

# Imagine

## MANATEE



A VISION FOR MANATEE COUNTY

FINAL REPORT

MARCH 2004

IMAGINE YOUR FUTURE – IMAGINE MANATEE

PREPARED BY  
ACP-VISIONING & PLANNING, LTD.

IN ASSOCIATION WITH  
URS CORPORATION  
NEIGHBORHOOD AMERICA

# Acknowledgements

## Manatee County Citizens

The thousands of people who have participated in ways large and small to make the Vision Process a success.

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*Members of the Steering Committee have generously given their time and efforts throughout the visioning process, including participation as Stakeholders, Facilitators and Public Outreach Volunteers.*

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## Part I: Introduction

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## 1. Preface

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“What can we do to make Manatee County the best that it can be in the coming years?”

This question was posed to the over 700 residents who participated in the 13 Public Brainstorming Meetings of Imagine Manatee winter 2002-2003. They responded with over 2,550 ideas. These ideas were distilled into 19 goals and 105 strategies and provide a dynamic road map for the future of the County.

Participation in Imagine Manatee was very broad mirroring the ethnic, geographic, and age diversity of the County. Many residents who had never been involved in something of this nature found an opportunity through Imagine Manatee to express their hopes, expectations, and concerns about the future. The number of participants and their diversity legitimize the results of the visioning process.

How can the Imagine Manatee vision be transformed into reality? How can the momentum for civic involvement be harnessed for implementation? A great vision in and of itself cannot make Manatee County better. The vision must be more than a compendium of good ideas and aspirations. It must put forth ways to mobilize people and resources to transform reality. To this end, the final chapter of this report summarizes the results into seven implementation drives. A brief description of each of the drives is provided on the following page.

- The implementation drive for a **Green County** deals with ways for the County to grow while protecting environmentally sensitive and agricultural areas.
- The implementation drive for a **Beautiful County** aims at improving the overall look and feel of the County.
- The implementation drive for an **Accessible County** tackles the problems of congestion and the need for improved mobility and choice, as the population grows.
- The implementation drive for an **Equitable County** deals with how to provide an adequate supply of affordable housing and how to increase the availability of social services in the community.
- The implementation drive for a **Prosperous County** looks at transforming the area's downtowns and waterfronts into vibrant places and at diversifying the local economy to ensure opportunities for all.
- The implementation drive for a **Collaborative County** deals with ways to sustain the involvement of the public beyond Imagine Manatee and ways to create greater cooperation among local governments.
- The implementation drive for an **Educated County** aims at improving education and better integrating schools into the fabric of the community.

Over the next few years, local governments, community groups, businesses, and residents will fill in many of the details necessary to transform the vision into reality. As this report marks the end of the Imagine Manatee vision process, it signals the beginning of new opportunities to become involved in shaping the future of the County.

### The Results

The results for Imagine Manatee – A Vision for Manatee County are presented in three volumes: the report itself, the appendices, and the ideas from the public. These documents provide a complete summary of the vision process, including the extensive public involvement effort and implementation approach.

### The Report

The report is divided into four parts as described below.

- **Part I: Introduction to the Visioning Process** includes this preface and an overview of the steps and methodology used to develop the Vision.
- **Part II: Community Profile** provides a general description of Manatee County and a synopsis of existing conditions and trends in the County.

- **Part III: The Vision** presents the Vision’s Goals and Strategies for Manatee County’s future as well as recommendations that focus on the County’s physical environment.
- **Part IV: Implementing the Vision** is a guide for turning the Vision into reality.

## Appendices

Throughout the course of Imagine Manatee, the ACP Team produced interim reports with detailed information on the results of each step of the process. These reports have been included in the appendices as follows:

- Appendix A: Stakeholder Interviews and Perceived Challenges
- Appendix B: Existing Conditions and Trends Report
- Appendix C: Stakeholder Workshop Summary
- Appendix D: Public Brainstorming Meetings Summary
- Appendix E: Public Brainstorming Meetings Demographics
- Appendix F: Tools for Implementation
- Appendix G: Acting on Implementation

## Ideas from the Public

This volume contains all the ideas submitted by participants of Imagine Manatee during the Public Brainstorming Meetings (for both the Ideas for the Future and Strong Places Weak Places workshop activities) and the Goal and Strategy Writing Workshops. The ideas are provided for reference purposes.

## Client and Consultant Team

Imagine Manatee – A Vision for Manatee County is an initiative of the County and local governments of Manatee County. The project includes all lands within Manatee County, including the six municipalities, as well as the unincorporated area.

ACP–Visioning and Planning (ACP) was retained to lead a consultant team – the ACP Team – for the project. ACP is a firm specializing in conducting visions in preparation for physical plans with offices in New York, NY and Columbus, OH.

Other members of the ACP Team included URS Corp and Neighborhood America. URS Corp was responsible for technical analysis, GIS mapping, and analysis of existing plans and codes. Neighborhood America was responsible for the design and management of the Imagine Manatee website.



Participants at the Youth Kickoff Meeting engaged in the Strong Places Weak Places workshop activity.





## 2. Public Process: Steps and Methodology

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Imagine Manatee was a citizen driven vision. As a result, the Vision summarized in this report embodies the ideas presented by county residents and is based on the input gained through a carefully crafted public program. County residents played a critical role in all phases of the program by being an integral part of the vision's decision-making structure and by actively participating – by the thousands – in a seven-month public involvement process.

The steps and methodology used to involve county residents and conduct the public process are described below. They have being organized in five steps:

1. Getting Organized,
2. Understanding the County – Perception and Reality,
3. Gaining Public Input and Developing the Vision,
4. Refining the Vision and Setting Priorities, and
5. Involving Elected Officials.

### **Step One: Getting Organized**

The dedication of volunteers has been key to the success of Imagine Manatee. Organized into a Steering Committee and three Action Teams, volunteers were involved in making critical programmatic and logistic decisions that helped structure Imagine Manatee.



The first Steering Committee meeting.

The Steering Committee included 41 members representing a broad cross-section of Manatee County residents. They met monthly to make crucial policy decisions, review the progress of the program, and help shape the vision for Manatee County.

The three Action Teams – Publicity, Outreach, and Volunteer – met frequently in the preparation phase of the vision and during the public involvement process to assist in program logistics. The complete membership of all Steering Committee and Action Team members is listed in the Acknowledgements.

The Publicity Action Team helped develop a countywide marketing campaign that included the writing, design, and distribution of bilingual brochures and flyers; the development of a bilingual Public Service Announcement; and the involvement of print and electronic media. They generated interest in the program announcing all of the vision’s major events and activities.

The Outreach Action Team developed an extensive outreach program designed to attract residents to the public meetings. They operated at two levels. After identifying the locations of the program’s public meetings, team members helped recruit organizations and associations active in the areas surrounding meeting sites. These organizations in turn helped in the distribution of nearly 20,000 fliers announcing the public meetings using their own networks. They also worked with countywide organizations such as the League of Women Voters and the local Chamber of Commerce to ensure that participants at the public meetings would reflect not only the demographic make up of the community but critical interest areas as well.

The Volunteer Action Team recruited residents to assist with the facilitation of Imagine Manatee’s workshops and meetings. Seventy-five volunteer facilitators were trained to assist with the public meetings. These volunteer facilitators also represented a broad cross section of County residents.



The Action Teams developed and distributed thousands of flyers like this one to generate interest and participation in Imagine Manatee.

### Step Two: Understanding the County – Perception and Reality

To understand residents’ and stakeholders’ perceptions of the County and the trends that affect the County’s growth and prosperity, the ACP Team conducted stakeholder interviews and an extensive analysis of countywide data and trends.

#### Stakeholder Interviews

The purpose of the stakeholder interviews was to identify how each stakeholder group perceived core issues and challenges faced by Manatee County. In October 2002, the ACP Team conducted structured individual and group interviews with 32 community leaders and stakeholders representing, among others, the business community, not-for-profit

organizations, and government agencies. A summary of the interviews and the list of community leaders interviewed are presented in Appendix A.

### **Data and Trends Analysis**

The purpose of the data and trends analysis was to establish baseline information related to the complex demographic, economic, environmental, and physical factors at play in Manatee County. To complete the analysis the ACP Team extensively reviewed data from several sources, including the U.S. Census Bureau, the Florida and U.S. Statistical Abstracts, the University of Florida Bureau of Economic and Business Research, the U.S. Department of Commerce Bureau of Economic Analysis, and local government comprehensive plans. The data was used to provide an overview of various conditions in Manatee County as well as comparisons of Manatee with surrounding counties, the State of Florida, and the nation. The results of the analysis are summarized in Chapter 4. The full text of the Data and Trends Report prepared by the ACP Team can be found in Appendix B.

### **Step Three: Gaining Public Input and Developing the Vision**

To involve the broadest possible segment of the population in drafting a bold vision for the future of Manatee County, Imagine Manatee held a series of public activities from the Fall of 2002 to the Spring of 2003. These activities included: the Stakeholder Workshop, the Public Brainstorming Meetings, and the Goal and Strategy Writing Workshops. Everyone living or working in Manatee County had an opportunity to participate in these meetings and to build the vision for the County's future.

#### **The Stakeholder Workshop**

The Stakeholder Workshop was designed to lay the foundation for future visioning activities by initiating a dialogue on future growth in the County. Participants explored the relationship between population growth and land consumption and discussed preferred growth patterns that could be used in accommodating the County's future growth.

Stakeholders representing citizens; the business sector; special interest groups in areas such as the environment, education, housing, the arts and transportation; representatives of the development community; and the planning community came together at the Manatee County Convention and Civic Center for three hours on November 19, 2002. After learning about current issues affecting the County, participants were encouraged to explore the tradeoffs between preserving agricultural and undeveloped land and accommodating future growth. Using large county land use maps and colored chips representing land for protection (green) and future growth (brown), the participants illustrated graphically their preferred scenario for development in the County.

Participants also discussed the positive and negative impacts of their choices and how they might relate to the quality of future development, the

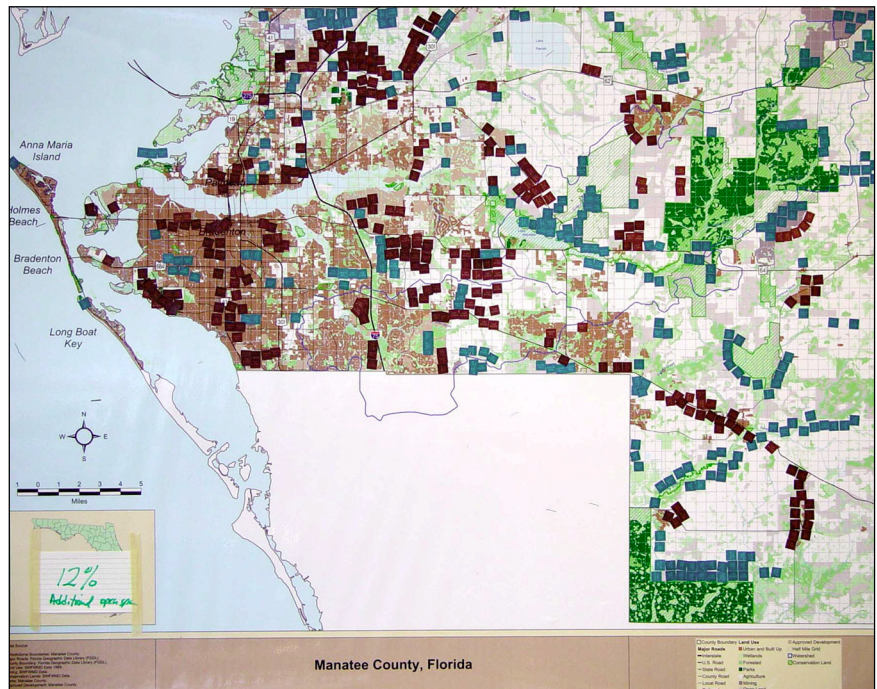


Participants recommend areas for preservation during the Stakeholder Workshop.

natural environment, the County's economy, and quality of life. A full report of the results from the Stakeholder Workshop is included in Appendix C.

A number of observations on preferred land use scenarios became clear during the workshop. For example, the desire to limit land consumption became a powerful theme during the Stakeholder Workshop and remained so throughout Imagine Manatee as reflected in a variety of the vision's goals and strategies. During the workshop, participants expressed a strong preference for concentrating future development in a clustered fashion on land immediately adjacent to urbanized areas and on land already developed. Another example of stakeholder preferences was the desire to protect land from development in order to expand existing parks, create green corridors for recreation and wildlife, and create new urban parks, among others.

The map below, created by Group #10 during the workshop, clearly illustrates these concepts and is representative of the preferences indicated by most groups during the workshop. Please refer to Appendix C for the complete set of Stakeholder Workshop maps.



### **Public Brainstorming Meetings**

A Youth Kickoff Meeting and 12 Public Brainstorming Meetings were held at locations around the County in January and February 2003. Over 740 residents from throughout the County participated in the meetings designed as countywide brainstorming sessions to generate ideas for the future of Manatee County. A summary of the Public Brainstorming Meetings is included in Appendix D.

**Participant Demographics at Public Brainstorming Meetings**

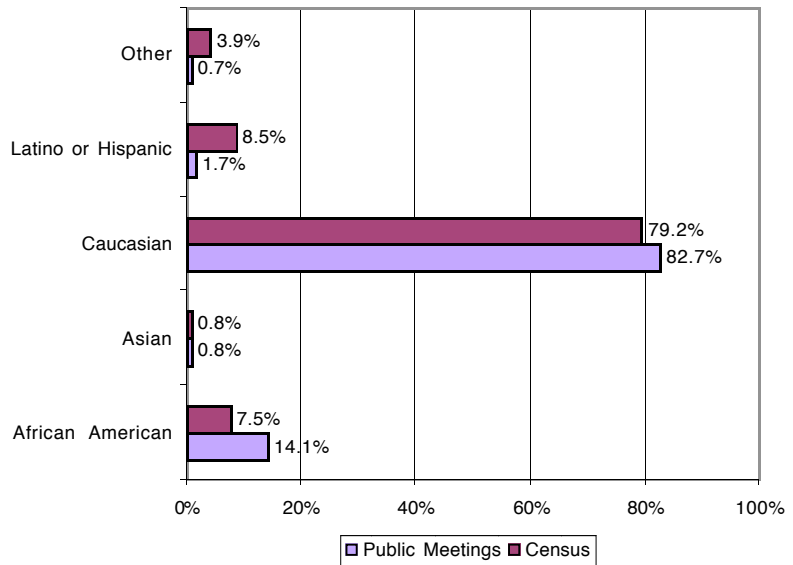
One critical goal during the public meetings was to involve the broadest possible cross-section of county residents. To facilitate diverse participation in accordance with the advice of the Outreach Action Team and the Steering Committee, the Public Brainstorming Meetings were held in all parts of the County from rural areas to urban neighborhoods. No part of the County was further than a 15-minute drive from a meeting site.

