

The Vision 2020 Process

**A Clear and Concise
Roadmap
As to The Direction and Goals
Of
MADISON COUNTY, FLORIDA**

March 27, 2008

INTRODUCTION

The Madison County Vision 2020 Process began with over eighty residents joining together for the common good of the future of Madison County, Florida. As a result of this effort, eight committees were formed and those committees met four consecutive times over a six-week period for the purpose of fine-tuning how they saw their county at the beginning of the year 2020.

Below is the outline of each committee's goals, the rationale that was used to justify each committee's efforts and the many dozens of priorities that were identified by these concerned and optimistic citizens.

Community pride has never been stronger in this faith-based community.

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ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

Goal – The goal of the Economic Development Committee is to work towards having a stronger community, providing for a better standard of living and work in Madison County. This goal can be achieved by targeting new industry and businesses to come to Madison County, and by encouraging existing businesses to pay a higher than average wage to its employees.

Rationale – Madison County residents currently earn wages that are below the state average. The committee sees the need to create job opportunities within the county that will provide quality pay for quality work and will provide medical benefits for the employees. The development of these types of opportunities will work to keep our young families here and will also encourage potential new residents to move here

Priorities - The committee identified fourteen needs that would lead towards the successful economic development of Madison County. Furthermore, the committee recommends that the current Economic Comprehensive Plan be completely updated to include these and other directives.

1. Encourage new and assist existing manufacturing, transportation and wholesale trade sectors which pay a higher than average current wage and offer health benefits.
2. Evaluate existing Enterprise Zones (EZ) to maximize the benefits of this designation to the county. Where needed, eliminate lands currently designated in EZ areas that may not meet environmental considerations or other constraints. Refigure Enterprise Zones to include better utilization of lands that have economic land use designations and available infrastructure and are better suited to encourage development.
3. Promote EZ benefits to current and prospective land owners within the zones to encourage economic development.
4. Provide a trained workforce targeted to economic needs to increase the overall average income of residents.
5. Encourage new jobs where the source of payroll is from the sale of goods or services outside the Madison economy.
6. Encourage partnerships with area schools, workforce development board and local businesses to support state mandated Career Academies.
7. Encourage business partnerships with North Florida Community College to assist in the development of a skilled future workforce.
8. Take full advantage of all state and local incentives to assist current and new employers in expanding and attracting new jobs. Examples: Enterprise Zone, Grants (CDBG) and Enterprise Florida programs.
9. Expand infrastructure as required
10. Offer assistance in permitting processes. This can be accomplished in part by becoming familiar with and taking advantage of the Office of Tourism and Trade and the county's designation as a Rural Area of Critical Economic Concern.
11. Madison County employees, officials and citizens should continue their positive and helpful attitude and assistance when dealing with the public and new prospective businesses.

(Economic Development Continued)

12. Attracting new business as well as keeping existing businesses is something the county can do without raising taxes
13. Support our traditional agricultural businesses and industries.
14. Encourage and promote local tourism and festivals.
15. Encourage businesses to invest in their Chamber of Commerce

PUBLIC SAFETY COMMITTEE

Goal – The goal of the Public Safety Committee is to insure that the residents of Madison County and its visitors experience a level of safety and security, provided by a coordinated effort of cooperation and communication from within all public safety entities. This includes access to adequate and quick response to emergency and non-emergency calls, community involvement and education of public safety issues and targeted enforcement by trained professional public safety employees and volunteers.

Rationale – Safety is a basic human need. Safe communities create an environment that is conducive to growth and prosperity. People who feel safe in their workplace can be more productive, and safe schools create a better learning environment.

Priorities – The committee identified four main topics as priorities, with eight sub-topics for consideration.

1. Maintain a centralized communication center with established response time procedures and recommendations. As a sub-topic to this suggestion, the committee listed the need for the full implementation of the E-911 system and the scheduling of regular cross-agency communication drills.
2. Develop a community involvement and proactive education plan to educate the public on safety issues and plans. This includes the need for a Neighborhood Watch Program, A Citizens' Academy and the inclusion of school and community education programs
3. Develop a targeted enforcement task force staffed by trained professional personnel and volunteers. These could include a Drug Task Force, a Gang Task Force and a comprehensive plan of recruitment and training of public safety employees.
4. Improve the condition of sidewalks in the city of Madison. Especially those sidewalks in the retail corridor and in the park areas. Remove all tripping hazards.

EDUCATION COMMITTEE

Goal – The Education Committee identified the need to enhance and expand existing educational programs in Madison County. The committee established the need for a well rounded education by establishing the need for physical, intellectual, emotional and spiritual growth of children, youth and families. The community sees the need to build community partnerships that will provide social interaction and an environment that encourages success for all.

Rationale – Statistics show that there is a need for a transition of power and responsibilities to the younger generation. They are the leaders of tomorrow. The committee acknowledged that education begins at birth and is a lifelong process. The need was identified to establish youth programs, and to develop programs that prepare citizens for the work place.

