

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

Report of Accomplishments

January 2015



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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 is required to update its current long range transportation plan (LRTP) by September 2015. The initial phases of this update process began in early 2013 with this Common Community Vision.

Prior to the initiation of the 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 coordination or consistency has been put into the different plans, even though there are common themes and categories within them all.

Consequently, all 20 plus plans which 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. Therefore, 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 which could be utilized to unite all local planning efforts. This common vision became known as the Greater Lowndes County Common Community Vision, and involved a thorough and comprehensive review, analysis and public outreach effort to ensure a current, comprehensive and coordinated vision and set of goals for the community were developed.

By establishing a single set of goals that all local organizations may incorporate into their plans would provide a unified vision to the community. As a result, all those organizations are brought into 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 would 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 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 can cooperatively implement throughout the community. Local organizations and governments are encouraged to modify and change these goals as needed to better fit the mission of the agency and 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 accomplishments towards achieving the Common Community Vision. Various efforts already underway in the community that are working to 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 with the #ccvinaction hashtags on Twitter and Facebook, so be sure to follow along in 2015.

1. *Promote and support our vital regional economic engines in collaboration with public and private sector partners.*
 - This past year the Valdosta Daily Times, in partnership with the Valdosta-Lowndes Development Authority, has highlighted several local businesses, promoting and supporting our regional economic engines and the products they make in our community.
 - [Chemical Research Technology](#)
 - [Alpha Pro Tech](#)
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.*
 - The community has embraced workforce training opportunities for high school students. One example of this effort is the Great Promise Partnership:
 - [Great Promise Partnership](#)
 - Wiregrass Georgia Technical College has led the effort in the region to educate non-traditional students (adults, military, etc.) in high-skilled, high-wage jobs. This year they were recognized for their success in the areas of Adult Education and being a Military Friendly School:
 - [Adult Education at Wiregrass Georgia Technical College](#)
 - [Wiregrass Georgia Technical College Named a Military Friendly School](#)
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.*
 - Both the City of Valdosta and Lowndes County have made great efforts this year to maintain and upgrade basic utility infrastructure and roadways
 - [City of Valdosta Force Main Project](#)
 - [Lowndes County Force Main Project](#)
 - [Lowndes County Local Roads](#)
4. *Support communitywide partnerships that encourage entrepreneurship and small business development for positive economic growth and self-sufficiency.*
 - Local community organizations offer many resources for small businesses and entrepreneurs. Some examples include the SEEDS Resource Center, the SGRC Small Business Loan Program, the VSU Small Business Development Center, the Valdosta-Lowndes County Chamber Small Business Competition, and the Valdosta Small and Emerging Business program.
 - [Valdosta Small Business Resource Fair](#)
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.*
 - The Valdosta Lowndes Development Authority has taken the lead in marketing the Valdosta and Lowndes County community to developers and investors. This past year they hosted a workshop for local elected officials and economic development leaders about how our community stacks up for businesses:
 - [Valdosta Regional Analyzed by Site Selectors](#)
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.*

- The two local public school systems are always working hard to educate the future workforce and leaders in our community. Below are just a few of the times over the past year where the school systems have worked to prepare a 21st Century workforce.
 - [Lowndes County Schools Funded for Bright Ideas](#)
 - [Valdosta City Schools Seeks Construction Manager for new High School](#)
 - [Lowndes STEM Students Compete at State](#)
 - [Dual Enrollment Programs at Wiregrass](#)
 - [Valdosta Early College Academy Share Dual Enrollment at VSU](#)
7. *Promote healthy eating and active lifestyles throughout the community.*
 - Healthy lifestyles are more than just a buzz word to many in our community. They are trying to live healthy, active lifestyles that reduce health costs and promote local economies.
 - [Local Businesses Promote Healthy Eating](#)
 - [Georgia Grown Trail 37](#)
 - [Gordon Street Sidewalks](#)
 8. *Continue to provide high-quality, locally-based, low-cost healthcare to a growing regional population in Southern Georgia.*
 - South Georgia Medical Center is the regional leader in delivering high-quality, affordable healthcare and has received several recognitions to this effect.
 - [SGMC Places on Quality Honor Roll](#)
 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 to participate in extensive training to be sure to be ready to save lives and property when emergencies or disasters strike.
 - [Officer Training and Supplies](#)
 - [Faster Response Times for Police](#)
 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.*
 - Valdosta and Lowndes County are not unfamiliar with flooding risks and are actively seeking solutions to mitigate impacts of flooding and promote land conservation and wet-land preservation.
 - [Valdosta and Lowndes County Flooding Response](#)
 11. *Provide housing throughout the community that is safe, affordable and accessible to all income levels.*
 - Valdosta is a leader in the state of Georgia in promoting community development and affordable housing.
 - [Affordable Housing in Valdosta](#)
 12. *Develop regional leadership in local government that promotes transparency, citizen engagement, and coordinated delivery of government services.*
 - The Valdosta Daily Times and local governments have recently discussed more transparency in local government. Lowndes County and Valdosta have also recently turned to social media to further spread news about the community.
 - [Local Government Transparency Symposium Item 1](#)
 - [Local Government Transparency Symposium Item 2](#)

- [Lowndes County Joins Twitter](#)
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.*
- Regularly local governments are requested to approve zoning changes that may impact the community. Through professional staff and diligent local leaders these items are addressed.
 - [Lowndes County Land Use Items](#)
 - [Lake Park Land Use Items](#)
 - [Hahira Land Use Items](#)
 - [Valdosta Land Use Items](#)
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 was named “Smart Energy Municipality of the Year” by the Technology Association of Georgia for 2014. Valdosta has been a leader in solar generation, and now energy conservation will be implemented with the street lights being converted to LED bulbs.
 - [Valdosta Named Smart Energy Municipality](#)
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.*
- Several organizations have made it their priorities to improve the quality of life for residents of Lowndes County. Below are just a couple of examples.
 - [Alapaha Water Trail](#)
 - [Valdosta Miracle League](#)
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.*
- Valdosta has made an effort to improve their storm and sanitary sewer systems and are working to meet the needs of our growing community. Valdosta and Lowndes County have taken a regional lead in developing a response to flooding events as well.
 - [Valdosta Sewer Tests](#)
 - [Regional Flooding Analysis with USACE](#)
17. *Develop public/private partnerships to preserve historic buildings and our community’s cultural resources, such as theater, music, and arts programs.*
- Valdosta State University has taken a leading role in promoting arts and cultural events to the community in 2014 by designating the 2014-2015 school year as the Year of the Arts:
 - [Valdosta State University to Celebrate Year of the Arts](#)
18. *Provide regional connectivity to global economic opportunities through an efficient, safe, accessible, and affordable multi-modal transportation system.*
- Valdosta is uniquely situated along I-75 with easy access to ports, railroads and highways that offer access to domestic and international destinations. Several organizations are working to continue to keep Valdosta’s regional transportation opportunities competitive.
 - [Valdosta Regional Airport](#)
 - [Valdosta Inland Port](#)