Participants at the Public Brainstorming Meetings completed an exit survey that provided basic demographic information. The two charts below show ethnicity and age of survey respondents. The first chart compares 2000 Census data with the race and ethnicity of participants at the meetings. The chart shows that the share of Caucasian participants at the Public Brainstorming Meetings was slightly higher than their share of the general population in Manatee County.



Participants at one of the Public Brainstorming Meetings

**Race or Ethnicity of Public Brainstorming Meeting Participants Compared to Manatee County Population**

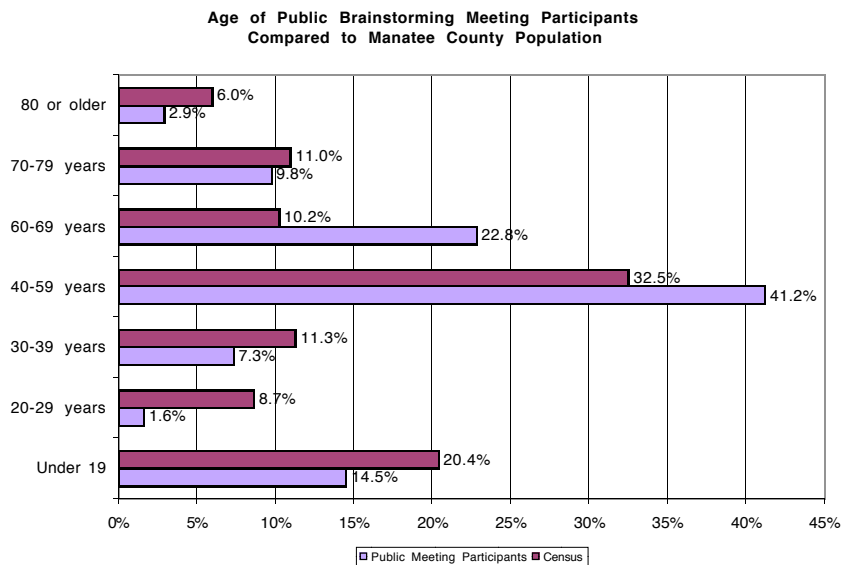


The rate of participation of African Americans was high accounting for 14 percent of the participants, nearly double their share of the general population in the County. The Hispanic population was lower than their share of the County’s population. Only two percent of the participants were Latino or Hispanic while their share of the general population is 8.5 percent.

In addition to comparing the Public Brainstorming Meeting participation with the Census, it was compared to the Current Population Survey (CPS) Voting and Registration Supplement for 2000, a joint project between the Bureau of Labor Statistics and the Bureau of the Census. Participation in the Public Brainstorming Meetings closely

matches the profile of the County’s likely voters. Caucasian voters in Manatee County account for 84 percent and the percentage of African American voters is 12 percent. Similar data for Latino or Hispanic voters is not available.

The second chart shows the age of participants. Participants included a good cross section of ages including participants under the age of 19 and over 80. The large majority – nearly 65 percent of the participants – fell between the ages of 40 to 69 years of age, far exceeding their 43 percent share of the general population. There was ample participation of those 30 to 39 years, a demographic group traditionally difficult to attract to these types of events. The lowest rate of participation was among those 20 to 29 years old.



For a complete review of the meeting demographics, refer to Appendix E.

**Activities**

During the Public Brainstorming Meetings, participants worked on three activities:

- Future Vision Assessment (FVA),
- Brainstorming Ideas for the Future, and
- Strong Places Weak Places.

**Future Vision Assessment (FVA)**

The FVA was conducted to assess residents’ visual preferences for the physical environment. Participants reviewed images representing varied conditions found in the County illustrating places where people live, shop and work, drive cars, park cars, and walk and play. Participants rated each image based on a scale of +5 to –5, where +5 indicated

the most positive reaction and -5 the most negative. The results of the FVA are summarized in Chapter 6, A Quality Place.

### Brainstorming Ideas for the Future

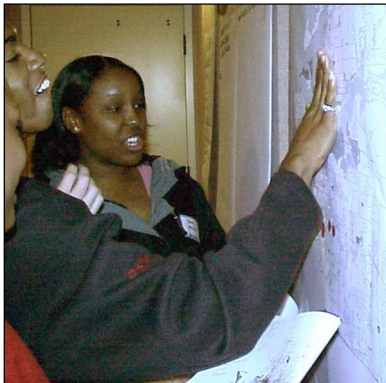
Ideas for the future of the County were gathered in small facilitated groups. The small group process consisted of a modified version of the Nominal Group Technique. Participants were led through a visualization exercise, asked to silently write down their ideas for the future, and then shared their ideas with their small group. The facilitators were instructed to document each idea as presented by the participants on flipchart paper. In total, 2,550 ideas for the future were generated through this process and through email submissions made by those who were unable to attend a brainstorming session. The complete list of ideas for the future is available on the Imagine Manatee website. These ideas served as the foundation for the Goals and Strategies in Chapter 6.



The visualization exercise being read by a facilitator during the Youth Kickoff meeting.

### Strong Places Weak Places

After contributing ideas for the future, participants engaged in the facilitated mapping exercise Strong Places Weak Places. Each small group was assigned a topic selected at random from the following categories: commerce, community appearance, parks and open space, residential areas, and transportation.



Participants identifying their strong and weak places on the county map.



A sample Strong Places Weak Places map dealing with Community Appearance from the Public Brainstorming Meeting at Palmetto Elementary School.

Using colored dots each participant identified strong (green) and weak (red) places on a county map for their assigned topic area. The

group as a whole then identified patterns indicating consensus among their individual selections and discussed the reasoning behind these choices. The participants also made recommendations for improving the weak places they had identified. The results of this activity are summarized in Chapter 7, A Quality Place, and Appendix D.

The table below includes the three priority strong and weak places in Manatee County by category as identified by the workshop participants. Detailed documentation on all strong and weak places, reasons for selection, as well as recommendations for improvement are included in Appendix D.

**Priority Strong Places and Weak Places**

Category	Strong Places	Weak Places
Commerce	Ellenton Outlet Mall Downtown Bradenton Anna Maria Island Cortez Road	Palmetto 14 <sup>th</sup> Street Corridor Oneco
Community Appearance	Lakewood Ranch Beach Communities Waterfront	Oneco Palmetto 14 <sup>th</sup> Street Corridor
Parks and Open Space	Emerson Point Myakka State Park Anna Maria Island	Oneco Phosphate Mines (Piney Point) Palmetto
Residential	Lakewood Ranch Anna Maria Island Northwest Bradenton	Oneco Palmetto 14 <sup>th</sup> Street
Transportation	I-75 U.S. 301 University Parkway	Cortez Road (and U.S. 41) Manatee Avenue 14 <sup>th</sup> Street

**The Imagine Manatee Website**

In addition to participating in the public meetings, County residents followed the visioning process and contributed ideas and comments at the Imagine Manatee interactive web site ([www.imaginemanatee.org](http://www.imaginemanatee.org)).

Between June 2002 and June 2003, the website received nearly 25,000 visits. Over 5,000 unique visitors viewed the website, monitored the process, and submitted comments, which means thousands of different people have interacted with Imagine Manatee over the internet. Twenty-five percent of these individuals visited the website more than once and spent on average 5 minutes viewing the site.

**Developing Goals and Strategies**

The next step in the visioning process was to transform the 2,500 ideas generated during the Public Brainstorming Meetings into specific goals and strategies for the future. First, the ideas were organized into 19 categories. Next, members of the Steering Committee reviewed the ideas for each category and wrote a draft goal for each category that embodied the essence of the ideas.

In March 2003, four separate public Goal and Strategy Writing meetings were held at the Manatee County Convention and Civic Center and attended by over 262 participants. At the sessions, participants worked in small



All project-related materials are available for viewing on the website including the ideas generated during the visioning process as well as an electronic copy of this report. The website address is [www.imaginemanatee.org](http://www.imaginemanatee.org).



groups with a trained volunteer facilitator to review and finalize goal language. The participants made necessary changes to ensure the goals accurately represented the ideas generated during the brainstorming sessions. The participants also identified strategies for achieving the goals. In total, the participants at the Goal Writing meetings developed 19 goals and 105 strategies. See Chapter 6 for a complete list of all goals and strategies.

### Step Four: Refining the Vision and Setting Priorities

Imagine Manatee sought the broadest public participation possible in the final stages of refining the vision and setting priorities through Visit the Vision events and the Community Choices workshop.

#### Visit the Vision

During the seven Visit the Vision open house style events held at strategic sites throughout the County, Imagine Manatee goals and strategies were presented on large format, tabletop displays. Visitors were given the opportunity to indicate which of the goals they felt were most important to the future of Manatee County and to sign up to work on implementing their priority goal. The Visit the Vision events provided a special opportunity to generate additional public awareness of and participation in the Imagine Manatee visioning process.



This flyer was displayed and distributed in both Spanish and English to promote participation in the Visit the Vision and Community Choices activities.

#### Community Choices

The Community Choices workshop was the final public participation event of Imagine Manatee. Held in April 2003 at Bayshore High School, Community Choices was designed to present all the information developed during the Imagine Manatee visioning process, to involve participants in further refining aspects of the vision, and to assess participants' priority goals for the future.

First, participants were divided into eight groups to discuss design principles and implementation tools for creating quality places in Manatee County. The principles and tools represented issues that pervaded the output of previous Imagine Manatee activities, but were not adequately addressed in the goals and strategies developed during the Goal and Strategy Writing Meetings. These included:

1. Community Appearance;
2. Land Preservation (Natural Areas, Agricultural Lands, and Parks and Open Space);
3. Mix of Uses;
4. Redevelopment, Infill Development, and Renovation;
5. Social Equity;
6. Civic Involvement;
7. Code Review and Enforcement; and
8. Neighborhood and Countywide Planning and Zoning.

**Goals in Priority Order**

Through the Imagine Manatee process, nineteen distinct goals for the future were developed. These goals were prioritized by participants during Visit the Vision and Community Choices. The results of the prioritization are listed below.

<b>Goals by Rank</b>	<b>Total Votes</b>
1 Preservation of Natural Areas	79
2 Environmental Quality	75
3 Automobile Transportation	69
4 Education	63
5 Growth Management	48
6 Parks and Trails	46
7 Affordable Housing	38
8 Culture, Arts, and Historic Preservation	37
9 Crime and Public Safety	34
10 Government and Leadership	26
11 Public Transportation	24
12 Neighborhood Character	22
13 Alternative Transportation	21
14 Social Issues	20
15 Planning and Zoning	20
16 Community Spaces	18
17 Economic Development	17
18 Downtowns	15
19 Delivery of Services and Water Supply	14

Next, the participants reviewed all the goals and strategies, registered their priorities, and were given the opportunity to register to assist with implementation of one or more goals. The results of Community Choices are included in Chapter 6.

**Step Five: Involving Elected Officials**

In the course of the public process phase of Imagine Manatee the ACP Team met on two occasions with elected officials from all jurisdictions in the County. These informal meetings were held to keep elected officials informed about developments in Imagine Manatee and gather their feedback.

The first meeting of Elected Officials was held following the Stakeholder Workshop in November of 2002. It included a review of preliminary existing conditions and trends and a presentation of the results of the Stakeholder Workshop. The second meeting was held at the conclusion of the Public Brainstorming meetings in March 2003. The meeting included a presentation of the final existing conditions and trends and a discussion of the results of the public meetings. The discussion focused both on the substance of the public input as well as on a review of the demographics of the participants.

A third meeting is scheduled to present the Imagine Manatee final report to a joint session of the County’s elected officials.

## Part II: Community Profile

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## 3. The County

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The visioning process is designed to be both informed and intuitive – analyzing available data on the existing conditions and trends in the County while incorporating the insight of those who live and work in the County through the public involvement process. This chapter on the County and the following chapter on County Data and Trends deal with documenting and analyzing conditions in the County.

### Location

Manatee County is located roughly midway along Florida’s west coast and is bordered by the Gulf of Mexico and Hillsborough, Hardee, DeSoto, and Sarasota Counties (see map in sidebar). The County has six municipalities comprised of diverse communities, each with its own particular character and identity. All of the municipalities are active participants in the Imagine Manatee visioning process.

The six municipalities are:

- Anna Maria,
- Bradenton Beach,
- Bradenton,
- Holmes Beach,
- Longboat Key, and
- Palmetto.



Manatee County is located roughly midway along Florida’s west coast.