Priorities - The committee established seven primary goals. The committee feels there is a need to focus on preparing students for the workplace. This can be achieved by working with students on life skills as well as social and recreational activities. The need exist to develop and implement courses in subject such as; leadership and development; financial planning; etiquette and ethics; gymnastics; performing and visual arts; and career development. A top priority stated by the committee is to engage and educate parents to develop youth / adult partnerships. The committee notes that the current Comprehensive Plan may provide for these needs if tied to Element #V-1 Rec and the open space element. Education element not available.

1. Madison County Schools should strive for a “B” or better overall grade classification.
2. Identify how businesses can assist in raising the education qualities of our students through the expansion of current mentoring programs. Build partnerships with community resources including business partners with Excel students.
3. Engage and educate parents as to the importance of developing youth and adult partnerships.
4. Teach life skills including self-discipline, respect, ethics, and moral values.
5. Establish a Youth Task Force for the purpose of recruiting students into meaningful activities including Boys and Girls Clubs, Scouting, YMCA, 4-H, etc.
6. Develop universal, preschool, after school and summer programs.
7. Provide vocational “hands-on” training opportunities for our youth.

HEALTHCARE COMMITTEE

Goal – The goal of the Healthcare Committee is to promote and support the mental and physical health of the citizens of Madison County by providing the very finest in healthcare services, healthcare education and healthcare facilities within Madison County.

Rationale – Healthcare ranks at the top of the fundamental needs of residents both young and old. Quality healthcare is essential for the maintenance of a quality way of life.

Priorities – With the building of a new hospital already on the near horizon, the committee listed its goals in short term and long term sequence.

Short Term Goals

1. The lighting of the Lanier Field Recreational Area as well as the addition of lighting and sidewalks around Lake Francis. This is to encourage and support year-round recreational and exercise programs in a safe environment.
2. Begin health education, prevention and exercise programs within the schools, civic groups and the faith community.
3. Begin a multifaceted approach to childhood sexual health education involving the faith community.
4. Support the hospital in the recruitment of medical doctors for Family and Specialty Practices.

Long Term Goals

1. The committee additionally identified its first long-term goal by identifying the need to create a specialized medical field of practice within the county that would benefit residents, but would also provide services to patients within a large radius of the county. This specialized medical practice would also serve to create new jobs for the residents of Madison County.
2. Work closely with North Florida Community College and the Hospital to develop a Diagnostic Allied Health Education Program.
3. Work with the Madison County School District to encourage and promote physical education and life skill classes in the public schools of the county.

HOUSING COMMITTEE

Goal – The Housing Committee was to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the housing market in Madison County.

Rationale – The residents of Madison County need housing that is affordable, and that is offered with a variety of construction options.

Priorities – The committee identified seven primary needs or concerns including the need for the continued participation of the Housing Committee beyond the Vision 2020 Process.

1. The committee feels compelled to create a task force, (continued with the current group) to work with local building and code enforcement departments for the purpose of identifying blighted, abandoned and uninhabitable homes for demolition.
2. Establish a community outreach program to promote the changes in building codes as a way to clean up Madison.
3. Encourage the City of Madison and Madison County to either waive or reduce the impact fees, taxes, sewer, water or gas surcharges associated with the re-development of any lot on record. This is an incentive to encourage the improvement or removal of abandoned structures. New homes will increase tax revenues and services in the city may increase.
4. Develop criteria to identify substandard housing.
5. Develop a program to upgrade substandard housing.
6. Identify programs that address very low and low income borrows needs (SHIP & USDA) and better promote these programs within the city and county.
7. Research the possibility of reaching out to the 55 and over age group for a retirement community development.

LAND USE COMMITTEE

Goal – The goal of the Land Use Committee was determined to be that Madison County continues to provide a quality of life as a rural and agricultural community.

Rationale – Growth is inevitable. The committee identifies the need to make sure that growth is not allowed to run rampant. Residential growth and the growth of new businesses should be directed into those areas of the county that have been pre-determined as appropriate for such development. Madison County continues to take the steps necessary to maintain and protect our rural and agricultural way of life.

Priorities – The committee identified four primary needs associated with the management of land use within the county.

1. The committee listed as its first priority the education of landowners, realtors, auction companies and developers as to the current zoning of land in Madison County, and for the enforcement of zoning regulations. Encourage the use of agricultural land for agricultural purposes.
2. Refine procedures for requesting density exceptions. No more density exceptions in A-1 unless property is completely separated by a county maintained road and is a minimum of 10 acres, or for those who would apply under the Family Homestead provision. In A-2, allow only one density per property, (changing the names of owners does not circumvent this rule) as long as the original acreage is maintained (10 acres or within 90%). Property owners cannot cut anything out of a parcel that is smaller than 10 acres. New parcels must have deeded access to a county maintained road and must not land lock any adjacent property. Request for density exceptions which do not comply with these ordinances must make an application to the Planning and Zoning Board, who will look at the request and make a recommendation to the Madison County Board of County Commissioners for the final decision.
3. Direct residential, commercial and industrial development to those areas of the county that have been pre-designated to accommodate this type of land use.
4. Allow and encourage higher density residential zones in those areas that can be served by municipal water and sewer.

