CALEA 2nd Year in a Row](#)
 - [Neighborhood Walks VPD and VFD Bring Community Together](#)

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 conservation of land and natural resources is a valuable part of making the community a desirable place to live. The Greater Lowndes County Planning Commission now includes all local governments, allowing even more consideration for the impacts of development throughout the community.
 - [Greater Lowndes Planning Commission Joint Ordinance / Agreement](#)
 - [Valdosta City Council to Consider Supporting Troupeville River Camp](#)

11. *Provide housing throughout the community that is safe, affordable and accessible to all income levels.*
 - Affordable housing is a challenge in many communities, including Valdosta and Lowndes County. The community is addressing housing affordability challenges by repairing sub-standard homes and providing assistance to those in need.
 - [Valdosta Featured in Where to Retire Magazine](#)
 - [Valdosta Focuses on Affordable Housing Repair](#)
 - [Hurting for Housing - Communities Fail to Offer Affordable Homes](#)

12. *Develop regional leadership in local government that promotes transparency, citizen engagement, and coordinated delivery of government services.*
 - As a metropolitan community and regional economic hub, Valdosta and Lowndes County are regional leaders for everything from economic development to influencing national policy discussions around topics like veteran and military affairs.
 - [Marshall Tapped for National Board](#)
 - [Locate South Georgia to Offer Regional Leadership Program](#)

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.*
 - A growing community needs to consider land use, conservation, impact on infrastructure, and aesthetics of the community, all while balancing private property rights. Organizations like the Greater Lowndes Planning Commission and the Board of Commissioners and City Councils debate these issues each month.
 - [County Approves New Val Del Subdivision](#)

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.).*
 - Valdosta and Lowndes County are blessed with an abundance of natural resources all around the community. Having programs that continue to invest in the natural environment as well as promoting recycling are important to preserving the natural landscape of the community.
 - [VSU Celebrates 7th Tree Campus USA Recognition with Arbor Day Ceremony](#)
 - [City Hosts eRecycling Event](#)

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 activities are popular among all age groups of the community and this year the Valdosta-Lowndes Parks and Recreation Authority embarked on a new Master Plan to improve their infrastructure and the programs they offer in the community.
 - [Parks and Rec Holds Public Input Sessions](#)
 - [City Welcomes Art Park](#)
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.*
- [Lowndes County and MAFB Partner on Grassy Pond Sewer](#)
17. *Develop public/private partnerships to preserve historic buildings and our community's cultural resources, such as theater, music, and arts programs.*
- Historic resources in the community are important to preserving the past, but also providing valuable space for businesses and homes. Public art throughout the community helps to create a positive sense of place and improves the aesthetic of the community for all to enjoy.
 - [Valdosta Awarded Georgia DNR Historic Resources Grant](#)
 - [Airport Unveils Public Art](#)
 - [Historic Resources Survey to be Conducted in College Park Neighborhood](#)
18. *Provide regional connectivity to global economic opportunities through an efficient, safe, accessible, and affordable multi-modal transportation system.*
- Well-planned and efficient transportation infrastructure is important in any community. From Airports to truck and freight transportation, organizations in Valdosta and Lowndes County are working to address challenges associated with providing high quality transportation infrastructure every day.
 - [Valdosta Streets to be Surveyed](#)
 - [Truck Bypass Part of Transportation Plan](#)
 - [Public Feedback Needed for Lowndes County Transportation Plan](#)
 - [New Developments are on Horizon for Valdosta](#)