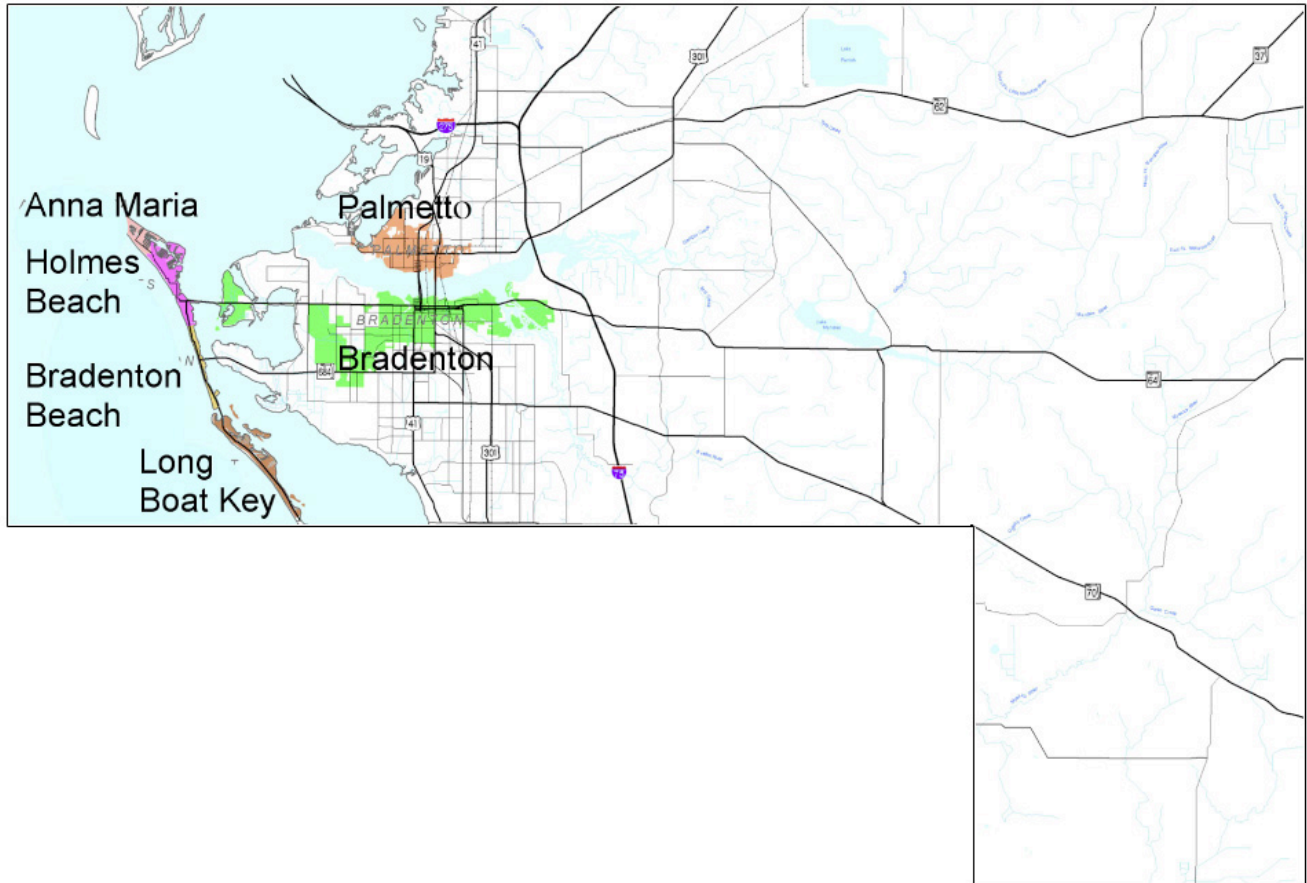
The municipalities are located on the west side of the County, four of which are on barrier islands. Anna Maria Island, a seven-mile long barrier island located due west of the City of Bradenton, is home to the cities of Anna Maria, Bradenton Beach, and Holmes Beach. Longboat Key is also a barrier island whose northern half is within Manatee County boundaries and southern half is in Sarasota County. The largest municipalities in the County are the cities of Palmetto and Bradenton. These cities lie on either side of the Manatee River – Palmetto on the north side and Bradenton on the south. A map of the County is provided at the end of this chapter.

**Area**

Manatee County is 740 square miles in area with 150 miles of coastline and 27 miles of beaches. Its unincorporated area is approximately 718 square miles. Roughly 13 percent of the unincorporated area is urbanized, consisting of residential, commercial, office, industrial, utilities, and institutional land uses. A considerable amount of land is allocated to agricultural and open space land uses. Approximately 43 percent of the unincorporated area is identified as agricultural and 12 percent is identified as conservation or parkland.

I've seen this county change quite a bit — some good, some bad.  
— Public Meeting Participant

**Map of Manatee County**



## History

In 1855, Manatee County was formed from portions of Hillsborough and now defunct Mosquito counties where thousands of cattle roamed unfenced land in the interior sections of the County. The County soon experienced a large influx of settlers from Georgia, Alabama, and South Carolina.

In 1867, as land was opened for settlement, over 800 families made up mostly of ex-confederate soldiers and their families moved to Manatee County. A person could claim 180 acres for homestead if they cleared a portion, defended it, and occupied it for five years. Most settlers brought small herds of cattle to the area, built homesteads, and grew sugar cane, corn, and other vegetables.

In 1887, Desoto County was formed from eastern Manatee County and the City of Arcadia was designated as the new county seat. Manatee's county seat was relocated from Pine Level, now a ghost town in Desoto County, to Braidentown (modern Bradenton). It was not until 1921 that Sarasota County was formed from the southern portion of Manatee County.

Cattlemen continued their trade from the 1880s through the 1920s, but the 1920s marked the beginning of Florida's boom years when thousands of people arrived in the state seeking prosperity. During this time, development in the City of Palmetto was accelerated by construction of the Victory Bridge, the first bridge across the Manatee River between the Palmetto and Bradenton. Similarly, the coastal area of the County began to develop when the first bridge to Anna Maria Island was built in the 1920s.

The County's population progressively filled in the areas between the barrier islands and the cities of Palmetto and Bradenton, creating Manatee County's present day urban core. As the resident population grew, agricultural lands were increasingly replaced by suburban development. Today, the County continues to draw new residents who are attracted by the County's pleasant climate, relatively low taxes and overall cost of living, availability of housing, proximity to regional markets, and abundant recreational resources. The local economy has developed around tourism, retirement living, retail trade, and real estate development.

## Manatee County Today

The physical location, environmental attributes, and history of any locality greatly influence the form of its physical and economic development, governmental structure, and social character. There are numerous examples of how these factors have influenced Manatee County.

The County originally developed around agriculture, which continues to play a critical role in the local economy. Although agricultural employment has declined, acreage in crop production remained stable between 1990 and 2000. Out of Florida's 67 counties, Manatee County ranks first in tomato and watermelon production, second in cabbage, and third in pepper crops. During the visioning process, residents indicated their desire to preserve

the agricultural character and economy in parts of the County (see Part III, The Vision).

Manatee County's location in Florida along US Highway 41 and access to the Manatee River and the Gulf of Mexico initially made the County an attractive area for seasonal retirees. The combination of its small town feeling and being part of the Tampa Bay metropolitan area, which includes Tampa and St. Petersburg to the north, and Sarasota to the south, contributed to turning Manatee County into a desirable area in which to live and work. More recently, I-75 and I-275 have played key roles in the development of the county. This dynamic has led to notable population growth affecting various aspects of development and quality of life in the County.

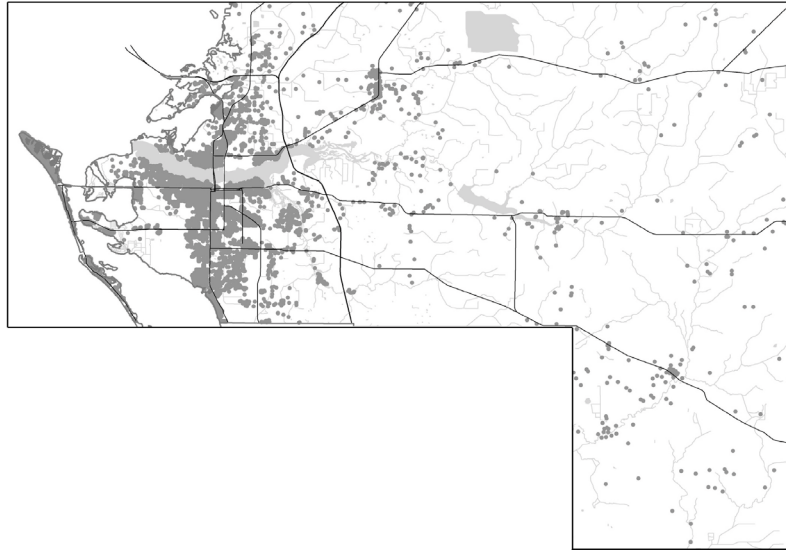
The maps on the following page illustrate the changing development patterns growth has created in the County. In the past, development was focused near the waterfront. Today development is spreading eastward into agricultural and previously undeveloped areas. In fact, between 1990 and 2000, approximately 83 percent of population growth took place in the unincorporated areas of the County. In addition, density is decreasing. The number of dwelling units per acre has declined from 2.8 to 2.5 units per acre in recent years.

Concerns about population growth were raised continually during the visioning process and numerous goals and strategies (see Chapter 6) attempt to deal with the resultant impacts of population growth on land, the environment, public services, and infrastructure.

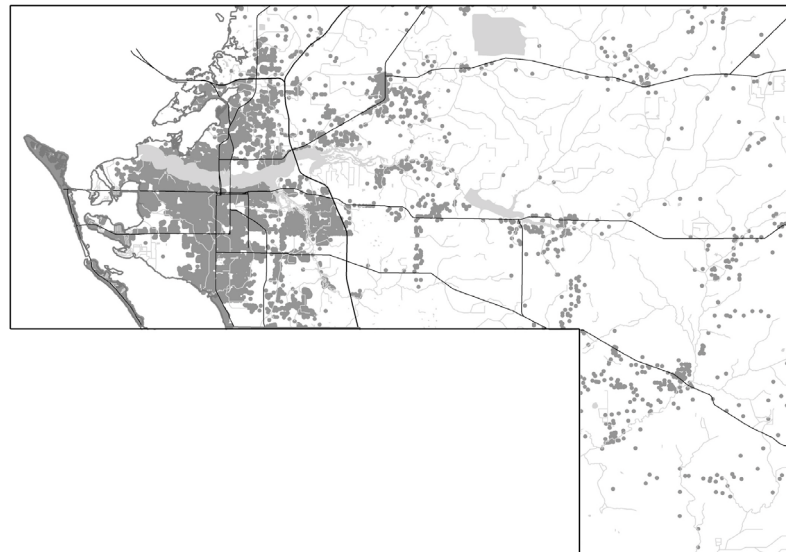
### Changes in Development, 1960 to Today

The maps below present all structures extant in Manatee County for the years 1960, 1980, and today. Each structure is represented by one dot. The maps illustrate the historical concentration of development near the water in the western portion of the County and the more recent expansion eastward.

**1960**



**1980**





Today





#### **A Day in the Life**

Based on current trends, between 2000 and 2010, Manatee County can be expected to change in the following ways, everyday...

- 14 more people,
- 6 new dwellings,
- 2.5 acres developed for residential uses,
- 62 new transportation trips on area roads, and
- 4 new jobs created.

## 4. County Data and Trends

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An extensive technical analysis of Manatee County's historical and projected demographics, socioeconomic indicators, and land use was conducted. Data was assembled from several sources for this analysis, including the U.S. Census Bureau, the Florida and U.S. Statistical Abstracts, the University of Florida Bureau of Economic and Business Research, the U.S. Department of Commerce Bureau of Economic Analysis, and local government comprehensive plans. When appropriate, Manatee County is compared to the region (defined for this report as Hillsborough, Sarasota, DeSoto, and Pinellas counties), the State of Florida, and the nation.

Outlined below are highlights from the findings of the data and trends analysis. The full Existing Conditions and Trends Report prepared by the ACP Team is included in Appendix B. In addition to a thorough analysis of conditions in the County, the appendix includes a comprehensive list of key findings. These findings correlate closely with the intuitive results of the Stakeholder Interviews (see Appendix A) and other Imagine Manatee public involvement activities.

Although data and trends are critical to generating understanding of the County, it is important to remember that trends are not destiny. Existing conditions are facts. Forecasts are predictions of what the future may hold – they are not set in stone. The Vision for Manatee County when implemented may very well change the course of current trends to create a community representative of the goals and aspirations of its residents.

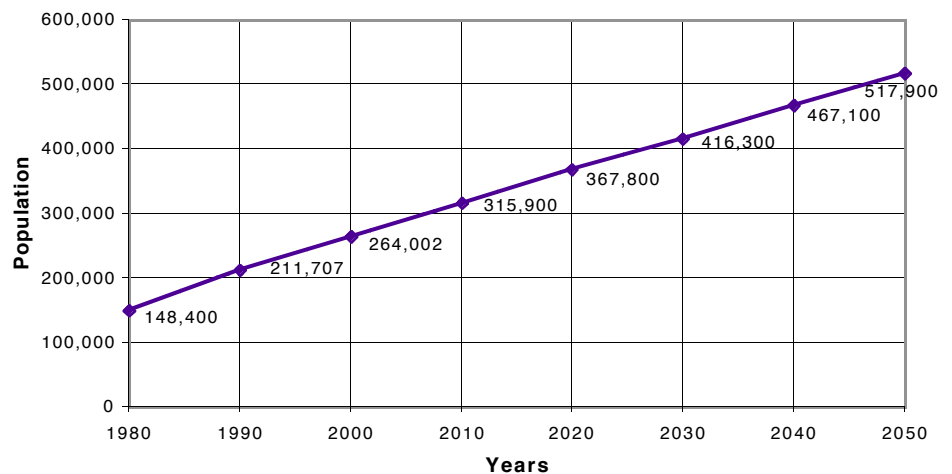
**Snapshot of Manatee County**

**Population**

As of year 2000, Manatee County had a population of 264,002. According to the Census, 86.4 percent of the population is white, 8.2 percent of the population is black or African American, and 9.3 percent Hispanic or Latino. Although the percentage of the Caucasian population decreased four percent between 1990 and 2000, Manatee County is still slightly less diverse than the region, state, and nation.

In the next 50 years the population of Manatee County is likely to almost double. It is projected that the population of Manatee County will grow by approximately 50,000 people each decade through year 2050 adding over 250,000 new residents for a total estimated population of 517,900.

**Manatee County Historical & Projected Population Growth, 1980-2050**



**Employment, Income, and Poverty**

In examining socioeconomic indicators there are four employment sectors of particular interest: arts, lodging, and entertainment which grew by 527 percent from 1990 to 2000; education/health and retail trade which are the first and second largest employers respectively; and agriculture which experienced the greatest decline in employment from 1990 to 2000 decreasing by 54 percent.