RECREATION AND TOURISM COMMITTEE

Goal - The Committee for Recreation and Tourism stated that the goal of the committee shall be to develop new and exciting recreational and tourism projects that will contribute to the overall quality of life for our residents and that will entice visitors to come and will enhance the experience of visitors to Madison County.

Rationale – Madison County has been blessed with great opportunities, both man-made and God given. These opportunities, along with new ones, need to be promoted to potential visitors from throughout the country and the world. Additionally, a method needs to be created to make sure that Madison County residents are aware of, and have access to, each of these opportunities. By accomplishing the above, recreation and tourism will continue to contribute to the economic and cultural growth of our community.

Priorities – The committee listed a total of nine goals that were identified as long term or short-term priorities.

Short Term Goals

1. Establish a professionally staffed Welcome Center in Madison County. The committee felt that the center would need to be centrally located and that it should have the necessary collateral materials to supply information to recreational and commercial visitors.
2. Work to develop a quality of room criteria that can be used by the Chamber of Commerce or the Tourist Development Council to rate room quality to insure that all rooms meet recommended state hospitality standards. Determine what times of year occupancy rates are lower and work to target events and promotions toward that time period.
3. Publicize all events in Madison County, via Chamber of Commerce websites, other websites, press releases and advertising in other venues. Facilitate a state of the art website to promote tourism and recreation in the county. Provide for the printing of collateral materials to be used to promote the county.
4. Promote the Recreation Park on the west side of Madison to groups and citizens. Encourage the development of extracurricular activities at this location. Add a walking trail, exercise room, swimming pool, bicycle rodeo and adult and kids summer programs.
5. Make recommendations to appropriate entities to seek and acquire the approval of alcohol sales in Madison County according to the regulations as set forth in the Florida Statutes.
6. Examine the feasibility of converting old railroad tracks into biking and walking trails. Develop events geared to cycling

Long Term Goals

1. Take all steps necessary to bring a YMCA / YWCA to Madison County
2. Examine and determine the steps necessary to add more hospitality rooms to the counties inventory. More hotel, motel, camping and bed & breakfast facilities are needed.

ENVIRONMENTAL COMMITTEE

Goal – The Environmental Committee established as its goal the desire to protect and preserve a healthy, unpolluted and aesthetically pleasing environment for the families of Madison County. The committee also wants the citizens of the county to remain aware of the impact of future developments and enterprises coming into the county.

Rationale – The environment is the sum total of all of our surroundings and includes chemical and living creatures, natural and man-made and the general categories of air, water and soil.

Priorities - The committee divided its topics into three primary categories, with ten sub-topics. The first suggestion noted involved the continued maintenance of clean rivers, roads and trails, along with effective and efficient trash removal services. The committee saw the need for the development of Eco-Tourism in the county as a clean enterprise. The committee continued by listing wetland protection and aquifer protection as top priorities. Code enforcement and consumer education remain essential.

The committee has asked that all the other committees involved in the Vision 2020 Process be kept ever mindful as to the environmental consequences of any of the decisions they make as they work to improve the county.

The Environmental Committee suggests that specific governmental agencies be identified and their codes, ordinances and guidelines be enforced throughout the county. Furthermore, encourage ordinances are needed, or change the ordinances that are antiquated.

In the initial committee report, they focused on water conservation primarily do to time restraints. Soil and air quality as well as other factors cannot be overlooked. We must conserve and preserve all natural resources.

1. Maintain clean rivers, roads and trails. Maintain a sustainable level of trash removal from throughout the public areas of the county. Promote the economic development of those companies involved in Eco-tourism and Recreational Activities.
2. Facilitate wetlands protection. Wetlands protection is critical for recharging the water in our aquifer, water that is currently used for drinking, irrigation and industry. Also be aware in future developments for the need of habitat diversity. Provide for the enforcement of the Codes as established by the Suwannee River Water Management District. Proceed with the necessary removal of non-native plants and animals
3. Maintain the quality and quantity of our underground water resource. Quantity is essential for the availability of well water for our residents, irrigation and industry. Enforce SRWMD restrictions during drought conditions. Quality insures that regular spot checking of our wells is done on a consistent scheduled basis, not just when required by a mortgage company. Chemicals, heavy metals, and disease causing bacteria are all enemies of a quality water supply. Enforce the removal of old cars and machinery that litters and contaminates our county.

(End)