Median household income in 2000 was \$38,673, which is on par with the State of Florida but lower than regional and national figures. Manatee County’s percent increase in household income between 1990 and 2000 was greater than those of the region, state, or nation. The percentage of those living below the poverty line remained relatively unchanged between 1990 and 2000 at 10 percent of the population.

### **Housing**

According to recent data, the housing stock is increasing in value. The average cost of a new home in Manatee County in 2000 was \$105,689. A large majority of housing in Manatee County (70 percent) has been built in the last 30 years. Approximately 74 percent of housing is owner occupied.

### **Transportation and Traffic**

Vehicle miles traveled (VMT) are estimated to increase by 99.8% from 1995 to 2025. Due to increasing congestion, it will take 23.5 percent more time to get to a destination in year 2025 compared to 1995.

### **Land Use**

The total land area of Manatee County is 474,000 acres. As of 2000, urbanized areas of the County totaled 59,700 acres, an increase of 31 percent from 1990. Residential land use is the largest consumer of land occupying approximately 44,000 acres in 2000. Two or fewer home-sites per acre represented the greatest increase in land consumption, growing by 97 percent between 1990 and 2000. It is anticipated that the trend in land conversion to urban uses will continue – unless steps are taken to alter development patterns – thus resulting in the urbanization of an estimated total of 128,000 acres of land by 2050.

## Part III: The Vision

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## 5. Goals and Strategies

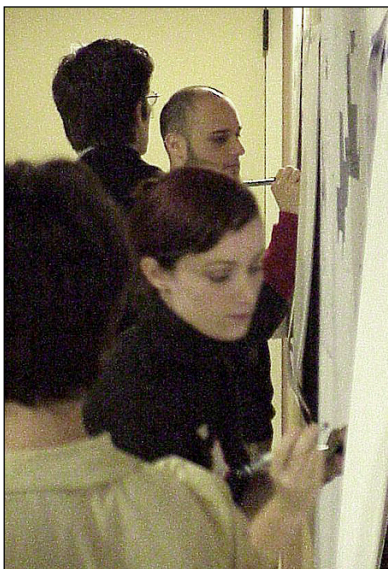
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### Goals and Strategies

The goals and strategies contained in this chapter represent the collective vision for the future of Manatee County. The goals express Manatee County residents' hopes and aspirations for their community and the strategies provide the roadmap to achieving the goals. Both the goals and strategies were articulated, refined, and validated through extensive public involvement efforts as documented in Chapter 2.

The 19 goal areas listed below are in alphabetical order in this chapter. The related strategies are listed within each goal in priority order based on the results of the Goal and Strategy Writing Meetings.

- Affordable Housing
- Alternative Transportation
- Automobile Transportation
- Community Spaces
- Crime and Public Safety
- Culture, Arts, and Historic Preservation
- Delivery of Services and Water Supply
- Downtowns
- Economic Development
- Education
- Environmental Quality
- Government and Leadership
- Growth Management
- Neighborhood Character
- Parks and Trails
- Planning and Zoning
- Preservation of Natural Areas
- Public Transportation
- Social Issues



Participants record their ideas at a Public Meeting.

If we want to solve problems, we need to find other ways that will work. We need to think out of the box.

— *Public Meeting Participant*

## Affordable Housing

### Goal

A community with safe, diverse, new, and existing neighborhoods that provide adequate amounts of quality affordable housing for very low and moderate-income families, agricultural workers, migrant workers, seniors, and residents with special needs throughout the County.

### Strategies

1. Revise local development codes to encourage traditional neighborhood development, boosting affordable housing by design.
2. Offer tax incentives or impact fee credits to builders and investors.
3. Offer families that are currently on subsidized housing assistance homeownership options, including faith-based initiatives.
4. Develop inclusionary zoning.
5. Local elected officials encourage developments consistent with the goal.

## Alternative Transportation

### Goal

A community with a fully integrated and regional multi-modal transportation system that serves everyone and promotes safety, increases transportation network efficiency, and maximizes neighborhood connections.

### Strategies

1. Establish rules and regulations that facilitate the incremental development of the goal in all construction, development, and redevelopment or scheduled infrastructure improvements/repairs.
2. Form a task force that includes all sectors of the community and local experts, that will determine the specific transportation needs, and will interact with the appropriate government and other agencies to plan, fund, and implement recommended changes.
3. Establish transit lines that are dense and frequent throughout the County.
4. Add sidewalks and bicycle paths on all major roads and around schools.
5. Coordinate with all regional public transportation systems seeking advice and suggestions.

## Automobile Transportation

### Goal

A community that plans, develops, and maintains a comprehensive network of efficient roads, highways, and infrastructure while encouraging the use of cleaner more fuel-efficient vehicles and other forms of alternative transportation, thereby creating beautiful livable roadways that improve travel throughout the County.

**Strategies**

1. Reduce future traffic growth and congestion by not building the Fort Hamer Bridge.
2. Seek out available funding sources such as a five-cent fuel tax and expansion of the use of transportation impact fees.
3. The Metropolitan Planning Organization should adopt an intelligent transportation system that would extend the life of and improve the efficiency of our two-county transportation network.
4. Coordinate in a master plan the Comprehensive Plan and the Metropolitan Planning Organization's 2020 Plan.
5. Evaluate all current and potential funding sources to pay for the implementation of the transportation master plan.
6. Develop a master plan that reduces trips and trip distances by creating more compact villages and shopping areas.

**Community Spaces****Goal**

A community that has centers and areas for youth, adults and seniors to meet, communicate and recreate; that promotes safety and a sense of community; that has clean beaches and clear access to waterways; and that has both neighborhood parks and events, and festivals and events for the whole county.

**Strategies**

1. Develop strict countywide requirements that builders and developers must follow to ensure residents can enjoy and be proud of what is built here, with a planning committee that has the authority and financial means to promote projects that will improve the community.
2. Operate schools as full-time community centers.
3. Implement cross-generational mentoring one-on-one or in small classes conducted by volunteers and paid staff.
4. Develop youth programs and events with a teen planning board.
5. Establish a planning committee for improving redeveloping areas.

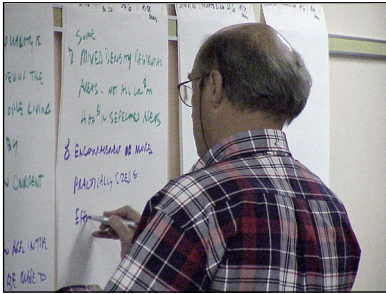
**Crime and Public Safety****Goal**

A community that aggressively enforces all laws and building codes with proper punishment that fits the crime, and that has adequate street lighting, proper emergency response by the appropriate authority (law, fire, EMS), and that supports prevention.

**Strategies**

1. Increase police patrols (both car and foot) to reduce crime and enhance public safety.
2. Consolidate all law enforcement, fire, and medical response to improve services through the County and city governments.





A facilitator records participants ideas at a Public Meeting.

I think we need spaces in all the communities for recreation, even if its just a small space where you can go and have your lunch or play some Frisbee.

— *Public Meeting Participant*

3. Ensure aggressive enforcement through additional sheriff's and building code department's personnel, increased accountability, and proper utilization of all assets.
4. Coordinate County and city governments' efforts with Florida Power & Light to provide streetlights in all communities of the County.
5. Policy makers should come together to focus on countywide needs.

### Culture, Arts, & Historic Preservation

#### Goal

A community with a thriving public events environment and facilities offering local and professional opportunities to experience arts, culture, entertainment, recreation, and historical resources.

#### Strategies

1. Establish a historic preservation ordinance.
2. Encourage city governments to join with the County and the School Board to support a downtown performance arts hall.
3. Establish special tax districts and develop a project-funding plan to encourage long-term historic preservation.
4. Create a voluntary board to work with elected officials and government staff from throughout the County on implementing the goal.
5. Direct a percentage of tourist development funds to the Arts Council of Manatee County.
6. Encourage city and County governments to cooperate, coordinate, and fund activities related to this goal.
7. Strengthen the existing Arts Council which will publish an annual calendar of arts, cultural, and historical events and maintain a website.

### Delivery of Services & Water Supply

#### Goal

A community that delivers services that are responsive to neighborhood needs; improves infrastructure and the health and safety of citizens; provides consistent value for taxes levied to provide services; and maintains a sufficient and clean water supply for current needs and future growth.

#### Strategies

1. County and city elected officials should develop a taxing plan.
2. Consolidate County and city governments by voter referendum.
3. Improve water conservation through the use of reclaimed water.
4. Develop neighborhood plans through citizen input.
5. Establish neighborhood groups to identify service deficiencies, and health and safety needs.

## Downtowns

### Goal

A community with attractive, vibrant, and economically sustainable downtowns.

### Strategies

1. Create a master plan for each downtown area.
2. Create mixed-use development plans offering residential, retail, offices, and cultural and entertainment facilities that encourage day and night year-round activity.
3. Maximize river and waterfront potential.
4. Develop economic incentives for each downtown's redevelopment.
5. Develop infrastructure and parking that are both people and vehicle-friendly.

## Economic Development

### Goal

A community with a diverse economy driven by a mix of tourism, agriculture, high-tech industrial companies, quality employers, and small, independently- and minority-owned businesses; providing employment and continuing skills-development opportunities for people of all ages and skill levels; and encouraging variety and quality commercial development including a vibrant downtown core supported by appropriate infrastructure.

### Strategies

1. The County and cities, in cooperation with the Economic Development Council, should identify and implement a dedicated source of funding to support economic development initiatives that attract and grow high-skill, high-wage jobs.
2. Develop partnerships between government and private business/industry to coordinate education and training necessary to attract and maintain a viable workforce and promote Manatee County as a learning community.
3. Develop effective, targeted marketing to promote the County as a business-friendly destination with supportive resources and incentives.
4. Enhance public services that support recreation and tourism activities in downtown areas.
5. Emphasize the importance of the Manatee River as a recreational playground involving all ages in water activities from kayaking to yachting.

## Education

### Goal

A community with an adequately funded public school system focused on student achievement, well-paid quality teachers, state-of-the-art

neighborhood facilities, and technologically advanced education and vocational training programs that are aligned with workforce opportunities.

**Strategies**

1. Encourage school officials as well as community groups to lobby legislators for more federal and state educational funds for the local school system.
2. Develop a cooperative vocational intern program with local industries.
3. Establish neighborhood schools funded by developers prior to allowing them to build a new community.
4. Form a planning group consisting of members from the School Board, businesses, higher education, and vocational training to plan and acquire necessary tools to achieve stated goal.
5. Advance the schedule of reconstruction or remodeling of older schools to bring them up to standards of newer schools.

**Environmental Quality****Goal**

A community that acquires and preserves environmentally sensitive natural habitats and land; protects existing trees during development; provides more environmental education and encourages pollution prevention; promotes recycling, litter control, and renewable energy; conserves and protects water quality, water supply, coastal areas, and all waterways; plants more native trees and landscape especially along roadways and removes invasive plants; provides and connects more green spaces for wildlife; manages stormwater runoff and flooding; and controls and restricts phosphate mining, sludge dumping, and development of bridges.

**Strategies**

1. Initiate a program to fund acquisition and management of environmentally sensitive lands.
2. Rewrite the comprehensive plans to reflect the goal.
3. Develop, pass, and enforce strict ordinances on management of water, land, and natural resources including amendments to comprehensive plans to reflect the goal.
4. Enforce existing environmental codes.
5. Develop assessment procedure to rank wetland quality with the purpose of protecting significant wetlands and allow improvement of degraded systems.
6. Establish a growth plan east of I-75 to address low-density, preserve farming and ranching, and preservation of open space.
7. Pass a local option sales tax funding for construction of stormwater management systems in existing urban areas to improve water quality.
8. Ban phosphate mining.

9. Support more environmental education opportunities for children and adults using existing resources.

### Government and Leadership

#### Goal

A community with an interactive, responsive and communicative government that encourages public participation; enhances problem solving through public-private partnerships and government accountability; places priority in cooperation with other units of government; maintains and enhances infrastructure; and provides diversified revenue generation.

#### Strategies

1. Encourage governmental units and private entities to hold forums with citizens, brainstorm ideas, and form partnerships to achieve the goal.
2. Review and recommend proposed changes to the land use and comprehensive plans by a joint planning committee to the local governments that will interactively approve appropriate changes.
3. Establish a citizen advisory group in each County Commission District to work with the respective Commissioner to monitor, track, and generate issues to come before the County Commission.
4. Establish a committee of citizens representing the community to meet with Commissioners and to state problems/needs quarterly at convenient times and places.



A facilitator and participants at a Public Meeting.

I've attended two Imagine Manatee sessions, and what I am hearing a lot is that people are saying we need more parks .

— *Public Meeting Participant*

### Growth Management

#### Goal

A community that controls, balances, limits, and plans for growth and redevelopment; prevents urban sprawl; protects open and natural spaces; protects waterfronts; preserves agricultural assets; and manages density.

#### Strategies

1. Revise zoning codes to achieve the goal in an open forum.
2. Develop a funding source for land preservation.
3. Implement stiff penalties and enforcement of codes.
4. Investigate ecological limits of growth.
5. Provide a mechanism to purchase development rights to protect agricultural and natural areas.

### Neighborhood Character

#### Goal

A community of distinct and safe neighborhoods, village areas, parks, and redeveloped city cores that reflects the diversity of its residents; beautifies public spaces; cleans up abandoned spaces and obsolete strip malls; preserves historical sites and restores older buildings and neighborhoods; and provides adequate sidewalks and lighting.

**Strategies**

1. Uniform code enforcement.
2. Local governments should add neighborhood planning boards.
3. Offer neighborhood incentives for builder/owner by the local governments.
4. Promote and advertise neighborhoods to enhance civic pride.
5. Establish a public referendum on the goal.

**Parks and Trails****Goal**

A community that preserves and plans for more neighborhood, regional, and state parks throughout the County with diverse uses for all ages and abilities such as dog parks, skate parks, gardens, fitness parks, and historical and parks with educational themes, etc.; connects a countywide walking, biking, and nature trail system, including sidewalks, with adjacent counties and statewide trail systems; improves the maintenance, safety, and public access of boat ramps, vistas, and blueways to our beaches and other waterways while considering the preservation of environmentally sensitive areas and natural eco-systems.

**Strategies**

1. Develop a parks and trails master plan.
2. Identify funding sources.
3. Seek and maintain the cooperation of landowners with the awareness of the special needs of agriculture.
4. Maximize use of public land.
5. Provide for public access to all publicly-owned lands and facilities.

**Planning and Zoning****Goal**

A community that encourages infill and mixed development while maintaining the appearance of the community; requires infrastructure concurrent with impacts of growth; provides for pleasant community appearance through strict code enforcement; and balances development efforts with preservation of open space and agricultural areas.

**Strategies**

1. Develop a plan that would enlist public input to define how the goal would affect their areas.
2. Amend comprehensive plans and zoning codes to provide incentives for mixed-use development.
3. Provide a permanent funding source for purchase of open space.
4. Embrace technology to relocate to the County.
5. Implement recommendations of the County's Blue Ribbon Transportation Report.

## Preservation of Natural Areas

### Goal

A community that preserves, protects, and restores its natural areas – including waterways, beaches and coastal areas, wetlands and sensitive lands, wildlife and wildlife habitats, trees and big trees in particular, and drinking water; acquires land for preservation, agricultural protection, and community access; and provides open spaces and greenways in developed areas and biodiversified green space.

### Strategies

1. Establish an Environmental Preservation Department.
2. Amend comprehensive plans to reflect the goal and to include the map of identified natural areas needing preservation and provide a way to transfer development rights from these lands to already disturbed lands.
3. Develop a mandatory environmental education program in County schools.
4. Establish a dedicated source of public funds; allow private sector partnerships for acquisition and management of natural areas, open spaces, and greenways; and pass an environmentally sensitive land acquisition tax.
5. Create a group with authority to study needs and implement the goal.
6. Establish citizen committees to review existing ordinances and regulations to determine if they meet the established goal and recommend revisions to bring ordinances and regulations into line.
7. Enforce goals and laws to preserve and protect environment and all natural resources through more patrols.
8. Change zoning codes to include the preservation of old-growth trees, native vegetation, and the use of native plants in landscaping.



Stakeholder Workshop participants discuss preservation of natural areas and land use during the Where Do We Grow? activity.

## Public Transportation

### Goal

A community with a convenient, safe, and reliable public transportation system for all that operates round-the-clock throughout the County on a predictable, frequent schedule and has a variety of travel methods including light and high speed rail, buses, carpool lanes, bike lanes, and park and ride options, which are interconnected with adjoining counties.

### Strategies

1. Initiate private and public funding partnerships to accomplish goal.
2. Have County Commissioners appoint an independent public transportation commission to implement a better public transportation system.
3. Establish a public awareness campaign for the transportation programs and its system.

4. Conduct a survey to determine development of park and ride facilities in the County.
5. Develop a time schedule to implement steps to obtain the goal.

### Social Issues

#### Goal

A clean, affordable community that supports a wide range of recreational and educational activities for children, teens, adults, and seniors; respects diversity and develops pride; and provides comprehensive services addressing issues such as substance abuse, homelessness, employment opportunities, and healthcare for everyone in the County.

#### Strategies

1. Establish programs that set goals for implementing comprehensive services and inform the community concerning their progress.
2. Establish a comprehensive web-based information and referral system for first call help.
3. Build a welcome center for immigrants funded by the growers.
4. Create a social services action task force under auspices of the County Commission to provide dedicated direction for the creation and implementation of services to meet identified needs.
5. Establish neighborhood outreach programs to better educate the community.
6. Require high school students to take a course that teaches them to acknowledge the need and purpose of specific comprehensive services.

## 6. Manatee County: A Quality Place

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What type of place will Manatee County be fifty years from now? How will its open spaces, towns, and neighborhoods look? How should homes, offices, and shopping areas be designed? Those questions, among others, were raised during Imagine Manatee in meetings such as the Stakeholder Workshop and Community Choices and in exercises such as the Future Vision Assessment Survey (FVA) and Strong Places Weak Places conducted during the 13 public brainstorming meetings. For a description of these meetings and the methodology used in conducting them, please refer to Chapter 2 and Appendices D and E.

Manatee County residents recognize that the County will continue to grow. (Conservative forecasts indicate that the population could grow by as many as 250,000 residents by the year 2050, doubling the current population.) The ideas they expressed during Imagine Manatee consistently addressed how the County should grow in order to protect and enhance the unique qualities of its built environment while accommodating growth, diversity, opportunity, and economic vitality and avoiding congestion, sprawl, and social inequality.

This chapter captures the residents' vision for the physical environment of Manatee County as expressed in the course of the visioning process. Each section provides an overview of that vision and a set of recommendations or guidelines on how that vision can be turned into reality.



The chapter is divided into four sections:

- **The Bird's-Eye View** addresses the countywide scale,
- **Neighborhoods and Corridors** addresses the scale and type of future development,
- **From the Ground Up** addresses the design of the County's public realm, and
- **Design Principles** provides a framework for implementation.

Each section makes reference to specific sources of information or events in the visioning process. Although these references are specific, it is important to note the results of all activities are consistent and reinforce each other. Similar ideas and propositions have been presented from the first to the last event of the process. These ideas are included in the Goals and Strategies presented in the previous chapter as well as in this one. The consistency of the results of the visioning process indicates a strong consensus about the future of the County.

### **The Bird's-Eye View**

The bird's-eye view provides the most comprehensive picture of Manatee County's physical environment. It depicts a place that accommodates growth while simultaneously protecting those elements of the natural environment that, in the eyes of current residents, make the experience of living and working in the County unique. This bird's-eye view addresses the participants' strong concern with the rate of growth the County has been experiencing in recent years and the amount of land used to accommodate that growth. Participants of Imagine Manatee have suggested two complementary ways to achieve their vision for the County:

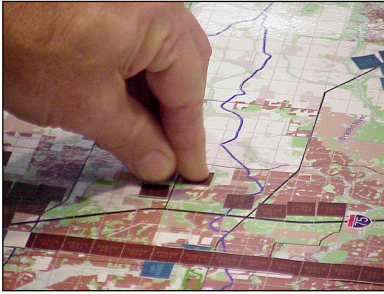
- Preserving Land, and
- Using Land Better.

These recommendations were mainly derived from comments made and issues raised at the Stakeholder Workshop and are fully supported by the Goals and Strategies. In fact, the Preservation of Natural Areas is the highest priority goal in the entire vision.

### **Preserving Land**

There is clear agreement that the County needs to set aside additional land and protect it in perpetuity from future development. Recommendations on how to do that, in addition to those cited in the goals, are outlined below.

- Amend current plans (or develop new ones) to set priorities for the preservation of natural areas, open space, and farmland.
- Develop a funding strategy for acquisition and preservation of open space and natural areas using all tools available including State grants.
- Acquire and preserve as much as an additional 10 percent of the County's total land – this would nearly double the amount of land in the County preserved in perpetuity.



A participant identifies areas to accommodate future growth during the Stakeholder Workshop.

- Map and inventory key natural areas, wildlife, and productive farmland.
- Use protected land strategically to guide future development.

### Using Land Better

Another approach to land preservation is to ensure that future development occurs in a way that minimizes the amount of environmentally sensitive land affected by development and developable land should be used more efficiently. Participants suggestions for better use of land are summarized below in four categories:

- Clustering Development,
- Directing Growth,
- Promoting Redevelopment, and
- Exploring Higher Densities.

### Clustering Development

Participants recognized that clustering development could help accommodate growth while allowing for sufficient open space in large enough parcels to create recreation opportunities and aesthetic appeal. The County should focus on development that increases sense of place, allows for more mixed uses, reduces transportation and infrastructure costs, and, in the long run, makes mass transit stable.

### Directing Growth

The concept of concentrating new development in areas adjacent to already developed parts of the County was presented numerous times. In particular, participants suggested that development should focus on existing transportation corridors along I-75 and US 41 to better utilize existing infrastructure.

### Promoting Redevelopment

Participants advocated the creation of incentives for the redevelopment of already developed areas as a multi-purpose strategy to reduce the amount of new land consumed, revitalize older neighborhoods, improve quality of life for those who live in established neighborhoods, increase availability of affordable housing, and encourage urban infill.

### Exploring Higher Densities

Participants did not shy away from the idea of promoting higher densities as another strategy to reduce the use of land. Two key issues catalyzed the discussion: the availability of choice between more urban and more rural types of development and the design quality of denser development. Participants also recognized that higher density areas that are well planned and designed could better support public transportation.

## **Neighborhoods and Corridors**

The Neighborhood and Corridors section provides a picture of Manatee County's physical environment as seen while driving around or walking through the community. It depicts a future where neighborhoods and transportation corridors are well integrated, visually appealing, create a strong sense of place, and welcome diversity.

During Imagine Manatee, residents reviewed areas in the County they considered weak and strong. From that analysis they identified a checklist of guiding criteria for the creation of visually appealing, well planned, and equitable new development and redevelopment. The guiding criteria presented by participants are summarized below for the following categories:

- Community Appearance,
- Mixed Use Areas,
- Parks and Open Space,
- Residential Areas, and
- Transportation.

### **Community Appearance**

Places in Manatee County should be well planned, safe, and diverse and should foster a strong sense of community. They should be complete, well maintained, and self-contained entities that have a well defined center and that balance shops with affordable residences, business, and recreation areas. They should be well designed, well landscaped, and pedestrian friendly conveying a quiet non-congested quality consistent with the natural assets and historic character of the area.

### **Mixed Use Areas**

Shopping areas should be conveniently located, secure, and well planned. They should mix stores of different sizes, types, and affordability providing all needed services to their area. They should integrate uses and activities including housing, restaurants, and places for visitors. They should be served by good public transportation, be accessible, and have easy parking. They should be attractively designed and of appropriate scale with good landscaping and lighting.

### **Parks and Open Space**

Parks and Open Space should be well maintained, clean, and safe with active recreation and ample parking. They should provide amenities such as boat ramps, waterfront access, and beaches. They should shelter wildlife, preserve pristine land, have trails, and include historical resources.

### **Residential Areas**

Residential areas should integrate affordable housing, diverse businesses, and support good quality of life. They should include amenities such as large and small parks that are accessible to the community, well maintained, and safe. They should have good schools and community facilities (e.g. libraries) nearby. They should include large and small lots providing for diversity of house sizes and incomes. There should be good places to walk and bike with sidewalks and a connected street pattern. They should have access to well designed nearby retail. They should be visually attractive and in harmony with their surroundings, with a small town feel when urban and a respect for nature when rural. They should be quiet, protected by speed limits, and low traffic.

### **Transportation**

The transportation network should provide for a good flow, easy access, and alternate routes throughout the County. It should be pedestrian friendly and offer public transportation alternatives such as a trolley system. Limited access roads should be safe and efficient, with well marked exits. Local streets should be low speed and well landscaped with bike trails and sidewalks and should provide on street parking.

### **From The Ground Up**

The From The Ground Up section provides a picture of Manatee County's physical environment as seen at the scale of individual streets. It focuses on the public realm of the County and depicts a place where diverse residential options, shops, offices, parks, streets, sidewalks, and parking are carefully designed and integrated.

Imagine Manatee participants reviewed 47 images illustrating a variety of physical conditions, predominantly in Manatee County. The images were organized into five categories:

- Where We Live,
- Where We Shop and Work,
- Where We Park Our Cars,
- Where We Walk and Play, and
- Where We Drive.

The participants expressed their preferences for the images, the results of which are summarized below. They, too, represent a foundation for setting guidelines for future development. They are illustrated using the images rated by participants. For a full review of the rating of the images presented see the FVA-At-A-Glance on page 6.10.

### The Highest and Lowest

Out of all the images reviewed the highest rated image (Score +3.1 out of maximum of 5) shows Bradenton's waterfront. The image shows a pleasant walking environment, with amenities such as a textured sidewalk and benches and with a tree lawn and planting separating and protecting the pedestrian environment from the street. Benches are in the open and oriented toward the view and the sidewalk activities. This image captures all of the elements of an attractive public realm (below left).



The lowest rated image (Score – 2.5 out a lowest possible score of – 5.0) shows a garish shopping strip (above right). The image shows a congested road, which evoked respondents' greatest frustrations and fears. It shows a loud environment of competing signs that is not mitigated by a planted median. There is no sense of enclosure. The image shows an unpleasant and hostile walking environment with nothing to protect the pedestrian from the traffic. The image underscores concerns raised during the process about congestion and the quality of this type of development.

### Where we Live

The highest rated image in this category (Score + 2.8) shows a single family home in a natural environment (below left). The high rating is

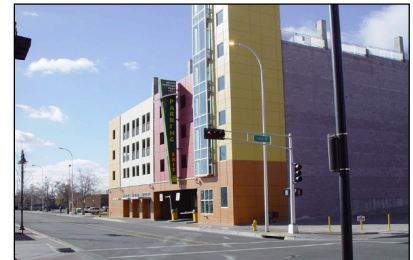


consistent with the high premium given to the preservation of the natural environment and to types of development that are compatible with nature rather than overwhelm it. Note how the edges of the road have no sidewalks and the native vegetation has been maintained, minimizing the appearance of a residential road.

The lowest rated image (Score – 0.5) shows a tall apartment building scarcely integrated with its surroundings (above right). The low rating of this image speaks to the inappropriate scale of the building depicted. It would also appear to be an indictment of density, but it is not.

### Where We Park

The preference given to well screened off-street parking in downtown Bradenton (Score + 1.8) strongly suggested that parking lots should be screened from public view (below left).



The lowest rating in this category was given to a multi-level parking structure (Score – 0.7) ill matched to its surroundings (above right). This type of isolated structure contrasts strongly with the participants’ vision of integrating diverse aspects of the built environment.

### Where We Walk

The highest rated image in this category (Score + 3.0) is that of a sidewalk in a very low density environment with large shaded grassy areas and big setbacks adjacent to a gently undulating street (below left). The image shows a low density development that appears natural. The curvature of the street also gives the impression of a terminated street, a feature that consistently scores high in this type of survey.



The second highest rating in this category (Score +2.5) shows the sidewalk of downtown Bradenton. A critical element of the picture is the arcade that provides a pedestrian scale and protection from the elements. The two images are contrasting. Their different feel and scale underscores a recurring theme of the vision that gives preference to both low density semi-rural environments and to more urban and intense places (above right).

The lowest rated image (left) in this category (Score – 0.3) shows a narrow sidewalk constrained on one side by tall shrubs and open to the road on the other. There is no buffer or protection from passing cars. This is precisely the type of environment that is inconsistent with the vision of the County’s physical environment.

The images below (left and right) rated very closely (Scores + 1.7 and + 1.3, respectively) and show remarkably similar appreciation for pedestrian environments in quite different settings, a new subdivision and a neo-traditional development. Both images present a fundamentally sound public realm with well designed and well maintained sidewalks. They represent the type of choices that should be available throughout the County.



### Where We Drive

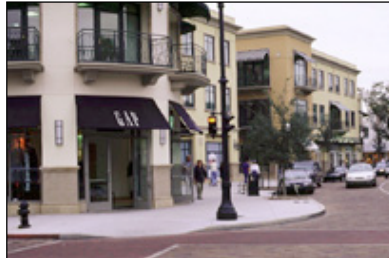
The highest ranked image in this category (Score + 2.3) shows a wide curvilinear residential street with a landscaped median (below left). This is the type of street design that participants have consistently favored and singled out. A guiding criterion from the Strong Places Weak Places, for example, suggests that “local streets should be low speed, wide, and well landscaped” even though as local residential streets they do not carry heavy volumes of or high speed traffic.



The lowest ranked image in this category has already been described as the lowest rated image of the entire survey earlier in this section. The second highest rated image (Score + 2.0) in this category shows an intersection in a residential neighborhood (above right). The intersection has a circle designed to slow down traffic. This type of traffic calming device is receiving increased support from area residents. Its application allows for the creation of an interconnected network of streets and for effective speed control.

### Where We Shop and Work

The highest rated image for this category (Score + 2.2) – one of the few from outside Manatee County – shows a mixed use shop and office infill project in the foreground (below left) and a continuous urban three-story background (from Park Avenue in Winter Park, Florida).



A new mixed use development in Portland, Oregon (above right), also scored high (Score +1.6). Mixed use development has consistently been a big part of the County's vision. That notion, suggested by goals and strategies and captured by one of five design principles described in the next section of this chapter, has been confirmed by the preferences expressed through the visual survey.

### Where We Play

This category has the highest rated image of the entire survey. The second rated image (Score + 2.9) depicts a neighborhood park – a focal point for its community – with playground facilities well integrated in the tree-shade of the park. The non-impervious surface of the playground also contributes to the natural aspect of the park (below left).

No image in this category received a negative rating, in fact the lowest rated image scored + 1.7. The image (below right) shows a formal park area in a neo-traditional mixed income new development surrounded by two-story attached residential units and faced by the neighborhood community center. While strikingly different from the previous image and clearly urban in context, the image again shows a broad range of preferences in park design.





Where We Live



Where We Shop & Work



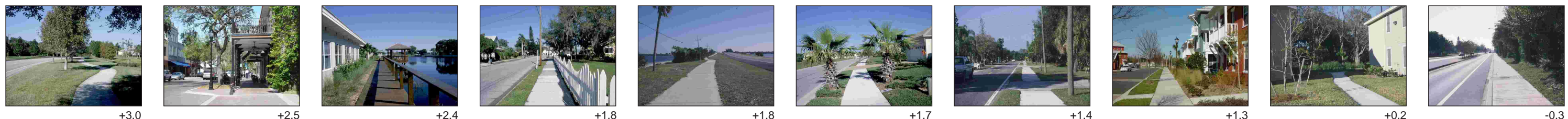
Where We Park



Where We Drive



Where We Walk



Where We Play



## **Design Principles**

Community Choices was the culmination of all public meetings conducted for Imagine Manatee. The purpose of the event was to review design principles and implementation tools dealing specifically with the County's physical environment and to complete the process of prioritizing goals and strategies.

The five design principles capture the essence of the recommendations and considerations found in this chapter. The implementation tools discussed at the Community Choices workshop have been incorporated into Appendix F, Tools for Implementation. The principles discussed in this section include:

- Community Appearance,
- Land Preservation,
- Mix of Uses,
- Redevelopment, Infill Development, and Renovation, and
- Social Equity

Participants at the Community Choices workshop strongly supported the design principles. A summary of their comments is presented below and once again indicates the degree of support and the consistency of opinions found throughout the vision.

### **Community Appearance**

The character of a community is manifested through what we see and experience when we walk, bike, or drive through a place. Elements that contribute to improve the character and appearance of a place include, among others: landscaping, street lighting, sidewalks, signs, paving, landscaped buffers, quality architecture, the placement of utilities underground, and proper maintenance.

#### **Principle**

*New and redeveloped existing neighborhoods and transportation corridors should be visually appealing to promote pride and a sense of place.*

There was overwhelming consensus that a commitment should be made to make Manatee County a beautiful place. Participants cited the beneficial effects beautification can have on creating a positive image of the community, supporting tourism, promoting ecological health of the environment, and positively affecting residents and visitors. The participants believed there should be a well conceived master plan.

There was also support for code enforcement and funding for beautification. The participants also noted that beautification should be the joint responsibility of local governments and residents.

## Land Preservation

Selected environmentally sensitive areas and agricultural lands can be protected from development. In some cases land can be protected in perpetuity. In other cases it can be protected until it is released for development. Tools for protecting land include identifying and purchasing land, transfer or purchase of development rights, and mandated set-asides for developments.

### Principle

*Throughout the County, natural areas and agricultural lands should be preserved and protected in order to direct growth, protect the agricultural economy, preserve natural habitats and environmentally critical areas, and provide active and passive recreational opportunities.*

There was strong support for preserving and protecting land in the County. The reasons cited for land preservation included: quality of life and protection of wildlife, watersheds, access to waterways, agricultural land, and corridors for recreation and sound economic reasons. Participants expressed concern on how the principle would be implemented and paid for.

The participants also believed it is possible to balance the rights of property owners, the needs of the larger community, and the need to promote sustainability through utilization of fair compensation.

Generally, participants believed clustering would allow for sufficient open space in large enough parcels to enjoy recreation and create appealing aesthetics.

## Mix of Uses

Neighborhoods and developments should provide for a balance of activities including small offices, live-work units, small shops (such as a grocery store), a range of residential housing types and price levels, schools, community facilities, and parks and open space. These types of communities are supportive of those too young or too old to drive and foster a strong sense of community.

### Principle

*New and redeveloped existing neighborhoods throughout the County should include a mix of integrated uses that support walking, biking, public transit, and automobiles and promote a sense of community.*

Participants supported a mix of uses to create a sense of community and diversity and to reduce sprawl and traffic. Their support was predicated on the need for the mix of uses to be realistic, consistent, and decided by community members.

There were varying opinions on incorporating different housing options into communities to accommodate younger people, older people and people of different needs and incomes, but the participants generally supported it. Those who supported the concept felt it is a valuable way to bring people together and create opportunity. Some believed the community should set the rules. Others thought the concept is unrealistic and did not recognize the needs of different ages and incomes.

### **Redevelopment, Infill Development, and Renovation**

Existing neighborhoods, under performing areas (typically older and obsolete shopping malls), old industrial sites, and vacant lots can be given preference in the development process improving the viability and appearance of communities within the County. Rehabilitation codes (that make it easier to bring up to code existing properties), tax abatements, and expediting the permitting process are tools that can facilitate redevelopment, infill development, and renovation of properties and create choice and alternatives to building on new land.

#### **Principle**

*Redevelopment, infill development, and renovation should be encouraged in existing neighborhoods and downtowns throughout the County in order to maximize the use of existing infrastructure, minimize the use of new land, and reduce pressure on agricultural land and environmentally sensitive areas.*

The large majority of participants felt there should be a commitment to redevelopment, infill development, and renovation in housing, commercial, and industrial property so it will be pleasing to the eye. According to some participants, renovation would mean higher property values for homeowners, industry, and businesses. And if redevelopment occurs, it could make mass transit more affordable and likelier to happen. Those who dissented believed that redevelopment should be driven by the market place.

The participants also believed the way to accomplish redevelopment, infill development, and renovation is through a “carrot and a stick” approach along with economic incentives. Greater incentives should be provided to those home and business owners in or near the urban core centers.

#### **Social Equity**

There are several ways that physical solutions can help create a just and fair community. Homeownership can ground residents in the life of a neighborhood. The renovation of low-income neighborhoods can create a strong sense of place and pride. Places that allow for diverse building types and incomes bring people of different ethnic backgrounds and incomes the opportunity to interact, breaking the concentration of poverty in older

neighborhoods. Locating jobs closer to the places where people live provides opportunity to those who are most likely to fill those jobs.

### **Principle**

*A fair and just County should be comprised of safe, healthy, and attractive neighborhoods that support strong community life and promote employment, education, and housing opportunities for all.*

The participants were divided on the issue of housing. Those who supported the concept of creating communities with different housing options cited that diversity creates an opportunity for a better understanding and a better sense of community. They felt that diversity could be achieved within reason by upgrading housing in low-income areas and adding open green space and landscaping to instill pride in the community.

Those who dissented believed that the principle is unrealistic as written and not possible in regards to homeownership.

Participants felt that the point of the question on promoting homeownership opportunities for low income residents was really about property maintenance. The participants questioned whether or not low-income ownership is a better option than rental units with active property maintenance, since increased homeownership by itself would not necessarily add to the tax base.

### **Application of the Principles as Remedial Actions**

During the Public Brainstorming Meetings, participants identified strong places and weak places in the County for five categories: commerce, community appearance, parks and open space, residential, and transportation. The strong places serve as models for the types of development participants appreciate while the weak places represent areas that are in need of remedial action to transform them from weak places to strong places. A detailed summary of the results of the Strong Places Weak Places activity is included in Appendix D. Strong Places Weak Places-at-a-Glance on page 6.17 marks the top strong and weak places on a map of the County.

The three priority weak places in the County are Oneco, Palmetto, and the 14<sup>th</sup> Street Corridor. Participants submitted recommendations on what should be done to improve conditions in the weak places. Although their proposals are specific to a location, there are some generalized recommendations that can be summarized from the results. These match closely the design principles described in the previous section.

One recommendation often cited by participants could be the root as well as the result of taking action to improve the quality of life – civic pride. The desire to create a positive identity for Manatee’s communities and empower its residents was suggested consistently during Strong Places Weak Places.

Beautification, landscaping, and cleanliness of the neighborhood are ways of generating pride in the community. Participants cited the positive effects of cleanup programs and landscaping. They promoted the concept of volunteer efforts to assist in the process, illustrating their recognition of these three places as part of the larger Manatee County community and their role in helping to improve the condition of the environment.

There was strong support for redevelopment and revitalization. This dynamic relates to the desire to support social equity as well as to reduce the demand for new land to accommodate future growth.

The participants also wanted improvements in the existing communities' infrastructure through better stormwater and flood management, sidewalks, landscaped barriers, and burying utilities. They would like to see the creation and maintenance of parks, playgrounds, and public spaces as well as a library, pools, bike facilities, boat ramps, and programs for children and youth.

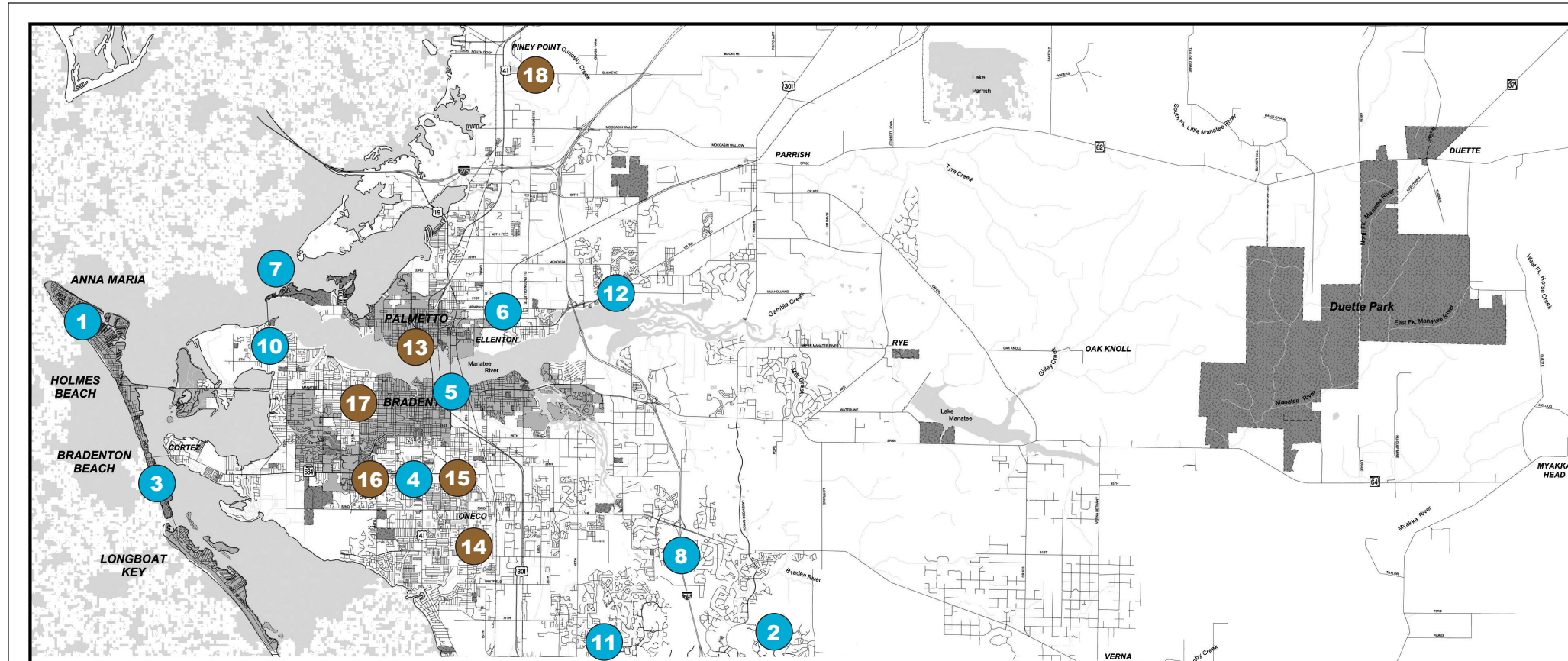
Participants believe there is a need for improved law enforcement to reduce crime, drug activity, prostitution, and loitering and make the areas safer for residents and visitors. This may be possible through a satellite police station or neighborhood watch groups.

In addition to the condition of the public realm, the proper maintenance of private property is important. Participants suggested increasing homeownership, increasing access to home improvement loans, and holding property owners accountable as methods to improve maintenance. The participants also sought enforcement of building codes to ensure proper property maintenance. They would like historic preservation to be emphasized, and when necessary, abandoned buildings to be demolished for redevelopment or as green spaces. They recognized the need for more affordable housing.

There was the desire to see commercial development and the commercial areas revitalized through incentive programs. Obsolete strip malls should be redeveloped for commerce or other purposes. The participants would like to see improved design standards for signage and storefronts, again, to enhance the appearance and image of the areas; convenient and attractive parking; and economic development to provide more jobs and higher incomes.

Transportation issues were also a key concern of the participants. Large numbers of commercial establishments and related access driveways were perceived to slow traffic flow. Some participants recommended limiting the number of access points to businesses while others suggested designated turn lanes and acceleration lanes. Many wanted roads widened and others suggested alternate routes, light rail, and trolleys. In addition, they would like to see improved landscaping along the road and medians as well as noise abatement measures.

In addition to the general comments described above, there were a number of recommendations specific to Palmetto suggesting revitalization of the waterfront. They suggest providing a safe and attractive walkway along the water, closing streets to create an outdoor mall, new shops and entertainment – bars, restaurants, antique shops – and water taxis connecting the Bradenton and Palmetto waterfronts. The number and range of recommendations for the waterfront area illustrate the possibilities participants believe exist for the area and their enthusiasm for an alternative entertainment district.



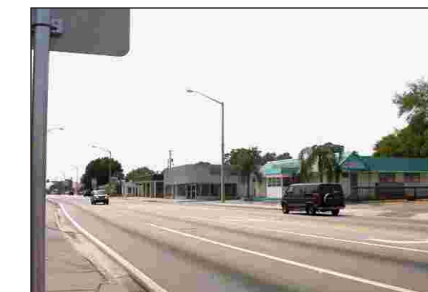
**Strong Places Weak Places At-A-Glance**

The Strong Places Weak Places identified a number of strong and weak areas in the County.

Weak areas identified included: Palmetto and Oneco with weaknesses in commercial areas, the general community appearance, residential areas and parks and open spaces; The 14th street corridor with weaknesses in commercial areas, general community appearance, residential areas and traffic problems; Cortez Road and Manatee Avenue specifically for their traffic problems; and the phosphate mines and Piney Point for their impact on the environment.

Strong areas identified included: the Ellenton Outlet Mall, Downtown Bradenton, Anna Maria Island and Cortez Road for their commercial areas; Lakewood Ranch, the beach communities and the Bradenton waterfront for their general appearance; Emerson Point, Myakka State Park, and Anna Maria Island for their parks and open spaces; Lakewood Ranch, Anna Maria Island and Northwest Bradenton for their residential areas; and I-75, US 301 and University Parkway as good transportation corridors.

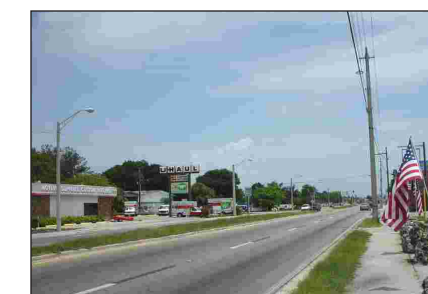
Those areas once identified became the jumping point for a discussion about what to do and what not to do with physical developments at the scale of neighborhoods and corridors. The discussion led to the identification of principles to create a strong, well planned community. They are described in this chapter.



Palmetto – Weak Place



Oneco – Weak Place



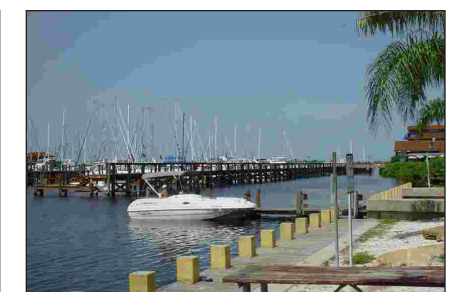
14th Street Corridor – Weak Place



Anna Maria Island – Strong Place

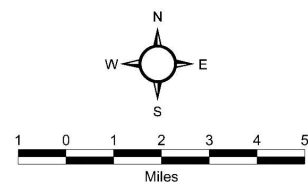


Lakewood Ranch – Strong Place



Beach Communities – Strong Place

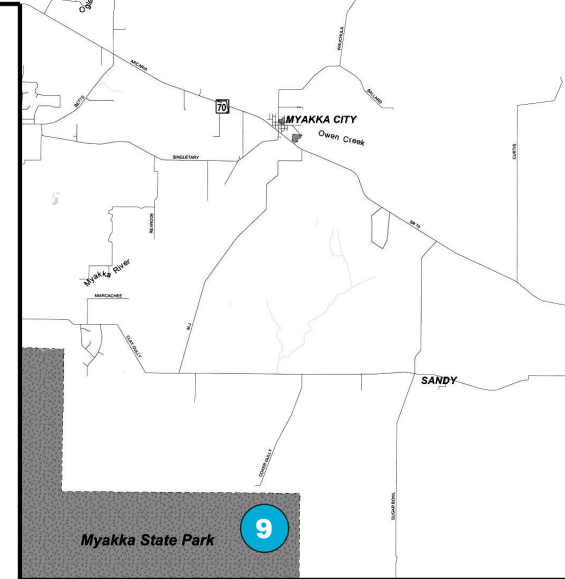
**Strong Places Weak Places**  
**General Location Map**  
**Manatee County, Florida**



**Legend**

- County Boundary
- Road
- Railroad
- ▭ Jurisdictional Boundary
- Parks
- Water
- Stream

- **Strong Places**
  - 1. Anna Maria Island
  - 2. Lakewood Ranch
  - 3. Beach Communities
  - 4. Cortez Road
  - 5. Downtown Bradenton
  - 6. Ellenton Outlet Mall
  - 7. Emerson Point
  - 8. I-75
  - 9. Myakka State Park
  - 10. Northwest Bradenton
  - 11. University Parkway
  - 12. US 301
- **Weak Places**
  - 13. Palmetto
  - 14. Oneco
  - 15. 14th Street Corridor
  - 16. Cortez Road
  - 17. Manatee Avenue
  - 18. Piney Point





## Part IV: Implementation

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## 7. Implementing the Vision

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This final chapter of the report illustrates how the Vision developed during Imagine Manatee can be implemented. The wide range of recommendations included in the two preceding chapters – Chapter 5, Goals and Strategies, and Chapter 6, Manatee County: A Quality Place – have been distilled into seven implementation drives. The drives make the implementation process easier to understand and provide a mechanism to jumpstart the process of turning the vision into reality. The chapter also includes selected Community Indicators that can help monitor implementation progress. The indicators are listed at the end of this chapter and are organized by the seven implementation drives.

Each implementation drive contains a vision statement that highlights key components of the drive and recommended actions. The sources for each of the drives are listed in the left margin.

To further explain the complexity of implementing Imagine Manatee, Appendix 8, Tools for Implementation, describes the role of regulatory tools such as comprehensive plans and codes (land development regulations adopted by local governing bodies) in implementing the vision. It also describes how Task Forces (appointed independent bodies that bring together government, the private sector, philanthropic institutions, special interest groups, and *residents*) can help implement the aspects of the vision that cannot be undertaken through an existing organization or agency.

Finally, Appendix G, Acting on Implementation, provides a detailed review of each strategy providing an understanding of the strategy's

institutional context, a timetable for implementation, and specific actions to bring that strategy to fruition.

Imagine Manatee has given Manatee County a bold vision for its future. The vision is of a scope and magnitude that cannot be implemented quickly nor can it be implemented by a single entity alone. Various levels of government will play a major role in implementing each of the drives together with the private sector, civic institutions, and local residents. The remainder of this chapter will explain how.

## **Implementation Drive # 1: For a Green County**

### **The Vision**

Manatee County will complete an aggressive land management and protection program designed to make Manatee a green county. Key elements of the program include: using an aggressive land acquisition program to protect and restore natural areas and agriculture and maintain the rural character of the eastern portion of the County; strategically directing growth toward urbanized areas; developing a wealth of neighborhood, county, municipal, and regional parks accessible for active and passive recreation and connected by an extensive trail system; developing strong environmental regulations; and mandating environmental education in schools; and providing environmental education opportunities for adults, to create a strong environmental and conservation ethic.

### **Recommended Actions**

#### **Acquire land**

*The County should develop a comprehensive program to acquire and protect in perpetuity environmentally sensitive land and open space and to use land acquisition to strategically direct future growth.*

This effort should include the mapping and inventorying of key natural areas and the development of a long term funding program. It should also recommend the use of available tools and propose new ones, such as the purchase of development rights and the establishment of mandatory set asides, to ensure the success of the land acquisition drive.

There is strong support from the County for a land acquisition initiative. The development of a deliberate, balanced, and clearly defined acquisition program together with a public awareness campaign should build support for a referendum to establish a dedicated revenue source for land acquisition.

#### **Direct Growth**

*County and local municipalities should develop a plan to manage growth east of I-75. The plan should identify and recommend preferred growth areas; evaluate and amend policies and regulations that affect*

#### **Source**

Goals for Environmental Quality, Growth Management, Parks and Trails, and Preservation of Natural Areas, and the Stakeholder Workshop

*density of development; and develop policies and incentives to direct development toward already urbanized parts of the County.*

The notion of directing growth has been expressed throughout Imagine Manatee and is supported by several of the vision's goals and strategies. Residents have repeatedly expressed concerns about the speed at which development is eroding the cherished rural character of the area east of I-75.

Equally important to residents is the notion of openly debating the issues related to property rights, fair compensation, and balancing private and common good.

### **Plan for Parks**

*County and local municipalities should prepare a Parks Master Plan to complement the Trail Master Plan already in place.*

The Parks Master Plan should maximize the use of public land, provide access to all publicly owned lands and facilities, establish a connected network of passive and active recreation areas throughout the County, and identify funding sources and mechanisms. As plans are developed for lands within the potable watersheds, they should be considered for appropriate passive recreation.

### **Coordinate environmental codes**

*County and municipal environmental codes should be evaluated and amended to protect, preserve, and help cleanup natural areas; to protect old-growth trees; and to encourage use of native vegetation in landscaping.*

Some land development codes have regulations protecting wetlands, erosion, sedimentation as well as regulations protecting native vegetation to some level. All codes may need to be amended to ascertain if current regulations meet the expectations set by Imagine Manatee. The public should be involved in the Evaluation and Appraisal Reports (EAR) being developed to update local comprehensive plans. This should be the first step in amending codes to equal expectations.

### **Build Awareness**

*Mandatory environmental education should be incorporated in school curricula to increase students' knowledge and awareness of environmental issues. Parallel efforts should also be made to inform the general public.*

This effort requires the School Board, civic organizations, and residents to cooperate in developing a school curriculum and adult education programs.

**Implementation Drive # 2: For a Beautiful County**

**The Vision**

Manatee County will be a beautiful place and a model of how to accommodate substantial growth without harming sensitive natural areas and productive farmland. Key elements in realizing this vision include: favoring redevelopment, infill development, and renovation of older neighborhoods, commercial, and industrial areas; clustering new development into distinct villages and neighborhoods with compact, mixed use, well designed areas at their centers; aggressively beautifying and turning around weak areas of the community; protecting historic buildings and districts; and strengthening the cultural and social fabric of the community through facilities, events, and support for the arts.

**Source**

Goals for Community Spaces; Culture, Arts, and Historic Preservation; Neighborhood Character; Planning and Zoning; and Community Choices



Participants in the Imagine Manatee process have consistently shown preference for images depicting well designed compact residential and commercial mixed use developments.



The type of quality development shown above when added to the type of conventional development shown below (both were equally supported by participants) indicates a desire for greater choice of development than is currently available.



**Recommended Actions**

**Amend Plans and Codes**

*County and local comprehensive plans and land development codes should be amended to provide incentives that favor redevelopment, infill development, and renovation and the creation of clustered compact, mixed use development.*

The redevelopment, infill development, and renovation of older neighborhoods and areas will maximize the use of existing infrastructure. Clustering development into neighborhoods and villages will create a desirable alternative to conventional low-density development patterns offering current and future residents greater choice.

The County and local municipalities are engaged over the next two years in the Evaluation and Appraisal Report (EAR) cycle to identify appropriate amendments to their comprehensive plans. This provides an opportunity for addressing several of the recommendations contained in the drive for a beautiful county. The comprehensive plan could establish the necessary policies to support the vision leading to the amendment of the land development codes to provide the legal framework to those policies prescribing what the County aspires to become.

**Sustain Historic Preservation**

*County and local municipalities should establish special tax credit districts and a funding program earmarked to encourage historic preservation.*

Continuing historic preservation efforts and programs will not only preserve key elements of the County heritage but also boost the County as an attractive cultural tourism destination.

Several of the municipalities in the County have adopted historic preservation property tax exemption ordinances and the County is reviewing an historic preservation tax credit program.

### **Involve the Public**

*Sustained public input in the comprehensive plans and code amendment processes should continue, taking advantage of the public involvement momentum created by Imagine Manatee. Strong consideration should be given to the creation of Planning Advisory Districts across the County as a way to address the diverse needs of areas throughout the County.*

Even though County and local governments will play a major role in developing the policies and regulations recommended by the vision, continued public involvement will ensure better plans, community good will, and support over time.

### **Tackle Decay**

*County and local municipalities should aggressively continue and expand programs aimed at improving the physical appearance and quality of life in those areas of the county that the vision has identified as requiring immediate attention and action. Consideration should be given to unifying code enforcement.*

The overall appearance of the county is directly affected by the visual quality and appearance of the weak areas identified by the vision, many located at key entryways to the County. A systemic effort in those areas will require governments working together with faith based and not-for-profit organizations, the private sector, and residents.

### **Strengthen Recreation and Cultural Life**

*Art organizations and residents should lead an effort to develop a comprehensive recreation and cultural plan, working together with County and local municipalities and the School Board.*

The plan should evaluate and weave together in a strategic way the many elements identified by Imagine Manatee such as: improving and adding recreational facilities; developing and expanding programs for youth, adults, and seniors; utilizing school buildings as community centers; building a performance arts hall; improving communication about programs, and establishing a sustainable funding mechanism for the arts.

## **Implementation Drive # 3: For An Accessible County**

### **The Vision**

Manatee County will have a safe, fully integrated, regional multi-modal transportation system that maximizes accessibility and minimizes congestion. The system will offer a great choice of ways to move around. A combination of land acquisition policies and growth management strategies adopted overtime will create optimal conditions for convenient, safe, and reliable public transportation. Roads will be better maintained and improved. An extensive network of sidewalks and bike paths will be introduced to

**Source**  
Goals for Alternative Transportation,  
Automobile Transportation, and  
Public Transportation

complement public transportation and roads. Pedestrian friendly neighborhoods will be connected to one another.

### Recommended Actions

#### Amend Plans

*County, local municipalities, and the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) should amend their comprehensive plans and long-range transportation plan, land development codes, capital improvement plans, and programs to make them consistent with the goals and strategies of the vision.*

The comprehensive plans, which will be updated in the next 24 months, guide the County’s and municipalities’ Capital Improvements Plans (CIP). The MPO is the entity that schedules and funds transportation projects.

Land development codes should be reviewed to determine if standards and regulations, for example width of streets and connectivity requirements, help or hinder the implementation of the vision.

Transportation plans should be coordinated with surrounding counties and should offer a wide range of options including dense and frequent transit lines – bus, light rail, trolley – as well as the addition of sidewalks and bicycle paths to afford mobility to residents who cannot or choose not to drive.

#### Form a Transportation Task Force

*A Task Force representing all sectors of the community should be established to work closely with government to assess transportation needs and assist in planning and implementing appropriate changes, particularly in the area of public transportation.*

The County’s Blue Ribbon Transportation Task Force has issued a report that offers guidelines on a number of issues raised by the vision. Many of those recommendations are consistent with the vision. An Imagine Manatee Task Force could be created to address implementing the type of extensive public transportation system envisioned. The Task Force could have a dual function. It could focus on alternative sources of funding for transportation such as a fuel tax, expanded use of transportation impact fees, or private/public funding partnerships. It could also develop a public awareness drive to build support for the measures.

### Implementation Drive # 4: For an Equitable County

#### The Vision

Manatee County will be a fair and just community with a diverse population living in harmony in well maintained diverse neighborhoods. Key elements to realize that vision will be the development of an aggressive affordable housing drive, and the coming together of a coalition of

#### Source

Goals for Affordable Housing and Social Issues, Guiding Principle for Social Equity, and Strong Places Weak Places

government, business, interest groups, and residents to address the effective delivery of social services.

### **Recommended Actions**

#### **Form An Affordable Housing Task Force**

*A Task Force that includes government, developers, not-for-profit organizations, and residents should be created to determine how to best create an adequate supply of affordable housing throughout the County.*

The issue is controversial. On the one hand, affordable housing needs are a top concern in a county where the median household income is lower than the State and national average and ten percent of the population is at or below the poverty line. On the other hand, the development community is concerned about the burden of providing affordable housing and the type of strategies likely to make affordable housing feasible are controversial with the public. These issues have been raised and debated repeatedly throughout the vision, most vividly during the Community Choices workshop.

The Task Force should explore best practices in the provision of affordable housing. These range from governmental programs including the success of Montgomery County, Maryland, to private sector programs such as the creation of Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFI). There are many successful models to draw from.

The Task Force should also explore the feasibility of implementing a broad range of measures that include: revising local development codes to encourage variable lot sizes and price levels; incorporating inclusionary zoning; establishing tax incentives or impact fee credits for builders and investors; and providing direct assistance to lower-income families to increase homeownership options. Better property maintenance through assistance to low-income homeowners, cooperative partnerships, volunteer efforts, and stricter code enforcement should be evaluated to maintain the existing affordable housing stock.

Finally, the Task Force should convene the public at critical points in the decision making process to discuss options and build awareness and support for recommended actions.

#### **Form a Social Services Coordinating Council**

*A Social Services Coordinating Council should be created to focus on the provision of social services in the County. The Coordinating Council should include social service providers, not-for-profit organizations, the private sector, and residents.*

There are a multitude of programs implemented throughout the County by various service groups that are supported by the County and local municipalities. Some of these programs provide excellent models on how to fund and mobilize the community in support of delivery of



services. For example, the Children’s Service Advisory Board oversees the Children’s Services Fund and helps at-risk children in the County. It is clear however that the public is unaware of many of these programs (particularly new residents). Awareness of supportive social services is often the first step to accessing such services.

The focus of the Social Services Coordinating Council should be threefold. It should identify ways of reducing duplication in the delivery of services. It should identify unmet needs and propose methods to address those needs. It should develop a multi-lingual drive to inform residents, particularly new comers, of the services that are already available.

### **Implementation Drive # 5: For a Prosperous County**

#### **The Vision**

Manatee County will have attractive, vibrant, and economically sustainable downtowns and waterfronts and will have a thriving diverse economy providing employment to residents at all skill levels. Key components of this vision will be the coordinated revitalization of the County’s downtowns, the development of recreational and business opportunities along the waterfronts, the continuation of successful business recruiting programs and the development of a skilled workforce.

#### **Recommended Actions**

##### **Create Vibrant Downtowns**

*County and local municipalities should initiate a coordinated review of existing downtown plans and the development of plans in those cities that do not yet have a plan.*

The long-term vision for Manatee County seeks vibrant cities and villages organized around compact, pedestrian friendly, mixed use centers. Local municipalities should review their downtown plans to ensure they are consistent with that vision.

Many of the existing plans already encourage mixed use development striving to create vibrant, round-the-clock communities. Many of the potential tools are in place. For example, CRA plans include development incentives to further the goals of the plan. Other tools could be adopted.

As population in the County increases, special consideration should be given to the issue of parking in these vibrant downtown areas. Parking strategies should be developed taking into consideration transportation policies and should minimize the amount of land consumed.

**Form a Downtown Waterfront Task Force**

*A Downtown Waterfront Task Force should be created to develop a comprehensive waterfront strategy aimed at maximizing the downtown waterfront economic and recreational potential in Bradenton and Palmetto. The Task Force should include public and private interests and residents.*

The Manatee Riverwalk could be the leading entity in this effort since it already has County, Bradenton, and Palmetto representation.

The downtown waterfronts have been recognized throughout Imagine Manatee as important assets. Focus of the effort should be to provide maximum public access, develop the waterfronts economic potential, and turn them into the signature places of the entire County.

**Support Economic Development**

*The County should continue supporting successful economic development initiatives.*

The County is already supporting the Manatee Economic Development Council and has been implementing the Rapid Response Team for the past 15 years. This is a model program that has received State recognition. The cooperation between the Economic Development Council and the County’s Planning Department ensure broad support to businesses planning to move to the County.

**Educate a Skilled Workforce.**

*Businesses, government, the School Board, and local colleges should continue coordinating their efforts to provide workforce education and training consistent with changing needs.*

There are already several programs designed to train a viable workforce. Continued improved coordination among all the programs and participants can lead to greater success. Efforts should be made to raise awareness of these programs.

**Implementation Drive #6: For a Collaborative County**

**The Vision**

Manatee County will be a truly collaborative County, a place where residents and governments are proactively communicating and sharing decisions. Key to the success of this vision will be the establishment of mechanisms to improve citizen involvement and government transparency, promote a greater level of cooperation among governments, improve law enforcement and crime prevention programs, and eliminate duplication in the delivery of services.

**Source**

Goals for Crime and Public Safety, Delivery of Services and Water Supply, and Government and Leadership and Community Choices results.

**Recommended Actions****Involve the Public**

*County and local municipalities should develop mechanisms to involve residents in developing and implementing future policies and programs.*

The vision recommends a variety of possible mechanisms. They include developing forums to debate ideas and identify implementation strategies; creating district-wide citizen advisory groups to monitor progress of programs and initiatives; holding quarterly meetings between Commissioners and the public to discuss issues of concern to the community; and establishing a neighborhood based planning process.

Efforts should be increased to inform and educate citizens on the issues facing the county. Reliable and understandable data should be easy to obtain and disseminate.

Some of these mechanisms are in place, in an embryonic form, while others are applied in an ad hoc fashion. The vision is to develop mechanisms that create a true partnership between the public, private, and civic sectors. The Task Forces recommended in this chapter are a first step in that direction.

**Coordinate Government Activities**

*County and local municipalities should step up efforts to improve cooperation and coordination among government entities and address consolidation of service delivery.*

Coordination and cooperation are the basis for a more efficient government. County and local municipalities have established an intergovernmental coordination framework for better cooperation in the ACCORD. The parameters established through the ACCORD should be expanded.

Among the areas to focus consolidation is that of law enforcement, fire, and medical response services. Special attention should be given to addressing crime and public safety concerns as they affect residents' quality of life and their desire or ability to move freely and safely throughout the County. Considerations include increased police personnel and patrols; the formation of neighborhood watch groups; the consolidation of law enforcement, fire, and medical response services; and the provision of adequate street lighting.

**Implementation Drive # 7: For an Educated County****The Vision**

Manatee County will have a well funded school system focused on student achievement and providing technologically advanced education and vocational training in schools that are well integrated in the community.

**Recommended Action****Form a Task Force**

*A School Board Task Force of businesses, educators, and parents should be formed to lobby for additional federal and state educational funds and to identify supplemental funding sources for schools.*

The Manatee County Schools Foundation, Inc. may be a logical lead group for the Task Force. The County has been very active in generating funds for education. A voter referendum has recently approved a 0.5-cent sales tax for schools and a School Impact Fee generates revenues for new school construction.

**Building Awareness**

The need to build community awareness in support of Imagine Manatee has emerged in a variety of ways. There are five communication areas that need to be addressed to make residents familiar with the vision and involved in its implementation.

First, the results of the vision must be presented in summary form to County residents. Even though many residents have participated in the vision meetings and visited the website, many more need to become aware of the plans for the future. Understanding the comprehensive nature of the vision is an important step in gaining support for it.

Second, individual initiatives must be explained and promoted at various points in the implementation process. Information needs to be disseminated to frame community discussions of a specific topic, for example, the need for expanding environmental education in schools.

Third, information about existing programs and initiatives must be shared with residents in more effective ways, reaching out to new residents in particular. Many of the strategies that have been suggested in the vision already have organizations and initiatives addressing them. Filling this information gap will make the process of implementing the vision less daunting.

Fourth, periodic updates must be given regarding progress of implementation. A set of indicators has been suggested as a way to keep score of the vision implementation process.

Fifth, issues that do not enjoy communitywide consensus must be debated openly. For example, the issue of property rights versus the common good is one that will require open and frank discussion.

There are several tools the County has at its disposal to facilitate the flow of information and to keep the community informed about the progress of vision's implementation and interested in its outcome. How these tools are used should reflect the creative, transparent, and interactive approach established throughout the Imagine Manatee process.

Efforts to keep Imagine Manatee in the public eye should include using the Imagine Manatee website, expanding programming of the government access channel, organizing a Imagine Manatee speakers bureau, and using

the schools and other educational institutions. Electronic and printed media could also play a strong role in building awareness and support for implementation. Consideration should be given to reconstituting a volunteer Publicity Action Team to engage newspaper, newsletters and local electronic media. Finally, and in the spirit of Imagine Manatee, the public should be convened for periodic “State of the Vision” report and feedback sessions such as public forums and brainstorming sessions.

### **Community Indicators**

Community indicators are numeric and quantifiable ways to measure progress in the seven implementation drives summarized in this chapter. The indicators have been refined from an initial list distributed for comment to the Steering Committee and staff.

As Imagine Manatee moves from the development of a vision to its implementation, indicators can be used to measure the effectiveness of actions. Over the 50-year span of Imagine Manatee, indicators will change and evolve as the community changes and evolves.

The indicators require baseline information against which forward or backward movements or lack of movement can be measured. The collection of the data necessary to activate indicators should become part of a joint effort of those individuals, organizations and agencies leading the implementation effort. The proposed indicators are listed below.

#### **Beautiful County**

- Level of investment in areas targeted for rehabilitation.
- Level of investment in the urban core of the County.
- Miles of roadways landscaped.
- Per capita consumption of land measured against current trend.

#### **Green County**

- Percentage of land area held in permanent “green infrastructure” by type.
- Acres of active park space per capita.
- Overall water Quality in the following:
  - Tampa Bay,
  - Sarasota Bay,
  - Manatee River,
  - Evers Reservoir,
  - Lake Manatee Reservoir.
- Air Quality measured by number of “unhealthy days.”

**Equitable County**

- Number of affordable housing units realized.
- Percentage of population living in poverty.
- Percentage of children living in poverty.
- Various crime rates per capita.

**Prosperous County**

- Number of value added jobs created.
- Commercial (non-residential) vacancy rates within the downtown cores.
- Commercial (non-residential) square footage added to the downtown cores.
- Number of additional residential units created in the downtown cores.

**Accessible County**

- Average time spent in traffic.
- Miles of bike facilities.
- Frequency of mass transit service (headways).
- Percentage of total population within a quarter mile of a bus route.

**Collaborative County**

- Number of methods developed to increase public involvement and understanding of local government.
- Per capital water consumption.

**Educated County**

- High School graduation rates.
- High School dropout rate.
- Percentage of students achieving appropriate reading levels.